‘this trauma is like a big fur coat. it’s made of dead things but it keeps me warm’

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org) at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/16525883](http://archiveofourown.org/works/16525883).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Teen And Up Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Rape/Non-Con, Graphic Depictions Of Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Heathers (1988), Mean Girls - Richmond/Benjamin/Fey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Veronica Sawyer, Janis Sarkisian, Damian Hubbard, Regina George, Cady Heron, Aaron Samuels, Gretchen Wieners, Karen Smith, Heather Chandler, Kurt Kelly, Ram Sweeney, Jason “J. D.” Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD Depression, Anxiety, Panic Attacks, Self-Harm, Trauma, Ronnie has PTSD, she's not doin so good, she's also ace/aro, Deal With It, Regina is team mom, Heather Kurt and Ram are ghosts, they appear a lot, they become really protective of Ronnie, JD is a fucking creep, or he was, he's horrible and Ronnie hates him, Janis is kinda oblivious to Veronica's pain she's a good cousin tho, there's a lot of vomiting/references to vomiting, RONNIE IS NOT OKAY, Veronica-centric, there's no romance Cause im tired of seeing romance fanfics, Heather is like Ronnie's dead big sister, Veronica stars in a play and and fuckin blows everyone away Damian is an angel, movie Veronica, basically movie everyone for Heathers, movie Aaron, movie/musical Regina, and then musical everyone else for Mean Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series:</td>
<td>Part 2 of Veronica and Janis are cousins AU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘this trauma is like a big fur coat. it’s made of dead things but it keeps me warm’

by n0t_bess1e_b4ss_0n_the_b4ss

Summary

Veronica Sawyer is almost one hundred percent positive her parents just disowned her and shipped her off to Evanston to live with her cousin, whom she barely sees. Of course, it wasn’t put like that, but she knows it’s practically abandonment. Oh well. A new start could be good for her. Unfortunately, her sins come crawling after her and the black hands of trauma are wrapping around her throat. She’s suffocating constantly and the only ones who seem to notice are the ghosts of the three people she murdered. Accompany this with relapses, drama at school, and secrets being spilled, and things are not looking up for Miss Veronica Sawyer. It also doesn’t help that her cousin added her to a group chat that blows up with messages at four in the morning.

Notes
here’s some background information folks:
- basically the plots of Heathers and Mean Girls were set in sophomore year in this, so they’re all juniors
- There is no romance in this story. Yay!! So tired of seeing nothing but romantic fanfics on here.
- I picture Wynona Rider’s version of Veronica in this, but you can use whatever design you want
- This is set in, like, 2018
- I’m not joking when I said there’s a lot of vomit. It’s mentioned at least once in every chapter
- JD IS A GODDAMN CREEP AND RONNIE IS SO DONE WITH HIM OKAY. SHE DOES NOT MOURN HIS DEATH NOR DOES SHE FEEL BAD.
- Also he might have raped her (he did basically sexually assault her in the movie)
Janis didn’t know how she felt about her cousin moving in with her family. She found it odd. Why couldn’t she just stay with her own family?

Her parents said that her cousin needed some time away from Sherwood for junior year and this might be a chance for her to make new friends. They said she needed a new start, whatever that meant.

Veronica Sawyer was a year younger than Janis and shorter than her, but they had been each other’s doppelgängers when they were younger. Now that Janis has grown and dyed her hair, the similarities had diminished. It’s actually been awhile since Janis had seen Veronica- or even talked to her- so she was curious as to how the girl has changed.

She changed a lot, apparently.

When an Uber pulled up in front of her house, Janis watched as a pale, weary-looking teenager stepped out. Her skin was ashen and dark purple bags looked like bruises under her dull eyes. Still, Veronica made an effort to smile at Mr and Mrs. Sarkisian as she walked up to stoop to greet them. Janis watched as her cousin flinched violently when she was hugged, like she thought she was going to be hit or something.

“Hey, Vera,” Janis said, finally emerging from the house.

“Hey, Janis.” Veronica replied with a shy smile.

Veronica had always been more reserved than Janis, but something seemed off. She seemed more more anxious than usual, constantly glancing around like someone was going to jump out of nowhere and attack her.

Janis then remembered what her parents had told her. Veronica was suffering from trauma- PTSD. She wasn’t told what caused this to form within her cousin, but she really wanted to know. Alas, she would have to wait.

“Janis, dear,” Mrs. Sarkisian spoke, “Show Veronica to her room.”

“Alright.”

Janis led her cousin up the stairs and to the guest bedroom.

“Enjoy your stay,” She said with a mock bow, getting a small laugh out of Veronica.

“Thanks.”

The smaller girl slipped into the room and set her things down. She had five bags in total. A suitcase and a duffle bag for her clothes, one for her brush and makeup and toothbrush etc, a computer bag with her laptop, journals, and pens, and then her backpack. She really was going to stay awhile.

Janis hung around the doorway for a moment, watching as Veronica fidgeted and put her things away. She would occasionally glance over at her, but didn’t say anything.

“It’s been awhile.” Janis finally said, trying to make things less awkward.
“Huh? Oh, yeah.” Veronica nodded while putting her clothes in the closet. “I like your hair.”

“Thanks!” Janis smirked, “My friend Damian helped me dye it. I’ll introduce you to him tomorrow at school.”

Veronica bobbed her head again. She seemed more distant than Janis remembered. Sure, she was never a social butterfly but she just seemed to isolated and locked up.

“Well, I’ll let you unpack!” Janis said, walking back to her own room. She didn’t know how this would all go, but she hoped nothing would go wrong.

———

North Shore was just as wild as Westerburg. Students were lumbering around, yelling, talking, fighting. The courtyard was a mess of people all doing their own thing. Veronica lost Janis in the crowd and started to get claustrophobic.

“Woah! Check out that football field! It’s huge!”

Veronica looked around and saw the trio of blue figures of the three teenagers she murdered. Kurt and Ram were eyeing the sports field while Heather gazed upon the students like she was ready to make them bow down to her.

“Do you guys really have to be here?” Veronica mumbled.

“You can’t get rid of us!” Ram laughed.

“Literally.” Heather said. “We’re practically roped to you. We can’t go anywhere else.”

Veronica didn’t know if they were just really vivid hallucinations or actual ghosts. They almost seemed to be alive and showed up often enough to be spirits, and the dizziness that accompanied their arrival felt real enough.

“Then help me find Janis.”

Suddenly, the ghosts didn’t seem interested in bothering her. They talked amongst themselves, showing no interest in helping. Veronica sighed.

“Don’t look so sad!” Kurt threw his arm around her shoulder. His touch was ice cold. “This is a new start for you! Nobody knows how you murdered three people and caused the death of one more.”

Veronica winced and shrugged off his arm. She didn’t know how they were able to interact with her like they were actually there. She thought ghosts weren’t able to touch things. Apparently they can.

“You’re not helping..”

“We aren’t trying to.” Heather said bluntly. “Now, chop chop! I want to see this place.”

Veronica sighed and began weaving through the crowd. A few people glanced at her and whispered about her being new, but she didn’t hear anything too horrible. She looked around for Janis nervously, calling out her name a few times. Her anxiety was relieved slightly when she finally caught sight of her cousin and padded over.

“Janis, I was looking for you.” She said.
“Oh, sorry for running off,” Janis laughed slightly and then turned back to the group she was hanging around. “Guys, this is my cousin, Veronica. She’s the girl I’ve been telling you about. She’ll be living with me.”

The people were introduced as Cady, Damian, Aaron, Regina, Gretchen, and Karen respectively. Veronica shyly greeted them, still feeling the presence of the ghosts lingering behind her. She opened her mouth to actually introduce them, but then stopped right when she pointed to Heather and said, “This is H-“ Her ears burned in embarrassment as her cousin’s friends gave her odd looks.

“I appreciate the attempt at introducing us, at least.” Heather said, putting her hands on her hips.

“Uh-“ Veronica cleared her throat. “Nothing. Sorry, I keep thinking my old friends are with me. We were always together.”

“Nice save.” Ram commented.

“Though you ‘weren’t always together’,“ Kurt piped up. “You spent most of the summer alone in your room. It was so boring!”

Ram and Heather each gave their nods of agreement. Even Veronica couldn’t deny that. She did coop herself up in her room when she wasn’t getting fresh air to soothe her dizziness or going to her therapist.

“Aww,” Gretchen cooed in sympathy. “We’ll be your new friends! Right, guys?”

They all seemed to give pretty sincere nods. Veronica was then bombarded with questions about herself, which she answered as best as she could. She was happy to not be left out or alone, but she also felt smothered.

The bell finally rang and Veronica stumbled through the halls with her schedule to find her first period, which was Algebra II. And she was horribly late after she asked for directions to the room from some seniors and was directed to the upper C wing.

There was no upper C wing.

After finally finding the D wing with all the math classes, she hiked up the stairs and checked her phone. Fifteen minutes late. Wonderful.

“Act natural.” Ram advised when she got to the room.

“Don’t freak out.” Kurt added.

“Just say you’re new. They’ll probably understand.” Heather said.

Veronica opened the door and stepped inside. The teacher, a middle-aged brunette woman, stopped talking and the class turned to stare at her.

“You’re late.” The teacher said.

“I-I’m sorry.” Veronica stuttered, “I’m new.” She held out the blue slip of paper with her schedule on it.

The teacher took it from her and scanned it for a moment.

“Veronica Sawyer?”
“Yes ma’am.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Veronica had turned to find a seat and then froze. She wasn’t expecting to be asked any question.

“I asked where you’re from. What brings you to Evanston?”

“O-oh, umm-“

Veronica assumed she couldn’t say how her parents basically disowned her because her trauma was becoming too much to handle. How they couldn’t deal with her thrashing and screaming in her sleep anymore. How her anxiety was deteriorating them and their happiness.

She swallowed hard. She hadn’t considered it abandonment until now. But surely they were coming back for her! She just didn’t know when.

“Sherwood, Ohio. I came from Westerburg High. I’m living with my cousins now.” Veronica quickly explained after thirty seconds of her saying nothing and just standing there awkwardly. “Do you know Janis Sarkisian? I’m staying with her.”

The teacher nodded thoughtfully.

“Wasn’t Westerburg the school that blew up?” Some kid in the second row asked loudly. A few murmurs went through the class.

A dizzy spell hit Veronica like a violent tidal wave. She curled her toes and struggled to not stagger backwards.

“That’s enough.” The teacher said before she could answer. “Please take a seat, Veronica.”

Veronica nodded and shuffled over to an empty desk.

“Could you have made your dwindling mental state anymore obvious?” Heather said, sitting on the desk beside Veronica’s. Of course, the student there didn’t notice.

Veronica bit her tongue. She wanted to answer, but surely someone would hear her talking to nobody. She didn’t want her new classmates to think she was insane.

First period went well enough and Veronica was soon searching for second. Lunch quickly rolled around after fourth period, but she had no idea where to sit up until Janis waved her over. Probably because Veronica looked so damn pitiful spinning around in the cafeteria, clearly lost.

“So, Veronica,” Cady started, “How do you like living with Janis?”

Veronica blinked at her. What kind of question was that?

“Wow. That is scraping the bottom of the barrel with an attempt at small talk.” Heather commented and Veronica snorted.

“It’s...nice?” Veronica tilted her head. “I’m not used to living with anyone except my parents.”

“Well, who’s this? Another girl the dyke tied to her bed?”
Veronica looked over her shoulder to see some guy leering down at her. Janis had her jaw clenched, which she also noticed.

“Go away, Peter.” Regina said, rolling her eyes. “Her name is Janis and that’s her cousin.”

“Oh, so now the dyke is fucking her family members now, too? I knew she was desperate, but not this desperate!” The boy, Peter, chortled.

“Leave her alone.” Veronica growled, glaring at Peter.

“I’m sorry, are you actually talking to me?” Peter loomed over her.

“Yes, I am.” Veronica said back confidently. “I want to know what gives you the right to pick on my cousin. You’re a high school has-been waiting to happen, a future gas station attendant.”

The tables nearby were silent, as was Peter. He stared hard at Veronica before growling deep in his throat.

“I’ll get you back for this.” He spat before storming off.

“That was amazing, darling!” Damian cheered, clasping his hands with Veronica’s.

“You really showed him.” Gretchen laughed and Karen nodded rapidly in agreement.

Janis nudged Veronica’s arm over the commotion of her friends and smiled.

“Thanks.” She said.

“No problem.” Veronica replied.

But there was this sinking feeling in her stomach that she couldn’t understand. She knew for a fact this wouldn’t be the last time her insides would twist up painfully.
It’s been two weeks since Veronica has moved to Evanston. By now she’s grown accustomed to this new world and has gotten used to everything.

At school she usually hangs around Janis’ group of friends, but she doesn’t always partake in their conversations. She just lingers around them so she wouldn’t seem like a complete outcast. She sits with them at lunch, but is also pretty quiet there, too. At least they added her to their wild group chat.

During breakfast, she sits at an empty table and quietly talks to the ghosts until the bell rings. They’ve become her little group and are really good at keeping her company.

Two weeks was a good stretch, and then things started to crash down on Veronica. Every moment of every day felt like a grain of sand falling through an hourglass. Her stomach knotted together. Just the mere thought of all the humiliation she would face made her want to vomit.

Maybe she did.

———

Big Gay: what’s up homos let’s do something
Gaylien: i one hundred percent Agree and Regina is buying

team.mom: Why me?
Gaylien: you have money

AfricaByToto: Janis is right

team.mom: Ugh. Fine. Where do you little shits want to go?
Gaylien: thanks mom

Big Gay: love you mom

team.mom: Shut the fuck up.

Gwetchen: food

cornHub: food

troybolton: football game
AfricaByToto: lets watch The Lion King 2
Gaylien: Hooters
Big Gay: karaoke
team.mom: Okay, let’s compromise and got to the mall.
Gaylien: fine with me Victoria’s Secret is there so i can look at some tots
AfricaByToto: tots
troybolton: tots
Gwetchen: tots
cornHub: tots
Gaylien: TITS
Gaylien: TITTIES!!!!!
Big Gay: it physically hurts her when she spells her favorite things in the world wrong
team.mom: Will you guys stop screaming about tits? I’m driving over to pick everyone up now. You better be ready.
team.mom: Also is Veronica coming?
Gaylien: dunno
Gaylien: let me ask her since she apparently doesn’t have her fuckin phone on her
troybolton: does anyone remember the fucking watershed????
Gaylien: y’all she’s asleep what do
Gaylien sent a photo- sleepyronnie.jpg
Big Gay: AWWW
AfricaByToto: wow your cousin is?? so cute and smol???
cornHub: a baby
Gwetchen: Karen speaks the truth
Gaylien: gonna wake her up
team.mom: Don’t. Let her sleep.
Gwetchen: YOURE DRIVING????
team.mom: I’m parked outside your fucking house.
Gwetchen: oh
Gwetchen: coming!!
Gaylien: Operation: Wake Ronnie Up is a go!!!
Big Gay: oh my god
AfricaByToto: rip Ronnie
Gwetchen: Regina says you’re horrible, Janis
Gaylien: yes
troybolton: water??shed?????
Gaylien sent a video- operationwakeronnieup.mov
AfricaByToto: she looks so fucking scared oh my god
Big Gay: someone save her
cornHub: u woke the baby
Gwetchen: SHE THREW Herself OUT OF THAT BED
Gwetchen: 1) Troy we’re at your house 2) I showed Regina the video and she’s like an Angry Mom
team.mom: JANIS MIRANDA SARKISIAN WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU
Gaylien: everything
team.mom: So let me get this straight... You see your cousin sleeping and you think to yourself, “Hey! I’ll pull a prank on her by putting a mannequin head on the pillow next to her to scare the shit out of her” and then you actually do it?
Gaylien: seems about right
Gaylien: don’t worry, she’s fine!
babyblue: Yeah.
troybolton: w a t r h e d
babyblue: ??????

———

The car ride over to the mall was loud, even though everyone seemed to be simultaneously texting in the group chat at the same time. Veronica was sitting next to Janis and Damian. The ghosts were on the floorboards, but only she could see them hugging their knees, since there was barley any space.

“We were never this loud.” Heather said, wincing at all the noise.

Veronica subtly nodded her head in agreement. She wanted to talk to them, but didn’t want her new friends to think she was weird or crazy, so she stayed quiet until she could branch off in the mall.
After twenty-five minutes of driving, the unholy group of teenagers hopped out of Regina’s car and herded inside of the mall. Veronica followed them around like a duckling until everyone seemed to go in different directions. She spun around in confusion, not sure on where she should go.

“God, Veronica,” Heather said. “Stop looking so pitiful and sad. This is a mall. Do whatever you want.”

“What do you guys want to do?” Veronica asked.

The ghosts looked surprised at the questions, but obliged to answer immediately. So that’s how she spent the mall trip, going wherever three ghosts (or possible hallucinations) directed her.

She went to Macy’s and Heather started looking through a variety of dresses. She interacted with everything like she wasn’t see-through, but Veronica was almost positive everyone else couldn’t see how the things she touched moved. Or maybe they did. Maybe that’s how paranormal stuff and objects moving on their own worked.

Heather ordered Veronica to try on stupid dresses, mainly red ones, but then objected to how red was not her color.

“Even I could have told you that,” Kurt piped up, “And I never match.”

“Yes, I know.” Heather said. “Some of your outfits made me embarrassed for you.”

Veronica laughed slightly, but she felt guilt twist her heart. She shouldn’t be the one to try on these bright red and really nice clothes, Heather should. But Heather couldn’t. Because she took a way her humanity.

Her life.

“What’s with the long face?”

Heather’s voice snapped Veronica out of her daze. She shook her head, blinking away the blurriness that edged her vision.

“Nothing.” She said, “Kurt, Ram? Where do you guys want to go next?”

—

team.mom: Okay, where is everyone?

troybolton: Nike store

AfricaByToto: by the fountain

Gwetchen: Build-A-Bear with Karen

Big Gay: on the escalator with Janis

team.mom: Yes, I can see her slowly rising up to the second level while T-posing.

team.mom: Veronica?

team.mom: Veronica??

babyblue: Here!
It was a birthday for Heather.

Veronica wasn’t too sure why that triggered something within her, but something felt wrong all of a sudden. The air became thicker and hard to breathe. The atmosphere was heavy. Everything was way too loud.

Little girls were gathered at the party table, singing Happy Birthday for Heather, who was beaming. She blew out the candles on her cake. Everyone cheered. The cheering sounded like screaming and nails on chalkboard in Veronica’s ears.

Something was wrong. Oh god, something was wrong. Something was wrong and it’s slipping out through her fingers and spilling everywhere. She tries to regain her grasp but it’s all breaking open.

It’s like Veronica’s underwater. Sounds are muffled and her movements are slow. Her breathing picks up and she stands up off of the bench she has been resting on. She tries to flee, but she bumps into someone and shrieks. She swore there was a bullet hole in the woman’s head.

Veronica stumbled and staggered backwards, knocking into people which caused her to yelp loudly. She finally managed to spin around and hurry away, breathing heavily. One hand was clutching at her chest. Her head started to hurt.

“Veronica!”

She heard the ghosts shouting her name as they scuttled after her. She shivered. Their presence made the air around them freezing cold.

“Veronica, wait!”

They caught up with her pace.

“Are you going to freak out every time you hear or see the name ‘Heather’?” Kurt asked, tilting his head.

“It’s not that.” Veronica rasped, weaving through people. Some glanced back at her because her loud breathing made her sound like she was having an asthma attack.

“Then what is it?” Ram asked.

“I don’t know..”
Veronica skidded to a halt in front of a fountain, trying to get air into her lungs. Her face was stark white and everyone could probably tell that something was wrong. She shut her eyes tightly and dug her hand in her pocket for some change.

She wished that she was okay. She wished that she could go out without having every little thing scare her. She wished that the gods would smite her now and exchange her life for the three she stole.

She tossed the coin into the fountain, knowing damn well nobody would hear her prayers.

——

Gaylien: does anyone have gum?
AfricaByToto: it’s one in the morning and we’re all at our own houses???
Gaylien: okay but do you have any gum??
troybolton: GO TO SLEEP
Gwetchen: wow Troy is triggered
Big Gay: you know Janis won’t sleep even if you yell at her
Gaylien: Damian gets it
team.mom: Jfc you guys.
AfricaByToto: hi Regina! you’re up too?
team.mom: Unfortunately.
Gaylien: ALDNKSHAOANDHEHA
team.mom: !?!?!?
Gwetchen: wtf
AfricaByToto: Janis????
Big Gay: WHAT’S WRONG?
troybolton: Damian is so concerned
Gaylien: i swear to god i just heard Veronica scream.
‘i tried to fly but my wings are mangled under a wolf’s paw’

Chapter Summary

The Remington party was the horrible beginning for Veronica’s trauma and she hasn’t stepped foot in another party since. Until now.

Chapter Notes

warning: Attempted rape

“Veronica, you have to eat.”

Veronica looked up from her tray of food from the cafeteria. She had bought breakfast, but she didn’t touch it. She felt guilty for spending money in her account for something she wasn’t going to eat.

“Not hungry.” She mumbled.

“Then why did you buy it?” Kurt blinked at her.

“I’m asking myself the same thing.”

Heather rolled her eyes.

“I’m not haunting someone that’s just going to starve themselves.” She said firmly. “Eat. Now.”

Veronica jumped at her stern tone and nodded quickly, picking at the eggs on her tray. She took a few bites, but couldn’t eat everything because her stomach kept churning in disapproval. She sighed heavily.

“At least you tried.” Ram pats her shoulder. “A for effort!”

Veronica smiled wryly at him.

“Thanks.”

The bell soon rang and she lumbered off to Algebra II. The class was unbelievably boring and she almost found herself nodding off, but kept waking herself up. She couldn’t fall asleep in class. If she did, she might have a nightmare and that would be embarrassing.

Her first few classes dragged on quickly, but weren’t very eventful. During lunch, she sat at the end of Janis’ table, scribbling something in her journal. She had taken to creative writing to help soothe her overwhelming anxiety. It actually worked sometimes.

“Are you coming, Veronica?”
The cobalt girl looked up and blinked at Gretchen, who was looking at her with a kind smile.

“Huh?” She tilted her head. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t paying attention. What were you saying?”

“The Halloween party.” Gretchen informed her, “We’re all going. You should, too!”

Veronica was quiet for a moment. She hasn’t been to a party since the Remington one. And that one ended led to....

A wave of nausea hit Veronica in a rogue wave and she had to swallow hard to keep down her lunch. She could almost smell the Drain-O and the fact that she also lost her virginity to a fucking psycho on that night, too, made her feel even more sick. Just thinking about the way he touched her makes her want to vomit. She was glad she couldn’t see his ghost.

“Are you okay, darling?” Damian asked, concern in his eyes. “You’re looking a little pale.

“Y-yeah. I’m fine.” Veronica cleared her throat as Regina and Janis exchanged looks, “So...Halloween party! I’m flattered that I’m invited. Uh...yeah, I’ll come!”

Heather, who was lingering around the table, raised an eyebrow at that, but she stayed quiet.

“Great!” Gretchen smiled.

“What did you get yourself into?” Heather shook her head.

———

team.mom: Okay, is everyone ready to go? I’m about to head out to pick you guys up.

Gaylien: ready!

Gwetchen: Karen and I are ready!

Big Gay: YES

AfricaByToto: pick me up already binch

troybolton: ready to go

babyblue: Mhm.

team.mom: Great! Pulling out now.

Gwetchen: so, can we all know what we’re going as now?

team.mom: Succubus.

Gaylien: Damian and i are going at Chell and Wheatley from Portal 2!

Big Gay: the ending made Janis cry

Gaylien: SHUT UP

AfricaByToto: lion tamer!!

troybolton: i lost a bet so i have to go as Troy Bolton from High School Musical,..,
Gaylien: HA
Karen: sexy hamster!!!!
Big Gay: oh my god
Gwetchen: vampire
babyblue: plague doctor
troybolton: niiice
troybolton: that fucking terrifies me

—

Everything was so loud. Too loud. Veronica was shoved around by all the drinking teenagers who were dancing or bustling around the house. She felt bad for whoever had to clean up afterwards. The music stabbed into her ears and made her head pound painfully. She could barely hear herself think.

She wobbled through a narrow hallway to get to the kitchen, desperately trying to find Janis or one of her friends. There were too many people and dizziness made her vision fuzzy. Not because she was drunk, but because parties shot her anxiety through the roof. She felt like she was going to relapse at any moment.

“You aren’t looking too good, Veronica.” Kurt pointed out.

“I have a mask on?” Veronica clips in slight confusion.

“I can just tell.” He states with a nod.

“Ah.”

Veronica hobbled over to the sink and got herself a cup of water. She moved her bird mask up slightly to take a sip. Ever since the Remington party, she never touched alcohol again. Maybe if she hadn’t drank anything she wouldn’t have thrown up on Heather Chandler and then dirtied herself by riding JD like there was no tomorrow.

Maybe her best friend wouldn’t have been dead.

She gagged and teetered over the sink, spitting up some of the water. She could still feel the way JD touched her and she wanted to vomit her innards. She fucking hated him. She wished she could forget about him and what he put her through. She did not miss him.

“Veronica?”

Heather’s touch on her back was ice cold, which was oddly soothing.

“Being here isn’t good for you.”

“Are you getting flashbacks, too?” Veronica croaked, glancing over her shoulder at the ghost. Heather pursed her lips and then nodded.

“A little.”
“...I’m so sorry.”

Heather shook her head and lightly elbowed Veronica in the ribcage.

“Maybe you should leave. We can continue that show on your laptop.”

“Merlin?” Veronica tilted her head.

“Yeah, that one!”

The girl smiled slightly and straightened up. She took one last sweep through the house before stepping outside into the crisp October air. If she wasn’t dressed in all black then it might have felt nice.

“I look like JD.” Veronica cringed, stepping out onto the street. She would just have to walk since she couldn’t find anyone and she didn’t want to ruin the party for them. After all, Regina took them all there. If she left, then everyone else would have to, too.

“That could have been your costume!” Ram says. “It is scary.”

“I enjoy that we refer to that bastard as ‘it’ a lot.” Heather said.

“Me too.” Veronica laughed.

That’s when she heard a branch snap from behind her. Veronica jumped around in time to see someone hide behind a tree. She shuddered.

“I know you’re there.” She called out.

“Veronica, what are you doing?!” Kurt whispered, even though he couldn’t be heard.

“Confronting this person.” Veronica whispered back.

There was rustling from a few yards away and some teenage guy dressed as a zombie steps out from behind a tree, clearly drunk out of his mind. He laughs and says a string of slurred words that Veronica couldn’t quite understand, but she’s sure she knows what he wants from her.

Sex.

She shuddered again and kept walking down the side of the road. She didn’t get why this guy was targeting her exactly. Sure, she was alone but he couldn’t see what she looked like with her black robes and white bird mask on. He might not even know if she was a girl or a boy. Maybe he didn’t care.

There was the sound of freshly fallen leaves crunching under boots from behind her and he was gone. Good.

Veronica looked forward again and continued her trek back to the house. She was skimming through her phone to find a song to play and that’s when she was tackled.

The girl was shoved roughly to the asphalt, knocking her elbows against the ground painfully and tearing her sleeves. She screamed and threw her arms out at the drunk teenager who was on top of her. He was groping for her robes, trying to rip them off while also pinning her to the ground.

Veronica twisted and managed to worm away enough to skitter into the woods. There was a heavy blow against her back; she’s on the ground. A grimy hand rips the bird mask off of her face and
lips press to her own. A slimy tongue slips into her mouth and muffles her screams.

The ghosts are yelling, too. Heather is grabbing at the guy’s hair and the boys at trying to pummel him, but they suddenly can’t interact with anything. Their hands phase through him, making their attempts at saving Veronica useless.

Veronica’s hands are pinned over her head. Dirty nails grate down her stomach and her spine arches in pain. Blood oozes from thin scratches stretching down her abdomen. Ropes of saliva connect her face to the creep’s mouth. She gags. He bites down on her ear.

She can feel his hips pounding against her pelvis and he hasn’t even taken his pants off yet. She still squirming and screaming, almost crying. His hands slip into her black trousers and she squeals loudly, kicking out her legs.

JD comes back to mind. She remembers how she had given herself to him the night before she murdered her best friend. She remembers how he pressed himself on her another night.

Fight or flight instincts kick in suddenly. Adrenaline pours into her veins. A panic attack in coming on rapidly.

Veronica paws around the forest floor, finds a big rock, and smashes it into the side of the guy’s head. He chokes on a scream and falls to the ground. He might have been bleeding.

Veronica is gasping and wheezing. Tears come fast and she’s sobbing, curled up on her side in the leaves and dirt. Heather kneels down beside her, gently rubbing her back. The boys seem to be keeping guard. The creep stirs and she jumps up, sprinting all the way back to the house.

People turn to stare as Veronica stumbles into the light. Her hair is a mess, tangled with sticks and leaves. Her robes are ripped to shreds at the chest and the sleeves are torn open. Her knees are skinned and her stomach is still dribbling blood. She wraps an arms around her abdomen and squeezes her eyes shut. She swallows down a mouthful of bile.

“Please help me find Janis,” She murmured to the trio of ghosts huddled around her protectively.

Kurt and Ram nod and branch off while Heather stays beside Veronica. They eventually find Janis and her friends and Veronica awkwardly staggers up to them.

“Janis,” She rasped, “When can we leave?”

Janis turned to stare at Veronica and her eyebrows raised in surprise.

“Woah, this is the makeup you had under that costume? It looks great!” She smiled.

“Oh...haha...thanks.” Veronica’s head is spinning. She thinks she’s gonna faint.

“You look like you’ve had way too much to drink.” Aaron comments.

“And you night seemed to be fun.” Gretchen teased playfully.

“Oh yeah,” Veronica mumbled, tilting her head up. She’s either going to vomit or pass out. “When are we leaving?”

“Probably soon.” Cady said.

Damian set a hand on Veronica’s shoulder and she leans entirely into his touch to where she’s snuggled right up against him. She shuts her eyes and relaxes, not caring about her odd actions.
There are a few small giggles, but she doesn’t open her eyes. She’s exhausted and feels really sick.

Should she tell them about how she was almost raped? No. She’ll cause enough problems once they find out about what she’s done.

“My new lock screen.” Aaron laughs after taking a photo of Veronica and Damian.

“Someone is making a move on your platonic soulmate, Jan!” Cady gaps in horror.

“Oh no you don’t!” Janis laughed and grabbed Veronica and yanked her away. She clearly wasn’t trying to be violent or rough or rube, but Veronica thought she was being attacked.

Her fight or flight instincts kicked in and, this time, her body chose flight. She flinched violently and ducked her head, almost bracing her arms over herself.

Janis let go and blinked at her. Slight concern glinted through her eyes.

“You okay?” She asked.

“Uhh...yeah.” Veronica cleared her throat.

“I’m going to take Ronnie to the car.” Regina said, nudging the girl. “Everyone get ready to go. We’ll be leaving in five.”

Veronica felt a wave of relief when Regina said that. She followed the taller girl out to the girl, thanking her.

“It’s no problem.” Regina said, smiling slightly. “This party was pretty lame, anyway. We could have a much better party at my house. Or someone else’s.”

Veronica nodded, but she just wanted to go home. She needed to sleep this pain and anxiety away.

On the ride home, Veronica fell asleep leaning against Janis. Her hands found her cousin’s shirt and she clutched to the fabric like it was her lifeline. The others tittered and giggled while snapping many photos.
Chapter Summary

History seems to be repeating itself for Veronica Sawyer + a trip to 7/11. At three in the morning.

Chapter Notes

Chapter warnings: Vomit and a creepy JD (both are minor though)

The cafeteria seemed ten times louder than usual. Whispers ran through the air like a crisp autumn breeze, but they were so hard to discern. Everyone was talking all at once and it was starting to make Veronica’s head pound.

“Are we still on for movie night?” Gretchen asked, leaning over the table to look at everyone.


“I wanted to watch Twilight.” Damian said.

“I second that.” Karen pipes up.

“Lion King 2!!” Cady said with a determined voice.

“My house, my pick.” Janis smirked, puffing out her chest. Her friends groaned and rolled their eyes in a good-natured way.

“Isn’t it technically Ronnie’s house, too, though?” Cady pointed out.

“Ohhh, she’s right.” Damian nodded.

Eyes turned to stare at Veronica, who had her face buried in a journal. She looked up slowly and blinked. A puzzled look crossed her face.

“Huh?”

“What movie do YOU want to watch, Ronnie?” Gretchen asked.

Veronica shrugged her shoulders. Personally, she wanted to watch Lord of The Flies, but she was too shy to say anything. So she would just agree with whatever her cousin chose.

“Anything is fine.” She said, clicking her pen. “I don’t really care.”

Regina pursed her lips and tilted her head at Veronica. Her eyes were skeptical.

“The Mother Lioness might be into you, Veronica.” Heather spoke up. “You need to act more natural. Just say a movie.”
“The Blind Side!” Ram suggested.

“San Andreas.” Kurt tried.

“Those are too loud, you know I can’t handle that.”

“She’s right.” Heather nodded. “Remember when we watched Skyscraper? She barely got halfway
through the movie.”

“There were explosions, and you know how I am around-“

Veronica bit her tongue until she tasted blood when she realized that she was talking to absolutely
no one, at least in everyone else’s eyes. Her friends were staring at her oddly. They
looked...concerned. She cleared her throat loudly, but didn’t attempt to explain. She just looked
down at her journal. Luckily she was saved by nearby whispering.

“...Are you serious?”

“...Yeah, dude! They found a body in the woods!”

“...Holy shit. Who’s body was it?”

Regina twisted around in her chair to look at the to seniors chatting behind her. She curiously
regards them on what they’re talking about.”

“You know Kyle Markson’s Halloween party?” The first one asks and the table nods. “Well, Tyler
Mylark’s dead body showed up in the woods down the road!”

Veronica felt her heart drop.

“How’d he die?” Aaron tilted his head.

“There was a gash in the side of his head, so he was probably hit by something.” The second
informed. “Someone must have killed him by bashing his skull in.”

Veronica didn’t need to hear anymore to know the story. It was her. She killed him. She killed him
when she hit him with that rock. She drove that pointed stone right into his temples and stole his
life.

She killed another person.

Veronica’s insides lurched. She slapped a hand over her mouth as nausea set in. Her stomach
bubbled warningly.

“Vera?” Janis looked at her. “You okay?”

Veronica shook her head wildly. She jumped up and ran to the nearest trashcan, ejecting everything
she had just eaten violently. The cafeteria seemed to quiet down just to hear her puke. Eyes burned
into her back. Some people were laughing. Others groaned and cringed. Nobody made a move to
help her.

“Oh my god,” She muttered hoarsely. “I killed another person...”

Veronica jolted awake, sitting up straight in her bed. She was breathing heavily, cold sweat
beading her forehead. Her pajamas were plastered to her clammy skin.

Her room was dark, aside from the dim nightlight plugged into an outlet. Distorted shadows were cast up the wall. Veronica shuddered and put her head in her hands.

“I really killed him, didn’t I?”

She peeked out slightly and the ghosts nodded.

“Calm down, okay,” Heather said from where she was sitting. “You had gloves on. They can’t track your fingerprints even if they found the rock.”

“That’s doesn’t make this any better!” Veronica snapped. “I killed someone. Again! For the fourth time!”

She felt sick all over again and shut her mouth to keep from vomiting. She slumped back down onto her bed, pulling the blankets close.

“But at least you might not be going to lady prison.” Kurt said.

“You’re not helping...”

Ram padded over to the door and peeked out into the hallway. He could head Janis and her friends laughing from downstairs.

“Maybe you should join them.” He suggested. “To take your mind off of things.”

Veronica stirred and peered out from under the covers at him, then buried her face back into her pillow.

“Really?” Ram groaned. “It’s so boring in here!”

“You can go,” Veronica said. “I’m staying right here.”

Heather sighed and shook her head.

“If you haven’t noticed, Veronica, we can’t exactly leave your side. We’re bound to our killer. We are supposed to be haunting you, after all.” She said. “Trust me, if we weren’t we wouldn’t be following around your sorry ass everywhere.”

Veronica’s heart twists at that, but she doesn’t say anything. The ghosts weren’t her friends. Not after what she did to them.

“I can get behind that.” She sighed, rolling over onto her back to stare at the ceiling. “Are my sleeping pills in here?”

Kurt nodded and pointed to a small capsule on the dresser. Veronica gives him a thin smile and gets up to grab the pills. Her hands are shaking, and she realizes just how hard child-proof caps are to open. There’s only two pills left inside.

———

Out by the flags is a small memorial for Tyler Mylark. There are flowers and photos of the boy. He’s smiling and so, so happy. People are crying and full on sobbing. One girl is on her knees, clutching a picture frame to her chest. That’s his little sister.
Veronica was passing the flag pole on her way to third period and froze. Her mouth hung open slightly. Guilt ripped open her heart when she saw how upset people were. She took Tyler Mylark from them. It’s all her fault.

“Terrible, isn’t it?”

Veronica must have jumped five inches off of the pavement when Damian put his hand on her shoulder. He was staring at the memorial with a strange look in his eyes.

“Did you know him?” Veronica asked.

He shook his head, laughing slightly.

“No way.” He said. “But it’s still sad.”

A silence fell between the two before Damian squeezed the girl’s shoulder.

“We better get going before we’re late.”

Veronica followed Damian to the Physics room, since they had the class together. Cady was already at the lab table, smiling.

“It’s about time!” She said as the bell rang.

“Sorry, we got sidetracked.” Damian said, sitting down beside her.

“Staring at a boy who was pretty stoned.” Ram said.

Veronica actually snorted at the pun, but stopped laughing when a girl with tear streaks down her face dragged herself into the room. The teacher hugs her, and Veronica wants to kill herself for what she did.

———

Gaylien: who’s your guys’ favorite Mario Kart character??

AfricaByToto: IT’S THREE IN THE MORNING

troybolton: Luigi

Gaylien: Troy gets how dire this question is

troybolton: stop calling me that

cornHub: princess peach

Gwetchen: Rosalina

Big Gay: Yoshi

Gaylien: mine is Bowser Jr

AfricaByToto: Yoshi too

team.mom: I fucking hate all of you.

team.mom: ...But probably Daisy.
Gaylien: woah mom answered my question!!!!

team.mom: I’m not your fucking mother. Why would I put myself through that?

Gaylien: >:O

troybolton: cold blooded

babyblue: Shy Guy.

Big Gay: DARLING WHY ARE YOU AWAKE

Gaylien: YEAH WHAT THE HELL RONNIE

team.mom: You should really be asleep, Veronica.

Gwetchen: this chat whenever one of us are awake at some ungodly hour of the night- fine don’t sleep for nine days straight and die
this chat when Ronnie is awake- ALSKAKHDANKANDBSJAJDNA SLEEP!!!!!!!

AfricaByToto: so true tho

Gaylien: Ronnie since you’re awake let’s sneak out !!

babyblue: I suppose I don’t have a choice since I hear you changing clothes and stomping down the hallway.

Gaylien sent a photo- sneakingout.jpg

cornHub: she’s wearing hedgehog slippers !!!!

AfricaByToto: Ronnie looks so exhausted

babyblue: I am.

Gaylien: just jumped out the window like a true pro bitches

Gaylien: it’s Ronnie’s turn!!

Gaylien sent a photo- letsgoronnie!!!.jpg

Gwetchen: she looks so concerned

team.mom: Please be careful you two.

AfricaByToto: Soft Regina is alive and her Mother Instincts are kicking

team.mom: Shut the hell up.

Gaylien: i love our mom

———

Janis and Veronica snuck off to a twenty-four hour 7/11 to get snacks. Stepping inside of the gas station made memories and horrible nostalgia come rushing back to Veronica, but she didn’t say anything and just shoved all the dark thoughts to the back of her head.
She greets the worker at the counter to be polite and shuffled over to the slushy machine. She just stared at it for a long time before finally grabbing a cup. While she’s filling it up, she looks up to see JD’s face pressed against the window, staring in at her.

Veronica yelps and jumps backwards, nearly flinging her Cherry slushy at him. Her heart skips a few beats when his lips curve into a wide smile.

“Are you okay, ma’am?”

The worker at the front counter is looking at her strangely, but had curiosity in his eyes. This had to be the most interesting thing that has happened all night.

Veronica opened her mouth to reply and noticed that JD is gone. If she squints, though, she swears she can see handprints smudged on the glass. Her head spins.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” She finally answers, “I just thought I saw a spider, that’s all. The coast is clear, though!”

The worker nodded and looked back down at his laptop.

Veronica breathed out shakily. She reached for a lid for her slushy and looked at the trio of ghosts who followed her in. The boys are poking around the aisles while Heather is staring intently at the spot JD had been in.

“Did you see him, too?” Veronica asked softly.

Heather pulls her gaze away to look at the girl. She frowns.

“Unfortunately.” She’s gritting her teeth. She hates that filth as much as Veronica does. Maybe even more.

“That’s the first time I’ve seen him since the incident...” Veronica admitted, “I thought he wasn’t real.”

“Maybe your eyes are just playing tricks on you.” Ram says, peeking out from an aisle.

“Maybe.” Heather nodded. “I only saw him for a split second, so I might have been mistaken, too.”

“I hope so.” Veronica mumbled.

She found Janis and offered to pay, but her cousin declined, so she went to the tables by the front door to wait. Her eyelids were getting heavy and she could barely remember how she even got home as drowsiness weighed down on her.

Though, she could have sworn she remembered JD’s voice whispering something in her ear.

———

Gaylien: please hand over the Best Cousin Ever award because i so deserve it

troybolton: ????

Gwetchen: please explain

Gaylien: carrying Ronnie home
Gaylien sent a photo- shesleep.jpg

Big Gay: AAAAAAA

AfricaByToto: AAAAAAAAAAA

team.mom: Please don’t wake her up this time.

Gwetchen: AAAAAAAAA

troybolton: AAA

cornHub: A BABY
Lord of the Flies

Chapter Summary

Veronica gets into a fight. Her blood feels boiling hot in her veins. Probably because of the mocking voice inside of her head.

Chapter Notes

Okay, I was not lying when I said JD is a psycho. He’s basically the JD from the movie. He’s a creep and he’s just here to torment Veronica. And Veronica is not still in love with him. She’s so fuckin done with this guy it’s not even funny.

Chapter warnings: Fighting (if that triggers people), Use of the d-slur (though it’s only once), JD being really creepy, Hearing voices, Vomiting

Veronica didn’t enjoy violence after the incidents in Sherwood, but if someone were to mess with her cousin or friends, she’ll forget all about that discomfort and go apeshit on that person. That’s exactly what happened on Wednesday when some guy named Shane Oman (apparently he was notorious for something at Northshore) decided to mess with Janis.

He started by calling her names when she was trying to walk back to her table with her lunch, and then he kicked her in the shin and smacked her lunch tray out of her hand when she didn’t give a reaction. By that point, Veronica had enough.

“Come on, Dyke.” Shane taunted, “Answer me. We all know you have a mouth since you use it so much to eat puss-“

He was cut off when he was shoved backwards. A few “ohhhs” went through the lunchroom and he glared down at the cobalt girl.

“What’s your damage, Shane?” Veronica snapped, “She wasn’t bothering you. Leave her alone.”

Shane towered over her, easily standing six feet tall. His hate-filled stare drilled holes into Veronica, but she stood her ground.

“You think you’re so tough, huh?” Shane growled.

Veronica merely shrugged her shoulders, which seemed to be an insult to Shane because he shoved her hard. Her lightweight body (thanks to how little she’s been eating) toppled to the ground. She tried to jump back up, but a sneaker drove into her stomach.

Shane began repeatedly kicking her while she’s down (literally) while spitting out insults. His asshat friends held back Janis and the others at her table. People are yelling, even cheering, and recording videos of the fight. The teachers are either lost in the crowd or don’t care enough to do anything.
“That’s what you get you stupid bitch.” Shane hissed, finally stopping his onslaught of kicks. He smoothed his shirt and turned back to Janis to continue his torment.

Veronica is lying face-down on the floor, twitching and shaking. Her stomach is throbbing. Her lip is busted, oozing blood down her chin.

“You’re just going to let him win? Get up. You know you can take him down.”

That horribly familiar voice rang out in Veronica’s ears.

“You know you have it in you.”

She shuddered.

“Do it. Do it! Kill him! Spill his blood! Gouge his chest! Do him in!”

She coughed and tried to push herself up.

“Kill him! Break his bones! Spill his blood!”

JD’s voice raises louder and louder.

“Kill him! Rip him apart! Spill his blood! Tear his skin!”

A tone of insanity. He’s screaming like a mad man, chanting and singing lines of morbid manslaughter. It’s not right. His voice is distorted. His influence is too much.

“Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!!”

Veronica flung herself at Shane, colliding with his back and sending him toppling sideways. Her blood is hot in her veins. She feels like a wild animal. This must have been the rush JD felt.

“You stupid fuck.” Shane hissed, only to have his threat be hollow when Veronica punches him square in the nose. The sickening crunch and cracking sounds are almost as loud as his howls of pain.

“You bitch! You little bitch!” He screamed.

Veronica felt like she could finally ease up, but Shane didn’t seem to be done. Apparently a broken nose only fuels his urge to attack.

His bloodied hands go for her throat and she panics, slashing her nails across his face. His grip hooks in her hair and her forehead smashes with his knee. Stars burst around Veronica and she topples over onto a table before rolling onto the ground. Above her, Shane is pawing at his eyes and cheeks, yowling like a dying animal.

Veronica surely thinks she’s about to be killed when Janis comes barreling into Shane. She leaps onto him like an angry leopard and began to pummel him, even biting if she could get any skin between her teeth. Veronica is in awe at her strength that she almost doesn’t hear Principal Duvall’s voice booming through the cafeteria.

“What is going on in here?!” He yelled.

Damian pulls Janis off of Shane quickly, holding her back when she clearly wants to lunge again. He’s glaring daggers at the boy, though, probably wishing he got a chance to beat him up as well.
“My office,” Principal Duvall said sternly. “Now.”

Janis didn’t seem to show any sign of involving her cousin, but Veronica refused for her to take the blame.

“Wait...sir...” Veronica gurgled. She pushes herself up and has to use a table for support. She can barely walk straight. “It wasn’t Janis...it was me... I attacked him..”

Regina and Cady both supported her when she almost collapsed again. She hummed in thanks, her head lolling onto Regina’s shoulder as consciousness started to slip again. Principal Duvall gave her a concerned look.

“All of you to my office.”

———

After multiple explanations, Shane was suspended and Veronica and Janis were given a day of detention. Principal Duvall seemed to take pity on the girls since he knew about Veronica’s PTSD and assumed it made her lash out so violently. She didn’t know how to take that, but was thankful they weren’t punished that harshly.

The detention room was quiet. Too quiet. Veronica would have covered her ears if Janis wasn’t in there with her. Instead, she just lay her head down on the desk and held an ice pack to her throbbing stomach, which was probably severely bruised now. She forced open her eyes when she heard the snap of a camera and then her phone go off.

- Gaylien sent a photo- indetentionwithronnie.jpg

Gwetchen: nice selfie but is Ronnie okay???
troybolton: she looks dead
babyblue: I’m okay. Just achy.
team.mom: Are you sure?
babyblue: I’m sure.
Big Gay: y’all Ronnie is so hardcore
cornHub: rt
Gwetchen: rt
AfricaByToto: rt
troybolton: rt
Gaylien: there’s no one in the detention room and i got Ronnie to spin on the spinny chair
Gaylien sent a video- shespin.mov
Big Gay: SHE!!!!!
troybolton: awww

Gwetchen: is no one gonna point out how she’s gripping the arms of the chair with a death grip because that is a big same

team.mom: Well, Janis is spinning her at full speed.

team.mom: And you both shouldn’t be up after what happened. You’re hurt.

Gaylien: we’re fine!

Gaylien: shit

Gwetchen: and there it is

Gaylien sent a video- shootingstar.mov

troybolton: your cousin smashes into a table while spinning at Maximum Velocity in a spinny chair and your first reaction is to take a video

Gaylien: yeah pretty much

AfricaByToto: JANIS

team.mom: JANIS IS SHE OKAY?!?

babyblue: I’m fine.

Gwetchen: Mom Regina is so Alive today

Gwetchen: also when Ronnie replies with periods i always think she’s so tired of everything

babyblue: I am.

babyblue: I’m going to lie on the floor until we can leave.

-

That’s just what Veronica did. She closed her eyes and felt a pulse beat against her brain as she’s pretty sure she drifted off.

She awoke with a start, momentarily forgetting where she was and how she go there. The first thing that registered was the sharp pain in her stomach and then fact that she was still in the detention room. Janis was nowhere to be seen. The thought of her cousin leaving her in there suddenly came to mind.

“Aww, how sad.”

Every muscle in Veronica’s body tensed up.

“She left you. Like usual. Nobody wants to be around you.”

JD’s voice is distorted, but she can hear every word loud and clear. He’s nowhere to be seen, but it’s like he’s right behind her, whispering into her ear.

“That’s not true.” Veronica growled, but her tone was shaky.
“Oh really? Then why did she just leave you on the floor? You’re injured, too. She would have stayed.”

“I’m probably still asleep.”

“You can’t feel pain in dreams, my darling.”

Veronica cringes at the stabs to her stomach. She can’t feel pain in dreams, but she can in nightmares, apparently. That’s what this is. It’s just a nightmare. A strange one, but still a nightmare.

“Everything is a nightmare to you.” JD says when it’s brought against him. “Your world is a nightmare. Your own personal living hell you destroyed all by yourself.”

“You destroyed it!” Veronica lashed out, her teeth gritted in rage.

JD laughs. It’s so maniacal and rebounds in her skull, echoing in her ears. She clutches at her head when her temples throb.

“Perhaps. Clever girl. My clever girl.”

“I don’t belong to you.” Veronica spat, peering up at nothing in particular.

There’s silence for a moment. She thinks she hears JD click his tongue. His laughter shivers again.

“You are a silly little girl,” He said. “Just an ignorant, silly little girl.”

Veronica says nothing. She keeps her head bowed. JD takes it as a sign of obedience.

“Don’t you agree?” He croons. “Aren’t you just a silly little girl?”

No words are said from Veronica.

“Well then,” JD says, “Better not just sit there. They’ll think you’re weak. You don’t want Janis to think you’re weak, do you? You like Janis a lot, don’t you?”

Veronica stirs. She grasps the edge of a desk and hauls herself up to her feet. Her eyes are open but she’s can’t see straight. Her body does not feel like her own. JD continues to taunt her.

“Go on, my darling. Find your ‘friends’. If they hadn’t drove off without you yet, that is.”

Veronica staggers for the door. She pounds her palm against her temple and seems to finally get a grip. The switch isn’t flipped for JD, though.

“It’s pointless, really. I’m giving you false encouragement. This isn’t your home. Your home is in the dirt. In a grave. Dead. Dead. Dead. Surrounded by fellow corpses. Eaten up by worms and maggots. You should be dead!”

Veronica is too caught up in taming the voice inside her head that she doesn’t even realize she bumped into Janis. Her cousin steps back and blinks a few times.

“Vera? I was just coming to get you.”

“Where were you?” Veronica asked, straightening out her voice.

“The bathroom.” Janis answered. “Detention ended twenty minutes ago. I wanted to let you rest,

“It was a little funny looking.” She pats Veronica’s shoulder and then jogs back to the detention room to collect their bags.

“She was trying to leave you.” JD leers. “She wants nothing to do with you. She thinks you’re weak and you can’t change her mind.”

“Get out of my head.” Veronica hissed between her teeth.

JD just laughed.

Veronica walked out to the parking lot with Janis. All of their friends were waiting in Regina’s car. Janis got in. Veronica hesitated.

“Aren’t you coming?” Cady asked from the shotgun seat.

Veronica blinks at her.

“I was going to go to the pharmacy.” She said. “I don’t want to bother you with that.”

“Get in.” Regina says, and Veronica is too scared to go against her, so she listens. She climbs in next to Aaron and Karen.

They did stop at the pharmacy and all got out, much to Veronica’s dismay. She shuffled to the medicine aisle and ended up grabbing three bottles of pills: sleeping tablets, painkillers, and antidepressants. She stared at the last one for a long time.

“Antidepressants won’t help you, darling.” JD quipped.

“I didn’t ask you.”

When none of her friends were around, Veronica slinked over to the counters and paid. The worker stared at her with this concerned look, but didn’t say anything about what she was buying. Veronica threw in a pack of gum to try and make things less awkward.

Home was her next destination, but instead she was taken out to a restaurant. Not the most ideal place to go in her position, but she didn’t protest.

This early dinner felt like it dragged on forever. The whole time she was fidgeting in her seat, trying to calm herself down. JD was making her way too nervous, and she didn’t even know if he was real. He could have just been a figment of her imagination. She wanted the ghosts back. Wherever they are.

She licked her busted lip and it started to burn again. She tasted blood on her tongue. Her stomach twisted for the ninth time that day.

“You really didn’t have to bring me.” She said when the table quieted down.

“It’s the least I could do after today.” Regina says. “You did save Janis’ ass after all.”

Her eyes look too much like Heather Chandler’s. It freaks Veronica out.

“Hey!” Janis barked defensively.
“You gotta admit that Veronica whooped Shane’s ass, though.” Aaron said.

“What are you talking about?” Veronica blinked. “I got beaten into a pulp!” She laughed at her own pain.

“You broke his nose!” Cady piped up. “You showed him who’s boss, Ronnie!”

Veronica let herself smile. She let herself enjoy dinner and put JD on mute. She let herself believe that these people cared about her. She let herself have a happy moment even though she knew it probably wouldn’t last.

And it didn’t.

Veronica felt uncomfortably hot on the ride back home. She kept shifting and squirming in her seat, desperately trying to get comfortable. Her clothes were plastered to her damp skin, which only furthered her discomfort.

“What if you just killed your friends?”

JD’s voice came back. It was so loud.

“There’s a thought. A fun thought. I would do it. Murder helps relieve stress.”

Veronica tuned him out. She rested her head against the cool window and curled up against the door. She shut her eyes and tried to focus on the music from the radio. It almost worked, too.

“Ohhh, it’s our song!”

Teenage Suicide, Don’t Do It began to play. That was the breaking point for Veronica.

“Pull over!” She cried, already starting to unbuckle her seatbelt.

Regina reacted quickly and swerved to the side of the road. The car hadn’t even stopped completely before Veronica threw open the door and started throwing up.

She stumbled out into the frigid evening air completely, doubled over with her hands on her knees. She had done everyone else a favor by kicking the door shut. Nobody liked other people vomiting.

There was a freezing cold touch on the small of her back.

“It’s about time... Where you guys, the ghost strip club?”

“No time for jokes, Sawyer.” Heather snapped. “You’re not doing too good.”

“Yeah, I can tell.” Veronica said before coughing up more of her dinner. She would have to pay Regina back for wasting money on that spaghetti she had ordered.

One of the doors to the car opened and closed and Janis was suddenly at Veronica’s side, grabbing a handful of her hair.

“Shit, Vera,” She muttered, rubbing Veronica’s back. “You should have told me you felt this crappy. Regina would have took you home immediately. I would have made her.”

Veronica laughed weakly.

“I can tell. Her group chat name is ‘team.mom’ after all.”
“Aww, they care.” Ram cooed. Unlike JD, Veronica knew he wasn’t taunting or teasing her.

Eventually, she could finally get back into the car. Janis switched spots with Aaron just so she could be next to Veronica.

“She really cares.” Kurt nods.

Veronica agreed in her head. She couldn’t hear JD anymore. Her stomach settled slightly without him being around. She let her head rest on Janis’ shoulder. Her eyes shut.

The next thing she clearly remembered was waving goodbye to Regina and the others while standing in Janis’ driveway. She blinked her eyes a few time before going inside.

“Feeling any better?” Janis asked, tossing her a water bottle so she could wash her mouth out.

“A little.” Veronica answered, taking a small sip. “I need to pay Regina back, though. She paid for no reason after I threw everything up.”

Janis laughed and shook her head.

“You can try. She’ll probably turn your attempts down.” She nudged Veronica with her shoulder, “Wanna watch a movie?”

Veronica smiled.

“I’d love to.”

PRIVATE MESSAGE BETWEEN team.mom AND babyblue

team.mom: Just wanted to say that I hope you’re feeling better!

team.mom: Oh, and you left your bag in my car. I can give it back tomorrow at school.

babyblue: Thank you, Regina! It’s really sweet of you to check up on me like this.

babyblue: I’m feeling better, don’t worry. I probably just got sick because of what Shane did. He did kick me multiple times in the stomach. I probably wasn’t ready to handle food just yet.

babyblue: And, got it. Thank you again!

team.mom: Hey, Veronica?

babyblue: Yeah?

team.mom: Why’d you buy antidepressants?

babyblue is typing...

babyblue is typing...

babyblue is typing...

babyblue has left the chat
**don’t Bite the hand that Feeds you**

**Chapter Summary**

Veronica thinks she’s getting sick. She also thinks she let too much slip when she snaps at Janis for the first time.

also Team Mom Regina

**Chapter Notes**

Chapter warnings: Super minor NSFW (kinda?? it’s just scratches on the chest. not actual sex. i just wanted to point it out somehow), implied sexual assault

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JD was Veronica’s pig head on a stick. She could almost hear the flies buzzing around the decaying decapitation as it stares at her with eyeless black sockets and a mouth full of blood and maggots. It would laugh. She would faint.

Veronica awoke in a cold sweat the next morning, shivering. She swung her legs over the side of the bed and padded to the bathroom, being careful to not disturb the ghosts, who were huddled up in a heap in the corner. Apparently spirits liked their beauty sleep, too, even in the afterlife.

It was six-thirty in the morning, so Veronica thought that would be a good time to take a shower. She cranked the nozzle and peeled off her damp pajamas. Her skin was so clammy.

A scalding hot rain pounded over her bare skin. She scrubbed and scrubbed until her flesh was raw and glowed neon pink, but she still couldn’t seem to get herself completely clean. She felt itchy and uncomfortable, like she wasn’t in the right body. Almost humorously, she turned in circles in the shower, clearly disoriented.

Then, she could have sworn she felt something rub her hips. She yelped out loud, knocking everything over in the small shower space before slipping and falling. There, she lay sprawled out, naked under a hot spray of water, wishing for one day she could live normally.

—

Gaylien: the loudest things in the world include:
-Opening a chip bag in a quiet class
-The fire alarms at school
-Moms yelling
-Dropping a spoon in the middle of the night
-Veronica knocking over literally every soap bottle in the shower at six in the morning

Big Gay: it seems to run in the family then because u do it all the time

Gaylien: shut up this isn’t about my flaws
troybolton: for once

Gwetchen: OOOH

Gaylien: im killing Troy when i see him at school
troybolton: id like to see you try
Gaylien: bitch
Gaylien: OADHAKDHBSHDHS
Gaylien: RONNIE DID YOU JUST FUCKING SLIP IN THE SHOWER

AfricaByToto: ????
AfricaByToto: it’s not even seven yet can’t you guys wait to cause a scene
AfricaByToto: WAIT RONNIE????
Gaylien: should i go and check on her???
troybolton: is she your first cousin?
Gaylien: second
troybolton: then it’s probably fine because you’re not completely blood related
Gwetchen: What the fuck Troy
cornHub: yeah so it’s okay if you see her boobies!
troybolton: that’s not what I
Gwetchen: KAREN NO
babyblue: I would prefer if she didn’t see me naked.
Gaylien: thank god you’re not dead
Gaylien: mom would have killed me
babyblue: I wish I was.
babyblue: I just slipped. I’m fine.

//

PRIVATE CHAT BETWEEN team.mom AND Gaylien WAS CREATED
team.mom: I’m worried about Veronica.
Gaylien: yeah, she’s a pretty weird kid, huh?
team.mom: More than weird, Janis. She bought sleeping pills and antidepressants. Usually I wouldn’t care, a lot of people take them, but something doesn’t seem right with her.
Gaylien: okay, damn, you cracked me. i’ll tell you and everyone else at school, but don’t let Veronica know. she’ll kill me

team.mom: Tell us what?

Gaylien: you’ll see.

—

Veronica stared at herself in the mirror, dripping wet and shivering. Her eyes were dull, like two pieces of scratched amber shoved into her face. There’s faded scars around her breasts. She vividly remembers the way JD tore into her with teeth and claws, biting and scratching and licking. Pain was not a turn-on for her. He didn’t seem to understand that.

JD had become her king, whether she liked it or not. At Westerburg, everyone scratched up a high rise to get footing for something big. Everyone scratched for an advantage, power. JD has scratched his way all the way to the top, climbing higher than the Heathers. Maybe people didn’t see him on the peak, but he has always been the top dog and kept one foot on the boulders that threatened to crash down on everyone else.

His influence had helped Veronica gain dizzying amounts of power, but he dragged her through a gutter to do it. Her life is a rollercoaster that doesn’t seem to stop escalating. JD has made her into what she is today.

A shell.

He had been ruthless. He easily would have slit Heather Duke’s wrists and drained her blood into a barrel or cut off Heather McNamara’s head and put it in a gift box for her parents. And Veronica would have let him. Because she was a coward. She was too scared to go against him and his murderous ways. She thought it was a blessing that she survived their final encounter.

Veronica shuddered violently. JD had known her every move. He watched her from a throne made of bones, never letting anything slip from his gaze. He knew her address, handwriting, and where she was every second of every day. He was an obsessive fuck that always seemed to be one step behind his little puppet.

He’s gone now, but his vice grip on Veronica has not let go.

Veronica slips on her clothing and steps out of the bathroom, her hair still a wet mop. She didn’t care enough to dry it. She walks downstairs and sees the Sarkisian’s black cat, Fen, laying on the couch. His fur bristles and he looks just behind Veronica.

He sees them, too, then. They weren’t hallucinations.

“You aren’t looking too good, ‘Ronica.” Ram said, perching on the side of the dinner table.

“I never am.” Veronica said bluntly, dragging her feet as she walks into the kitchen. “I feel like I’ve been beaten with a baseball bat.”

She feels ten times worse than usual. Her nose is stuffed up, her head hurts, and every muscle in her body is aching. She doesn’t know how she’ll redeem herself from the day before when she’s all pale, shaking, and has a nose like Rudolf.

“I think I’m dying.” She groaned, then her head shot up. “Actually. I wouldn’t mind that.”
Heather rolled her eyes and lightly elbowed Veronica.

“You’re not dying.” She stated.

Veronica hummed in response. She heard Janis walking down the stairs and straightened up, rubbing her nose with her sleeve.

“Morning, Vera!” Janis chirped while laughing about something on the group chat.

Veronica looked down at her phone and saw that she had no notifications. Nobody said anything after her message. They all must be on a chat she wasn’t on. They made her heart clench with jealousy for some reason.

But why? They weren’t her real friends. They were forced to like her.

“Good morning.” Veronica finally returned the comment, filling a cup with water to soothe her burning throat. She then walked over to the table to grab her backpack for school, knowing Janis was probably staring at her.

Not many words are exchanged after that. Damian comes over to pick them up, but Veronica acts like she’s missing something so she doesn’t have to ride with them. When the aching in her muscles flares up, she wishes she had taken their offer. Her choice not to go was good for Janis, though, as she told her friends about her condition.

Janis didn’t know the full story of how Veronica was diagnosed with PTSD or what caused the trauma, but the least she could do was give her friends a heads up.

“Again, don’t let her know I told you.” Janis finished, wringing her fingers through her shirt. “She doesn’t like letting people know. In fact, I don’t even think she knows I know.”


“That’s...concerning.” Aaron put in, blinking a few times. He wasn’t the only one who was expecting to start out their morning with this news.

Cady nodded in agreement.

“Does she take medicine?” She asked.

“I’m not sure.” Janis shrugged. “No prescription that I’m aware of.”

“You really have to keep an eye on her more often, Janis.” Regina said.

“I do!”

It wasn’t Janis’ fault Veronica was so hard to talk to. The girl was reserved and hid inside of a shell. She wasn’t good at interacting with people. Not anymore.

Despite no one talking about the news after the first bell rang, Veronica knew something was up. The lunch table was oddly quiet and she was sure they were all texting on the group chat she wasn’t apart of.

“I’m gonna go to the bathroom.” She said while getting up and walking to the restroom.

There, she splashed her face with cold water and dig through her pocket to pull out some medicine.
“Did I ever make things that awkward at Westerburg?” She asked, popping a cough drop into her mouth.

Heather looked away from the mirror she was pruning herself in and raised an eyebrow. She chuckled lightly.

“You were just awkward in general with us.”

Veronica tilted her head and Heather continued:

“You were a follower, Veronica. You were very meek and scared to do anything, but at the same time, nervous to go against what I said.”

“An omega.” Ram put in.

Heather looked at him and then nodded.

“That describes you well, actually.” She said.

An omega? Veronica agreed. She was an omega in a pack of top dogs. Heather was the alpha female and Kurt and Ram were her betas. Veronica was just a scraggly little pup, despite leading the three more dominant wolves.

A wolf. That’s what she felt like.

“Ah.” She said, jostling the cough drop in her mouth.

“But no,” Heather spoke up again, “Our table never got like that.”

Veronica’s shoulder slumped.

“Damnit.”

She twitched when the bathroom door opened and a pristine lioness with finely groomed fur walked in, one paw after another.

“Oh, uh, hey Regina.” She said awkwardly.

Regina walked over to the sink beside Veronica and started to fix her hair, even though it was already perfect. Veronica sensed a conversation coming on.

“Are you doing okay?”

There it was.

“Yeah?” Veronica blinked at her. “Everything is fine.”

Regina was quiet for a moment before sighing. She turned to look at Veronica, who had a nervous expression.

“Veronica, I wanted to talk with you about that, actually.” She said. “You can open up, you know. I’m your friend- everyone at the table is your friend. You can talk to us.”

Veronica’s muscled tensed up. She swallowed hard, wringing her fingers in her shirt. She glanced at the ghosts for help. They all looked helpless.
“I know.” She said softly. “There’s nothing I need to talk about.”

“We both know that’s not true, Veronica.” Regina says, rolling her eyes. “Something is wrong.”

“Nothing is wrong.” Veronica said through gritted teeth. It hurts to swallow. She fights the urge to wince every time she moves.

“Veronica-“

Veronica backs away from Regina when she reaches out, flinching when a hand is extended to her. Fear flashes in her eyes. Her fingers twitch. She hated the feeling like she had to claw at the taller girl’s eyes to get away.

“I’m fine.” Veronica said.

Regina’s eyebrows furrowed at the way she jumped backwards. Concern glinted in her eyes. She took a slow step forward to make sure she didn’t startle the girl.

“Veronica, listen-“

“I’m fine! I’m fine, Regina! Seriously, I’m okay!” Veronica shouted and she was sent reeling when her head spun wildly. She stumbled backwards and Regina lunged to catch her before she could hit the floor.

Regina grasped her arms around Veronica’s waist to keep her upright. She tried to keep her hands where the girl could see them, but she was more focused on other things, like making sure Veronica doesn’t smash into the ground. Or that she should not be this light.

Veronica was leaning heavily against her, eyes full and glazed over. She almost looked blind. Her skin is sticky and hot, too hot. She blinked and inhaled sharply, squirming in Regina’s arms.


“You can let go now.” Veronica said. “I’m fine.”

Those damn words... They had been repeated so many times they almost seemed to be stuck on Veronica’s tongue. She didn’t know how many people actually believed her when she spoke them. This might be the first time someone actually caught her in the hollow lie.

“You’re really not.” Regina said. “Veronica, I know we haven’t known each other for a long time, but you can talk to me.”

“No, you wouldn’t understand.” Veronica says, wriggling away from Regina and pushing herself up into her feet. She wobbled for a moment before grabbing her backpack hanging up on a hook. “Thanks for trying to help, though. But there’s no need. I’m fine.”

Regina silently watched her go, knowing how Janis felt when she said Veronica was hard to talk to.

———

The rest of the school day never seemed to end. Veronica felt worse as time passed, but she couldn’t be happier when the final bell rang. She hurried out of the building and started walking home. She could have hitched a ride with one of Janis’ friends, but she decided not to. She wanted to be alone.

Janis was already home when she finally stepped inside the warm house. She gave her cousin a
small smile and made a beeline for the staircase to go straight to her room.

“Hey, Veronica—“

She froze.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

Veronica walked over to Veronica and crossed her arms over her chest, raising her eyebrows. She tilted her head slightly.

“What’s up?”

“Not to be blunt or anything, but my mom said you have PTSD. I wanted to know why.”

Veronica’s mouth pulled back in a grimace. That’s not what she had been wanting to hear.

“Umm...” She cleared her throat, “I-I mean- Uh-“

Her hands start to tremble. Her skin is itchy and she’s desperate to scratch it.

“I’m fine- Wait-“ She shook her head and took a deep breath. “Your mom...isn’t wrong. I do have PTSD.”

“Nice.”

Veronica blinked at that and Janis rubbed the back of her neck.

“But why though? That’s what they never told me.”

“And they were right to.” Veronica said, shifting her backpack to a different shoulder.

“You’re not gonna tell me?”

“Uhh no.” Veronica deadpans. She swiveled around to got back to the staircase. “Where are you and the others going today?”

“Veronica!” Janis grabbed her cousin by the wrist. “Why can’t I know? We’re family! Family should know why family has a crippling trauma disorder.”

“Because it’s serious.” Veronica said. “Besides, you’ve never told me anything this serious before.”

“I’m a lesbian.”

“Doesn’t count. Literally everyone knows.”

“Damnit.”

Veronica tried to pull away but Janis didn’t let go.

“Come on, Ronnie! Tell me! The curiosity is killing me!”

“Then I guess you’ll just die then,” Veronica shrugged, “It really isn’t your business, anyway.”
She turned, then froze. Her muscles suddenly tensed up. She sniffed.

“Wait—”

She looked Janis in the eye.

“Did you tell everyone else?”

Janis finally let go.

“Well, yeah. They’re your friends. They deserve to know.” She said. “But your family really deserves to know why.”

“Janis!” Veronica shouted, “How could you do that?!”

Janis blinked a few times.

“Why does it matter?”

“Of course you would respond so stupidly.”

The wolf inside of Veronica’s heart is awake. She can feel her blood boiling.

“You don’t understand what it’s like when people find out about a mental disorder. They either treat you like a porcelain doll or they start to avoid you like you’re a psychopath. That is the exact reason why I didn’t tell you in the first place, because I knew you would have told everyone!”

“It’s not that big of a deal, Ronnie.” Janis said coolly, “A lot of people have PTSD! You’re no different.”

“Janis, you don’t understand! I didn’t want them knowing! You had no right blabbering my secrets to people I barley know.”

“Okay, maybe so, but you’re missing my main point...” Janis says, “Why do you have PTSD?”

“Ugh!!”

Veronica ran her fingers through her hair, trying to keep herself calm. She wanted to lash out and scream, but her throat already hurt enough. She had to figure out a way to get out of this conversation.

“I can’t tell you.”

It came out as a whisper, which made Veronica want to kick herself. She hadn’t meant to sound so weak.

“Why?”

Janis reached out and gently touched her cousin’s arm.

“You can talk to me.”

“No, I can’t. I can’t even talk to a therapist. I can’t tell anyone. Nobody can know, Janis.”

Janis had a strange, but concerned look in her eyes. She had her head tilted slightly, clearly not catching on.
“Veronica, you’re shaking...”

“Shit.” Veronica muttered, exhaling a quivering breath. “Shit! Forget what I said, okay? And don’t
tell those guys anything else!”

“Ronnie, I don’t understand. Why is it so hard to let people in? I get it. People are mean, but there
are a few good ones. Like me and Damian and Troy Bolton!”

Veronica hugged herself tightly.

“You wouldn’t want to be around me anymore if you knew.” She murmured, “I’m sorry. You can’t
know. Not now. Not ever. I-I just can’t lose anyone else because of my stupid mistakes.”

“What are you talking about?” Janis asked. “Veronica, whatever happened at Westerburg, or
whatever your old school’s name was, can’t follow you here.”

“Yes it can!” Veronica cried, panic in her voice. She’s glancing around everywhere again. “It has. I
can’t run from it, Janis. It follows me everywhere. It’s crushing me and destroying me and tearing
me apart from the inside out and-and you think I should share that with you? No way. I can’t.
You’ll leave.”

“Veronica-“

The girl shied away from Janis’ touch. She gave her a pained look before scuttling up the stairs and
into her room.

Veronica backed up into the corner of her room, breathing heavily. She sinks to the ground,
burying her head into her knees. She had said too much. Just with that information alone Janis
probably thinks she’s a freak.

No...

A monster.

Chapter End Notes

okay but did y’all see the sentence that said the ghosts were all sleeping in the corner
together cause that’s my favorite line
open the door and let me in

Chapter Summary

Veronica and Janis forget about their first fight and reenact Lord of the Flies in their backyard. Oh yeah, Veronica also has her first real panic attack in Evanston.

Chapter Notes

i just wanted to say that the inspiration for the sleepover at Regina’s house came from typical_art_dork’s Mean Girls text fic. the twentieth chapter really interested me and this is how i thought Janis confronting Veronica would have gone. please go read their story it’s so funny and so good!!

Chapter warnings: Panic attacks

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day, Janis acted like nothing had happened between the two cousins, and Veronica appreciated that. She was glad that they could just move on, even though she knew Janis was probably thinking about what she said every time they make eye contact.

School dragged on slowly and Veronica was sure she was never going to get her damn antidepressants back. She was too nervous to ask Regina for them. It sucked. She had had gum in that bag.

———

Gaylien: who wants to come reenact lord of the flies with me

AfricaByToto: ITS??? FOUR IN THE MORNING????

Gwetchen: JANIS FUCKING GO TO BED

Gaylien: bitch im gonna Fight someone for a Conch and some specs

team.mom: JANIS MIRANDA SARKISIAN

cornHub: woh ur middle name is Miranda???

Big Gay: Angry Mom is here

team.mom: GO TO BED. LET US SLEEP.

Gaylien: no

troybolton HAS MUTED THE CHAT
Gaylien: >:O
Gaylien: bitch
Gwetchen: Power move
Gwetchen: NOW SLEEP
babyblue: Hey, Janis, I’m up. I’ll act out Lord of the Flies with you.
AfricaByToto: RONNIE NO-
Gaylien: yesss!!!! thank you Ronnie!!!!
Gaylien: im in the backyard come join me
babyblue: Coming.
team.mom: JFC

Gaylien: I HAVE THE CONCH
Gaylien: I HAVE THE CONCH I GET TO AKDJAJDJAJSNAD
troybolton HAS UNMUTED THE CHAT
troybolton: What the fuck
babyblue: It’s my conch now, bitch.
Gwetchen: Ronnie just fuckin killed Janis
team.mom: Wonderful! Maybe this idea wasn’t so bad after all.
AfricaByToto: skkdhajdajsn REGINA!!!
Big Gay: WOW
Gaylien: bitch
Gaylien: nobody can kill me
Gaylien: except maybe Ronnie at this moment because she’s pointing a big ass stick at me
Gaylien sent a photo- herstick.jpg
Gwetchen: r u guys using a rock for the conch???
Gaylien: bitch does it look like we live around a beach
AfricaByToto: who is who???
babyblue: I think I was Simon but I’ve evolved into Roger and Jack.
Gaylien: im Ralph!!
Gaylien: RALPH DOESNT DIE RONNIE STOP THREATENING ME WITH YOR STICK

troybolton: yor

cornHub: yor

Gwetchen: Janis is about to be fucking murdered but she continues to type to keep us posted

Gaylien: I HAVE THE CONCH!!!!!

Gaylien: DAMIAN IM COMING OVER MAKE SURE THE WINDOW IS OPEN

Big Gay: WHAT

babyblue: You literally just gave away your position.

Gwetchen: r u srsly chasing Janis over a rock?

Gaylien: IT’S A CONCH

babyblue: ^^^^^

babyblue: And yes.

——

Veronica did, in fact, chase Janis. Her cousin bolted out of the backyard and onto the street. Veronica did her best to follow, but she eventually grew tired and her lungs burned for air. She skids to a halt and heaves her breaths, placing her hands on her knees.

When she looks up, Janis is nowhere to be seen. She has no idea where she is, as she never memorized the streets or neighborhood. It’s dark and the streetlights cast an eerie orange glow on the asphalt. Shadows crawl across the ground.

Veronica shivers and turns around in a few circles. She calls out for Janis. No answer.

She sighed and walked back to the house. Because of all that running, she was tired enough to finally sleep. Except she couldn’t. Because the door to the house was locked.

——

Veronica awoke to the sound of street noises and birds, which were two times louder than usual. She pries open her eyes and winced at the white light that stabbed into her retinas. She rubs them and then shivers, realizing that she was freezing.

That was because it was snowing. And she was laying outside.

Veronica sat up straight, blinking multiple times. Now she remembered. She had been too tired to call Janis or do anything and just...sat down on the ground. She must have feel asleep and it had snowed overnight. She was lucky she didn’t get hypothermia or frostbite.

Veronica pushed herself up, shaking harder. Her muscles crackled when she moved. They, too, were frozen. And in pain.

She hobbled out to the front yard and looked around, dazed. A neighbor from across the street was getting her kids into the car for school when she saw Veronica. She gave her a puzzled look and
Veronica just stared back at her, equally as confused.

“I can’t believe you made us sleep outside.”

Veronica turned around to face the ghosts. Heather had her arms crossed.

“It’s freezing! And snowing!”

“Sorry,” Veronica said, her voice weirdly hoarse. “I was tired! I just kinda passed out!”

“We know.” Kurt said. “We were there. We watched with our eyes.”

“I assumed so.” Veronica says.

Heather walked up to the girl and pressed the back of her hand to her forehead, making her flinch backwards in surprise.

“Why are you touching me?” Veronica blinked.

“You’re burning up.”

Veronica rolled her eyes.

“Like a ghost would know a human being’s temperature.”

“Veronica, you’re leaning into my hand.”

“So? You’re cold!”

“Probably using her cold skin to soothe your burning skin.” Ram says and Heather nodded knowingly.

“I’m fine!” Veronica pulled away, but missed the cold feeling on her head. She wouldn’t admit it out loud, but she was uncomfortably hot, despite it being freezing outside. “It’s probably just from me shivering. Shivering does generate body heat!”

Heather looked at the boys, who shared the same expression as she did. Unbelieving.

———

From across the street, the woman with the children stared at the girl talking to no one.

“What’s she doing, mama?” One of her little boy’s asked.

“I’m not sure.” She said.

“She’s probably crazy.” Her daughter piped up.

“Most likely.”

———

Since it was a Friday, Regina invited everyone over to house for a sleepover. Veronica had looked up from her journal when she heard these plans during lunch, but didn’t say anything. When Regina noticed her, she smiled kindly and clarified that that meant her, too. Veronica smiled back, even though sleepovers sometimes made her a little uncomfortable.
Still, she went over with a bag of clothes. There, she greeted everyone and introduced herself to Regina’s mother.

“Hi,” She said shyly, offering her hand for a handshake. “I’m Veronica. Veronica Sawyer.”

“She’s Janis’ cousin.” Regina said.

“Oh, hello, honey!” Mrs. George chirped, shaking Veronica hand enthusiastically. “Make yourself at home!”

“I haven’t seen my real home in a month, but I’ll try!” Veronica joked, but her laugh was dry and nobody seemed to catch on to her dark humor. She cleared her throat, “Thank you, ma’am. Your hospitality is very nice.”

“You can go up to my room,” Regina said, practically saving Veronica from more humiliation. “Everyone else is up there. Janis can show you where it is.”

Janis nudged her cousin playfully before walked to the large staircase, Veronica shuffling after her like a duckling.

Once they were out of sight, Mrs. George turned to Regina with a concerned look.

“Is she the one who you said had post-traumatic stress?” She asked.

“Yeah,” Regina whispered. “Don’t bring it up, though.” She paused. “You could tell?”

“Oh, honey,” Mrs. George laughed slightly. “That girl is terribly shaken up. Her hand was trembling. Keep me posted if you ever find out why!” She patted her daughter’s shoulder before prancing off to the kitchen.

Regina blinked before snorting lightly and walking up to her bedroom. Janis and Damian were challenging each other’s gayness while Cady, Gretchen, and Aaron cheered them on. Karen watched with an amazed look. Veronica was sitting quietly by her bag.

“Sorry, kids,” Regina said while walking in, “But Damian wins.”

“Haha!” The boy threw his arms up into the air. “Too Gay To Function wins!!”

“I’ll be back for round two later.” Janis threatens before laughing.

After calming down, the gang sat down in a circle on the floor and began playing truth or dare. The bedroom became a laughingstock, as either embarrassing secrets were shared or someone had to do something outrageously stupid. Janis really wanted to ask Veronica why she had PTSD, but she didn’t. For now.

Veronica was actually having a lot of fun. She laughed so hard she fell over at one point, her legs flailing in the air. When she pushed herself up, everyone was beaming at her, pride in their eyes. She hadn’t looked so alive like this before.

It’s a shame it didn’t last.

At one point, the group started to derail when Regina’s dog came running into the room. Karen started to coo about the puppy and then Mrs. George peeked in to check on the kids.

“We’re okay, mom,” Regina said, “We better continue the game already, now, or I’m gonna blow myself up!”
Veronica’s face paled. She heard laughter buzz in her left ear. He was awake. She wanted to cry.

“I’m gonna go to the bathroom.” She said while standing up. “You guys continue without me.”

“There’s a bathroom in here.” Regina says.

“Uhh... I like privacy.” Veronica said before scuttling out, passing Mrs. George, who watched her for a moment.

“Same.” Damian said. “Okay, Karen, truth or dare?”

“What’s up fidget spinners!” Aaron yelled while walking back into the room after getting snacks. “I’m back.” He sat down. “Oh, Janis, you might want to check on Veronica. She looked like she was about to cry.”

“What? Why?” Janis snapped her head around to look at him.

Mrs. George was about to duck out of the room, but she lingered back over to the door to listen.

“She was breathing really heavily when I passed her in the hallway. Did she eat something bad, or...?”

“SHIT!”

Janis snapped to her feet and rushed for the door, concern for her younger cousin twisting in her heart.

“Remember when I said she had PTSD? Well, she didn’t tell me why, but my mom said that random words can make her go into a panic. Like guns and explosions or stuff like that.” She swallowed hard, “I’m gonna go check on her. Everyone keep playing. She hates when attention is drawn to her.”

They all nod and Janis walked out into the hallway. She knocked on the bathroom door. There was sobbing coming from inside.

“Veronica?”

A sharp yelp of what she could only describe as pure terror.

“Veronica, it’s just me. It’s Janis. Can you let me in?”

A few whimpers.

Silence.

“Veronica?”

Sniffling.

Shuffling.

The lock clicks.

Janis opens the door. Veronica is standing up in front of her. Her eyes are puffy and red and she couldn’t cover up that she was crying even if she tried.
“You okay, Vera?” Janis asked, tentatively touching her cousin’s arm. “You don’t look too good.”

“I’m not feeling too good either.” Veronica mumbled.

She twists on her heels and slumps down in the corner of the bathroom. She’s shivering violently. Everything around her is doubled.

Janis walks over and sits down next to Veronica. She wraps her arms around her cousin and pulls her in close. Veronica flinches, but relaxes and leans into Janis completely. Soft sobs shake her thin body.

“Wanna go home?” Janis asked quietly.

Even though Veronica really wanted to leave, she shook her head. She couldn’t drag Janis down anymore.

“I’ll be fine.” She whispered before moving closer, much to Janis’ surprise. “Just-just give me a minute.”

Damian and Regina walked into the bathroom fifteen minutes later, concerned as to why the cousins weren’t back yet. Inside, they found Veronica snuggled securely against Janis, asleep. There were tear streaks on her cheeks, but she looked peaceful.

Damian offered to carry Veronica to a guest bedroom, but Janis did it herself. She didn’t want Veronica waking up in someone else’s arms and then panic.

“You’re such a good cousin.” Damian cooed once Veronica was in the bed. Janis elbowed him and walked back to Regina’s room.

“She was hurting. The least I can do is stay with her until she calms down.”

“Such a softie!” Damian squealed, hugging his friend tightly.

“Soft Janis? This is the best thing ever!” Gretchen laughed.

“Is Veronica okay?” Cady asked.

“She’s sleeping.” Janis said, sitting back down on the floor. “I think she’s okay now. Let’s get back to playing.” She paused, “But keep it quiet. Wake Ronnie up and I’ll kill you all.”

“SOFT JANIS!!” Damian cried in joy, not caring about his upcoming death from the girl next to him.

Chapter End Notes

Ronnie’s gonna get sick sooner or later. her immune system won’t hold up for long.

mwaha
“I hope you guys had no other plans for today because we’re going camping!”

Of course Cady was the one to present this idea.

It was around eight-thirty in the morning when everyone had finally woken up from all the fun the night before. Well, some of them woke up on their own while others had to be shaken awake. Or got music blasted in their face. Like Gretchen, Aaron, and Veronica, for example.

They were all in the George’s fancy kitchen, eating breakfast Mrs. George had made for them. They peered up from their omelette and bacon, giving Cady a strange look.

“Camping?” Regina said slowly. “Really?”

“Yes, really!” Cady says with natural enthusiasm. “My parents and I go to this really good place. Just think of all the fun we’ll have. We can roast marshmallows and put up a tent and watch the deer, the whole nine yards!”

They all exchanged looks. Cady was a nature freak, but in a good way, and they didn’t have the heart to turn her down. She did deserve her pick of something to do, after all, since she had to deal with them all the time. (You might even call her the second-in-command Team Mom, right behind Regina.)

“Sounds good to me.” Janis said, smiling at her friend. “It gives me more of a reason not to do my history report!”

“I haven’t gone camping in years.” Aaron said. “It’ll be nice!”

“Yes!!” Cady cheered, “Thank you! Thank you!”

So, that’s what they did. After spending the day doing things in actual civilization, the gang packed up Regina’s car with things they might need and drive off to the campsite Cady knew about. They arrived a little after six. It took around thirty minutes to unpack and get set up, but they were all eventually sitting on logs around the fire Damian and Janis had started, a task Regina was hesitant about giving them.
“Let’s play a game!” Damian said.

“Hippo,” Gretchen suggests.

Veronica tilted her head. She didn’t know if this was a normal camping game, as she has never gone camping in her life, something that apparently mortified Cady when she brought it up. The Heathers were never into the sort of thing, sleeping on the ground and all, and neither was she. In fact, the thought of being out in the middle of the woods scared her. Even if it was a populous camping grounds, there could always be someone lurking in the trees with a machete and a crazed grin.

That’s why she had initially been reluctant to tag along. She already felt like she had a cold and didn’t want to ruin this for anyone if she had an attack or something. But Janis insisted that “The dream team has to stay together” and she went along because that made her a little bit braver. She was apart of her own clique again. It made her heart swell.

“What’s Hippo?” She asked.

“It’s like Truth or Dare,” Damian answers, “Except it’s a little nicer because nobody has to chug a bottle of hot sauce or kiss the opposite sex even though everyone knows you’re gay.” He glared at Cady, who smiled innocently at him.

“Basically you can ask anyone any question you want and they have to answer no matter what.” Regina explains. “But if someone can prove that they’re lying, they gets to slap them for not telling the truth.”

“Oh.” Veronica laughed slightly. “Fun!”

“I’ll go first.” Gretchen says, “Aaron- Kiss, Marry, Kill...Veronica, Cady, and Damian.”

“Oh, easy!” Aaron says, “I would kiss Cady, marry Damian, and...”

Veronica raised her eyebrows at him. He bites his lip.

“Wow, Troy!” Janis barked while laughing, “You’d Kill my cousin?”

“I’m sorry!” Aaron exclaimed, “I don’t know her well enough to marry or kiss her or feel bad to kill her!”

Veronica started to laugh loudly, almost falling off of the log she was sitting on. She wiped her eyes and grinned at Aaron.

“It’s no big deal! Now, ask a question. It’s your turn.”

“Okay...well, since you brought it up, Veronica,” Aaron looked at the girl, “What is the stupidest thing you’ve ever done?”

“Oh, definitely going to that Remington party sophomore year.” Veronica said. If she could, she would have answered with how she accidentally killed three people, but this sounded better and it revolved around the incident.

“Oooo, a party?” Gretchen said, interested.

“I thought you weren’t the type to go to parties.” Regina says.

“I’m not,” Veronica laughed slightly. “Remington parties were these big college parties hosted by
frats or something like that, and I had to go because I was friends with this group of girls who were all named Heather and they probably would leave me in a ditch if I didn’t attend, so...” She shrugged her shoulders and took a sip of the soda Damian brought, “Basically I drank to try and get rid of my misery, got sick, threw up on my best friend/the lead Heather’s shoes, and then was exiled from the group anyway.”

She didn’t know where the ghost of Heather Chandler was (or Kurt and Ram for that matter) but she kinda wished she were here to hear this. Just because she wanted to see her reaction to how she considered that a stupid event.

“Wow.” Aaron said, laughing slightly. “Yeah, that does sound pretty stupid.”

“I would go to a Remington party.” Karen piped up and Veronica laughed before going to ask her question.

“Alright...Janis!”

Her cousin perked up with an eager look.

“Okay, spill. How do you really feel about me living with you now.”

Janis stared at her for a long time before bursting out into laughter. She leaned back into Damian, who she was nestled against, and smiled fondly at Veronica.

“I knew you were insecure but this really proves that!” She said, “I love having you here, Vera! It’s been too long since we hung out before this. And you’re not a bad resident at all. You’re quiet and you like movie marathons! A match made in heaven!”

Veronica felt herself blush slightly. She didn’t actually expect Janis to speak of her so affectionately like that. It made her feel better about this whole ordeal.

“Thanks,” She said.

“No problem, Vera,” Janis says, “Now...Karen!”

As the game continues on, darkness fell over the forest as day turned to night. Laughter and music filled the grove, not dying down even when the clock struck twelve.

Veronica was the first to turn in for the night. She crawls into her tent to get some rest, letting the hum of the grasshoppers and soothing voices of her friends outside lull her to sleep.

Then, her eyes snapped open.

Veronica sat up, rubbing her eyes and checking her phone, which read “12:45” in big white letters at the top of the screen. It was silent outside, so she crawled out of the tent to find the campsite empty. The fire was still blazing. There was nobody in the other tents.

“Guys?”

No answer.

Veronica grabbed one of the flashlights lying around and began scanning the area of the camping ground. There was nobody. Only the sounds of animals.

“Hello? Guys?”
She vaguely remembered them talking about going on a night hike right before she fell asleep, so
she stepped out of the fire’s light and started to search. She waved the flashlight around
everywhere, calling out for her friends.


Only crickets and frogs answered her.

Veronica delved deeper into the woods. Fallen leaves and icy grass crunches underneath her feet.
She shivered as cold whirlwind gusted around her, her pajamas providing little to no protection
from the wind. She regretted not grabbing her coat, but she wasn’t expecting it to take this long.

“They could have at least told me where they were going.” She grumbled, “Or when they would
get back. Or when they left because this is ridiculous!”

A branch snapped loudly from behind. Veronica whirled around to see nobody.

“Guys?”

Bushes rustled nearby.

“Guys, this isn’t funny anymore!” She yelled.

There were more snaps an crackles that seemed to come from every direction. A crash sounded
from a few yards away, like someone had taken a big log and threw it to the ground with as much
force as possible. Veronica thought she heard laughter coming from in the trees. She’s spinning
around in rapid circles, shining her flashlight everywhere.

Then, a scream. Something lunged out from the underbrush.

Veronica shrieked in pure terror and fell backwards, becoming paralyzed with fear. She braces her
arms over her head. The laughter is back. She peeks out and her heart sank.

“Oh man, you should have seen your face, Vera!”

“You...you jerk!!”

Janis jumped out of the way when her cousin flung a stick at her. She doubled over, giggling and
trying to catch her breath.

“That wasn’t funny!”

“Sorry, sorry, okay! It was just too good!”

She hauled Veronica up to her feet with ease.

“So all of that was you?”

Janis nodded, grinning widely and wiping her eyes.

“God, you put way too much effort into that.” Veronica rolled her eyes. “That didn’t sound like you
up in the trees. Come on, let’s hear you do that voice again.”

Her cousin gave her a confused look.

“What?”
“The laughter. In the trees. Do it again.”

“What are you talking about? I just made all those rustling noises. I never climbed a tree.”

Veronica had become pretty good at telling when Janis was lying, so she believed her. She fidgeted nervously.

“It must have just been the wind then.” She said, despite how painfully cliché that sounded. “Let’s-let’s just get back to the camp.”

She and Janis began walking through the woods. They walked and walked but it soon became evident that they had no idea where they were going.

“Shouldn’t we have found the clearing by now?” Veronica asked anxiously.

“Calm down,” Janis said, “We’ll get there.”

The younger nodded slightly.

“So, was everyone in on the joke?”

Janis shook her head.

“Nope. Just me.” She said, “We we’re heading back from the hike and I heard you yelling, so I decided to give you a little scare.”

“Which was so nice of you.” Veronica deadpans.

They stepped out of the trees and onto a gravel path, which wasn’t even remotely familiar, but nothing was said about it.

“It was funny!”

Suddenly Janis’ phone rang. She quickly picked it up and while Veronica muttered something about how she getting service out there.

“Hello?”

“Janis?”

“Karen!”

The blonde’s voice came clearly out of the speaker, with a bit of background noise.

“Janis! You picked up!”

“Karen, listen, I’m with Veronica. We’re kinda lost. Do you think you can help us out?”

“Umm...”

Karen fumbled with her phone.

“I really can’t.”

“Then give the phone to someone who can. Like Regina. Or Troy Bolton.”

“They’re not with me.”
“What? Why?”

“Uhh... I’m kinda in some ranger tower.”

“What?!”

Janis sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose.

“How did you- Okay. Listen up... Stay where you are. We’ll come and get you.”

“Really? Thank you!”

“Yeah, yeah. No problem. Hang tight, we’ll be there soon.”

Janis hung up and scouted the trees, catching sight of the ranger tower looming in the distance.

“How did she even get there?” Veronica asked.

“I have no idea.” Janis answered, “It’s Karen. She can manage to herself in the weirdest places.”

“True.”

The two of them set off for the ranger tower, using the flashlight and glow from the moon to guide them. During the walk, Janis noticed that Veronica was shivering and rubbing her arms. Her teeth flattered against each other loudly.

“That’s some thin material,” She said, nodding at her pajamas.

“Huh? Oh, yeah.” Veronica stuttered over her chattering.

“Here.”

Janis slipped off one of her jackets- she was wearing, like, three- and draped it around Veronica, who immediately pulled it closer. The coat was really big on her, practically drowning her frame, but it was warm and snug.

“Thanks.” Veronica smiled at her cousin thankfully.

Slowly but surely, the pair moved through the trees to get to their set destination, finally arriving at the tower. There, they hiked up multiple flights of stairs to get to the top.

“Alright, Karen,” Janis called once they got to the top, pushing open the door, “We’re here!”

The blonde was perched out the windowsill, peeking outside like an excited child on a car ride. She craned her head around and beamed at the cousins.

“You guys came!”

“Well, of course we did!” Janis said while walking over.

“So nice,” Karen cooed before looking back out the window with the curiosity of a cat staring at a laser pointer. In her defense, though, it was a really pretty view.

“How’d you get here?” Veronica asked.

“Not sure!” Karen laughed, “I just kinda got lost and wandered up here for shelter.
“Classic Karen.” Janis said.

Karen giggled in agreement.

“Yup,” She said. “Classic Karen!”

She grinned and teetered backwards out the window. Veronica and Janis watched her fall in shock before rushing over to the window, screaming.

“Karen!!”

“Oh my god, Karen!”

They both peered down into the blackness below, mouths hanging open. It was too dark to see anything and they could hear no signs of life.

“Oh. My god.” Veronica muttered, backing away, “Oh my god! She- I didn’t know if things were- Was she upset- Oh my god!! She-

“-killed herself!” Janis cried, “She just killed herself! Oh my god. Why?”

She has her hand over her mouth, eyes wider than saucers. She looks to be in more of disbelief than grief.

“Holy shit. Holy shit!!”

She ran for the staircase with Veronica on her heels.

“I can’t...I can’t believe this. I-I know I haven’t known her long, but this- What are we going to tell the others?” Veronica says in a rush.

“The others?” Janis yelped, “Shit! How do we tell them? How do we tell her mother?”

That question was left unanswered as they got to the bottom of the staircase. Veronica’s flashlight shined onto a large dark red splotch in the grass, but no body. It made her stomach twist in morbid confusion.

“She’s...alive?!”

She glanced at her cousin, who was biting her nails.

“No way. That had to be over a fifty foot drop.” Veronica said. “Even if she didn’t die on impact, how’d she crawl away so fast?”

“I have no idea, Vera.”

They were completely stumped. There’s no way Karen could have fled that quickly. Or survive, for that matter. That was her blood all over the ground.

“I need to sit down,” Veronica muttered breathlessly, sitting on one of the steps, “How do we explain this to the police? ‘Yes, hello, officer, our friend just jumped out the window but, uhhhh, there’s no body on the ground when she landed. Hope you understand.’ They’re going to think we’re insane! Or that we did it. Janis, they might think we murdered her and this is out stupid coverup! I can’t go to jail!”

“Nobody is going to jail!” Janis said, but she looks equally as nervous about the possibility. “It was
suicide. They can’t charge us for witnessing a suicide!” She paused. “...Right?”

“I don’t-I don’t think so. But they can suspect us. Or charge us for not doing anything. Maybe. I-I don’t know any of this law and legal crap!” Veronica put her head in her hands, “I didn’t think things were bad for her. And even if they were, doing this- Janis, this is so horrible.”

“I know, I know.” Janis said.

She sat down beside her cousin, who leaned against her. They both stayed huddled up on that step for awhile in silence, trying to wrap their heads around what happened. It seemed to lucid for Veronica, as this was the first time she witnessed an actual suicide and not a murder she had to coverup as one.

“Let’s just-“ Janis was the first to speak up again, “Let’s just get back to the others. Maybe that’s where she hobbled off to.”

“Yeah... Maybe.”

The two moved away from the blood patch and ranger tower and back into the trees. They were mostly silent, unsure on what to do after what they saw. The tension was so thick you could probably cut it with a knife, but, luckily, two voices from the woods helped clear up the awkwardness.

“Hello?”

“Hello? Anyone?”

Veronica perked up. Those were Cady and Aaron’s voices!

“Cady? Guys?”

“You hear Cady?” Janis looked at her.

“Yeah! Don’t you?”

“No.”

“Hello?”

“Janis?”

“Guys, I’m here!”

Veronica started running towards the voices, completely forgetting that Janis was even with her until she was out of sight. She yelled into the darkness, thinking she saw someone in front of her, running away.

“Hey!” She called out, “Slow down! Wait!”

The trees started to open up. It was Cady who was running, the moonlight showing off her terrified features.

“Cady!” Veronica yelled, “Hey, slow down! What’s wrong? It’s me. It’s Veronica!”

Cady hobbles onto a wooden bridge in an open part of the forest, breathing heavily. It connected two cliff faces together. She whipped around to face Veronica and began to back away. Her eyes
were wide. Scared.

“Hey, what’s up?” Veronica stopped at the beginning of the bridge, giving Cady some space. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost. Are you okay?”

Cady looks like she’s panicking when Veronica takes a step forward. She looks around everywhere and then flings herself off the side of the bridge.

“Cady!!” Veronica shrieked.

Cady went everywhere. A jagged rock pierced through her stomach and ripped her apart. One arm fell all the way to the bottom of the trench while a leg got caught on a point and was entirely torn free from her waist. Bright red blood spilled out in every direction, along with an overcoat of other bodily fluids. If you squint, you can probably see the contents of her stomach drooling down a stone.

After many horrible thuds that were accompanied with the horrendous sound of bones snapping, Cady was finally fully impaled on a sharp spire, tangled up in a position that wasn’t humanly possible. Her upper half was twisted up towards the sky, while her bottom half was curved down at the ground. She’s stabbed through the waist, tilting herself at an angle. Her stomach is gouged wide open with long, gooey intestines hanging out. Her one arm is broken, bent into an impossible position that’s stretched out across her with the bone protruding from the skin. Her waist and whatever is left of her right leg is barely even connected to the rest of her body, dangling from a few threads of flesh, and the icing on the cake is the rock sticking out from her mouth.

Veronica is looking over the edge of the bridge with a mortified look, watching helplessly as her friend is mangled by the rock pit. Her mouth is ajar, eyes bulging in their sockets. She’s frozen in her place for the longest time before throwing up. She finishes and sputters in disbelief and shock. “Cady! Cady- Oh my god. Why? Why?!”

She stumbled onto her feet, backing away from the sight of the gore-fest down below.

“I don’t understand...” She mutters. “Why did you do this? What happened?!"

Veronica exhales a big breath and runs her fingers through her hair while pacing back and forth.

“There’s no way I can tell the others about this. First Karen and now Cady? No way...” She said and took another deep breath, almost throwing up again as the pungent smell of a dead girl fills both her mouth and nose. “I’ll just act like I wasn’t here! Y-yeah... That’ll be fine.”

She started to walk away from the gruesome mess, rubbing her palms over her eyes. The image of Cady’s bloody, mutilated corpse was burned in her mind. She was so busy thinking about it that she almost missed the eyes peering out at her from the underbrush.

Veronica jumped around, seeing nobody. She thought she heard something scuttling away, but she really didn’t want to chase after anything else. It had to just be her imagination, though, she tried to reason. This all was just in her head. A dream.

She moved quickly as thunder rumbled overhead. She had to figure out a way to wake herself up because all of this was just getting ridiculous.

By some stroke of luck, Veronica stumbled upon the campsite. Everything was in its place. The fire was still burning brightly. In fact, fresh logs had been put in not too long ago.
Veronica starts looking through the tents, finding Gretchen asleep in her sleeping bag, undisturbed by the craziness going on out in the forest so close to her. Veronica sighs at the sight, almost laughing at how funny it seems. She crouches down into a puddle to wake Gretchen up.

“Hey, Gretch, do you mind getting up?” She said, “Have you really been sleeping this whole ti-“

She stops.

Why is she kneeling in a puddle? Or rather, what is she kneeling in?

Veronica looks around, squinting in the dark tent and finding a spilled over water bottle. She laughed slightly and went back to shaking Gretchen.

“Come on, Gretch.” She says, “Time to get up! I kinda need you right now.”

Gretchen didn’t wake up.

Veronica sighed heavily, slightly agitated at this point. She shook the girl harder, speaking louder.

Nothing.

“Gretchen. Come on. This isn’t funny anymore. It’s just getting annoying.”

No response.

Veronica rolls her eyes and shoved at Gretchen. When that doesn’t work, she starts to unzip the sleeping back, finding that the water has soaked through the fabric, too. She grumbles to herself.

“Oh my god, Gretchen.” She groaned, “Have you always been this deep of a sleeper? This is insane.”

Veronica flips on her flashlight to shine it in Gretchen’s eyes and finds that it isn’t water she’s kneeling in.

It’s blood.

What could possibly be gallons of hot blood is pooled inside of the tent. Gretchen’s blood is all over Veronica’s hands and knees and pants and shirt. There’s a huge, stained kitchen knife sitting by the pillow.

Gretchen’s wrists are slit down the middle and all the blood has been drained from her body, collecting into a big red lake at the floor of her tent. Her skin is colorless, almost transparent.

There’s a note by the knife with the words “L I F E S U C K S” scrawled in black ink. But what scares Veronica is what’s written on the back of the paper:

“Remember this? ;))”

Lightning crackles as Veronica stumbles backwards out of the tent. She grabs one of the handguns that were brought along in case of an emergency and sprinted away, screaming for her friends. Or, rather, whoever is left, that is. They could be dead for all she knows. Her heart clenches in guilt when she remembers how she had just left Janis behind.

Rain was falling, now. Veronica was battered by a freezing cold spray of water that soaked her to the bone. Her pace of slowed significantly. She had to squint so those subzero jerks couldn’t stab her blind.
It became so bad that she had to stop and rub her eyes. The storm was insane and Veronica could have spun around in a computer chair one hundred times and feel less disorientated. She stumbled blindly through a stew of mud and slush, her vision so hazy that she didn’t even notice the hillside she was hobbling towards until she stepped off the edge.

Veronica violently tumbled down the steep hillside, feeling like every bone in her body was breaking in impact. She landed roughly in a heap, twitching and groaning. She’s covered in mud and her clothing has ripped, freeing any bare skin to the elements. Her knees are skinned raw, practically glowing neon pink and bright red.

She staggers up, wincing as sharp pains crawl up her right leg. She lifts her foot off the ground like a dog with a thorn in its paw as it feels like every tendon in her ankle has just been slashed. She had to hobble and limp forward, nearly crying out in pain every time her toes merely brush something. Then, she stumbled right into the clearing where Janis, Damian, Regina, and Aaron were all standing in, talking quietly.

“Guys!” She cried out in relief.

“Vera!”

Janis raced over and hugged her tightly.

“God, I was so worried! You ran off and I couldn’t find you. What the hell were you thinking?!?”

“I don’t know,” Veronica mumbled, exhausted. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s...it’s okay.” Janis said. “Just don’t do it again!”

“Not planning on it!”

“Yeah, what matters is that we’re all here.” Regina spoke up.

“I don’t know...” Aaron rubbed his arm, “I felt a lot safer when she wasn’t here.” He nodded at Veronica.

Damian blinked at him. Janis leans back into his arms securely and he holds her protectively.

“Aaron, what are you talking about?” He asked.

“I mean, doesn’t anyone else think it’s strange that bad stuff has never happened until she tagged along?” Aaron said, “Everything has just gotten worse ever since Janis’ new creepy weirdo cousin joined the group. She’s always ruining the experience and just about everything we do with her attacks and trauma.”

Veronica winced. She always thought the same thing but it hurt more to have it said by someone out loud. Someone she thought she could trust. Someone she thought cared.

“This is clearly her fault. It has to be her fault.”

“Okay, let’s not fight. It’s nobody’s fault.” Damian said, trying to keep peace, but his comment wasn’t heard.

“My fault?!” Veronica snapped, “Why does it have to be my fault?”

“Why does it have to be your fault? Are you serious?”
Veronica clenches her jaw, glaring daggers at Aaron.

“Everyone looks at you like there are cat ears sprouting from you head. There is something wrong with you.” He turns to the others, “You guys know it, too, right? She’s not right. She’s messed up.”

“Messed up?!” Veronica yelped. “It would take a really sick person to see it that way so I would love to hear your explanation!”

“Funny you say that because the sick one here isn’t me, Veronica. It’s you.”

Veronica took a step back away from him. Her blood was boiling in her veins.

“You don’t know what my world looks like!” She cries, “You don’t know how I feel and you sure as hell don’t know what made me like this, so you have no right to talk like you know everything about me!”

“I know enough.” Aaron said, “Everything was fine until you showed up.”

“Do you think I chose this?” Veronica snarled, almost baring her teeth. “I never asked to be like this or to be shipped off here or to have this...this burden. It’s not my fault my body just decided to give itself PTSD one day!”

Regina, Janis, and Damian are all weirdly silent. The Janis Veronica knew would have jumped in by now. She wonders why she hasn’t.

“Soldiers and veterans and cops have PTSD as well. I guess that makes the messed up, too, huh?”

“That’s different.”

“Oh, yeah, because ‘protectors’ can’t be considered wrong in the head, right? Just because they served in the army or some shit doesn’t mean they can’t be messed up.”

“The difference between you and them is that they wouldn’t just let someone kill themselves.”

Veronica felt every muscle in her body tense up. So she had heard Aaron when she was running after Cady. She wonders if that was him in the bushes.

“What are you talking about?” Regina asked.

“I’m talking about how Cady is dead because of her.”

All eyes turned to stare.

“This one didn’t stop her when she neared the edge of the bridge even though she was close enough to do something. And she died. Cady died!”

“That doesn’t make it my fault!” Veronica cried, “Anyone- Anyone else, any one of us here could have been there and watched her die, you unbelievable cunt!”

“‘Anyone’ wouldn’t have watched her fall, Veronica. Anyone else would have done something.”

“You weren’t there so you have no right talking like you know what happened!” Veronica yowled, “Unless you have one hundred sewing needles or healing powers, Aaron, you could have done nothing, okay? She went everywhere. She fell onto some rocks and they ripped her apart.”

Veronica’s voice became softer, weaker.
"You didn’t watch her fall. You didn’t watch as her leg was torn off entirely from her body or her blood splatter in every direction. I wanted to do something, I really did, but there was nothing I could do. She was dead."

"You don’t—"

"-know for sure?" Veronica cut him off, "Last time I checked, Aaron, the small intestines should not be hanging out of the body. Her insides came out. I saw her organs!"

Aaron’s eyes are narrowed into a hate-filled stare. Veronica counters with the same stare.

"You are just a clueless jerk, Aaron," She said, growling deep in her throat. "I don’t know what your problem is or why you’re targeting me, but none of this is my fault. I didn’t cause this madness. I didn’t even want to come in the first place, so get off my dick."

"You know what you did."

Veronica’s whole body tense up. Aaron couldn’t possibly know what she had done. She grits her teeth and shoots daggers at the boy.

"Who the hell is clutching your cock, Aaron, because it certainly wasn’t me." She said, trying to stamp down her rage and fear. "You are just spewing nonsense. Like-like just because I witnessed Cady jump does not make it my fault. Just like how you think you can put all the blame on the new kid, too. I haven’t done anything to you!"

"You didn’t have to."

Something is wrong with Aaron’s voice.

"It’s all your sins catching up to you."

Veronica didn’t know if he was lunging out at her, but she felt like he was, so she raised the handgun and shot him in the neck, killing him instantly.

Lightning strikes and thunder roars. Aaron’s lifeless body falls to the ground. Rain is coming down harder. Veronica runs away, almost forgetting about her wounded ankle.

She trips and tumbles face-first into the mud. Her nose is bleeding. Her hands are shaking. She didn’t want to shoot Aaron and she certainly didn’t want to kill him.

Tears mingled with the blood and mud and rain water on her face. She kept remembering about Kurt and Ram and cried harder. She looked up after awhile, sniffling and gasping. The trees are laughing at her.

"Why are you doing this to me?" She shouted into the storm, "What do you want?"

"Oh, darling, I never wanted to hurt you."

Veronica freezes.

JD is grinning at her from the tree line, his eyes malicious and hungry. He licks his lips and takes one big step forward, causing Veronica to jerk backwards. He reeks of the dead.

"Get away from me!"

"Aww, don’t be like that." JD cooed, taking another step. "I just want to help you."
"You should be dead!"

JD stopped, his grin turn into a frown. Anger flits in his eyes for a moment. Lightning crashes and Veronica can see the shadows of who she thinks is Regina, Damian, and Janis standing by the trees.

“What are you doing?” She demands, a small growl in her voice.

“Nothing you should worry about,” JD replies coolly, “It’s been a long time, Ronnie. I’ve missed you.”

“I haven’t.” Veronica spat and JD laughs.

“Oh, how feisty!” He titters, “Let’s catch up. You like your new friends, don’t you? You want to protect them, don’t you?”

Veronica is quiet, watching JD closely as he circles around her like a bear stalking its prey. She nods slowly.

“Yeah.”

“Good!” JD smiles, “Good. I love that I get to hear your voice again. It’s really quiet where I usually am. You know, after I killed myself? Yeah, I went to this dark place. It’s so lonely.”

Veronica thinks the exact opposite. She hates the sound of his voice. It’s like venom in her ears. JD is a snake, his word scaly and poisonous, just like he is. She wants him to just shut up.

“Go away,” She growled lowly. “Go away! Leave me alone. I know you aren’t real, none of this is real, so don’t even try!”

JD stared at her hard, unmoving, unblinking. Then, he pulls out a pistol and shoots Veronica in the leg.

The girl howls in pain as blood spurts out from the bullet hole just above her knee. A horrible burning sensation ripples through her skin. Within seconds, her hands are fully covered in a coating of red. She thinks she might have blacked out for a few seconds.

“Does that feel real, Ronnie?! Does it?!” JD roared, “It is real enough for you?!”

“Fuck you!!” Veronica screamed and she’s shot at again.

She flinches and the bullet grazes the side of her neck. Her skin burns and a long, angry red streak is opened up in her flesh. She presses an already bloodied hand to the fresh wound, gasping. JD had been aiming to kill her.

JD lowers his arm, his eyes bright with primal insanity. He looks rabid.

With animalistic fury, he charges forward and grabs Veronica by the hair before she can flee. He hooks his fingers in her scalp, carving hot red crevices into the back of her head using his dirty fingernails. He draws her in close, his mouth pulled back into a snarl.

“Watch what you say, Ronnie.” He said lowly before shoving her to the mud.

Veronica is gasping and wheezing, like she had been choked. She’s foaming crimson at the lips, gurgling on her own blood. She lays there like a broken doll before her conscious mind comes back. With shaking arms, she pushes herself back up into a sitting position. It hurts to turn her
head. Her leg feels painfully numb.

“Now,” JD clicks his tongue. “Let’s see how much you love these new friends. I was just going to kill them, but might as well make it fun, right?”

He just wanted to make her absolutely miserable.

“What are..you talking about?” Veronica grunted, her question punctuated by a wince.

Her answer is when lightning flashes and she sees a bomb strapped to Regina’s chest. Veronica’s heart sank in fear. The blinking red timer began to count down from thirty.

“N-no!” She cried, “Turn it off! How do I turn it off?!”

She tried to push herself up to run to Regina, but sharp pains shoots up her wounded leg and she collapsed to the ground again. She tries crawling, desperately wanting to save her friend from a gory demise.

“I’m hurt, Ronnie.” JD said, “You didn’t act this panicked when I was hugging a bomb.”

“Tell me how to turn off the goddamn bomb, asshole!”

JD ignored her as the timer struck ten seconds.

“JD!”

“Better step back, Ronnie.”

“JD, please!!”

Orange and red momentarily lit up the clearing. Bits and pieces of Regina exploded in every direction. Blood splattered across Veronica’s body, almost soaking her completely. An arm smacked her in the face. She was sure other fluids got into her open mouth when she screamed. The explosions was loud enough to render her deaf and left her ears ringing.

“No...” She uttered in horror.

“Oooo,” JD faked a wince. “Too slow. Let’s move on!”

Veronica is trembling harder. Regina’s blood is sticky and warm on her body. The pungent metallic scent is so strong she almost vomits.

“Let’s do the gay kid next!” JD said, holding up his gun. He’s smiling widely, like a kid in a toy store.

“Leave him alone!” Veronica yelled, attempting to stand up, but to no avail.

“Make me.”

JD is testing her. His are glowing with malicious intent.

“Mess with me all you want but leave them out of this!”

“Too late.”

JD pulls the tigger, shooting Damian right between the eyes. The boy falls to the ground, red
looking under his face. Veronica is frozen. For a moment, there is nothing but the sound of the rain falling and the gunshot ringing out to silence.

“Oh, what a disappointment you’ve turned out to be, Veronica.” JD says, cooing in pity.

“Why?” She cried, “Why are you doing this? What do you want?”

“Oh, you silly little girl,” JD tutted, shaking his head, “I’m doing this for you! It’s all been for you.”

“You think that this will make me happy?!” Veronica stared at him in disbelief.

“It will.” JD said simply.

“No it won’t!” Veronica reprimands, “None of this will make me happy! You are no different from when you were alive. You’re ignorant and blind and sick and you think that your morbid fantasies will make me happy, but they don’t, JD, they don’t! You will never make me love you again so why are you still trying?”

JD is silent for a moment. Then, he screeches in anger, like a demon or banshee waking up to unleash chaos on the world. Fury dances in his eyes like hot embers.

“Because I love you!!” He shrills.

Veronica ducks under his outstretched arms and manages to scramble over to Janis. Her cousin seems to just disappear before her eyes when she gets close. Her heart sinks.

“Awww, there goes your cousin.” JD purrs, “I guess she won’t always be there.”

“No, no, no, no, no!” Veronica sputters, “No, Janis! Janis, c-come back! Please, I need you!”

“All you need is me, Ronnie.”

Veronica whipped around to face him, glaring and growling. Despite the fact that she was in a lot of pain and covered in blood, she felt hot anger build up in her stomach. Messing with her friends was one thing, but messing with her family, messing with the one person she always trusted and felt safe around, was a big step over the chalk line.

“Bring her back!” She yelled.

“I’m sorry, darling. What’s done is done.” JD said nonchalantly. “She’s gone now. Forever. You don’t need her. Just like how she never needed your dragging her down.”

His voice is horribly distorted, like a hundred different people are talking at once. He looks like he’s rotting, his skin decaying and melting away rapidly. His smile is still sickeningly wide.

Thunder booms in a deafening chain. Veronica leans against a tree, breathing heavily. She clutches Janis’ jacket closer to her. Even though it’s ripped and muddy and soaked in blood (which isn’t all of hers) it still provides her comfort. It’s like her cousin was still there. It helps when there’s a sharp pressure in her temples and JD leers at her evilly. The storm rages harder.

“Why are you so determined to hurt me?!”

JD smirks.

“Because I can.”
He laughs in hysterical madness. He stalked towards Veronica, who cowers the closer he gets. She tried to flee, but her injured leg keeps her immobilized. She’s trapped like a rat at the paws of a beast.

He forces himself onto her, strapping a pack of thermals to her chest. Veronica was screaming like she was being raped, trying to push JD off or at least wriggle away, but he was too big and she was too weak. He had her hair in his hands. The beeping of the timer was like nails on a chalkboard. Veronica cries out, scratching at her chest.

The last thing she saw was JD’s grin as he backs away and looms menacingly. And then, pain. White hot agony exploded from her heart.

“No!!”

Veronica shot up, clutching and clawing at her chest. There was no bomb. There was no JD. There was no blood or gore soaking into her flesh. All of her skin was intact. She was alive.

In fact, she wasn’t even out in the forest. She was in the tent, in her sleeping bag. Her phone said it was almost five in the morning.

Her body was soaked in cold sweat. Her breathing was heavy. Fear coursed through every vein. She was on high alert.

Veronica crawled outside and checked on all the other tents, finding that each and every one of her friends were there and very much alive. Cady was fully intact, Gretchen’s wrists weren’t slit open, Karen didn’t have a single drop of blood on her, Regina wasn’t in pieces, and there wasn’t a bullet lodged in the boy’s skin. Janis was still there.

Veronica allowed herself to breathe and sat down on one of the logs surrounding the fire. She poked at the embers with a stick, hoping to wake up the flames so she wouldn’t be cold and in the dark. A flashlight was just a grim reminder of what she saw, so she didn’t even want to look at one.

Then, there was a pressure in the side of her head. Leaves crunched right behind her.

“Hey, Heather.” She croaked, not even turning around.

The smell of coconut and roses and drainage cleaner always accompanied her arrival. A sickeningly sweet aroma.

“You look terrible.” Heather says bluntly.

“Thanks, it has taken me all night to get like this.” Veronica says and starts speaking again before Heather can comment on that, “Where are the boys?”

Kurt and Ram smelled like gunpowder and the forest (and just a bit of too much Axe). Veronica always wonder what the ghosts do when they aren’t around. Are they watching her but are just invisible or is there some ghost world (heaven?) they can hang out at?

“I don’t know,” Heather answers while sitting down on the same log. “Alright, now spill.”

“What?” Veronica blinks at her, “What are you talking about?”

Heather rolls her eyes.

“Why do you look like you’ve been hit by a truck?”
Veronica looks down at the ground, clasping her hands together. She’s quiet for a moment.

“I had a nightmare.”

Heather raised an eyebrow.

“It was...so horrible, Heather.” The cobalt girl continues, “It was like a mirror of real life, but if real life had all of my darkest fears in it... Karen killed herself. And then Cady killed herself, too. I-I think she was scared of me.” She swallowed hard, “Gretchen’s wrists were slashed the same way Heather Duke was supposed to die back at Westerberg... And there was the suicide note I had to write for her.” She shuddered. “Then I found the others- after falling down a cliff side- and Aaron started yelling at me for how I ruin everything for the group, which—which is pretty true, but still... He started blaming me for everything that was happening in the forest a-and I thought he knew what I did and I got scared, s-so I...shot him. I didn’t want to, it just happened! And then I saw Him.”

Veronica’s thin body trembled harder.

“I saw JD, Heather. He—he was there and he looked so real... It was just so horrible, Heather. It was so terrible.”

Veronica put her head in her hands.

Heather had listened quietly, thoughtfully. She nodded once Veronica had finished, choosing her words carefully. She set a hand on the smaller girl’s back.

“Well, know that it was just a dream,” She said. “You’re safe. He can’t hurt you anymore.”

Veronica nodded slowly, looking up a little. She sniffles.

“It’ll be okay.” Heather comforted. “You’re okay. Everything you heard and saw wasn’t real. These people adore you, Veronica. JD is just a cruel, manipulative, abusive bitch who wanted to hurt you. He was trying to get into your head. But everything he says is a lie. He has no idea what the hell he’s talking about.”

Veronica moved closer and rested her head on Heather’s shoulder, who allowed it. She wonders if the ghost has ever confronted the spirit of JD. What if she and the boys ward him away from her? No way. They wouldn’t do that for her! Well...maybe.

“Thank you, Heather.” Veronica said softly.

“No problem.” Heather replied, wrapping an arm around the smaller girl.

The two of them shared a tender quiet moment. Veronica let herself relax, feeling safe around the alpha she-wolf she was curled against, even if she was just a ghost and would eventually phase through her. The bonds of the nightmare retracted away, but lingered in the back of her mind hauntingly. Still, she felt secure enough to let her eyes close.

Heather glanced at her then at the edge of the woods. She narrowed her eyes and hissed warningly at the grinning blue figure in the tree line.

Chapter End Notes
A few things
One- If you squint you can see all the references from the movie Heathers
Two- Fun fact: I was actually planning on scrapping this entire chapter because I felt like it was too cryptic and out-of-place but decided to keep it because I loved all the details and how I wrote it.
Basically, this chapter was supposed to, like, represent Veronica’s innermost fears and darkest thoughts. Almost every event had a meaning. They were subtle and probably unclear, but there were meanings.
Karen- The fear of all of her friends just...dying. Killing themselves because of her or leaving before she can figure out her mistake. Or, perhaps, what Martha had done back at Westerberg. Suicide scares her. It’s more than a deep topic for her after all that has happened.
Cady- The thought that all of her friends will be scared of her if they ever found out the truth about her. That they’ll be so overcome with terror that they would rather die than spend one more second around her.
Gretchen- Humanized flashback. If y’all have ever seen the movie, you would know that the dream sequence of JD going to kill Duke was fuckin terrifying.
Aaron- Everyone hating her if they ever found out what she did.
Regina and Damian were just a visualization of how helpless Veronica really is when it comes to JD. Even if she wasn’t wounded, she might not have been able to do something.
Janis- The fear of losing her cousin. Veronica is really clingy, mkay? It’s canon now.
JD- JD is just JD. JDphobia. She despises him but she’s also fuckin terrified of this creep
Three- Also I didn't mean to antagonize Aaron that badly!!! I love Troy Bolton and just needed someone to spit fire at Ronnie and he was the only one left who didn’t already have a purpse sooo
Four- Please don’t picture that ending scene with Ronnie and Chandler in a romantic way. Thanks
why is Recovery taking Forever?

Chapter Summary

Veronica’s immune system punishes her body for refusing food by completely collapsing on itself. Her fever makes her delirious.

Chapter Notes

Chapter Warnings: Purging

“...And that’s why it’s actually very important to annotate your books!” Cady concluded.

Damian claps.

“How did we get in this topic again?” Aaron asked.

“I think I made the mistake of bringing up that I have to take notes for my Economics class.” Regina said.

“It’s important!” Cady barked, “You could get extra credit!”

“Hey, Caddie?” Janis spoke up, “Ever notice how nobody listens when you talk? It’s because we don’t care.”

Cady huffed, but she knew Janis meant that in a light hearted way.

“Don’t worry, Cady,” Karen nudges her with her elbow, “I care!”

The two smiled at each other.

“Hey, Ronnie,” Gretchen says, “Lunch is almost over and you haven’t touched your food at all.”

Janis’ cousin blinked and snapped out of her thoughts. Her confused, dazed look made the small group laugh.

“Oh, I’m not hungry.” She said after realizing what Gretchen had said.

That wasn’t a complete lie. It’s been four days since the camping trip and the horrific nightmare she had, and food just repulsed her. Every time she put anything in her mouth, she thought back to the way Cady was impaled or remembered the feeling of Regina’s hot blood all over her body. She wasn’t trying to starve herself, she wanted to eat, but her body was just rejecting everything that was edible.

Her brain was on panic mode. The second something was in her stomach, it freaked out and made her either feel horribly sick or force herself to throw up. She couldn’t control herself. It wasn’t her
Veronica was able to get away with not eating rather well. She came up with various excuses that seemed to work in her favor. This wouldn’t last forever. She just have to continue avoiding the truth for a little longer. Her stomach will beg for food sooner or later.

“You should at least eat a little,” Regina said, her brows knitted together in concern.

“And don’t waste food.” Cady added.

“I wasn’t going to.” Veronica stated, “I was going to give my food to Janis.”

The artist looked up from her plate when her name was said.

“Huh?”

“Nothing,” Veronica slid her plate over to Janis, “Here.”

“Aww, yeah! Double lunch!”

“You gotta eat something.” Regina said in her concerned team mom voice- Something Veronica has become very familiar with.

“Here. Have my orange!” Karen says.

“Thanks,” Veronica said through her teeth while taking the fruit from blonde’s outstretched hand.

She stared at the orange as if it were a human heart, dreading having to eat it, knowing what would happen if she did. Finally, she peeled the fruit and popped a slice into her mouth. The taste of food was almost foreign on her tongue; The orange was tangy and juicy, but also somewhat bitter sweet- literally. It slithered down Veronica’s throat like molasses. Even swallowing something made her want to vomit.

A conversation rose up again and Veronica listened quietly. Janis nudged her to have another orange slice and she obeyed, even though the thought of eating more was revolting. She grimaced and swallowed down three more pieces before lunch finally, finally ended.

“Hold up.”

A hand grabbed Veronica by the arm before she could leave with the rest of the group.

“What’s up, Damian?”

“Is everything okay? You’ve been looking a little pale lately.”

Fear spilled into Veronica’s stomach like a dark oil pit. Was he hinting at something? Did he know? Why was he so concerned about her? She’s wasn’t Janis. Janis was his best friend, not her.

“Huh? I’m fine, Damian.” Veronica says.

“I’m just making sure.” Damian said. “You usually whack Janis with your journal whenever she tries to take your food.”

Maybe Veronica wouldn’t have to force herself to purge because she felt like she was about to be sick. Damian was looking at her with a skeptical gaze. She wonders if he thought she was anorexic or something.
She wasn’t. She was just having some...problems.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m okay.” She said. “I might have a cold, but it’s not bad or anything.”

Damian nodded slowly, like he was trying to decide whether or not he’ll believe her. He gently pats her on the shoulder and smiled warmly.

“Alright, darling. Just remember that you can always talk to me or one of the others.”

Veronica smiled and nodded, and, with that, they parted ways. She hurried down the hallway with embarrassment burning bright red on her ears. She only felt like she could breathe when she was in the bathroom, slamming a stall door shut behind her.

“Stupid!” She hissed. “Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!”

She sank to the floor, palms pressed over her eyes. For a moment, she just shuddered and whimpered before finally uncurling and crawling over to the toilet. Parts of her were screaming not to do this, but that was silenced by a much louder voice yelling to get on with it. She obeyed, took a deep breath, and shoved her fingers down her throat.

The muscles in Veronica’s neck contracted and tightened, trying to remove the things that were not supposed to be there. Her gag reflex kicked in to try and double the efforts. Bile was forced up Veronica’s esophagus, bubbling around her fingers and frothing at her lips. It dribbled down her chin, which was finally enough to make Veronica rip her hand out of her mouth. She winced when her fingernails grated against the inside of her throat.

Veronica hunched over the toilet, violently vomiting up pieces of oranges and stomach acid. The taste was horrifically sour, which only seemed to make her throw up more.

*I’m going to be late at this rate,* Veronica thought before heaving again. *Aaand now I have vomit up my nose. How great is this? What a time to be alive!*

She groaned and blinked dazedly. Her vision was black at the edges and she was just now realizing that she is trembling. She flushed and set her head down on the toilet seat, not even caring about how unsanitary it was.

Veronica stays put for a long time. She’s already late, so what’s the point in going to class now? Her World History teacher would probably make her explain why she was tardy and she didn’t have a believable lie. She only decides to get up because she needs to wash her mouth out.

Tentatively, she tried to restore some mobility. That only stoked the embers shovelled into every muscle. It made her shut her eyes tightly and hiss between gritted teeth.

In her head, she counted to three and pushed herself up to her feet. Stars flitted in front of her eyes and her head spun like a top as a burning sensation traveled up her legs and to her spine. Luckily, though, it was gone as quickly as it came and she could focus again.

Except her body refused to cooperate. She was trembling violently and, after the first few staggered steps, she slammed right into the stall door. Blood thrummed in her ears. At the same time, it felt as if fingers of ice were crawling over her skin.

She shoved open the stall door and careened towards the sinks, catching herself before she fell again- a newborn foal had better balance than she did.

Veronica pawed cold water on her face. Her senses were finally gathering together as her body
came down from its high. It was calming down and so could she.

Then, someone walked in.

“I was wondering where you were.” Regina said, “Mrs. Holly counted you absent. What are you
doing in h-”

She stopped when she saw how disheveled Veronica was. Her mascara was smeared across her
eyes and her hair was a fuzzy mess. She didn’t look this bad at lunch.

“Are you okay?” Regina asked.

“Fine.” Veronica answered quickly, digging through her bag for her makeup. She winced at how
hoarse her voice was. God, she sounded so pathetic.

“You don’t look fine.”

Veronica flinched backwards when Regina tried to touch her. Her head spun and she grabbed onto
one of the sinks for balance. Fatigue washed over her and she began to worry if she would even
make it through the rest of the day.

“Woah, easy,” Regina said, her arms outstretched like she was Veronica’s spotter. “You should sit
down. You really don’t look so good.”

“I know.” Veronica said before slumping against the wall. She tried to make it look natural and
wasn’t because her legs were giving in on her.

Regina crouched down beside her and her hand fluttered over her shoulder, finally touching
tentatively. She gave a reassuring squeeze when she was given permission to interact.

“Maybe you should go home.”

“Can’t,” Veronica mumbled with her eyes shut. “Janis’ parents are out of state or something so
there’s nobody to pick me up. And I’m sure the school wouldn’t let me drive home, even if I had a
car.”

Veronica didn’t drive. She had her license and knew how to, but was too anxious to even take the
wheel.

She took Drivers Ed early sophomore year in October when the classes first started- she hadn’t
been old enough freshman year- so she could get it over with. She passed and went on to get her
permit, and then got her license later in the year when she turned sixteen. She never got a car,
though. Not because she didn’t have the money or her parents didn’t get her one, but because she
never found the thought of driving a steel death machine on wheels appealing. Too many things
could go wrong and, added with her post-traumatic stress, she might have an attack and swerve
herself off of a bridge in her panic.

Regina pursed her lips. She offered to drive Veronica home, but the girl turned that down, saying
that they would probably get caught.

“Alright,” She sighed. “Do you want some painkillers or something?”

“Yeah,” Veronica nodded. “That would be nice.”

Regina fishes an Ibuprofen bottle out of her purse and pressed it into Veronica’s hands, who
thanked her.

The pills helped some, but Veronica felt a lot better once the school day finally ended and she got to go home. Unfortunately, she seemed to get worse, as her immune system finally just collapsed, but at least she wasn’t at school. And she wasn’t completely alone, either.

Veronica didn’t know how she felt about Janis finding out that she’s feeling ill. She desperately tries to hide it, as she didn’t like attention being on her, but it was fruitless as her rational mind slipped.

Janis was perched on the side of Veronica’s bed, wiping down her burning skin with a cold rag. Her cousin was breathing rapidly, panting like a tired dog. Her eyes were half open, drifting in and out of consciousness as a fever blistered through her whole body.

The room was cool and dark, but it didn’t help Veronica’s discomfort. She was tossing her head back and forth on the pillow, twisting in her blankets. She felt like she was being cooked alive under them, but she didn’t have the strength to kick them off.

Her brain felt like it was being fried. She couldn’t think straight and began to mumble incoherently.

“Heather...”

Janis blinked and furrowed her eyebrows at what was said. She pressed the rag back to her cousin’s hot forehead.

“Heather... I’m sorry...”

“Vera? What are you talking about?” Janis asked.

“I’m sorry, Heather... I’m so sorry...” Veronica continued to mutter, her head lolling back and forth across her pillow.

“Vera? Veronica? Who’s Heather?”

Veronica forces her eyes open and she stared blearily at Janis. Her pupils are dilated and glossy. She’s delirious with fever.

“Heather?”

“No, Veronica. I’m Janis. I’m your cousin.”

“Heather... Heather, you’re alive! I’m sorry- for what I did. He made me, Heather. I didn’t know. You can’t let me go back to him. Please, Heather. I don’t want to be around him anymore.”

Worry etched across Janis’ face. She had no idea what Veronica was talking about, but it didn’t sound good. Who was Heather? Who was “He”? What happened to them?

“Please, Heather... Please take me back. I won’t mess up again. I promise.”

”Veronica, you have a fever. It’s making you delirious.”

From in the corner of the room, Heather Chandler herself watched on. There was a sympathetic look on her face. She moved towards the bed, unseen by Janis, and brushed the back of her fingers against Veronica’s clammy cheek.

”Heather!” Veronica began to straight up wail, struggling under her blankets. “Heather! Heather,
please! I’m sorry!”

There are tears pouring down her cheeks, now. Janis’ heart twists in sympathy.

”Veronica, calm down. You’re okay. You’re safe.”

”No, no, no, no-“ Veronica bawled. “Heather, you can’t- You have to come back. You can’t leave me with him. Please. Please!”

“Okay, I’ll take you back.” Janis said, unsure on how else she would help Veronica. “It’s me, Heather. I’ll take you back.”

It seems to work, as her cousin’s sobs stifle. She sniffs, her eyes glassy and glossed over in her daze.

“Heather...” Veronica mumbled again, completely out of it at this point.

“Yes, it’s Heather. I’m here.” Janis said, making the actual Heather raise an eyebrow at her. She didn’t see, of course. “I need you to rest, okay? If you rest, I’ll, umm, take you back. Does that sound fair?”

Veronica stares at her for a moment before nodding slowly. She shuts her eyes and attempts to relax. Despite her discomfort, she’s out within minutes, her fever and exhaustion practically knocking her out.

Janis stays on the bed for a few more minutes before getting up and walking down to the living room. She’s concerned and confused. Veronica was just babbling nonsensically, but hadn’t she mentioned someone named Heather before?

—

Gaylien: Hey guys, does anyone know anything about some girl named Heather?

Big Gay: must be important because you’re typing like that

Gwetchen: i don’t think so

cornHub: i have no idea what we’re even talking about.....so no

AfricaByToto: draws a blank for me

Gaylien: Damn.

team.mom: How’s Veronica doing?

Gaylien: Honestly? Pretty terrible. She has a really high fever, but she’s asleep right now.

team.mom: I knew she was sick!

troybolton: wait Janis, did you say Heather?

Gaylien: Yeah.

troybolton: wasn’t there something about a Heather on the news, like, last year? i only remember because it was about suicide or something. i couldn’t be the only one who saw it.
Gaylien: Holy shit.

—

Janis ran over to the computer in the office and searched “Westerberg Heather”, hoping to find something. Despite the vague search, multiple articles came up about some girl named Heather Chandler. She clicked on the first link and read about how this really popular sophomore committed suicide by drinking a cup of drainage cleaner. Her stomach twisted at the cause of death.

Is this what Veronica was talking about? Her friend committed suicide? Maybe that’s what she meant. She had been blaming herself for the death.

Janis went back and saw something else that was searched: Westerberg suicides. She hesitated, then clicked on it with morbid curiosity.

Multiple sites came up about suicides that apparently happened at the high school. Not only did this so-called Heather Chandler die, but also two jocks named Kurt Kelly and Ram Sweeney. They shot each other in a double suicide because they weren’t accepted at homosexuals. Janis felt her heart clench with sympathy for those two.

“Holy shit,” She muttered, leaning back in the computer chair. “What the fuck happened to you at this school, Vera?”

But only if she knew. Only if she knew her theories were all wrong. Only if she knew those three teenagers were actually murdered by the girl twisting and turning upstairs.
Bottle Up The Memories

Chapter Summary

Veronica just wants to feel something. She also wants to sleep peacefully for once. But at least dreams about better times that would never come back were better than nightmares.

Chapter Notes

Chapter Warnings: Self harm, self-inflicted burning

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Veronica didn’t know what time it was when she woke up. She pried open her eyes and sat up, sweaty and uncomfortable. A headache made her consider laying back down, but she felt dehydrated and needed water, so she forced herself to get up and walk downstairs.

She didn’t see Janis, but she did see that the computer in the office was turned on. Curious, she walked over to see. Everything was closed out of, but when Veronica decided to be a little snoopy and checked the search history, she almost threw up. The “suicides” that happened at Westerberg had been looked up and multiple articles had been read through about the topic. Her head spun as her fever spiked again, nearly sending her to the ground when her legs grew weaker.

She shakily moved the mouse to one of the police reports and read through it, despite the fact that she really didn’t need the horrible nostalgia. There were pictures of the bodies.

Heather Chandler was lying face down on her stomach, shattered glass all around her from where she fell through the coffee table. The suicide note was placed on the table.

Kurt Kelly and Ram Sweeney were sprawled out in the dirt of the forest behind Westerberg. They were almost completely naked and bleeding from the bullet holes in their neck and chest. The guns in their hands looked too perfect, be the police seemed too incompetent to catch onto what had happened.

Veronica stepped backwards, running her fingers through her hair. Her eyes were wide, but she didn’t know why she was so scared. She thought she should have been over this by now. Most killers don’t feel remorse for their victims.

But she wasn’t a killer. She didn’t want to kill anyone. Heather Chandler was an accident and Kurt Kelly and Ram Sweeney felt forced onto her. She didn’t want anyone dead. But accidents would still put her in jail for life.

Veronica stared at the bodies for a long time. She jumped around when she heard a noise from behind. The trio of ghosts were there. The temperature in the computer room dropped significantly from their arrival, which Veronica almost found comforting in her current state.
“I still can’t believe the pictures of our dead, naked bodies are online.” Kurt said, staring at the computer screen. “I mean, how embarrassing is that?”

“I didn’t think pictures like that are allowed to be leaked onto the internet.” Veronica said.

“Me neither.” Ram blinked. “I guess they’re not too graphic. Even though I have a bullet in my neck. And you can practically see my cock through those underwear.”

Veronica looked at him with a raised eyebrow. He and Kurt were still undressed, even as ghosts, like how Heather was in her robe. There were scabbed bullet holes in their blue skin, dried blood forever stained on their flesh.

“Well then hopefully don’t get off to your corpse.” Heather says, chuckling lightly. She bumped Veronica with her arm, sending a chill across the girl’s skin. “Shouldn’t you be in bed?”

“Probably.” Veronica shrugged, closing out of the browser and turning the computer off. “I was going to get water and then I got sidetracked.”

She walked to the kitchen, massaging her temples. Her immune system was kicking her ass, giving in on her and making her suffer as some kind of punishment. She sighed and filled up a glass of water, checking the time and seeing that it was only six in the afternoon.

“Do you guys know where Janis is?” She asked, trudging over to the staircase. The ghosts padded along behind her.

“I think she went out.” Kurt answered.

“Yeah, that would make sense.”

Veronica shut her bedroom door and collapsed into the bed, curling up underneath the blankets. She hugged her knees, the scenes of the trio’s deaths replaying in her head before a vivid fever dream took over.

———

Veronica jittered nervously on the Chandler’s doorstep. She clasped the strap of the bag slung over her shoulder and, for the fourth time, failed to knock on the door. Her fist hovered over the wood, then pulled back. If she couldn’t simply knock, she didn’t know how she was going to spend an entire night with the demon queens of high school.

She initially wasn’t even supposed to be there, anyway. She had just accidentally brought up some problems happening at her house and Chandler ordered her to come over. Then McNamara made it a sleepover, since she and Duke were already going to spend the night. Veronica obliged because she was too scared to say no.

So now she was awkwardly lingering on the stoop, probably looking like a creepy stalker-loiterer. She spun around a few times, kind of regretting the walk she made all the way to the house. It was cold and raining and she was wet, even with her umbrella.

What made her even more worried is that her makeup wasn’t perfect, her hair was a mess, and she was going to break in dress-code, as she didn’t have blue pajamas. This would be the first time she wouldn’t be in the right color around the Heathers and worried they would punish her for breaking a rule or something.

Despite the fear of one of the empresses pulling something for her disobedience, she finally
knocked on the door. Whatever she did, leave now or go inside, she would still get hell either way. Might as well get it over with.

The door opened and Duke was there with her eyebrows raised. She was already in her pajamas, green cotton sleeping pants and a button-down shirt of the same color. Her hair was pulled back in a braid.

“It’s about time, Veronica!” She said.

“Sorry,” Veronica says while closing her umbrella and stepping inside, “It was a long walk.”

She though she saw concern flash in Duke’s eyes, but she couldn’t be too sure, as it went away in almost an instant.

“You didn’t get a ride?”

“Well, no.” Veronica said while following Duke to the den. “I don’t have a car.”

“Alright,” Duke says before looking forward, “Veronica’s here!”

Chandler and McNamara were in the living room, sitting on the couch with a bowl of popcorn between them. The large TV was turned to Netflix, as they were probably about to pick something to watch before there was a knock at the door.

McNamara was clad in a pale yellow nightgown with white rims and a bow near the collar, while Chandler was wearing a red silk robe with a flower pattern across the material. Realizing that the demoness’ were all in their pajamas, Veronica felt a little out-of-place for still being in the clothes she wore to school.

“Told you long enough,” Chandler says, and Veronica was sure she was eyeing her lack of sleeping wear on.

“Like I told Duke, I am sorry.” Veronica says.

She awkwardly dotes around the edge of the den while Duke was already sitting back down on the couch next to McNamara. She considered just sitting there to watch the movie, as she wanted to give the predators their space.

“Oh, go change.” Chandler said, waving a hand and Veronica skittered off. She would have never moved without permission.

She shut the bathroom door and sighed, trying to calm her nerves. She has been friends with the Heathers for a whole month now, so she really didn’t know why she was freaking out. Maybe it was because she was in their home court, their den. She was in the den of the most powerful pack of alphas in all of high school.

Heather McNamara was a slick, pristine feline, specifically a puma in Veronica’s eyes. She had glossy fur that was always kept finely groomed and a sharp gaze. Everyone thought of her as the angel of the group because of her soft face, but she can and will maul any opposer. She was the tallest of the quartet, letting her loom over enemies with gleaming eyes and sharp claws. Her teeth are pearly white, ready to sink into any unsuspecting prey.

Heather Duke was a big, burly grizzly bear, no doubt about that. She and what could be considered one of nature’s most dangerous predators had a lot in common. She was threatening, even though she seemed to be the quiet and reserved Heather. Oh, how wrong you would be. It would be best to
flee when she rears up on her haunches, roaring and snarling. With razor sharp claws and strong teeth, she can make quick work of those who are too weak to protect themselves.

Heather Chandler was a wolf, the beastly queen that lurks the forest that is Westerberg High School. A big canis lupus occidentalis lustrous, smooth fur and a set of mean teeth made for biting and tearing and not letting go. When you see her coming, it’s too late to flee. She has your scent. Instead, you stop and pray. Listen and obey if she speaks to you and you may get to keep your windpipes. Never forget that she is the alpha and she rules your world.

And then there was Veronica Sawyer. She didn’t know what she was. Maybe an opossum. Something runty.

Veronica sighed and shook her head. She changed into her pajamas, which was just a T-shirt and some sweat pants, and washed off her face. Without makeup, she suddenly looked much rougher. With no foundation or blush, she was pale and the bags under her eyes were more evident. She suddenly had the urge to climb out the bathroom window and run home, but she didn’t want to go out in the rain and worked up enough courage to walk back out to the living room.

“Who are you?” McNamara asked teasingly.

Veronica laughed slightly and sat down on the floor in front of the couch, not wanting to intrude by sitting next to one of the Heathers. Unless asked, she wasn’t going to. And they didn’t. She wasn’t sure how to feel about that, but she brushed it off.

“What are we going to watch?” She asked.

“Silent Hill Revelation.” Chandler answered while selecting the movie.

Veronica didn’t think the Heathers were the types to be into bloody, gory like that horror movies, but they all looked eager to watch this. She had actually played a few of the Silent Hill games on her dad’s old PlayStation before, but never got around to watch any of the movies. Maybe that was because she wasn’t a big fan of horror films. Even though actually playing a game felt more scary, movies just freaked her out. She wasn’t sure why. Not that she would voice that fear to the Heathers. And not like they would switch their pick, either.

Quiet conversations were exchanged during the movie, but Veronica mainly stayed quiet. She was pretty sure the trio of she-devils actually forgot she was there at one point, since they weren’t really addressing her. She didn’t mind. Better ignored than being hit with an arsenal of insults.

Silent Hill 3 had been Veronica’s favorite game of the franchise, so it was nice to watch a movie about Heather Mason, even if it wasn’t following the story of the game and she didn’t enjoy the forced romance with Vincent. But she did appreciate the lack of jump scares. Even though they were replaced with excessive amounts of gore. Like the scene where Heather watched a man get a large strip of skin sliced off or when she had to plunge her hand into that monster’s chest to grab a piece of a pendant. She was glad to see Pyramid Head, though.

As the movie continued, Veronica started to calm down. She felt fine, thinking the night would go okay. And the movie wasn’t enough to induce nightmares, so that wasn’t a problem, either.

“So, Veronica, what was going on with your parents?”

Veronica jumped at the sound of McNamara’s voice. Silent Hill Revelation had ended and she had gotten so used to not being talked to that the sudden conversation startled her.

“Just a fight.” She said, uncurling herself from her position on the floor. Her tailbone throbbed for
a moment from sitting for so long.


“Job stuff,” Veronica shrugged. “And drinking. Things like that.”

The Heathers were quiet for a moment and Veronica looked up at them curiously, since none of them had made a retort. Chandler shook her head and stood up to order the group to do something else.

They ended up playing Never Have I Ever and Truth or Dare and spread rumors until finally starting to turn in for the night. While watching an episode of Friends, Chandler noticed Veronica fishing out a pill bottle and gave her a curious look.

“I didn’t know perfect little Veronica Sawyer had to take medications.” She said in a teasing tone, even though she was obviously wasn’t trying to be too mean.

Veronica’s ears burned red as she obviously had been trying to be discrete about it. She stutters on her words for a moment, not catching on to Chandler’s light-hearted meaning with her words. She cleared her throat.

“Yeah, well... You thought wrong.”

She mentally slapped herself for that answer. She must have sounded like she was sassing off Chandler, and that’s the last thing she wanted the Heathers to think. Chandler just snorted.

“What are they?” Duke asked.

“Sleeping pills,” Veronica answered before swallowing two of the tablets. This would be her first time trying them, so she hoped they would work better than her last kind.

And they did. The effects practically punched her in the face then roundhouse kicked her in the stomach. She felt like she was just injected with way too much novocaine as she was walking up the stairs, and the way she stumbled made the Heathers laugh.

“I’m going to bed now,” She called, hobbling off to guest bedroom. She collapsed right into the bed, falling asleep almost instantly.

—

It had to be three in the morning when Chandler was woken up by the sound of her phone buzzing loudly on her nightstand. She made a tired noise and grabbed it, squinting to see what was going off. It was the group chat she, the other two Heathers, and Veronica were in.

//

bluebell: all mm sayign s thta e shuold
bluebell: we shuodl
bluebell: hhhhhjjhhdjjjd
bluebell: my penis fels lke a cherio
bluebell: wait
Bluebell: Pe is

RedQueen: what the fuck Veronica you don’t have a penis

RedQueen: go the fuck to bed

Bluebell: no

Bluebell: yuo dnot tell me waht to do

Bluebell: im teh Swan Princess

//

By the shuffling beside Chandler’s bedroom, she assumed Duke was up now, as well. McNamara, too.

She groaned and got up to go check on whatever the hell Veronica was doing.

Except the room was empty.

//

RedQueen: Veronica, where the hell are you?!

Bluebell: i lov the feelign of whne my clothse gte otu of the dishwahser

MacAndCheese: wait she isn’t in the house?

RedQueen: No!!

Moby_duke: holy shit

Bluebell: i csnt evne feel my toenails

RedQueen: VERONICA WHERE ARE YOU

Bluebell: tres

Bluebell: haha theres a brid

Bluebell: btich thsi is my Wood

Bluebell sent a photo- fightingabrid.jpg

MacAndCheese: How did she get outside?!

Bluebell: is slippery

RedQueen: I have no idea. But I know where she is. I’m going to go get her.

//

Chandler pulled on her red rain coat and boots and stomped outside, grumbling to herself the whole time. She hated this and was going to give Veronica hell for pulling this.

She had to scale the fence around the property to get to the woods behind the house. She began
yelling Veronica’s name, glancing at the horribly taken picture the cobalt girl had sent.

After around five minutes of yelling in the dark, Chandler found Veronica. In a tree.

“Veronica!!” Chandler cried, “What are you doing up there?!”

“I’m washing my hands!!” Veronica yelled back.

The way she was unsteadily positioned on the branch was making Chandler nervous. It didn’t help that she was soaked from the rain and not dressed for the cold temperatures outside.

“Get down!”

“No!” Veronica replied stubbornly, almost like a child, “I’m not done! I need to wait...for the bird. He stole my soap!!”

It soon became clear Veronica was completely out of it. And then Heather remembered those sleeping pills she took. They had to be causing this as some kind of after-effect.

“Veronica! Come on! It’s cold and wet and the middle of the night!”

Veronica mumbled something Chandler couldn’t hear. She clambered to another part of the tree and then slipped, yelping as she hit another branch. Chandler lunged to catch her before she could break something or get seriously injured.

“God, Veronica,” She muttered, trying to hold the girl steady. She was worried about how easy it was to hold her, but pushed it to the back of her mind for now. She had to get to the house.

“But the bird!” Veronica cried, squirming in Chandler’s arms.

“The bird brought your soap back.”

Veronica stopped.

“Oh. That’s so nice.”

Chandler shook her head and began walking back to the house with Veronica curling up in her arms. She was biting her lip to hold back laughter the whole time.

—

The next morning, Veronica walked down to Chandler’s living room to find that all the Heathers were already awake. She gave them a small smile, then furrowed her eyebrows when they giggled.

“What?”

“You had fun last night, huh?” Duke said, smirking.

“What are you talking about?”

“Those mediations you took made you loopy as hell,” McNamara explained. “It was like you were high.”

“You got up and somehow went to the forest behind Heather’s house. And into a tree. Then Heather had to go out there and get you while you screamed nonsensically. And you had to climb a fence to get back.” Duke informed.
“I climbed a fence?”

“No!” Chandler barked, looking up from her coffee pot, “I climbed the fence! With you on my back! While you yelled about soap!”

Veronica’s face turned as red as Chandler’s hair tie.

“Sorry.” She says.

Chandler eases up and then laughed while shaking her head.

“It’s fine.” She said, much to Veronica’s surprise. “At least the pills knocked you out again, so I guess they work.”

Veronica laughed slightly and sat down at the table. If she had remembered being in that situation, she surely would have thought the Heathers would have left her out there. But they didn’t. Chandler went out of her way to go rescue her shrieking ass from a tree.

She smiled to herself, feeling like trio of demoness’ had her back and that she had nothing to worry about.

———

Veronica didn’t cry at Heather’s funeral. She couldn’t.

Not because she didn’t feel upset, but because JD was with her with his arm around her shoulder, grinning. She knew tears would only be a sign of weakness and she was scared of what he might do to her if she cried. So she didn’t. Not until she got home and was away from him.

All alone, in her bed, she wept. She wept and wept until she had no more tears left. She cried so hard she hyperventilated and then threw up in the trash can in her room. She bawled and relieved her break down by slitting open her thigh in the bathtub, hoping it would please Heather for what she had done to her.

Little did she know that a ghost was watching on, shaking her head.

Funerals were always bad, but Veronica thought the night after you got back was the worse. When you lie in your bed and remember all the good times that were shared, the whole situation comes crashing down. Staring at the body is hard, but having to accept that they are gone is the worst.

Because when you’re a teenager, when you’re a child, and your best friend is fucking dead, you don’t want to believe that it is true. You want to just sleep and wake up the next morning with your phone blown up with texts from them. But there are no new messages when you check their contact. And you cry again because they’re really gone and nothing will bring them back.

That shouldn’t happen to kids. People shouldn’t just die, especially friends. It wasn’t fair. It hurts even worse when your last conversation was a fight that you never got to make up and you end up apologizing to a corpse.

How do you deal with that? How do you deal with your best friend being dead because of you? Because you killed her. She’s dead and you end up smiling at her funeral because your stupid fucking boyfriend won’t stop cracking jokes that you laugh at. And you want to chug down a drainage cleaner for it.

Veronica woke up crying. Not because she had a nightmare, but because she dreamed about a
better time. When everyone was alive and things were okay. She dreamed of things that would never happen again.

She draped her arm over her face, sniffling and trying to stop the flow of tears.

“Why do you guys treat me like I’m not your murderer?”

The ghosts looked at her from where they’re standing, glancing at each other for a moment. It’s like not even they knew why they were nice to her. Maybe they just got tired of tormenting and actually wanted to enjoy the world again.

“It wasn’t necessarily your fault that we died.” Heather shrugged, “JD was an abusive asshole who probably would have killed you if you tried to resist.”

“I should have though. I let him kill people. I did nothing.”

Veronica sat up and doubled over on the side of her bed. Her fingers are curled into tight fists, nails digging into her palms. Her shoulders shake with soft sobs.

“It wasn’t fair to you! You guys shouldn’t have died... I...I should have died. I should have died in the explosion with JD.”

“Veronica-“ Ram attempted to say.

“I should have died! I should be dead!” Veronica wailed, “I don’t deserve to live after what I did! I should have been blown up just like JD! I’m just as much of a monster as he was!”

“Veronica!” Heather grabbed the girl by the forearms, shaking her slightly. The boys hover behind her. “There’s a reason you didn’t die in the explosion. I don’t know what it is, but if the world wanted you dead, it would have killed you then. But it didn’t. You’re still alive.”

Veronica sniffled. Heather strokes a stray piece of hair out of her face.

“You are nothing like JD. He’s terrible and forced you to do horrible things that you couldn’t say no to. Don’t blame yourself for what his abuse did.”

Veronica nodded, even though she was never going to forgive herself for murdering three innocent teenagers.

After calming herself down, she staggered downstairs, despite her raging fever. Her chest was throbbing with sobs she was holding back. She didn’t want to break down in front of the ghosts after that. She just kept it all bottled up.

She really didn’t want to get up, but she needed more water. There was the bathroom, but she thought that tap water tasted gross. Though, after she realized Janis and her friends were down there, she would have willingly drank from the sink.

“Hey, Vera!” Janis greeted, smiling at her.

Veronica must have looked like a mess. She was clad in sweats, with one sock on and hair that was sticking out in various directions. Her eyes were still puffy and red and she was a white as a ghost. She squinted at Janis, clearly still delirious.

“Hey.” She mumbled, awkwardly shuffling to the kitchen.

“Not feeling any better?” Cady asked with a sympathetic tone that made Veronica wince. She
didn’t deserve their concern.

“Not really. I was just getting water.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed the red light on the stove, meaning it was hot. She stepped over to it and stared for a long time, probably looking completely crazy to her friends. She thought they were saying something to her, but she didn’t hear. Her ears started to buzz.

“Don’t you dare.” Heather hissed.

She didn’t listen to the ghost. She needed to feel something. She needed to feel something that would act as a punishment for her mistakes. She needed to feel pain.

In one swift movement, Veronica put her hand on the burner. Her reaction the the hot agony was immediate, and she shrieked like a dying animal, tottering backwards. Janis screamed her name and ran over, grabbing her wrist to inspect the damage to her hand. Veronica broke down into painful sobs, burying her face into her cousin’s chest.

She desperately wanted to feel something again, but her body has gone completely numb and there’s nothing she can do about it. Well, hey, at least Janis didn’t light a cigarette on her self-inflicted burn like the person who she swore was smirking at her from the window.

Chapter End Notes

Silent Hill Revelation actually isn’t on Netflix, I just wanted to include it because it’s my favorite horror movie. I don't care what anyone says, it was a good movie!
Also oof the feels in that one part
Also also delirious Ronnie is an amazing thing. Chandler is like a demon mom. She didn’t sign up to babysit but she does it anyway
breathing Underwater

Chapter Summary

Veronica feels like she’s relapsing, Janis is an amazing cousin, Damian is an angel, and the ghosts do something they wished they could have done when they were all alive.

Chapter Notes

Chapter Warnings: Relapse, Panic attacks, Thoughts of self harm, Fantasizing self harm (by that I mean she likes doing it), Minor body horror/gore

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Veronica really didn’t mean to cause a havoc in the house. She had completely forgotten that her friends were even there, like she was in a trance. It felt like when she was having one of her episodes; her body didn’t feel like her own and she completely forgets about what she’s doing. Something else is controlling her. Parts of her joked about one of the ghosts possessing her, but she knew that wasn’t it. It was just her deteriorating mental state being an asshole.

Damian had herded everyone who wasn’t Janis down to the basement after he, too, yelled in shock when she willingly put her hand on a hot stove. He kept gesturing for the door, saying, “Nothing to see here, people! Keep moving! This isn’t the movie we’re watching, it’s downstairs! TV time, now! Let’s go!” He didn’t even have to be asked to get everyone out, he knew when he was needed and when he had to step in.

Once everyone was downstairs, Veronica crumbled even more. She sunk down to her knees, bawling and wailing like someone was raping her. She almost expected her cousin to get tired of her crying, but Janis stayed the whole time, stroking the back of her head and murmuring soft, reassuring words.

Veronica was soon shuddering and whimpering against Janis, eventually tiring herself out so much that she was close to falling asleep. Or maybe she was about to black out. She wasn’t too sure.

Janis held her like that for long time, not daring to move for a moment. When she did, she texted Damian to come upstairs and help her, which he answered to immediately, as she heard the basement door open and close a few seconds later.

“Hey,” Damian said. He softened his voice when Janis pointed to the girl tiredly slouched in her embrace. “Sorry. How is she?”

“Feeling pretty shitty,” Janis said, threading her fingers through Veronica’s hair.

The girl stirred, her fingers twitching. A burning pain ripples up through her arm and she cringes.

“Heather...?”
“Oh no,” Janis muttered.

“What?” Damian looked at her with a curious-concerned look.

“She’s mumbling again. She thinks I’m her friend Heather Chandler, I believe.” Janis answered, “The thing is that this Heather Chandler girl killed herself by drinking drainage cleaner a year ago.”

Damian winced and crouched down next to the cousins, his eyes fixed on Veronica, who’s squirming a little harder now. They need her to be calm and hopefully go back to sleep, so they had to stop whatever this attack was.

Veronica wrenched around in Janis’ arms, staring at Damian with wide eyes.

“You...” She muttered. “You’re dead.”

Damian blinked a few times, slightly baffled by such a statement. He exchanged looks with Janis, who is equally concerned. He shakes his head at Veronica’s statement, trying to brush away some of her hair, which causes her to flinch away.

“No, darling,” He said, “I’m alive. It’s okay. I’m alive and so is Janis.”


Her words become labored gasps. In Janis’ arms, Veronica was still shuddering and crying. On the inside, Veronica sobbed “I don’t want to cry like this! I want to stop crying right now!” But no matter how hard she squeezed her shoulders, the shaking would not stop. Veronica simply could not cover up her pain. She was seizing out of control in her cousin’s arms, who could just watch with wide eyes.

“Can I try something?” Damian asks Janis, who nodded swiftly. “Veronica, honey, where do you think you are?”

“Sherwood.”

Veronica was so sure of it. She was back home. Except home didn’t feel safe. It wasn’t safe because He knew her address and He was probably heading over right now. She snapped her head around to look at the window, thinking that she would see Him. She thought she did notice him grinning for a split second, then there was a warm touch on her shoulder.

“No, honey. We’re in Evanston. Illinois. You’re not back at Ohio.”

Veronica looks at Damian like he’s crazy. She looked around for a moment, realizing this wasn’t her kitchen.

...Why was she in the kitchen anyway?

No. She can’t be in Evanston. She’s still in Sherwood, trapped in her string of murders. She’s stuck in a stick web with four corpses wrapped up in bloodied silk nearby. She can’t move. She can barley breathe. She’s so terrified and whimpers pitifully.

“I’m gonna ask you again. Where are you?” Damian tried gently.

“I’m...not in Sherwood?” Veronica says, but it still comes out as an unsure question.

“That’s right,” Damian cooed gently, brushing a stray strand of hair out of Veronica’s eyes.
“You’re not in Sherwood.”

“I’m not in Sherwood.” Veronica repeated more to herself than to the boy or her cousin. It felt a little better this time.

“We’re in Evanston. At Janis’ house. It’s seven-twenty in the evening. Friday night. November sixteenth.”

Damian had actually done some research on PTSD and read about how you sometimes have to remind the person where they are. It seems to work, as he thinks he sees a little life come back in Veronica’s glossy eyes.

“Evanston,” Veronica echoed and her lips continued to move to repeat all the information. She sniffled and glanced up a little to look at Damian. He’s smiling warmly.

Janis looks between her cousin and her best friend, gnawing on her lip worriedly. She’s impressed by Damian’s ability to help. He looked like a big, burly grizzly, but he was a teddy bear at heart. No bark and no bite (unless it came to Janis, then he would maul someone.) He was a total sweetheart and would do anything to help his friends.

“It’s okay, Veronica. You’re safe here. Nobody is going to hurt you.”

“Like JD...”

Damian furrowed his eyebrows at her, glancing at Janis for an explanation. She shrugged helplessly, not knowing who that was either.

“Like who?”

Veronica screwed her eyes shut and shook her head. Her hand curled into a tight fist and the pain came back, hot and blistering. Janis moved her into Damian’s arms so she could go and get some ice.

“Him. JD. He- he-“ She whimpered sharply and pressed her face into Damian’s neck, tensing up in a tight ball.

“Shh, Shh,” Damian soothed, “Easy. You don’t have to tell me. Just breathe, okay? You’re having a panic attack, hun. But it’s okay. Can you try breathing with me?”

Veronica glanced up at him with bleary eyes. She was so frightened and vulnerable at moments like this, and it scared Damian. As Janis’ best friend and with Veronica being her cousin, he felt a strong urge to protect her, even if they weren’t all that close.

The cobalt girl gave a weak nod and Damian smiled slightly. This was a good start.

“Alright, in and out, Ronnie. Like me. It’s going to be okay.”

Veronica tried to follow him, but her throat was so tight. She breathed in as deeply as possible and her chest burned, which felt like an open furnace and she just inhaled a mouthful of smoke. She choked on the oxygen and gasped, forcing more air into her already full lungs. She felt like she was drowning. Hands were shoving her under black water.

It was His hands. She could see Him grinning at her from the surface before she’s pushed down deeper, deeper, deeper, until she’s lost in the depths. Waves and violent tides are battering her bloated, broken body to the shore, where her skin is torn and air is knocked from her lungs. And
then the undertow sucks her back in, yanking her under and shoving her to the seabed. Salty green water blurs in front of her vision and bloody mouthfuls of sea foam spill down their throat. Red clouds of bubbles burst from her cracked lips. She’s tossed violently until she becomes a scarred, sunburnt carcass rolling in the wine-dark sea.

It felt like her chest was filled with muck and sludge, lungs sloshing with water that is slowly drowning her. Every breath is watery and comes out more of a heave or gasp. Her limbs feel tingly and numb, barley supporting her body, which feels more like a corpse on days like this.

It’s not okay, but she’s gotten better at reigning things in. It’s getting easier to hide behind false smiles because she’s done it so much that it almost seems real.

Or, at least, it used to. She’s breaking apart, now, and she can’t breathe, she can’t breathe, she can’t breathe-

“-hear me? Vera? It’s okay. I promise it’s okay. Nothing is happening. You’re not in danger. Can you even hear me? Veronica, it’s Janis. I’m here and I’m not going to let anything happen to you.”

Veronica pried open her eyes and stared at her cousin. An ice pack is slipped between her clenched fingers and she holds it tightly, soothing the burn on her hand.

“Janis?”

“Yeah, It’s me, Vera. It’s me. I’m here. It’s just you, me, and Damian. Everybody else is downstairs in the basement. Nobody is gonna hurt you.”

Veronica managed a nod and leaned her head back against Damian’s shoulder. Black spots flit across her field of vision and she tried to blink them away while still listening to Damian’s directions. Slowly but surely, she’s able to breathe again. Then, she’s able to sit up on her own, no longer sobbing or gasping. Finally, shame sets in.

Her hands fly to her face, which make Janis throw her arms out to grab her in case she did something stupid.

“Oh my god... I did that in front of everyone didn’t I?”

“Well, it was only Damian and I who just saw all of that.” Janis said.

“No, the other thing. Me touching the hot stove like some mental patient!”

“Yes, but they don’t blame you. They know about your condition, Vera.”

“That doesn’t make it better! It shouldn’t be a ‘norm’ for me.” Veronica puts her head in her knees. “They shouldn’t be worried or scared or something like that...”

She hated that she loved the feeling of her skin burning. She loved the sting and the feeling of her pain receptors screeching from the blazing feeling on her bare flesh. She loved how it resembled her skin melting.

And she fucking hated how wanted more. She wanted more than a burn. She wanted to take a knife and slit open her wrists, just like the night after Heather’s funeral. But she didn’t have an excuse this time. She just wanted to do it.

“Vera, do you want to discuss this now or do you want to sleep?” Janis asked, fine with either option. She just wanted her cousin to be okay.
Veronica sighed and staggered up, not without Damian and Janis jumping to their feet to make sure she was okay. She smiled thinly to be polite, took some pills for her fever, then shuffled upstairs to collapse into bed.

“Thank you so much,” Janis said, leaning into an embrace Damian was holding her in. “You’re good at that. I didn’t realize that’s what it sounded like, since you always used that with me.”

Damian laughed and squeezed Janis slightly before letting go.

“I hope she’ll be okay. I’ll be protective of anyone related to my best friend.” He ruffled Janis’ hair affectionately before walking to the basement door. “Should we go tell everyone? I’m sure Regina is a worried mess down there.”

“Yeah.”

Damian called it. Regina was the first to jump up from the couch, demanding to know if Veronica was okay like the worried lion mom she was.

“She’s okay,” Janis said, “I wouldn’t be down here if she wasn’t.”

Aaron and Gretchen raised an eyebrow. They would tease her about being so adorably protective later. Probably on the group chat.

“Just...guys, listen.” Janis sat down, “Vera is going to be really humiliated about this. Please don’t bring it up. Ever. Unless she talks about it, don’t say a word or I will personally rip open your stomach and strangle you with your own intestines.”

Regina smirked at that threat.

“She gets that from me,” She says and Janis grinned at her for a moment.

“But I’m serious.” She said. “Vera is really insecure. She doesn’t like making people worried about her. Just forget this ever happened.”

“What happened?” Karen tilted her head.

“Good!”

Back upstairs, Heather and the boys were still in their spots from where they had watched on with worried looks. Heather was the first to snap out of it. She charged outside and roaring in anger to confront the ghost grinning from the window.

“What the fuck is your problem?” She snarled.

JD craned his head around to smile at her, laughing. There’s a gaping hole in his chest that reeks of an infection. All of the skin on his torso is charred and peeling, either crispy black or raw pink from falling off. The flesh on his stomach looks taut, like it was straining to keep all of his goopy innards inside. One arm looks like it’s barley still attached to his body and his neck is a burnt mess that crackles in disagreement when moved. Blood oozes from his mouth when he talks. He’s missing a middle finger and there are multiple blackened bullet holes in his upper body.

“Touchy, touchy,” He croons. His voice is creepier and hoarser than normal, his vocal chords fried. “The demon queen herself is worried about her mangy little killer? What a change.”

“Stop stalking her, you fucking creep!” Ram growls, equally as defensive as Heather.
“You, too?” JD laughs. “Kind of strange coming from you. You hurt her just as much as I did.”

“We didn’t abuse her.” Ram spat.

“I’ll have you know that we would have treated her really good in a relationship!” Kurt barks and Ram points to him, nodding.

JD rolled his eyes and some goopy fluid leaks from the left socket. He snorted laughter, blood splattering out onto Heather’s chest, who clawed to get it off.

“Oh sure. You stuck your junk in her face multiple times. You made a rumor about having your cocks stuffed in her face. You actually thought she was going to have sex with you two in the woods. Two of those things are sexual assault and harassment.”

The boys shrunk back at his words, almost hiding behind Heather.

“We’re just warning you, Jason,” Heather spat. “Leave Veronica alone. I don’t care if you’re already dead, I’ll kill you again if you try anything.”

JD narrowed his eyes when his first name was used. It sounded wrong and Heather loved how it gave him discomfort.

“I still love her. I’m not going anywhere.” He said, almost stubbornly.

“You’re hopeless.” Heather said. “Leave her be. You can’t fuck her in that form.”

“Watch me.”

Acrylic nails slashed across rotten, burnt flesh and JD howled like a shot dog. He stumbled backwards as foul-smelling ooze flowed from his chest. He coughed and creamy pus came out. He glared at Heather, who was wiping off her hand.

Kurt and Ram practically hounded him before he had a chance to react. They leapt onto JD, screaming battlecries as Heather watched with an amused look. With no regards to staying clean, they dug their hands into his burns and wounds, tearing flesh and muscles until they eventually got all their anger out.

“You-you bitches!” JD shrilled. “Fuck you!”

“No. Fuck you.” Heather flipped him off and turned to go back inside, gesturing for the boys to follow her. They copied her gesture before padding after the demon queen, leaving JD in pieces on the ground.

As the dead teenager began to regenerate his torn off arm and skin, he snarled. He snarled, knowing damn well he was going to give his love complete and utter hell.

Their love was God, and not even the big man himself could stop his assault.
People: Ghosts can’t interact with people or physical objects!!!!
Me, writing about Heather hugging Ronnie and the boys beating up JD: lol

I don't care about the whole thing about ghosts not being able to touch stuff. They can now! Haha
I really Like the ghosts
if i could tell her

Chapter Summary

It takes pressure during a Thanksgiving party and trip to some club for Veronica to tell Janis about a piece of her trauma. Also Janis tried to hook Veronica up with some girl by calling her a stud. Neither of them know how to feel about that.

Chapter Notes

Chapter Warnings: Mentions of abusive relationships

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Recovery had to come fast, as Thanksgiving approached. Janis’ parents were also coming home from wherever they were, too, and Veronica didn’t want them to see her all feverish and sniffly. So, she made sure to take all her medicine and got rest until her fever finally faded enough for her to play it off.

Even better, nobody talked about what happened that Friday night. Nobody had to. With Janis’ sharp eye, none of the others dared to say a word about it, or the last thing they would see is the artist standing over them with their intestines in her hands. She would do that. None of them tested her.

On Thanksgiving day, Veronica got into the car with Janis and her parents, since there was some party going on at their grandparent’s house. Veronica was a little nervous, as she didn’t really know that side of the family too well. Still, she made an effort to smile, even if she hobbled around the crowd like a giraffe on roller skates.

“Oh, you’ve gotten so big, Veronica!” A woman who she presumed to be her great aunt said.

Veronica smiled to be polite, but didn’t think she looked any different. In fact, she thought she looked worse. She was significantly paler than she used to be and the bags under her eyes were so dark that they looked like bruises. She attempted to cover them up with makeup.

And she wasn’t that big, either. She was only 5’3; Janis was the tall one out of the two of them.

“Thanks?” Veronica answered the woman who barley looked familiar.

During dinner, the conversations pressed onto Veronica became more abundant, as people wanted to talk to her right as she put something in her mouth. She looked up at the relatives sitting at her table with a confused expression, swallowing quickly so she could answer whatever they asked.

“Where are you parents?” One of her grandparents asked. “I haven’t seen them all day.”

“Oh, they’re still in Ohio.” Veronica answered. “I’m living with Janis for a little while.”
“Why?” A younger cousin pressed, being the nosy little gremlin he was.

“They wanted me to have a ‘fresh start’ or something like that,” Veronica paused, then continued bluntly, “I kinda have post-traumatic stress, so they wanted to get me out of the area that gave me it.”

Apparently that was news to this side of the family, as the people near her exchanged looks of concern. Veronica was used to reactions like this. Usually it ended up with them apologizing or pitying her or even treating her like she was completely helpless. She was not helpless. She has an almost animalistic fight or flight instinct and could easily go apeshit on someone if she wanted to. Well, usually if her adrenaline was pumping, but she still wasn’t helpless!

“Woah!” Some little girl gasped, “That must be creepy. How’d you get it?”

More children began to chime in with wanting to know the reason, and even a few adults looked curious. Veronica was wondering who the hell these kids were while also gnawing on her lip nervously. She hadn’t told Janis, but now more than one person were pressing her. Maybe she could just bend the truth.

“Well, uhh...” Veronica wrung her fingers through her shirt. “There were some problems at my old school that involved, umm...”

Her rope ladder was dropped from heaven when Janis called out to her, beckoning her to come play kickball. Despite not being a fan of sports, Veronica jumped up and scurried over to her cousin without answering the question she had been asked.

“I didn’t know you liked playing sports.” She said, nudging Janis with her elbow.

The taller girl laughed.

“I don’t. It’s just kind of tradition to play kickball on Thanksgiving here.”

Veronica nodded and ended up teaming with Janis, as she was the only person she knew. And because she didn’t want to be with someone she didn’t know.

Surprisingly, she didn’t play bad at all. In fact, she was pretty good. She was able to make pretty quick dashes to the base (they only had one since there weren’t very many players) and didn’t completely suck at kicking. Janis was a lot better at that than her, though.

When they were out field, Veronica had been running to catch the ball when she heard Janis screaming something about a windmill. She didn’t understand what she meant until she ran right into the windmill that was in the backyard. She tottered sideways before collapsing, laughing even when blood snaked from one nostril. Janis hauled her up to her feet and dusted her off, smiling widely.

Spending the holidays without her parents wasn’t as bad as Veronica had expected. She was with Janis, someone she trusted and really liked being around, so it was fine. Except she still was thinking about that question. She knew she had to tell someone sooner or later.

———

Gaylien: oh my god

Gaylien changed babyblue’s name to VOREonica
It was Janis’ idea to go to the club. Veronica wasn’t big on places like that, but Janis persuaded her to come along and she didn’t want to disappoint her cousin. She felt like it was more of a bar than a club for minors, but she didn’t say anything. She still couldn’t believe that they got in so easily.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t all fun and games. The club was a slap to the senses with all its noises and smells. Getting used to the crowd was hard. Music was blasting, the strobe lights could make even the wildest of partiers dizzy, and it was so easy to get lost in that sea of dancing, half-drunk toddlers. Even Janis began to get a little claustrophobic. She couldn’t imagine what this was like for Veronica, the one who was suffering from a mental disorder and was easily spooked. It was probably like living hell. Just another Westerberg in all its uncontrollable, wild glory with dangers that could spring out at any moment. Such a tightly packed area with so many people was a perfect place to set off a bomb and kill hundreds.

Janis jumped when someone grabbed her wrist. She looked to the side and saw Veronica pressing close against her. The she-wolf has her head ducked slightly, gritting her teeth while glancing at everyone in the room. This intrusion of her space felt more like a punishment than a fun way to spend the evening, and she began to wonder what she did to deserve it. It was setting her on edge.

“We can leave.” Janis said, “I didn’t expect it to be this crazy.”

Veronica shook her head. She had made an effort to look good for this place, so she had to stay a little while. Besides, she didn’t want to ruin this for her cousin.

“No, it’s fine.” She said back, forcing a smile. “I need to be able to handle stuff like this.”

Great, a fun evening together has turned into an coping exercise.

“Are you sure?” Janis tilted her head.

Veronica nodded.

“Yeah.”

“Allright... Let me know if you need to leave.”

They found a booth against the wall to sit down at and ordered some drinks. Naturally, anything they ordered had to be a virgin or some kind non-alcoholic beverage, as they were both minors. Veronica still wondered how they were even let in.

Janis seemed to get a little antsy over time. She wanted to go dance or talk to people, but knew there was no way Veronica would go in the mess of writhing limbs that was the dance floor. She couldn’t just leave her traumatized cousin all by herself at the table, but Veronica gave her permission once she realized what Janis wanted to do. She assured her that she would be fine and then Janis went off.
While out on the dance floor, Janis was approached while a strikingly beautiful blonde woman. She was probably a senior or high school graduate.

“Are you and that girl a couple?” She nodded at Veronica at the table.

Janis barked a laugh and shook her head.

“No way. We’re cousins.” She answered. “Why? You got the hots for her? I don’t blame you. Veronica’s a total stud.”

Calling her cousin that was weird, but she wanted to help Veronica branch out and meet new people. And, for some reason, she thought that using that word to describe her would help.

Truth be told, though, Janis had no idea what the fuck she was talking about. She had only known Veronica to be with guys- a grand total of two. The first was when she was in fifth grade and she had him for four days and then the second was some guy she didn’t even know the name of, as Veronica only brought him up once. But what Janis did know is that she once remembered Veronica saying she was bisexual.

Unfortunately, Veronica was hopelessly shy when it came to nudity, male and female alike. She hated all things sex-related and averted her eyes at even the slightest sign of nakedness. Janis joked that she probably didn’t even look at herself when undressing or showering, instead focusing her eyes on the wall or ceiling. Even PDA seemed to make her uncomfortable.

“Veronica,” The woman tested the name and smiled widely. “It fits her. A beautiful name for a beautiful girl.”

Janis chuckled. In her eyes, though, Veronica was more cute in a puppy dog kind of way.

“Do you think I have a chance?”

Janis shrugged her shoulders. She really didn’t know, as her cousin seemed to be some kind of Mother Superior-in-training, but she wanted to see Veronica come out of her shell at least a little.

“Maybe.” She said and the blonde purred in appreciation. “She might play hard-to-get, though.”

The blonde nodded then smiled wistfully at Janis.

“Thank you. If this doesn’t work out, I think I know who I’ll turn to next.”

Janis’ eyes widened with excitement before the blonde sauntered over to the table. She watched as she talked to her cousin, who’s face grew increasingly redder as the conversation went on. Veronica looked absolutely bewildered.

“Who was that?” Janis asked, walking back over once the blonde glided off back into the dancing.

“Some girl named Jasmine.” Veronica answered, studying the slip of paper she had been given.

She looked up and something seemed to give Janis away. She narrowed her eyes.

“What did you do?”

“I’m sorry!” Janis said, bursting out into laughter. “It was just too good, okay? I wanted my little cousin to open up!”

“What?!”
“I just told her that you were bi.”

“Janis!” Veronica hissed, bright red flaring across her cheeks.

Surprisingly, though, she didn’t seem too pissed off. Instead, she looked little bashful and shy. She shook her head and slid the piece of paper over to Janis.

“Thanks, but I’m not ready for another relationship. You can have her.”

Janis furrowed her eyebrows and tilted her head at Veronica, but didn’t say anything about the statement. She put the number in her pocket and then took a sip of her Coke.

“Thanks.”

Veronica hummed.

The club wasn’t as eventful as Janis had been hoping and she realized going back home to play Tomb Raider or something would be much more fun. She got up to leave and Veronica didn’t the same eagerly. Her cousin had been ready to go for a long time.

While walking for the door, the two of them seemed to snare the attention of a pair of guys at a nearby table. They got up and loped over like hyenas with a dead gazelle in their mouths, ready to present it to their potential mates.

“Hey, ladies.” The brunette of the two said, smiling lustfully at the cousins. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“To our car.” Janis answered, stepping in between Veronica and the two guys, acting as some kind of barrier.

“Aww, don’t go so soon!” The blonde whined, “We were watching you. We could have a lot of fun, you know.”

Janis rolled her eyes.

“I wouldn’t even try.” She said. “I’m a lesbian.”

The two of them exchanged looks and then snorted.

“You just need a man to give you a good time.” The brunette says, which seems to offend Janis. He smirks. “Come on, baby.”

Janis growled, glaring daggers. She yelped loudly when the brown haired guys groped for her chest and that was enough to send her cousin into a frenzy.

“Don’t touch her!!”

Veronica grabbed the neck of the first bottle she could reach and smashed it on a table. Shards spray in every direction. Within seconds, jagged glass teeth were pointed at the pair of drunken suitors.

“Veronica, no!” Janis yanked the bottle free from her hands.

“Crazy bitch!” The blonde screamed, jumping backwards.

Without a weapon, Veronica’s anger was blown out like a candle. Wild fear flared in its absence.
She was no longer a threat, but weakened prey. A wolf with a broken leg. And everyone could see it.

The club was unmoving. Everyone was still, staring with wide eyes. They all seemed scared.

Hot shame bloomed in Veronica’s chest and she had to sudden urge to apologize.

Janis grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her out of the crowd while she blubbered on her words. She could only speak coherently once they were in the car with the doors locked.

“Veronica-“

“I’m so sorry, Janis,” Veronica blurted, “I’m sorry. I thought he was going to hurt you and I panicked so I...”

“Veronica, that was awesome!”

The cobalt girl blinked multiple times, a confused expression crossing her face.

“What?”

“You just smashed that bottle, Vera! You weren’t having none of that!” Janis clasped her hands with Veronica’s, “Thank you.”

Veronica smiled back, the tightness in her chest loosening with that huge wave of relief. She suddenly felt like she could tell Janis everything.

Well, not everything, but she had a good way to start.

Once they got home, the girls decided to go watch TV down in the basement. While flipping through channels, Veronica opened her mouth to speak. She had to say it now or she might never get the courage to again.

“Hey, Janis? Can I talk to you about something for a moment?”

Janis muted the TV and turned to her cousin, giving her her full attention.

“Yeah, of course!”

Veronica smiled thinly in thanks then dipped her head, taking a few deep breaths.

“So, I’m not really bisexual. Not anymore, at least. I’m actually aromantic-asexual.” She started slowly and Janis nodded, feeling a little guilty for trying to hook her up with someone. “But that’s not what I wanted to talk about. I wanted to tell you why.”

Veronica had to take another big breath before continuing:

“Last year, when I was a sophomore, there was this new kid. His name was Jason Dean, or JD for short.” She shuddered at the use of his name. “He...he flattered me. He seemed genuinely interested in me. Not about what the Heathers could do, but what I could do. I was so entranced by him. Like a lovesick puppy. And I was so, so stupid to let my guard down around him.”

Veronica shut her eyes tightly. She’s starting to tremble.

“He wasn’t who I thought he was. He saw the world in a way I didn’t agree with, but I never said no. I couldn’t say no.”
The words are coming free. She can’t stop them.

“He was horrible. He used me to make it seem like what he did was good. I wanted to make him stop, but he was crazy and every time he spoke I just caved in. I let him do whatever he wanted to people...and to me.”

She glanced up slightly to see Janis jump at those words. Her cousin’s eyes are wide with shock and fury. She looks back down.

“He was just an abusive, manipulative asshole who never got the help he needed. He thought he could get his way by hurting people. And it worked. He broke me.”

Her voice cracked on the last sentence and the tears came fast. She shuddered and sobbed softly, leaning into Janis’ embrace when she wrapped her arms around her.

Only if she knew, though. Only if Janis knew all the bloody, gory details about what JD had caused. If she knew, she wouldn’t be touching Veronica. She would be shoving her away and calling the police and calling her a monster.

Until that day would come, Veronica would relish hugs and affection because she wouldn’t always get it. She allowed herself to be held as she cried into Janis’ chest, wishing it could always be like that.

But it wouldn’t. Because people can’t love a monster.

Chapter End Notes

i thought Mean Girls was set in Evanston but people are saying it’s set in Seattle???
a little piece of heaven

Chapter Summary

Janis gets hurt. Veronica blames herself for it.

Chapter Notes

Just a really big warning that the ending to this chapter is seriously fucked up thanks to JD.

Chapter Warnings: Mental abuse, Emotional manipulation, Encouraged self harm, Self harm, Haematophilia

A snowstorm hit Illinois like a violent white tidal wave, meaning the day had to be spent inside. It wasn’t that big of a deal, as Veronica bundled up in her bedroom while loading Skyrim on her laptop. It was one of her favorite games, as the virtual world was so vast and you could really do whatever you wanted. She had chosen to be a lesbian Argonian thief that enjoyed long rides on her horse and murder, but that was just her.

She had downloaded multiple different mods to enhance the game, many of them suggested to her by Janis, who was also a fan of Bethesda games. Veronica had once opened up Steam to get many notifications about how Janis was reloading Skyrim multiple times due to her game crashing from the abundance of mods she had gotten. Eventually the game did load and Janis had just stated, “I expect no bugs.”

There were bugs. There always were bugs, but it just made it more enjoyable. Something about walking through this vast, thriving world full of magic and dragons while holding a sword still bloodied by your last kill and then turning one-eighty degrees to see an NPC stuck in the floor was absolutely hilarious.

Slicing down enemy characters was also a surprising way to blow off steam. Veronica could not believe she had actually told Janis about her abusive asshole ex-boyfriend. Sure, she did it all on her own and had been wanting to tell her, but she still regretted it in the end. She didn’t want to work Janis up.

And, man, did Janis lose it at the information.

She was beyond pissed off at this shady Jason Dean guy and had demanded to get his number and address to beat him into a pulp. Veronica winced and told her that JD had killed himself. That seemed to please Janis, but she tried to hide it.

Veronica sighed and watched as her character sliced off a Forsworn’s head. She clicked around to loot the corpse for any good items and wondered about how easy it was to get away with murder in that world, Yeah, sure, Skyrim was set in the medieval times with low security and that had been a
bad person, but still.

The “Suicides of Westerberg” were just last year. Modern times. In the future. With three dead kids were definitely not bad people. Sure, they acted like jerks, but that didn’t mean they deserved to die. They could have been good.

Now nobody would ever know.

Well, Veronica might. The ghosts were definitely nicer after they died. Maybe they had realized their mistakes and were trying to be better, even if it was too late.

Maybe that’s why they weren’t tormenting her.

Speak of the devils, there’s a sharp pain in Veronica’s head that goes away as quick as it came. It’s a good thing, too, as she can move onto a different topic without ruining her good mood.

“How is Qibli so calm about killing people?”

Ram is referring to Veronica’s character. She had felt really proud for that name. Qibli. It sounded so cool.

“I mean, she just cut off someone’s head and picked through their decapitated corpse like it’s nothing.”

“This is every day for her,” Heather said, sitting down beside Veronica. She allows the smaller girl to rest her head on her shoulder. “Kill. Steal money from dead bodies. Scream at dragons. Repeat.”

Veronica laughed slightly. That was very accurate to what she does on the game.

“Yeah, but she does it so calmly. How is one so calm while killing?”

Veronica shrugged. She certainly wasn’t calm when she killed, but she was not going to think about that right now. She was going to enjoy this snow day whether her psyche liked it or not.

The room is quiet for a moment, aside from the sounds of the Argonian player slashing away at enemies. Kurt was the first to speak up again.

“Why do female Argonians have tits? They’re lizards.”

The art room was Janis’ safe zone and to be invited into her domain felt like some kind of honor to Veronica. She had never actually followed her cousin to that room because she felt like she would intrude. Everyone else would go, but she would stick behind until Janis finally laughed and said she could come inside.

The art room smelled of paint and ink. It was a colorful mishmash of paintings and sketches that designed the walls. Easels and drawing tables were set up all around the floor with paints and colored pencils neatly put up on shelves. Another door lead to the supply closet, a place where Janis often went to draw in privacy. There was a calming aura in the room, so Veronica understood why her cousin liked coming here.

Cady, Karen, and Damian also accompanied the two of them. Gretchen, Aaron, and Regina were spending the advisory/free period finishing some work from one of their classes.

For most of that free period, the five of them doted around inside of the art room, talking about
how their Thanksgiving break went and catching up on any good rumors. Veronica decided to help pick up while talking, putting away paints and whatnot.

Janis had taken off her snow boots and slid around on the tile, which earned a small disgruntled noise from Veronica. The floors seemed a little dirty to walk around on without shoes, but she wasn’t about to tell Janis what to do, so she didn’t say anything.

“Do you ever miss holidays in Africa?” Karen asked Cady. She was leaning back and forth on a black stool.

“Yeah, I guess,” Cady answered. “Though, Thanksgiving was never like the ones here. Way different.”

“I hear Africa is a real party continent.” Veronica says from where she’s standing.

“Oh yeah,” Cady laughed, “You got that right.”

“Imagine Thanksgiving, but instead of drinking out of cups, everyone drinks out of drench guns.” Damian randomly says with complete seriousness.

Janis laughed loudly at that statement.

“That would look so weird. You would have to stick the probe down your throat and basically inject the drink into your mouth to swallow.” She said.

“It would be funny!”

“What’s a drench gun?” Karen blinked.

“It’s what Ag kids use to get medicine into their animal’s mouth.” Cady clarified. “Why are we still talking about Thanksgiving anyway? It’s passed. Old news.”

“Okay fine, imagine Christmas, but instead of drinking out of cups, everyone drinks out of drench guns.” Damian restates and Cady laughed.

“I used one before.” She said, “For a baby zebra. You have to stick your fingers in their mouth to open their jaw.”

While listening to her talk, out of the corner of her eye, Veronica noticed Janis fiddling with a pair of large, sharp scissors. A pang of fear jolted in her chest when she saw the gleaming silver blades.

“Janis!”

Her cousin jumped and Veronica suddenly regretted yelling as time seemed to slow down just long enough for her to watch as the scissors slip from the grasp they’re held in and plunge right into Janis’ foot.

The art room erupted into complete chaos. Everyone is screaming. Janis has collapsed into a shrieking ball of pain, her eyes bulging so wide they look like they might pop out of her sockets. Hot fountains of blood are gushing from the wound in her foot with the scissors sticking out like some kind of horrible monument to this moment.

“What’s up Jake Paulers,” Aaron said while walking inside. He freezes when he sees what’s going on. “Oh. OH!”

Damian is the first to snap out of the panic. He dives to Janis’ side, slipping his hand under her
cheek to lift her head off of the hard ground. She’s crying and he thumbs away her tears.

“It’s okay, darling, it’s okay,” He said gently. “You’re going to be okay.” He turned his head away from her. “Someone call 911!”

“M-maybe we should take the scissors out?” Karen suggested in a shaking voice.

“We can’t.” Cady said. “We have to keep them in so the blood will clot. And we don’t know if they punctured any major arteries or vessels.”

“Then-then what do we do to help?!”

Janis wailed, a high pitched sound of agony.

“Someone call 911!!” Damian yelled again. This time, the others stop floundering around like panicked wildebeests that were just shot at and did something. Karen pulls out her phone to call an ambulance.

Damian takes off his jacket and presses it to Janis’ foot to try and stop the flow of blood, earning a sharp cry of pain from his best friend. It breaks his heart and he gently strokes some hair out of her face.

“I know, I know,” He says softly, “I know it hurts but it’s going to be okay.”

He slides his arms under Janis and hoisted her up bridal style. She immediatelycurls up with her head resting on his chest, shuddering and shaking with pain.

During all of this, Veronica is frozen. The sight of her cousin getting stabbed and then Janis dropping to the floor keeps replaying in her head. The only thing she’s thinking is: “What the fuck have I done?”

Damian hurried out of the art room and to the nurse’s office with the others on his heels. Students in the hallway jump out of the way and stare in disbelief when they come by. Karen is still blubbering on the phone. Blood drops are left in their wake.

Gretchen is one of those kids in the hallway, as she was going to the art room to meet everyone. She gasps in shock and runs up to their side, asking about what happened.

“Janis dropped scissors on her foot apparently,” Aaron said, equally as confused, but just as concerned as everyone else.

And it’s all Veronica’s fault that it happened. That part is left out, even though it’s true. If she hadn’t yelled this wouldn’t have happened. Janis had known what she was doing. Veronica just wanted to protect her, but she ended up hurting her in the end.

This is her fault. They need to say it. The blame should be on her, not Janis and her clumsiness.

“Someone should be on the way,” Karen said, putting her phone away. She’s as white as a ghost. Adrenaline must have made her sound like she knew what she was talking about on that phone call.

“Good.” Damian said, holding Janis closer. She’s sobbing into his chest. “Where’s Regina? She can drive us over to the hospital. I refuse to not be there.”

“She’s still in her advisory.” Gretchen said. “I can go get her.”

“Please do.”
Gretchen nodded and ran off to the AP-Research classroom she knew Regina was in. She practically kicked open the door and screamed for the blonde to come down to the nurse’s office immediately. The teacher and other students stared at her like she was insane, probably thinking she was a really crazy nurse’s aid.

“What’s the meaning of this?” The teacher asked.

“Regina George needs to come to the nurse, like, right now.” Gretchen answered.

“Why?”

“Because Janis has scissors sticking out of her foot, that’s why!!” Gretchen yelled in her panic.

“What?!” Regina exclaimed, jumping to her feet.

“Yeah! Come on, you need to drive us to the hospital!”

Nothing else had to be said. Regina was sprinting to the nurse’s office, which was pretty impressive since she was wearing heels. She and Gretchen both bursted into the room where their other friends were. The nurses were trying to calm down Janis, who was in complete hysterics. She was clinging to Damian like he was her lifeline, gasping and wheezing over the horrible pain.

Veronica is leaning against the wall with her eyes shut tightly. Her cousin’s screams were going to haunt her for years to come.

———

“Veronica, it is not your fault!”

The dark grey sky outside seems to match the mood for that day. Thunder rumbles up in the blue-black clouds, a storm brewing, which is just icing on the cake for the following events.

Damian was the only one who was allowed to ride in the ambulance with Janis, as she had refused to let go of him. Veronica could have gone, too, but she couldn’t. It didn’t feel right, so she rode with Regina and the others. Technically they weren’t allowed to leave, but they did anyway.

Damian had been glued to Janis’ side the whole time. He was overwhelmed with worry, too scared to leave her side for a second. His bond with Janis really showed in those moments and Veronica realized how close they actually were.

When asked about what happened, Veronica spoke up to tell the doctors and her aunt and uncle about how she had startled Janis, which caused her to drop the scissors. Nobody blamed her, so she had to do it herself.

That’s why she was pacing in her locked bedroom back at the house. Regina had dropped her off. Janis would be getting back later with her parents. The ghosts were watching her.

“It is my fault!” Veronica said, “If I hadn’t opened my stupid mouth then Janis wouldn’t have gotten hurt!”

“That doesn’t make it your fault,” Heather reprimanded. “Anyone could have startled her, Veronica. She could have dropped the scissors for some other reason. It is not your fault.”

“Yes it is! I shouldn’t have said anything!” Veronica says and then hissed in pain. She clawed at the crown of her head when there’s an almost unbearable pressure in her skull. It goes away
quickly, but she would rather have it stay and replace the fourth ghost now standing a few feet away.

“Get out of my house!” Is the only thing she can say. This is the first time she’s actually seeing Him again and it makes her feel sick.

“Come on, baby,” JD cooed. “Don’t be like that.”

He takes a step forward.

“Stay away from me!”

“But I want to help you! Don’t you want relief? Punishment?”

Veronica doesn’t let her guard down around him, but that does sound nice. She deserves it.

It’s almost like she was granted some kind of permission. Veronica hurries to the bathroom and pulled open a drawer to take out a razor blade. JD is the only one who can slip inside before she shuts and locks the door. The other three ghosts are yelling, but Veronica can barely hear them over the buzzing in her ears. JD’s voice, though, comes out so clearly.

“Do it.” He urged. “You deserve it. You are the reason Janis is hurt. You should feel the same pain you brought upon her.”

Veronica’s hand starts to tremble as the razor hovers dangerously close to her wrist. She clenches her jaw and makes a move to slice, but pulls back.

Maybe she shouldn’t-

“Do it!”

JD grabs Veronica’s hand and forces the blade onto her skin. She throws her head back and cries out at how badly it hurts. He guides her hand to slit until she’s able to do it herself. He smirks widely, watching over her shoulder with craziness and bloodlust in his eyes.

“There you go,” He purred. “Such a good, obedient little girl. Doesn’t that feel good?”

Veronica answers in a strangled whimper. Tears are flowing from her eyes. She splays her fingers open while holding her arm over the sink. Glistening red rivers stream from four thin, but angry red cuts, flowing down her pale skin. Blood fills the porcelain bowl.

“It hurts,” She finally gasps.

“Good.” JD said, lifting her arm to his face to get a closer look. “It should.”

He inhales deeply and shudders with some kind of pleasure. The smell of Veronica’s blood is so sweet and sends him on some kind of high. He’s absolutely mesmerized by the trails of crimson. He presses two fingers to one of the cuts and then licks off the fluid, which absolutely sickens Veronica.

“You deserve it, remember,” He continues after somewhat containing himself. “You deserve the pain after you hurt Janis. You hurt everyone you’re around. You destroy everything you touch.”

Those words sting and Veronica sobbed, lifting the razor to cut herself again. Tears come faster and she wants to beg JD to go away, but she can’t speak. She’s gasping and whimpering while JD coaches her through this horrible act of self harm. But instead of helping her stop, he beckons her
to continue. Each time she tries to set the razor down, he says some cruel comment which makes
her go again.

Eventually, Veronica’s knees give in and she crawls over to the space between the toilet and
bathtub to brace herself in. She curls up, holding a wet rag to her arm. It quickly becomes bloodied.

JD watches for a moment, smiling proudly at his work. Then, he turns and goes through the door
(literally) only to be met with three furious ghosts.

Heathers strikes first, as fast as a cobra. She seizes JD by the throat, digging in with her nails. The
charred skin crackles under the pressure.

“I said to stay the fuck away from Veronica!” She roared in anger.

“I’m sorry, it’s hard to hear you over all your bullshit.”

Two fingers plunge into JD’s eye socket, acrylic nails popping his eyeball like a balloon. She
shoved him against the wall to dig in as deeper as she can. JD’s eye becomes nothing more than a
goopy fluid in his socket once she’s done.

He yowls and swung his arms out, hitting Heather in the face. There’s a crunch and she hissed in
pain, stepping backwards as red-black blood gushed out from her nose. That only fuels her need to
beat the shit out of JD.

Kurt and Ram desperately wanted to join in, but there’s no way they could get a punch in. This was
Heather’s fight. She wasn’t going to share the victory of ripping apart JD this time, so they made
themselves useful by going into the bathroom to comfort Veronica. She seemed to appreciate it, as
she was safely nestled in between the two of them. They were ready to strike if the insane ghost of
the trench coat kid came in.

“You don’t know how badly I’ve always wanted to do this.” Heather said, standing above JD,
who’s on the floor. “You seem to have lost your strength, Jesse James. What a shame.”

“I’ll just regenerate,” JD says, growling deep in his throat. “And I’m never going to disappear.”

“You’ll be just as ugly as you are now.” Heather shrugged, wiping away the blood from her
nostrils. Her nose is crushed, but the bones are already shifting back into place. “Get lost.”

She spits her drainage cleaner-tinged saliva into his eyes and he claws to get it out. JD’s body soon
disappears, giving Heather a breather. She turned on her heels and walked into the bathroom to find
Veronica securely sandwiched in between Kurt and Ram. It brings a small smile to her face, even if
the blood all over Veronica’s arms makes her heart sink.

It wasn’t Veronica’s fault. It shouldn’t have come to this.

Chapter End Notes

First of all- I don’t actually encourage self harm. It’s just for the story’s sake.
Second- Can y’all tell that I hate JD??? He’s the worst. I love antagonizing him.
Because he deserves it.
Third- I live for the friendship between Damian and Janis.
Fourth- Yes, the ghosts can feel pain and interact with things. Why? Because I want to
write about the ghosts beating the shit out of JD. That’s why.
Chapter Summary

So much madness happens in one day. At least an old friend is met again and makes things a little better.

Chapter Notes

Just a heads up that this chapter may seem a little inconsistent and mashed together, but it’s supposed to be that way. It’s like a fever dream in a way. Also the creature in this chapter is just an embodiment of Veronica’s fears. A lot of therapists tell their patients to draw what they’re scared of, and her mind makes that fear come to life. I just wanted to clarify that it’s not actually real and just her mind playing tricks on her.

Chapter Warnings: Hallucinations, Mentions of abusive relationships

Stitches were the only thing that were needed to fix up Janis. She was going to be limping around like a shot deer for awhile, but at least she wasn’t in a cast.

Damian was super protective of her for awhile. He offered to carry her up and down the stairs, which Janis declined. Sure, it hurt, but she wouldn’t make her friend do that. His concern was enough. He was just like her worried big brother and she loved it.

Janis apparently didn’t think what happened was Veronica’s fault at all. She said that she shouldn’t have been messing with those scissors and that Veronica had just been trying to keep her safe, despite being the younger one, which was true, but still. Veronica still felt like she was to blame and the cuts on her arm proved it.

Luckily nobody found out about her bloodbath in the bathroom because she didn’t tell a living soul and it was winter. Long sleeved clothes and jackets covered up any evidence of self harm. She was just glad it was over.

But if she thought her problems ended there, then Veronica was greatly mistaken.

She couldn’t really explain why or how this happened. She’s still debating on whether or not it was real. It felt like something that was ripped straight out of a horror movie.

Veronica was walking out of the bathroom and started back for her classroom when she thought she heard something.

“Veronica...”

She froze in her tracks. Did someone call her name? She looked around, but saw no one. In fact, it seemed like that part of the school building was completely empty. No students, no teachers, not
even that girl who had left the bathroom a few seconds before her.

She tried to reason that this was just a quiet hall, even though it was weirdly silent. Besides, there’s not always people in the hallways. She had to remember that.

Anyway, she just saw someone at the end of the hall. She waved to be friendly before continuing on.

Wait-

“Veronica...”

Students or teachers don’t have glowing red eyes.

“I know you see me, Veronica.”

Veronica turned on her heels slowly, like she was moving underwater, to face the towering figure at the end of the hallway. Its red eyes bore straight into her soul as a sadistic grin spread across its face.

“Hello.”

Veronica could hear the monster’s thunderous footsteps behind her when she finally thought to run.

“You can’t run from me, Veronica!” It screeched.

Veronica rounded the corner, only to be faced by the creature. She stumbled backwards a few steps, then squared her shoulders to try and look tougher than she actually felt.

“That’s better.” The creature purred, “I didn’t think you would give me a proper hello, Veronica. Vessel. Self.”

“No!” Veronica yelled.

She felt hot breath on the back of her neck; the creature is behind her now. Up close like this, it’s so much more frightening. Its skin is a mesh of iridescent black and green and patchy hair, almost like the colors of a fly. Horrible burns stretch all across the flesh. Its arms are rigid at its side, with each finger tipped with a long point. Bug wings buzz on its back and jagged teeth stick out from its lips, dripping with some kind of creamy pus. Smoldering horns stick out from its head, glowing like embers. There’s a gaping hole in its chest, which looks infected. A long, limp and heavy tail drags across the ground.

Veronica remembered from when she was in counseling her therapist had told her to try drawing what her biggest fear looked like. It had come out as this grotesque monster. A persona of what she was scared of. She had been reading Lord of the Flies at the time, so she jokingly gave it the same name to try and lighten her mood.

Who knew it would actually be facing her.

“You’re not real!”

That seemed to be the wrong thing to say, as a look of fury Lord of the Flies’ face. Veronica thinks she likes it better smiling. Taking the sudden change of expression as a warning, she took off running. The monster screamed her name in rage.
Even if Lord of the Flies wasn’t real, it sure was cruel. It gave Veronica a chance to get away by giving her some distance before appearing in front of her. Two fly-like appendages bursted out from under its arms and grabbed her, lifting her to eye level.

“You don’t think I’m real, hm?” Its voice sounded like sweet venom, “Well, then how do you think of this?”

Lord of the Flies’ grip tightened. It was so painful, like being crushed or getting into a way-too-tight straightjacket.

Veronica grunted and kicked out her legs, like she thought that would help her. Her arms were burning and straining painfully. Bones were splintering audibly, making her stomach churn.

“How real is this, Veronica?” Lord of the Flies roared, “It is real enough for you?!”

Veronica screamed over its insane babbling. Right when she thought her arms would snap in half, the grip loosened. She gasped and wheezed, finally able to breathe.

“You should watch what you say next time,” Lord of the Flies said, tossing the girl into the wall. “Now...let’s talk.” It was smiling again.

"How...how are you here?” Veronica panted, grunting. "I thought- You’re just a-"

Lord of the Flies blinked a few times before roaring with laughter. It was a maniacal sound.

"You think I'm just a drawing?” It chortled. "No. I'm a product of your despair and suffering. I am a creature of rage and misery! The darkness of your heart gave me life."

"B-but-"

"You're a monster, just like JD and just like me. We are no different. I am the inner demon that lurks in your mind.”

Veronica started to push herself up. If she found a friendly face, then this would all end. She knew who could help, so she took off.

When she reached the art room door and called out to her cousin, a clawed hand snatched the back of her shirt and yanked her backwards. Lord of the Flies shoved her against the wall with so much force she thought her spine had snapped. It was pinning her, trapping her, sneering.

"You don't need her." It said, "You don't need anyone."

"Let go!" Veronica hissed, trying to sound tougher than she actually felt.

"She doesn't need you." Lord of the Flies continued. "Nobody needs you."

No. It wasn’t like that.

With a flash of angered denial, Veronica digs her fingernails into the grooves where Lord of the Flies’ claws meet its hands. It growls in pain and steps back, glaring daggers.

“Go to hell.” Veronica spat.

Lord of the Flies stopped rubbing its talons and smirks widely.

“Can’t you see? We're already here.”
It’s gone. Veronica is alone. She hears people again. Breathing a sigh of relief, she walks into the art room, getting a warm welcome from the corpse swinging from the ceiling.

Fear poured into Veronica’s veins and stumbled out of the room and into world she didn’t know. This isn’t the school she knows; she doesn’t think she’s in North Shore anymore. It has the structure of North Shore and it feels like North Shore, but this isn’t North Shore. How is she so sure? North Shore doesn’t have bodies in the hallway. The students don’t have bullet holes in their face and chest. The school walls aren’t splattered with blood and guts. North Shore doesn’t have a bomb detonating in the boiler room.

Veronica runs into someone and, for a moment, she sees a flicker of a friendly face, but even that is gone. She scurries away from the half dead, half alive girl. She was begging for her to come back, yelling and howling. Maybe she said her name.

She ran and ran until she tripped and fell down a staircase. She grunts in pain, pushing herself up with shaking arms.

“Your world is a living hell. You turned it into your own personal nightmare.”

Lord of the Flies stared at Veronica from the top of the staircase, tail lashing. It wasn’t smiling, just gazing.

“Stay away from me!” Veronica shouted, whirling around. “If I created you, I can make you disappear. What makes you think I won’t destroy you?”

There was that smile again.

“How can you?” Lord of the Flies is closer now and leans down to eye level, mere inches away from Veronica face. “I am you.”

“No!” Veronica snapped back. “I am nothing like you!”

“Oh really?” A large mirror forms in Lord of the Flies’ hands. “Take a look.”

Veronica couldn’t even recognize the creature in the reflection. The corpse staring back at her looked like a victim of an explosion that was horribly pieced back together. It had dead eyes and a soft blue glow.

This thing is a copycat. When Veronica blinks, it blinks. When a single tear rolled down her cheek, it cried, too. She looked down and it copied. Blood coated shaking fingers. But those weren’t the reflection’s hands she was gazing down at.

Veronica turned her head up to Lord of the Flies, a look of horror on her face. She stepped back, shook her head, and ran, denying it all.

It wasn’t real. It couldn’t be real!

She hides in a small janitor closet and curls into a fetal position in the corner. The sounds of footsteps hitting the tile floor approach and Lord of the Flies starts to pound on the door. It says nothing, just knocks.

Veronica closes her eyes, staying perfectly still. She didn’t think it was possible in that situation, but, somehow, she fell asleep in that closet. Not without hearing the repetitive knocking and a soft voice calling her name.
Veronica snapped awake, gasping in shock and flinching away from the hand on her shoulder. She stared at Regina with a startled expression, then looked around in a panic.

She was... in the bathroom. Why was she in the bathroom? How did she get in the bathroom? Oh please, for the love of God, don’t say she fell asleep on the toilet or something.

She was in the stall, still, but she was in the corner. Somehow. She still wasn’t sure how she got there, because she could have sworn she had fallen asleep in some janitor’s closet downstairs.

“R-Regina?”

“Yeah, it’s me,” Regina said gently. “Are you okay?”

“Wh-what happened?” Veronica asked in a hoarse whisper.

“I was going to ask you the same thing,” Regina said. “You randomly started texting me in some kind of panic during advisory and it got me worried, so I started looking for you. I found you in here, crying in your sleep.”

Veronica’s ears burned red in embarrassment.

“Oh,” She croaked, “Sorry. I-I didn’t mean to make you worry. Or seem like a crazy person.”

She went to get up, but Regina grabbed her wrist and she hissed in pain. She watched as the blonde rose to her feet slowly, like she was trying not to startle Veronica.

“It’s okay.” Regina said. “But you don’t look okay. Veronica, you were sending me texts about some guy named JD coming to get you. It was like something out of a horror movie.”

Veronica winced. Was Lord of the Flies just a persona for JD? It had to be. It’s the only thing that made a little bit of sense. He was one of her biggest fears, after all.

“I’m sorry.” She mumbled.

“Who is this JD guy, Veronica?” Regina pressed. “Is he bothering you? Stalking you? Give me his address, I’ll fucking kill him.”

Veronica shut her eyes tightly and blurted out:

“He’s my abusive asshole ex-boyfriend!”

Regina stiffened, shutting her mouth upon hearing that. She set a hand on Veronica’s shoulder, a look of sympathy in her eyes.

“Oh, Veronica...”

“Or, he was.” Veronica continued, “He killed himself last year. You can’t really get revenge or anything. He’s dead.”

Regina moved her hand so she could embrace Veronica, who flinched a little, bit relaxed in her
arms. She set her head against the taller girl’s chest, breathing out shakily.

“He abused you?” Regina asked softly.

“Yeah.” Veronica answered in a voice barely above a whisper. “And I let him.”

Regina was quiet for a moment. She tightened the embrace.

“If he were alive, I’d kick his ass.” She finally said. “He can’t hurt you anymore.”

“I know.” Veronica lied, knowing damn well JD was still kicking, even after exploding into bits and pieces.

“Is there any way I can help?”

“Just...keep holding me for a little while longer...”

“Of course.”

Regina did just that, not letting go until Veronica was ready. They eventually did and Veronica sniffled, wiping away the tears brimming in her eyes. She smiled at Regina.

“Thanks. I really needed that.” She said.

“No problem,” Regina says, smiling back. “Hey, wanna skip the rest of today? We could round up the others and go for ice cream even though it’s freezing outside.”

“I’d love that.”

———

team.mom: Alright, thots, anyone who wants to skip the rest of today and go for ice cream with Ronnie and I, meet at my G.

Gwetchen: awww yeah im coming

AfricaByToto: im thoroughly against skipping but i love me some ice cream when it’s below freezing outside so im coming too

troybolton: Karen and i are headed over now

Gaylien: im yeeting over as fast as i can

Gwetchen: as in she’s hobbling at two miles per hour

Big Gay: NOT FOR LONG

AfricaByToto: yall Damian just sprinted by and scooped Janis up into his arms??! it was so magical

VOREonica: Hurry up!

VOREonica: Also please change my name.

Big Gay change VOREonica’s name to smol

smol: This is fine.
They ended up going to Starbucks, which made all of them cheer, as it was the best place to go to when you’re skipping school. Veronica rode shotgun beside Regina while everyone sang loudly to the radio from the backseat.

When they were inside the Starbucks ordering, Veronica caught sight of someone wearing an alarming amount of green. She has only known one person to wear that much, but there was no way... She was all the way in Ohio.

Still, Veronica had to make sure.

“Sheather?”

The girl in green turned around and her eyes widened.

“Veronica?!”

It was her.

“Sheather!”

Veronica ran over to hug Duke and, surprisingly, she returned the embrace tightly. They didn’t part for a minute, relishing the moment.

“Oh my god, it’s so good to see you again,” Veronica said, clasping her hands with Duke’s, “What are you doing here?”

“Visiting family,” Duke says, smiling. “How have you been? I haven’t seen you in forever.”

“Honestly, as good as I can be.” Veronica admitted sheepishly.

Duke, McNamara, and Martha are the only living souls that knew what she had done. They were a bit disturbed and upset upon hearing the news, which was natural, but they didn’t seem too angry with Veronica. She didn’t know if they were faking it, but she appreciated how they didn’t scream about her being a monster.

Duke nodded and then glanced at the group Veronica had come in with.

“Which one is your cousin? I assume she’s here. You are pretty clingy.” She teased playfully and Veronica pointed out Janis.

“Hi,” Janis said, “I’m Janis.”

“Heather Duke,” Duke says, offering a hand, which Janis shakes. “Veronica and I were friends back at Westerberg.”

“She’s one of the Heathers in that group I told you guys about.” Veronica informed.

“Ah, so now it’s Heather, Heather, and Veronica?” Aaron asked and Gretchen elbowed him in the stomach.

Duke and Veronica exchanged mournful looks. Aaron was right, but it was still hard to accept, even after a year of the red queen being dead. The clique just didn’t feel the same without her
calling the shots, even Duke agreed when she attempted to gain power.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Veronica said and then her temples throbbed momentarily.

“Heather!”

Heather tried to touch Duke, but her hand phased right through green girl. She stared with eyes full of disbelief before pulling her arm back to her side. Not being able to touch her friend hurt so badly, but at least she was able to see her.

“Wow. Look at you.” Heather murmured and Veronica glanced at her for a moment.

“Okay, but damn, Ronnie,” Duke started a new topic with a small laugh, “You look as rough as when I saw you after that bomb went off.”

The statement shocked not only Veronica’s group of friends, but also everyone in the whole vicinity, as the entire Starbucks seemed to go quiet. Duke blinked and then looked at Veronica with wide eyes, realizing that nobody had known about the bombing at Westerberg.

“I mean- Shit! How do you cover up that?” She blabbered nervously.

“Not like that.” Heather said. “She still has that trait, it seems.”

Veronica cleared her throat and attempted to create some kind of coverup, but there was no way to make an excuse for what Duke had said.

“Well, Uhh,” She said. “You know how there’s school shootings? We were in one of those. But with a bomb.”

“Yeah, it was wild.” Duke adds, hoping to lighten the news.

“Really wild. And loud! Bombs are, haha, loud.”

“Really loud.”

“Yup...bombs make noises.”

“But no one died! So it was kind of a false alarm!”

“Yeah! False alarm! But, well, one person died, but he deserved it.”

“We are not making this any better.”

“No we are not.”

Duke and Veronica exchanged looks and then cleared their throats loudly.

“Wanna come over?” Duke asked quickly.

“Yeah, I’d love that! See you guys later! Bye!”

Veronica scampered out of the building behind Duke, breathing a sigh of slight relief.

“Sorry,” Duke said while getting into her car. “I thought you would have told them.”

“Not yet,” Veronica says. “There’s never a good time to tell them about how my boyfriend wanted to blow up the whole school for me and ended up blowing himself up instead.”
Duke nodded slowly.

“Makes sense.” She sighed, “Let’s forget about that for now. I want to know how you’ve been.”

Veronica smiled, a crazy whirlwind brewing in her brain. She still couldn’t process everything that had happened that day, especially with Lord of the Flies. It seemed like the world was out to get her, and she wouldn’t be surprised if that was the reason for all this madness.
metamorphosis

Chapter Summary

Heather Duke and Veronica spend some time catching up.

Chapter Notes

who’s ready for some good platonic/sisterly Duke and Veronica content????? me.
that’s who.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Wait, you and Mac did what? No way!”

“Yes way! It was Martha’s idea to sprint around the hallways in each other’s heels. Let’s just say it did not end well. I think I might have broken my ankles! Martha had just watched while recording us.”

Veronica leaned back in the chair she was sitting in and laughed. She had expected McNamara and Martha to do something like that, but not Duke. It just goes to show how much they’ve all changed ever since the bombing.

Spending the evening with Duke was pure bliss. Veronica enjoyed every second of it. They decided to catch up at an Olive Garden (the food was on Duke, even though Veronica tried to pay). There, they chatted about how they had been before going on to share stories with each other.

Duke really was different. It’s like she went through some kind of metamorphosis. Veronica remembered her being a little reserved and quiet, then a complete bitch, and now she was so much nicer. She had been making an effort to change after trying to take control of the Heathers and it was working really well.

“Please tell me you have the video.”

“Of course I do!”

Duke pulled out her phone and showed Veronica a video of her and McNamara wobbling down one of Westerberg’s hallways at full speed while Martha commented in the background.

“Beautiful!” Veronica laughed, clapping her hands.

“I know!” Duke grinned while putting away her phone. “What about you? How have you been holding up?”

Veronica shrugged her shoulders and took a sip of her tea, no longer making eye contact. Duke caught onto her discomfort and tilted her head slightly.

“Oh, don’t give me that,” She said, “You can talk to me, Veronica.”
The cobalt girl sighed and looked up.

“I know,” She says, “I’m doing the best I can, really. I mean, I do like it here, but I keep having nightmares and it’s really hard to hide panic attacks from the others.”

Duke furrowed her eyebrows, making a small disgruntled noise.

“You really try and make excuses for your attacks?” She asked.

“Well, yeah,” Veronica fiddled with her straw, “I have ruined so much for my friends here. We’re always having to cut our trips short or they constantly look so worried. I don’t want to mess up anything else because of my anxiety or something.”

“If they’re your friends they would understand,” Duke said.

“When did you get so therapeutic?”

“I’m serious, Veronica!”

Veronica raised her eyebrows at Duke in an inquiring look.

“They better not be blaming you for any of that stuff. It’s not your fault.” Duke says before taking a sip of her drink.

Veronica really liked this new Heather Duke. She had actually been one of the people who helped her through the recovery after the bombing.

That had been hell on earth.

———

Without the thick layer of grime and gore covering her body, Veronica had been vulnerable. Under all of the ash and blood was a terrified girl that was horribly shaken up after what she had witnessed and been through.

Veronica was broken.

She didn’t go to the hospital. She didn’t go to a teacher or a therapist or even the police. She went to class, tattered clothes and scratched up face and all, until her safeguard wore off and the weight of the situation set in.

She trudged to the showers after the bell rang, her body feeling heavy. She didn’t even take off all of her clothes, only peeling off her blazer and skirt before stepping under a scalding hot rain. Soot and dust ran down her face; she was crying, maybe.

She thinks she was still in shock because everything felt numb and so, so cold. She glares at her shaking hands that betray how she wanted to be strong. She couldn’t. It was all too much.

Duke, McNamara, and Martha found her in the showers. They loitered around out by the sinks after checking to make sure she was alive or okay at the very least. Saying they were worried would be an understatement.

The girl who stepped out of the stall was almost unrecognizable. Her hair was a tangled brown mop upon her head, slightly matted from the water. Mascara and makeup were running down her face, gliding over the nasty cuts on her cheek. Her white undershirt was soaked through so you could see her bra and her legs were so bare with only the black shorts she wore underneath the
skirt. She was trembling like a leaf in the wind, staring up at nothing in particular.

Veronica looked more like a corpse than a living, breathing person.

It was Duke who offered her coat while Martha guided Veronica over to the sink. McNamara ran to get a towel, as the cobalt girl looked like she was freezing, even after the hot shower.

Veronica couldn’t speak. She tried to, but no words came out of her mouth. Her jaw just hung half open as she stared at the wall with a dazed expression. She was almost completely unresponsive, almost like her body was shutting down. Martha and the Heathers could have done anything they wanted to her at that moment and she would have let them.

Veronica didn’t get better. In fact, she seemed to get worse.

At home, she ignored her parents and went straight to her room. She stayed huddled up in her bed for three days.

For three days, Veronica shivered, burned, and cried. For three days she was almost completely helpless, unable to function correctly at all. She even had a seizure, once.

She didn’t eat, didn’t drink, as almost everything put in her system was thrown up. Her body refused medicine and water, so she quickly became severely dehydrated, which only added to her misery. Her constant crying and sweating didn’t help, either.

She drifted in and out of consciousness for most of those three days, always waking up to a daze of heat and pain. She remembered dragging herself out of bed to take a bath and had considered drowning herself. She didn’t, only because she thought she should die in a much more painful way.

Her friends came over quite often, but Veronica can barley remember anything they did. Her brain wouldn’t process the memories, or maybe she just hadn’t been awake in the first place.

But their company did little to help. Veronica felt worse each time she looked at Martha or one of the two Heathers because she caused this. Martha and McNamara attempted suicide and Duke nearly became a monster all because of her. And it made her cry even harder.

At the same time, though, she would have hated if they weren’t there. Surprisingly, they had been around more than her parents, who were probably drinking away this new annoyance at the bar. She vividly remembered once waking up to Duke sitting beside her bed, reading a book.

And, Dear God, her head had hurt. She opened her eyes to the dimly lit bedroom that smelled of illness. How long had she been out? She didn’t know. An unbidden whine escaped her dry throat.

Veronica rolled over onto her side and squinted at Duke, who eventually looked up. Her eyebrows raised in surprise.

“You’re awake!” She proclaimed, setting the book to the side.

Veronica made a small, confused noise. How long has Duke even been here? When did she get here? She couldn’t remember. Not that it really mattered, though. She probably wouldn’t even remember this because she was just going to pass out again soon.

“You woke up a few times before,” Duke informed. “Only for a few minutes, though, then you blacked out again. But you didn’t throw up! So good job there!”
Veronica gave Duke a weak thumbs-up.

She stirred in her place, cringing at how her clothes were plastered to her skin. She was sweaty and hot and desperately needed to wash off again. There was no way she would go back to sleep like this.

“Bath?”

She cringed even harder at her one word sentences. It was the only thing she could manage, though.

Duke blinked.

“Oh, uhh...”

Veronica didn’t wait for an answer.

“Bath.” She decided and got out of bed, despite the horrible wave of weakness that washed over her.

“Woah! Hey! Hang on! HEY!” Duke sprung to her feet. “Wait a minute!! Don’t get up so quickly, you might pass out!”

Veronica pointed to the door and then looked at Duke. The emerald girl sighed.

“Fine.”

There was really nothing Duke had to be flustered about. Veronica just needed help getting to the bathroom, she could do everything herself. There was no way in hell she was going to let someone else undress her. Even if it took her two thousand years to get her clothes off, she was doing it herself.

She was impressed that Duke actually stayed out in the hall the entire time she was bathing. Parts of her had expected her to walk away or even leave, but she waited by the door loyally.

Veronica didn’t know what she did to deserve that kindness.

—

“The mother hens have arrived!”

Duke raised an eyebrow at McNamara’s statement as she and Martha walked inside the Sawyer house. She appreciated their attempt at lightening the situation.

“How’s Veronica?” Martha asked.

“Shitty.”

“Details, please.”

“She can’t stomach anything at all, not even water, her fever is burning her alive, she can only stay awake for a few minutes before passing out again, she’s completely sore everywhere, she’s starting to cry in her sleep, and she can barely speak.” Duke said, nervousness lacing her voice. “To sum it up, trauma is kicking her ass.”

McNamara winced. She had been hoping that her friend had gotten a little better, but to no avail.
"Maybe we can make her something," She said. "Like, soup. Something easy on the stomach."

Martha glanced at her then nodded slightly. It was worth a shot, even though it would probably just get thrown up if Veronica didn’t refuse it.

They ended up making oatmeal, which they somehow overcomplicated and nearly made a huge mess of the kitchen. They all laughed, which was a nice change to the grim atmosphere.

“Ronnie?” McNamara knocked on the bedroom door, “It’s me, Heather, and Martha. We’re coming in.”

Veronica was surprisingly awake, which was a change, but it didn’t make her any better. She was curled up under her thick blankets on the edge of the bed, shivering. Her face was very grey, eyes still traumatized and scared. Her gaze momentarily flicked to her friends, then returned to the floor.

“Hey,” Martha said gently, hurrying over to her friend’s side. “Feeling any better?”

Veronica made a weak hum. If her not being able to speak was any indication, then probably not.

“Do you need anything?”

Veronica shuts her eyes. Martha takes that as a “no.”

“We have oatmeal if you’re hungry,” McNamara said, holding up the steaming bowl.

Veronica made a bitter face. Even though she was hungry, the thought of trying to stomach anything sickened her. She shook her head.

“Sorry,” She croaked in whatever voice she had left. “I didn’t mean to put you guys through so much trouble...”

“Nonsense,” Duke waved a hand dismissively, hiding an oatmeal stain on her skirt. “No trouble.”

The cobalt girl nodded slowly, then pressed her face back into her blankets.

“You’re going to be okay,” Martha said, rubbing her back comfortably. “You’ll get better soon.”

Veronica didn’t get better. Not exactly. Her body recovered over time, but her psyche and mental state were permanently damaged. The carefree, innocent girl she had once been was gone forever.

———

“If only they knew,” Veronica said while laughing dryly, “What I did, I mean.”

Duke looked up from her food and raised an eyebrow.

“I’m sure they would be shocked,” She said. “I certainly was. But if you tell them the full story, they’ll understand.”

“You can’t ‘understand’ murder, Heather.” Veronica says, rolling her eyes. “They’ll hate me.”

Duke shrugged. She wasn’t going to argue with Veronica about this. The cobalt girl really appreciated that.
After they finished eating, the girls eventually had to say goodbye and part ways, but not without making more plans to get together before Duke left for Ohio.

Veronica got a ride home and greeted her aunt and uncle, filling them in on her evening with her friend before going upstairs to take shower and get ready for bed.

Under the spray of scalding hot rain, Veronica thought back to that day. The day of the bombing and how she had fallen apart afterwards. She thought it was a miracle she survived through those days of complete and utter suffering, but knew she probably wouldn’t be as lucky if it ever happened again.

Maybe this time she’ll actually drown herself in the bathtub.

_____

That night, Veronica has a vivid, way-too-realistic dream of murdering her cousin.

She had woken up in her bed with JD smirking by her side, coaxing her to go kill Janis. And she obeyed. She had gotten up, walked down to the kitchen, grabbed a knife, then went to the artist’s room.

Janis woke up to a gleaming kitchen knife hovering over her right before it plunged into her chest. Veronica stabbed multiple times in multiple different areas until her cousin’s torso became more of a bright red gaping hole of blood and gore.

She then finally woke up for real and couldn’t fall back asleep. She shivered underneath her blankets, cowering like a little baby.

She reached out and snatched her phone from the nightstand, calling the only person who understood.

“Veronica...?” Duke’s groggy voice said after her phone had gone off a total of six times.

“H-hey, Heather... I just needed to hear a friendly voice.” Veronica says shakily.

“...Do you need to come over?”

“Y-yeah...”

“Alright, I’ll be over in fifteen.”

_____

Gaylien: yall i never realized how comfortable not wearing a bra to bed was

team.mom: You...sleep in your bra?

Gaylien: yeah

Gaylien: not anymore though

Gaylien: hot damn it felt amazing!! i wish i could have my Tits out like this all the time!!!!

AfricaByToto: Janis is the only one here who can get away with saying that

Gwetchen: she’s,,so brutally honest
Big Gay: that’s why I love her

troybolton: the only thing that’s capitalized in that sentence is tits????

Gaylien: I need to tell Ronnie the news!!!!

Gaylien: VERONICA WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU

Gwetchen: ?!?!?!

Big Gay: “her tiddies being free” omg

team.mom: Janis, what are you going on about? You were literally talking about not wearing a bra two seconds ago and now you’re screaming.

Gaylien: VERONICA IS NOT IN HER ROOM OR ANYWHERE IN THE HOUSE. SHE’S NOT ANSWERING HER PHONE EITHER

team.mom: WAIT WHAT?!

Gaylien: I’M FREAKING OUT

Gaylien: WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TO HER?

Gaylien: VERONICA AUTUMN SAWYER ANSWER YOUR DAMN PHONE OR I’M GONNA HAVE A HEART ATTACK

cornHub: ooooh Autumn is a pretty middle name

cornHub: waIT

AfricaByToto: HOLY SHIT

Gwetchen: OH GOD

troybolton: uhhh holy shit???? panic mode engaged????

smol: Awww. You guys are so sweet.

Big Gay: Veronica!!

Gaylien: VERONICA YOU LITTLE SHIT WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU

smol: Oh, this isn’t Veronica. This is Heather Duke. Veronica’s at my house.

smol sent a photo-proof.jpg

cornHub: awwww so peaceful <3

Gaylien: Wait what? She came home, though.

smol: She had a nightmare and couldn’t get back to sleep, so I let her come over. It’s the least I can do.

smol: With that in mind, she won’t be coming to school today. She seriously needs to rest.
team.mom: I can second that.
Gaylien: Alright... Please just make sure she’s okay.
cornHub: softie
Big Gay: JANIS IS SO SOFT FOR HER COUSIN AAAAAAAA
AfricaByToto: it’s adorable
smol: Haha, alright. I’m gonna go now. I’ll drop Veronica off later. Bye!

Veronica panicked when she woke up, since she momentarily had no idea where she was. She looked around, realizing this room was...not familiar whatsoever.

Thinking that she may have gotten kidnapped, she flung herself out of bed and ran into the hallway, looking around wildly. She heard laughter from behind and whirled around to see Duke standing there with her head tilted.

“Calm down,” Duke said, chuckling lightly, “You’re just at my grandparent’s house, remember? I picked you up last night?”

Veronica blinked a few times and then relaxed, laughing slightly.

“Oh yeah.”

Duke’s family probably didn’t know about the horrible things Veronica had done, but they probably did know that she had PTSD. All of her friend’s families seemed to know. Because of them being aware of her mental disorder, they always made an effort to be sincere and gentle. Even the grandparents who didn’t even know her.

Veronica knew Duke’s family liked her. She was polite and well-mannered, so that wasn’t a problem. But they still looked at her like she was made of glass. Sure, Veronica was fragile and was slowly breaking into pieces, but she didn’t have to be treated like she was a porcelain doll. Still, she appreciated the kindness.

But kindness gets exhausting.

Sometimes Veronica wished people treated her like she deserved to be treated. With reproach and disgust and hatred. She hated referring to herself as a monster, but, deep down, she knew she was one.

Veronica Sawyer has done horrible things. And though she hasn’t suffered enough, she has suffered.

People only see that outer shell of anguish and pain. They see this shaken up girl who jumps at every sudden noise and flinches away from physical contact, and they pity her without knowing what made her like that. But if they could see what lurks within that shell, they would make a salt circle around themselves instantly. A mishmash of pure madness is what clots that teenager’s mine. Anyone else would die from shock if they lived in her skin for a day.

That’s how Veronica should have been treated. People should look at her like she’s a demon wrenched out of hell, not this fragile little baby bird.
She sometimes wonders about how her friend’s families would react if they knew the truth. They would probably refuse to let their child near her ever again. Even though she hated being lonely, that’s the kind of punishment she deserved.

That, and so much more.

“Veronica. Veronica?”

The cobalt girl snapped out of her thoughts and looked up, tilting her head at Duke. They were sitting on the couch together, eating a late lunch, since it was two in the afternoon.

“Sorry,” She apologized, “I just kinda dozed off there for a moment.”

Duke laughed slightly.

“I could tell.”

She focused back on the TV, but kept glancing over at Veronica. Her heart twisted in sympathy at how glazed over the cobalt girl’s eyes were. Her friend was so fractured from the events at Westerberg. The mental scars that adorned her body would never heal for the rest of her life. Her horrible secret has left her with severe psychological problems that no amount of therapy could fix. Veronica was fighting, and Duke was proud of her for that, but she worried that it wouldn’t always be that way.

She sighed and rubbed her hands against her thighs. God, she must have taken on the motherly role after Heather Chandler died. She never realized how worried she was. A natural protectiveness came on when Duke was around McNamara and Martha, but she was like some kind of mama bear with Veronica. She knew damn well that Veronica could protect herself, but at what cost? The cobalt girl would freak out if she spilled anyone else’s blood. Maybe that’s why Duke took on the role of defending her and the others.

She hoped Veronica’s new friends will do the same.

Veronica grimaced when the channel changed and was perfectly timed to show some murder scene on the TV. She used to think all the killing on these shows looked so realistic, but after doing it herself, she realized how it’s all wrong on media. You can’t talk a killer out of killing you. Not when their brain is fried and they’re just downright insane. Veronica can’t help but feel bad for the characters who are murdered, even though she knows they aren’t real. She closes her eyes and sighs, and Duke quickly switches the channel.

“You okay?” She asked and Veronica nodded.

“Yeah,” She said. “Thank you again for all of this.”

“No problem,” Duke grinned at her.

It’s hard to believe Duke used to be like Satan reincarnated. She had been so cruel and almost drove McNamara to suicide, but she has changed so much. It makes Veronica happy. Even demons have a good side. She just wished Heather, Kurt, and Ram had the same chance to grow out of their devil wings.

———

Veronica sat in her bed with the lamp on, tapping a pen against her journal. She needed to vent out stress and, even though JD encouraged her to cut again, she took to writing.
She flipped to an empty page and her hand began to move on its own.

“Dear Diary,

Death stinks. Literally.

Sometimes it reeks of drainage cleaner or sulfur and fresh blood or even charred flesh. Really, it depends on how long they’ve been dead. But you get used to it fast, I’m ashamed to say.

Some black dude just got shot by simply walking down the street, so what? You know deep down that he probably has a wife and kids and a whole family to go home to, but you don’t care...it’s not possible to care because he’s just another statistic in the US-fucking-A now. He’s part of the reason this world is so fucked up, just like every other victim of manslaughter.

And people die every day. Innocent people who probably don’t even deserve it. Grandmas getting stabbed by muggers, fathers getting electrocuted in their garage, teenagers being hit by drunk drivers, children getting chopped up into pieces, jocks being shot at and a queen bee unknowingly drinking Drain-O..... None of that’s fair. None of that should happen. It ruins lives and makes people sad, but nobody can do anything about it.

But getting used to something isn’t the same as being okay with it. Nobody gets used to death—not doctors or police officers or paramedics or fucking funeral directors. Certainly not me. I never got used to it, even after the third time I spilled someone else’s blood. JD said killing is scary at first, that everyone freaks out after their first kill, but you calm down and get into the flow of things quickly. But I didn’t. It was never okay. I never felt the thrill he got from putting a bullet in someone’s fucking skull. I was just scared.

No one isn’t bothered by it. ‘Cause avoiding death is the most basic thing humans do. Surviving, living as long as you can, doing all the stuff you promised yourself you would do...it’s all programmed inside of us. But seeing someone who has failed to do that, someone who was cut short is never okay...we just pretend it is.

Just like how I pretended that what JD did was okay, even though I always knew it wasn’t. There was no justification for the harm he brought, I just acted like it was fine. Because I was scared of so much.

Death, ceasing to exist, is terrifying. It’s understandable to feel that way. Sure, people might call you a pussy, but no one will pull out a gun and shoot you in the face- no one will tie you to a post and fucking saw you in half in front of a camera for the whole world to see the coward meeting their biggest fear. That just won’t happen. Which is why when death finally comes for you, it’s the real deal. The kid gloves have come off. You can’t escape. And anyone who doesn’t find that scary is a fucking idiot.”
honestly i love Duke so much. Especially movie Duke
also i made Ronnie’s middle name Autumn for some reason. i just liked it
Chapter Summary

When Veronica shatters, she thinks she’ll just have to ride out the panic attack alone. Instead, she finds an anchor that keeps her grounded.

Chapter Notes

Janis being worried and protective over Veronica adds ten years to my lifespan. help me make these two being cousins an AU you cowards

Chapter warnings: Lockdowns, PTSD episodes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Veronica wished Duke had stayed a little longer. Just a few more days, then she would have been there when she started to shatter. Since she knew about Veronica’s issues, she would have known how to help. She would understand what was going on.

But she couldn’t stay. Duke left back for Ohio the day before Veronica broke.

Veronica didn’t like referring to her bad attacks as “psychotic episodes”. She wasn’t psychotic. Not necessarily, at least. They were more like...major breakdowns. She didn’t become insane or anything, just really panicked and pretty unresponsive. It was like her body was no longer her own.

Besides, it wasn’t her fault she fell apart like she did. The situation that had made it happen could cause anyone to have an attack.

She had been in sixth period, AP English III with Regina and Damian.

“I want you to choose a character from your book and explain what social contract theory they would agree with in your opinion,” Mrs. Dowel, the teacher, had been explaining, “Look at how they treat others and how they view the world. Provide text evidence to back up your claim.”

Veronica already would have her head ducked, scribbling away on a piece of paper. She utterly despised her book, but she didn’t think this would be too hard.

Ah, yes. Book projects. The thing every kid loathes when they start taking English. Though, they wouldn’t be all that bad if you actually got to pick whatever you wanted. Instead, at least in this class, students had to select a book from a list, which barley let them have any freedom.

Regina had picked out To Kill a Mockingbird, which she found boring and uneventful, but it was easy enough to read. In fact, she finished it within a few days, but had to go back and do those damn annotations students had to do to get credit. Most of them were her just pointing out figurative language and symbolism, though.

Veronica chose Slaughterhouse 5, a book she almost immediately regretted picking out. It was
supposed to be a black comedy, which had interested her, but it ended up being nothing like what she was expecting. It was a mess of World War II, aliens, time travel, and unexplained transitions, but it was still, somehow, unbelievably boring. Not the kind of boring that lulls someone to sleep, though. Rather the kind of boring that agitates you and sucks your soul dry and makes reading time go ten times slower. She said the book feels like a fever dream, like the author couldn’t decide what they wanted the plot to be and just combined every idea.

“I expected slaughterhouses,” She would growl deep in her throat, “I have seen no slaughterhouses.”

It was actually hilarious how disgusted she looks when she has to get out the book for silent reading time.

Damian seemed to be the only one who remotely enjoyed his book. He went with Lord of the Flies, since he thought it sounded interesting. And it was. Veronica and Regina were a little jealous of his good pick. Though, he was a little bit disappointed because he expected at least two of the boys to start dating.

“Can we use any of the theories or only the ones the first three OGs stated?” A kid with sharp cheekbones had asked, something Veronica vividly remembers.

“Any of them as long as it fits with your character. Check with me if you’re not sure if your choice will match.” Was Mrs. Dowel’s answer.

Then, the com overhead crackled and Principal Duvall’s voice came over the loudspeaker:

“This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill.” He sounded panicked and worried, “Everyone go into lockdown.”

The students looked at each other as the usually laid back Mrs. Dowel ran to shut the lights and lock the doors. She pulled down the blinds and darkness fell over the room. Everyone scrambled for the back corner.

Everything was completely silent and still for the first minute. Veronica’s peers were all exchanging concerned looks, nobody daring to speak. She had been surprised that none of them had ran for their phones in the red phone pouch on the wall. And when a screen did light up in the huddle, everyone hissed in objection.

“Turn off your phone you fucking moron,” One girl spat out softly, “or we’ll throw you out there.”

Everyone collectively nodded in agreement at that; Veronica was sure that even Mrs. Dowel didn’t mind the sound of it. The student with the phone whimpered then shut off the screen.

From above, the white noise from the vents suddenly stopped, meaning that the power in the school had been cut. With an abrupt sputter and a cough, the AC died. Total silence was left behind.

But only for a moment.

Yelling was coming from outside, down the hallway. It was loud and sounded crazy, like the screams of an escaped mental patient.

Two girls in the class actually started crying and a few of the others firmly tried to shush them. The walls almost seemed paper thin at that moment, so Veronica understood why they wanted these girls to shut the hell up. Just like them, she was fearing for her life, surely thinking she was about to
Was this a shooting? Or maybe there was a bomb down below the floor that would go off at any
minute...

She slowly craned her head around to glance at her classmates. Some were sitting perfectly still,
like they thought they wouldn’t be seen if they didn’t move, while others are hugging their knees.
A few were even covering underneath nearby desks. Regina and Damian are sitting close to each
other, unreadable emotion in their eyes.

Suddenly, someone pounded on the door, screaming like a madman. A few students are crying out
loud, now, as heavy fists deliver violent bangs to the door.

Veronica doesn’t feel safe next to these people she barely knows, so she starts to slowly crawl over
to her friends. One of Damian’s arms wrap around her and she’s pulled securely against him. She
clutches onto his shirt and curls up, trembling with him. He’s probably worrying about Janis.

Regina is eyeing the door nervously. She doesn’t necessarily look terrified, rather furious. She’s
bristling, ready to throw herself at anyone who might come in. She wasn’t going to cower and
scream; she was going to protect her friends even if it killed her. After all, they were all taught to
run, hide, or fight, and two of those weren’t an option for her. If you mess with a lioness’ pride,
you’re gonna get her claws, even if you have a gun.

Veronica shut her eyes tightly, covering her mouth with her hand to muffle her heavy breathing.
She leans closer to Damian, resting her head against his shoulder. Her chest aches with sobs she’s
trying to hold back. She didn’t want to be one of the students creating such a ruckus, so she kept as
quiet as possible.

The terror gripping the room was overwhelming. The stench of fear hung heavily in the air.
Usually you would think a group of immature juniors in high school would be laughing their asses
off at something like this, but everyone in the corner just looks worried. Nobody wanted to laugh.

Veronica began to pray to the god she doesn’t believe in for everyone to get out alive. She didn’t
care who they were or what they might have done, she just didn’t want anyone to die. Nobody
deserved to die this way.

Even when the banging moved down the hall, nobody moved. Even when the screaming became
an echo in the distance, everyone stayed huddled together, not caring about who they were pressed
against. It’s not until Principal Duvall’s voice comes back over the loudspeaker saying that it’s all
clear that they finally uncurl from the floor. But even then it’s hard to relax.

Principal Duvall went on to explain what happened, which was surprising for him to do. He said
some mentally unstable man forced his way into the school and attacked the senior at the front
desk, causing her to flee while screaming. At the time, nobody knew if he was armed or not, but it
was revealed he had been wielding a large butcher knife when he was finally caught by a swarm of
police down in the lower B Wing.

Everyone is told to stay in their classes with the doors locked until their bus number is called over
the loudspeaker, as the students were being sent home early. Kids who drove to school had to wait
until they got the announcement to go to the parking lot.

It was quiet, tense. Worry filled every person in the classroom, probably the whole school.
team.mom: Alright, where is everyone? Is everyone okay?

team.mom: Damian, Veronica, and I are all in AP English.

cornHub: bio

troybolton: Janis and I are in Geography together

troybolton: refusing to get out of our huddle underneath a table

Gaylien: please make fun of us for being soft and hetero we could use the distraction

Gwetchen: me and Cady are in Zoology

AfricaByToto: can confirm that I'm still alive

team.mom: Thank God everyone is okay.

smol: god doesn’t exist

smol: if god existed then this wouldn’t have happened

smol: there is no god

smol: only us

smol: we watch over ourselves

troybolton: wow big mood????

troybolton: I want to laugh but I feel like that would be inappropriate at this moment

Gwetchen: is Ronnie okay??

AfricaByToto: she didn’t type normally??

Big Gay: she’s dissociating

Big Gay: and leaning on Regina

Big Gay: it’s cute and helps lighten the mood

cornHub: picture!!

Gwetchen: yes please

Big Gay sent a photo- cuties.jpg

AfricaByToto: awww!!

troybolton: wow that helps a lot??

cornHub: Regina is soft

Gaylien: I wish I could be in there with Veronica.

AfricaByToto: AWWWW (x5)
Big Gay: big same Cady
Gaylien: Oh, thank the apparently non-existing God that our bus was just called.
Gaylien: I’ll meet you at the bus ramp, Vera.
team.mom: You too. Love you.
Big Gay: love you too!
Gwetchen: ily!!
AfricaByToto: love you both!
cornHub: RT
troybolton: i feel so cold without the alien by my side,,,,

———

Janis and Veronica have never ridden the bus before, so this first time was going just great so far thanks to the guy who had tried to hit on Veronica. He though she as cute (which she was) and perfect prey for his oppressive flirting (which she certainly was not).

“Hey, baby,” He had swooned, “Seems like we’re all going to die soon. How about we spend these last few days with you on my lap?”

That made Veronica more uncomfortable than turned on. Now, the guy was nursing his bruised ego after his stupid, sexist attempt at getting with someone he probably doesn’t even know the name of.

Janis moves closer to Veronica. If she were a dragon, smoke would be streaming out of her mouth from the fire she had just spit. Seated at the back of the bus, she’s now shielding Veronica from the other kids.

Now, she didn’t know if her cousin was always this deprived of touch, but she was at moments like this. When a plague of silent anxiety breaks open her exoskeleton and leaves her in quivering and quaking nervousness. She’s starved of physical contact that she so desperately needs. Usually, Janis wasn’t big on affection that wasn’t from Damian, but she has learned to get used to Veronica occasional clinginginess. It was nice, actually. She wouldn’t accept it from anyone else.

Veronica looked up from the window and leaned against Janis, who set her chin on the top of her head. A few people gawked, but looked away when the older flared and gave them a warning hiss.

Veronica closes her eyes and breathed out shakily. She tries to calm herself down, but the anxiety is too great and the cap on her trauma is starting to come undone.

———

Janis can’t sleep that night. She tries and manages to drift off for two hours, but ended up waking up again at one in the morning. She finally gave up, sighed, and got out of bed. She walked downstairs to find Veronica sitting at the bar with a cold cup of cocoa and a distant look in her eyes.
“Hey, Vera,” Janis greets softly, “Can’t sleep either, huh?”

Veronica just nods.

Janis walked over to a bar stool while her cousin gets up to reheat her drink.

“Yeah, that seems natural after what happened. I wonder if any of the others are awake.”

She looks up from checking her phone when glass shattered. Veronica is just standing in the middle of kitchen, staring down at the broken mug all over the floor, which she had dropped. Janis stands up.

“Vera? What’s wrong?”

“I can’t breathe...” Was the whispered response.

“What’d you say?”

“I can’t breathe,” Veronica gasped, “Janis, help, I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe!”

The cobalt girl reeled backwards, hitting the counter and sinking to the floor, barley missing the glass and pool of cocoa. She’s clutching at her head, shaking so badly it looks like she’s having a seizure. Her nails dig into her temples.

Janis dives down to her side. She tries to touch Veronica, but the girl yelps and jerks away. That’s out, then.

“Veronica, take a deep breath,” She instructed, “You’re okay. You’re safe.”

The words didn’t seem to reach her cousin, as she continued to just tremble and mumble incoherently. She wasn’t hearing Janis.

“Veronica, it’s me. It’s Janis. You’re safe.”

Nothing.

Veronica’s crying turned into more of an agonized death-rattle. She’s gasping and wheezing, panicking out of control. Her pain is so clear; Veronica is hurting herself. Maybe not on purpose, but she’s only furthering her own suffering.

She shrills when Janis reaches for her, scrambling away and bracing herself in a different corner. Her breathing is ragged and heavy, like oxygen isn’t enough to keep her alive anymore. Her hyperventilation system is kicked into overdrive. Blue tints her lips and underneath her nails. If Janis doesn’t do something quickly, she might suffocate.

“Vera. Veronica.” Janis tried gently. “Let’s try something different, okay? Can you tell me where you are?”

She remembered some of the things Damian tells her when she’s having an anxiety attack. He repeats her name multiple times and says that it’s just him, but he has never had to ask her what was going on behind her eyes. Her panic attacks were just from stress and normal fear and are relatively harmless, even if she feels like she’s dying. But this? This is the real deal. What Veronica is going through is what death really feels like.

Her cousin shuddered violently. Her head is bowed closed to her tucked-in knees, hands pulling at her hair.
“Boiler room…” She whispered so quietly Janis almost missed it.

“A boiler room? That’s where you are?” Janis asked.

It took thirty seconds for Veronica to nod.

“Alright. Where? Do you think you can be more specific for me? It’s okay if you can’t. Don’t push yourself.”

Janis wanted to know what was going on in her cousin’s head, but Damian had strictly told her to not bring up what the person was seeing. It was best to try and distract them.

“School…” Was Veronica’s quiet answer. “Wester…”

“Westerberg?”

Veronica hiccups.

“Okay, Veronica, I need you to listen to me, alright? You’re not there. You’re not at Westerberg anymore. You’re in Evanston. At my house. Your house.”

Veronica looked up a little, but snapped her head jack down when she made eye contact.

“You’re in the kitchen. On the floor. It’s,” Janis checks the clock on the stove, “one forty-seven.”

Veronica makes a soft noise.

“Everything is okay, I promise. Just breathe, okay? Breathe.”

Nothing happened for a moment. Janis bit the inside of her lip, her hands fluttering over her cousin’s back.

“Vera?”

Veronica whimpers and mumbles something incoherent. Something about a pep rally and that Jason Dean guy.

“Veronica?” Janis tried again, a bit louder this time, “Do you need something? Water? Something to hold onto?”

Still nothing and Janis began to worry again. They were doing so good, too.

Surprisingly, she didn’t feel any hints of agitation. She didn’t know where this patience came from, but if it wasn’t Veronica she was talking to (maybe Damian, too) she might have made a frustrated retort by now. But she didn’t.

She took a deep breath and tried again:

“Hey, Vera, can you try to breathe with me? It might be easier if you don’t do it alone.”

This time, Veronica actually offered an answer.

“I-I can’t…”

Janis furrowed her eyebrows. She manages to rest her hand on top of Veronica’s, which is good progress.
“Yes, you can.” She said gently. “I know you can.”

She moves slowly, working an arm around Veronica’s shoulders and inching closer as the seconds tick by. It’s like she’s laying a trap or trying to catch a wild animal. Veronica seems to think the same, because when she notices, she frenzies.

Janis, not wanting to lose her progress again, did something that might have been stupid and could have ended poorly. She locked her arms around Veronica, basically trapping her in an embrace. She put one hand on the back of her cousin’s head and held her against her chest.

“Veronica, try to ground yourself. Focus on the sound of my heartbeat.”

Veronica spasmed for a moment and wheezed. Then, the thrumming of Janis’ heart reached her ears. It was weirdly soothing, like the gentle beat of a drum. She curls her fingers into Janis’ nightshirt and leans closer. The sound overtakes the roaring in her ears.

“There you go,” Janis coos, “You’re doing great.”

Veronica burrows her face in Janis’ chest- something that will probably be joked about later if either of them remember. She’s still shaking very hard and the color hasn’t returned to her eyes, but she looks slightly less traumatized. Her teeth chatter and she bites her tongue until she tastes blood. A gentle hand strokes the back of her hair.

“It’s okay. Everything is okay. Remember that it’s just you and me, Vera. I’m your cousin. I’m not going to let anything happen to you.”

Cousin.

There’s only place where her good cousin lives and that place isn’t Sherwood Ohio. Which meant she wasn’t there. She wasn’t at Westerberg and she certainly wasn’t down in that dark boiler room.

Janis’ heart- Janis herself- becomes Veronica’s anchor. She’s never had anything that grounds her during her episodes and attacks. She usually just rides out the breakdown in a corner, digging her nails into her skin until blood is drawn and she goes completely numb. Sometimes, she passes out. Other times, she throws up and chokes on her vomit, feeling like she just barely got herself to breathe normally again.

But not anymore. She can’t live like that anymore.

Slowly, Veronica is able to get air into her burning lungs again, her senses were finally starting to gather. She made sure she could function correctly before doing anything.

“Janis?” She croaked.

“Yeah, it’s me. I’m here.” Janis assured her, “Feeling a little better?”

“Kinda..”

The cobalt girl finally uncurled from the floor. Janis helped her up and coaxed her to drink some water. Her throat hurt from all the crying.

“Thank you,” Veronica murmured, her eyes on the ground, “And I’m sorry. I-I don’t know what came over me.”

“Don’t be sorry, Vera,” Janis says, “I just want to make sure you’re okay.”
Veronica gave her a small glance and then nodded. She was exhausted and achy and just wanted to go back to sleep. She was sure Janis felt the same way, as Veronica’s trauma has now become her trauma. That’s just how it works. Burdens have been passed and now Janis is being dragged down, too.

Chapter End Notes

tbh Slaughterhouse 5 is a terrible fucking book. just saying. so is To Kill a Mockingbird.

also soft Janis gives me life y’all
North Shore High School (probably haunted)

Chapter Summary

The ghosts were Veronica’s and Veronica’s alone.

Chapter Notes

there’s some good hurt/comfort in this.

also everything in this is platonic/sisterly. i cannot stress this enough. Chandler is the team mom and protective of Ronnie and you can pry that from my cold, dead fingers. write more about these two in a non romantic way you cowards. there are so many possibilities. like, Veronica can be like an “apprentice” to Chandler when she’s first joins the Heathers and is like a clueless little baby bird learning how to fly. just saying.

and thank you so much to my friend on Tumblr who helped give me ideas!! ily!!!

Chapter warnings: Self harm, Self-hatred, Vomiting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nobody was killed during the lockdown, so these new occurrences at North Shore didn’t make any sense. See, if someone would have died, then ghosts haunting the school would seem to be normal enough. They were vengeful and would forever roam the place where they died, as the rumors would probably go.

But that’s not how it went.

Nobody died. Everyone got out safely. So why were there fleeting figures in the hallways?

The first was a girl. She was said to be tall with strawberry blonde hair and wore a red silk night robe. Electric blue oozed from her mouth. She was mainly seen in the lady’s bathroom, or that’s what the female students would say. She’s only seen for a split second, so gathering her details took awhile. The smell of drainage cleaner and roses stated her arrival. Sometimes, you might be able to catch her pruning herself in the mirrors.

The next ghosts came in pairs. Two boys that wore only their underwear and had blackened bullet holes in their necks and chests. They were apparently seen in multiple different places. The gym, the boy’s locker rooms, the football field, places jocks would be.

And the final ghost was much more sinister than the first three. He was a inhumane black mass, the embodiment of body horror. His figure was horribly mutilated, if you were even able to see all of that gore through the dark fog swirling around him. The smell of fresh roadkill seemed to follow him everywhere. Even though he was a rare sight, anyone who saw him couldn’t get him out of their heads. Dark aura moved to them, too.
Even though there was no real proof of the four of them actually ever existing, rumors still went around. Some people thought it was stupid and fake, some people were die-hard believers, and some people didn’t even understand what was going on. The ghosts weren’t the talk of the whole school, rather a back conversation in all the main gossip, something people just thought of on their own. Freshman were afraid to walk the halls alone. Seniors laughed their asses off at the whole ordeal. Most of the believers were the “weird kids” of school.

Despite this, students thought the ideas were kind of cool. Only a few them actually believed it, but the rest humored the whole thing just to get a kick out of it.

Veronica found it very strange. She didn’t know why her peers were so infatuated with the idea of dead people waddling around their school or why her main trio of ghosts wander through the halls like they own the place. When she asked them about it, they just shrugged, not too sure about it, either. They didn’t find the idea of haunting “fun”, but rather just enjoyed exploring. Though, they couldn’t get very far, since they were bound to Veronica.

Her friends didn’t talk about the ghosts. Maybe one of them brought it up once, but it wasn’t really in their interests. That was fine. Veronica didn’t like other people knowing about them. It was like an invasion of privacy. The ghosts were her friends and hers alone. When other people came along and claimed to see them, too, it was like someone stepping into her personal space bubble. They were taking them away from her.

She was worried about JD the most. He wasn’t her ghost. He could roam around as freely as he wanted without a host he was anchored to.

That’s what it was like with ghosts. If their death was caused by someone, then that person became their host to haunt however they please. Got in a car crash and someone died? You’re probably a host now, buddy. Doesn’t matter if it wasn’t your fault. If you lived, then a ghost will cling to your mortal soul like a fly on an open wound. You bullied someone and they killed themselves because of it? Well, then you have a big storm coming.

Suicide caused by one’s own feelings was different, though. Those ghosts usually don’t have anyone to latch onto, unless they decided to hitch a ride with a family member or friend to stay connected. They roam however much they want.

A joke that Veronica made with herself that if writing doesn’t work out, she could become a ghost hunter or paranormal expert.

But JD! Veronica didn’t like him being at the school. Bad aura wisps around him everywhere he went, like dark fog only she could see. She thinks his evil vibes are what caused this one incident. Or maybe it was just that Shane Oman was a huge dick.

Veronica was waking to the school’s basement, where a few other rooms were, like Cady’s Zoology class and Veronica’s Journalism period. While she was going to go and pick up some homework, Shane Oman approached her, slinging his arm around her shoulders, which made the girl flinch.

“Hey!” She yelped, immediately squirming, “What do you want?”

“Why are you walking alone?” Shane asked.

“I’m going to my class. Leave me alone.”

Shane pulled his arms to his side. An angered look crossed his face. Veronica remembered the last
time she and Shane crossed paths. Sure, she had broken his nose, but he also beat her up pretty badly, too. If Janis hadn’t stepped in, she thought he would have pummeled her until she died.

This must be his revenge.

It happened fast. A few more exchanges were shared and Veronica must have said something to piss off Shane because he suddenly grabbed her. They awkwardly struggled around in the hallway, but Shane was so much bigger and he easily overpowered her. He made her pay for breaking his nose by smashing her fingers in a locker door.

“That’s what you get you stupid slut,” Shane spat, holding the locker shut.

Veronica yowled. She managed to pull her fingers free, tearing strips of skin off in the process. She tottered into the wall, cradling her hand against her chest. She bit down on the inside of her cheek, trying to choke back tears. She felt like she deserved this, though. What Shane said and getting her fingers getting jammed is what she deserved, and so much more.

Karen of all people was the one who found her. She had yelped and helped Veronica up, taking her to the nearest bathroom to try and calm down.

The bathroom was weirdly cold and smelled faintly of cleaning supplies. Specifically, Drain-O.

Veronica teetered over one of the sinks, which she ended up vomiting into, though she couldn’t figure out why. A thin trail of bile dribbles down the sides of her mouth.

Karen winced. Out of the corner of her eye, she thought she saw something at the fifth sink. Smoky grey-blue shadows swirl gently. Something has caught this thing’s interest, and it’s starting to scare Karen.

Then, it shimmers into view. A ghost. A tall ghost with hawk-like features and clad in a flower-patterned robe. Just like the rumors said, neon blue leaked from its mouth.

The figure’s edges flickered and pulled apart for a moment before coming together again. It took a step forward and the lights above flickered. It got closer and closer until it was right beside Veronica and only a few feet away from Karen.

It- no, she- looked more human in the mirror. When she stared, the glass cracked and then shattered. She gives a pleased hiss, then grabs Veronica by the elbow and guides her over to the wall to sit down. She kneels down securely beside the cobalt girl and Karen realizes she was becoming a protective barrier.

Still, the blonde was stunned. She was frozen, mouth open and eyes wide. She couldn’t move, couldn’t speak, couldn’t scream, even though she desperately wanted to.

Veronica pawed for the ghost and convulsed with a strangled noise when she couldn’t touch. The spirit shushes her and slips her fingers in between Veronica’s own. It seemed to calm the cobalt girl down slightly, but she was still shuddering and in pain.

The ghosts craned her head around and locked eyes with Karen. In a rusty voice, she speaks:

“Do something.”

The lights popped and Karen fled the bathroom screaming.

Heathers blinked and then sighed, turning back to Veronica, who was scratching at the purple-red
marks on her fingers. Blood buds up in small specks.

“I’m going to kill the guy who did this,” Heather spits, brushing the pads of her fingers over the wounds, “Are you okay?”

“Fine,” Veronica mumbled, “I need to go wash that sink out.”

She went to get up, but Heather grabbed her with her unnaturally strong grip and pulled her back to the floor.

“Hang on a moment,” She said. “Take a breather.”

Veronica glanced at her before nodding. She closed her eyes and remembered back to the first time she saw Heather.

At first, she just saw the ghost out of the corner of her eye. At the time, she just brushed it off as nothing. But then she saw her in her bedroom, sneering. Heather wasn’t as nice as she was now. She was snarky and spitfire, taking any chance she could get to needle her new host. She was there when Duke took control of the Heathers, when Veronica told off Martha, and when JD targeted the whole school.

That’s when she started to change.

The night in question had been horrifying and Veronica’s terror seems to transfer over to the ghost fixed to her soul, softening her edges.

//

Veronica had been curled up in her bed in a state of shock. The doll hanging from her ceiling swung eerily a few feet away. She kept the blankets pulled over her head, refusing to even look at the sight set before her.

A sharp throb thrummed in her temples and the floorboards creaked.

“God, Veronica,” Heather sneered, “Hiding under the blankets? How much of a baby can you be today?”

Kurt and Ram snickered at her side, but they got no real answer. Instead, a stifled sob escapes Veronica’s lips. She slapped a hand over her mouth. There’s silence in the room for a moment, and she thinks the trio might have disappeared.

“Shit, she’s crying,” Heather muttered, “What do we do?”

“I don’t know.” Kurt replied helplessly.

There’s a weight on the side of the bed, meaning they must have sat down. Veronica shudders. She feels exhausted, but her fear is overwhelming and she’s too scared to sleep.

“He’s coming to kill me,” She whispered, “Oh my god... He knows where I live. He’s going to come and kill me.”

She sits up, white-knuckling the blankets. Her face is pale, fear in her wide, bulging eyes.

“Woah, hey,” Heather touches the girl and she flinches, “I won’t tell you that everything is okay, because it’s not, but...there, there.”
“I am so stupid!” Veronica put her head in her hands, pulling at her hair. “I trusted him... I let him do anything he wanted to be because I was so terrified and ignorant! I should have known.”

She sucked in a shaky breath.

“I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry.”

She really meant that. The trio of ghosts looked shocked.

“I didn’t want anyone to die. Kurt, Ram, you were sorta jerks with the whole sex rumor, but I never wanted you guys dead. And Heather-” She gasped over a sob, “God, I’m so sorry. I looked up to you! You were like the older sister I never had and-and then I go and give you a cup of Drain-O for breakfast! I didn’t want that... I want you to still be here.”

Veronica’s quiet crying was the only sound in the room for a moment. Then, Heather moved.

She squeezed the smaller girl’s hand with icy fingers. There was a strange look in her eyes.

“I am here.”

Veronica looked up sharply. Something about that made her heart twinge.

“Heather...”

She sniffs and wipes her eyes with her other hand. Something about the ghosts being there had comforted her, but she was still eyeing Heather like she was a venomous snake. The demoness notices and frowns, going to pull her hand away, but Veronica tightens her grip.

The cobalt girl is panting, still shuddering with anxiety. She’s glancing at her window and door constantly, throwing her blood pressure through the roof.

Ram purses his lips before disappearing for a moment. He returns with a glass of ice water, which is jostling in his ghostly grip. Veronica was surprised. He held it out to her as some kind of peace offering and she took it.

Kurt has perched himself on the windowsill, gazing out into the night. His eyes are fixed on the street, waiting to sound the alarm.

It’s quiet in the room, a strange tenseness gripping all four of them. Veronica sips from her glass before finally standing up. She couldn’t just wait around to be killed. She tells the ghosts her plan and they collectively nod in agreement.

“Thank you,” She says, “And I’m sorry for being a horrible person.”

Heather didn’t want to watch Veronica destroy herself. She deeply cared about the girl and hated seeing her fall apart because of a trauma forced onto her. She fought to remain in the living world for as long as possible, even if Veronica couldn’t see her at some points.

When she became a ghost, Heather didn’t think she would feel anything other than anger and vengeance. But she doesn’t. She feels a wide range of emotions, one of them being worry when she found Veronica with blood on her arms and a razor blade in her hands.

Veronica was still reeling from her episode a few nights ago and what recently happened with Shane Oman. It was like she was in some kind of aftershock, her body was running on a backup
panic system. One of the side effects from this seemed to be an excessive need to hurt herself.

Heather materializes in the bedroom and looks around. The sharp scent of blood filters out from the bathroom and into her nose. She sighs. She sits down on the bed, crossing her arms and legs and waits. When Veronica finally walks out rubbing her wrist, she jumps.

“Oh, hey, Heather!”

She only sounds a little bit awkward because she thinks Heather won’t get after her for cutting. The ghost shook her head.

“How much longer are you going to keep this up?”

Veronica looks back at her with her head tilted.

“What?”

“Oh, don’t give me that clueless bullshit.” Heather rolls her eyes, “You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

Veronica bites her lip and looks away.

“Not much longer.” She mumbles.

“It isn’t healthy.”

“I know. I said I’ll stop soon.” She says, “Besides, no one has noticed. It’s fine.”

“Oh yeah?” Heather quirks a brow, “What about when they see your scars? When they find the razors? When they catch you scratching at your wrists in class- yeah, don’t think I didn’t see that, young lady. And what about when they see how your condition gets worse and worse? They’ll notice then.”

Veronica says nothing.

“I’m not telling you to go and share everything to them, but I am asking you to take a moment to breathe. I’m here. You can either calm down and talk through this with me or suffer more. Your choice.”

“How blunt of you,” Veronica says dryly.

“I can only get through to you when I’m blunt.”

“Tsk...” Veronica looks away, “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Well, of course I won’t understand unless you talk to me.”

“Just drop it, Heather.”

Heather raises an eyebrow at that, almost amused by the statement.

“That’s the last thing we need, letting this go on longer.”

Veronica went to make a retort, but ended up just shutting her mouth. She stared at the ground for a long time before turning to go back to the bathroom.
“Where are you going?”

“You shouldn’t waste your time by being here.”

Heather snorted an almost-laugh. Veronica forces one of her own.

“I’m serious.”

She dips her head.

“I guess you’re gonna get what you wanted,” She sighed, “Why shouldn’t I feel like this? I deserve it. I am a horrible person. I have nothing and it really should be that way.”

Her voice is hollow. She reaches for the razor blade again.

“It feels like I have nothing left in the world. JD scooped out everything I ever was and left me as this empty shell. Sometimes I don’t even want to go on. So, yeah, I should be doing this to myself.”

Heather was quiet for a moment. She clenches her fists.

“So what does that make me?!”

In a moment of blind fury, she charges at Veronica in a full-body tackle with enough force to send them both to the ground. She had meant to just take the razor away, but her brain decided to do something entirely different.

The girls landed in a heap on the floor, with Heather slightly on top of Veronica from the fall. She considered pinning the cobalt girl down just so she wouldn’t make a move for the blade, which clattered to the tile a few feet away.

Veronica is dazed for a moment, stunned, then wiggles out from under Heather. She goes for the razor, but the ghost grabs her by the arm and yanks her back down.

“Not again! You are not fucking doing that again!”

A sound similar to something a dying puppy would make bounds from Veronica’s chest. The noise coils up Heather’s neck and makes her heart clench.

“Heather, please—“

“What the hell am I, huh? What am I? Screw all those other people! I’m here, aren’t I?”

Veronica stared up at her from her sprawled out position on the floor. Her eyes are wide, mouth half open, but no words came out. She was acting like a deer in headlights, freezing up when she feels threatened.

“I know that we have some pretty weird history with all that’s happened and I know I’m just a ghost, but don’t I mean something?” Heather takes a breath, “These last few months have been...crazy for me. But I love every second of them. Please, please don’t make it end.”

She grabs Veronica’s forearms and squeezes tightly.

“Seeing you do this... Seeing you in so much pain... I get so scared.”

Veronica sniffles and lowers her head.
“I—I’m sorry...”

Heather swallows hard and exhales shakily. She smiled slightly.

“It’s okay.”

“That doesn’t satisfy the guilt.”

Heather frowns. In morbid, worried curiosity, she presses:

“What?”

“No matter what you or anyone else says, it’ll never be okay,” Veronica says, “Life doesn’t feel normal, Heather. Nothing feels right. Everything is such a struggle...and it’s only getting worse.” She inhaled shakily, “It consumed my mind. It’s all I ever thought about. Doing simple things became difficult. There have been so many occasions when I simply said ‘I can’t!’ And I didn't.”

“If it hurt that badly, why didn’t you say something?” Heather asked.

“Because I deserve it!”

Heather purses her lips and frowns at the outburst.

“I deserve everything that has happened to me. I deserve all of this pain and suffering!” Veronica howled, “Heather, I hurt people! I killed people!”

“That wasn’t you,” Heather says, “That was JD.”

“There is no difference!”

“There is a tremendous difference!” Heather raises her voice, “You are not him. You can’t keep blaming yourself for the things he did. He tricked you into everything. You didn’t know what you were getting into.”

“Stop treating me like I’m a good person.” Veronica mumbled, “I’m not.”

Heather searches for the girl’s gaze, but doesn’t find it. She puts her hands in her lap and leans forward.

“Young lady, why is it so hard to believe that I forgive you?”

Veronica is quiet.

“There is one person out there that doesn’t forgive you and that person is you.”

The cobalt girl still has her head bowed. Tears start to drip down her cheeks. Heather eases her into an embrace and she clings to the ghost with the desperation of a drowning woman.

No more words are exchanged. Veronica can’t speak. Exhaustion comes out of nowhere and hits her like a ton of bricks. Anguish and aftershock melts her brain until, finally, she’s knocked out, listening for Heather's unmoving heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes
hey y’all i hate being THAT writer but...if you enjoyed...or if you have something to say..anything to say.....please comment im desperate........
Thunder rumbles and lightning crackles in the dark sky. Rain is coming down in sheets. Despite her think coat, Veronica is soaked to the bone.

She steps under the front porch and shook herself out like a wet dog. She’s shivering and desperate, looking utterly miserable. Her stomach burns with anger, but her chest aches in fear. It’s a gross mix of emotions inside of her. She needs relief and knocks on the door. It opens a few moments later.

“Veronica!”

Regina looks surprised and shocked to see the cobalt girl at her house.

“Hey, Regina... Listen, I’m sorry for being here like this, but-“

“Don’t be sorry. Get in here!”

Regina pulls her inside. The interior of the house is decorated with Christmas decorations and small strings of lights. There’s a tall tree glowing in the den nearby. Veronica notices people peeking over from the dining room.

“Wait, there’s something going on? Damn, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“Don’t be,” Regina says dismissively, “It’s okay! My parents won’t care. Besides, they love you.”

Veronica smiled slightly and looked around shyly at the people in the dining room. They had to be parts of Regina’s family there for a Christmas party.

“Veronica, dear!” Mrs. George exclaims when she sees her, “You’re soaked! Regina, go get her some dry clothes!”

Regina gave Veronica a look that said, “I told you” and then lead her upstairs.

“So, why were you out there?” She asked while handing the smaller girl some spare clothes.

“Janis and I kind of got into a fight,” Veronica sighs.
“Oh. Really?”

“Yeah.”

She loved her cousin to death, but sometimes she was a little too pushy and didn’t know when to shut up. Janis’ attempts to find out the reason for Veronica’s PTSD made the girl really uncomfortable. They this, she pressed too many buttons and Veronica lashed out out of instinct. After that, a heated argument started up.

“I just thought some time away would help cool both of us down,” Veronica says, “But I really hadn’t meant to waltz in here uninvited. Sorry again.”

Regina chuckled lightly and shook her head.

“And again, don’t be.” She said, “I’ll let you change in privacy, now. I’ll be in the hallways if you need me.”

After peeling off her wet clothes and changing into some dry ones, Veronica joined Regina and her family for dinner. A lot of them were eyeing her wryly, which she didn’t blame them for. She was a complete stranger to them, after all.

When everyone left, Veronica was allowed to stay the night in one of the many guest bedrooms. Once she fell asleep, it wasn’t the nightmare that woke her open again, but, rather, the sharp pain in her arm.

Her eyes snap open. It’s 3:33 in the morning and there’s a dark figure looming over the side of the bed. She can’t move.

“Ah, you’re awake,” JD drawled, “Good. I’ve been really wanting to talk to you lately.”

Veronica tries to struggle or get up, or even just say something, but she can’t. It’s like she’s strapped down to the bed. Her brain is awake but her body isn’t. She stares at JD with wide, fearful eyes.

“Don’t look so scared, darling,” JD says, “It’s okay.”

He strokes the crown of her head, but it provides no comfort.

“You look so beautiful in the moonlight, you know. I can barely control myself.”

He crawls onto the bed, the mattress creaking beneath his weight. He’s perched on the edge on his knees and he leans down to kiss Veronica. His cracked, black lips meet hers and his tongue slithers in between her teeth, forcing open her jaw. A burnt, rotten taste fills the girl’s mouth, but she still can’t make a peep, even when his tongue laps against her own.

The invader in her mouth is making it even harder to breathe, as it was already difficult before she was getting a forced make out session from a ghost. Veronica wants to push him away, but her arms are stiff at her side.

JD finally pulls back, ropes of blood connecting the two of them together. He licks saliva off from his lips and then bows down again, kissing along Veronica neck and collarbone. He gets closer, grinding against her side. It makes the girl sick, and she wonders if she would get free if she were to throw up.

JD must have thought the same thing, maybe, because he sat up and stared at her for a long time.
She looked like a kicked puppy and that made him even more turned on.

But, alas, sleep paralysis doesn’t last forever.

He jumped down from the side of the bed and settled back into his position from before. There was an audible sniffing sound, like a dog trying to find a scent. His cold fingers slid onto Veronica’s arms, caressing the self-inflicted wounds on the pale skin.

“You know what would be fun? Killing Janis.”

The smallest hints of a sound utters from Veronica’s throat. She tries to wiggle her fingers or toes, but they’re stiff. She’s still stuck.

“She never leaves you alone. Without her around, you won’t have to worry about being bothered all the time.” JD explains, “You need to get back into the gist of things. It won’t hurt to sharpen your murder skills.” He pauses, then smiles wildly, “Let’s cut out her tongue! That way she can’t babble on and one anymore.”

When the look in Veronica’s eyes doesn’t change, he bares his teeth in more of a forced-grin.

“I want to see her as a ghost with me by tomorrow night.”

He curls his fingers into Veronica’s arms, mainly the scars. When blood oozes free, he dips his head and licks up the red fluid like a hungry animal. It all hurts more than it should.

Veronica squeezes her eyes shut tightly and tears slip free. She wills her body to move and, by some miracle, her fingers twitch. It took great effort, but she managed to form a fist, which returned feeling to that arm and, slowly, to the rest of her body. She opened her mouth to scream, but cold fingers wrapped around her throat.

“You’re not going to scream.” JD whispered, climbing back onto the bed and straddling the girl.

Veronica gasped helplessly and claws at JD’s hands, but it was no use. Kicking her legs out didn’t help, either.

“Shh, shh,” The ghost purred, “Just let it take you. You’ll feel better when you wake up.”

Barely-audible cries escaped Veronica’s lips, but it wasn’t enough to save herself or get anyone’s attention. Her lungs began to ache. Everything started to blur together.

“That’s it,” She heard JD say, “Good girl. Don’t forget my request, darling. You don’t have a choice.”

———

Veronica awoke sprawled out on her back. The blankets are barley even on her and she’s soaked with cold sweat. She sits up in the bed, feeling achy and exhausted. She rubs her hands over her neck and chokes the urge to cry.

The George’s were more than hospitable for letting her stay over. She didn’t tell them what happened that night- who would even believe that story?- but they were comforting when she simply said she had a nightmare. Hanging out with Regina for the day also helping distract Veronica from the horror she went through, but, eventually, she had to go home, as it was Sunday. She sure did take her sweet time, though.
She padded off to the park nearby, obviously stalling. Snow and leaves crunched under her feet as she passed by playgrounds, which were a flurry of activity, even at five in the afternoon. The temperature and light snowfall didn’t stop any children from having fun. They were climbing up on the colorful jungle gym or gliding down the twisted slides. Veronica stared for a moment before others gave her the same look, mainly parents, but with more skepticism. She blinked and waved an apologetic hand before going on her way again.

She must have looked off being there. A junior in high school at a kid’s playground, just watching them for an uncomfortable amount of time. It didn’t help that the bags under her eyes must have made her look a little crazy. But she wasn’t. She was not crazy.

Though, she didn’t know why she stared for so long. She doesn’t like kids. Never had, never will. They were annoying little gremlins that she couldn’t believe people wasted money on and thought were adorable. It’s more of their innocence that caught her eye. They weren’t yet tainted by the real world. They still thought everything was good and everyone was happy.

Stuff like that made Veronica laugh, as their purity felt like a joke. Oh, how she wished she could tell them about all the horrors. Maybe then they would be more on guard.

Veronica walked down a gravel nature path into the trees, which wound alongside a thin river. The trail she was on was just a scenic route to the lake in the park. At least there was a private little shoreline she could perch on.

A thin sheet of ice covered the surface of the lake, which was pretty small. She watched ducks float around in areas that weren’t frozen and moved to get a closer look. Ducks were cute, at least to her. She smiled, and water slipped in between her teeth.

Wait-

This wasn’t right.

Veronica’s eyes snapped open wide, but they were blurred by a blue-green haze. It feels like water is leaked through her sockets the longer she keeps her eyelids open, so she shuts them.

Nothing makes sense and that only makes her struggle harder. The fear of the unknown keeps her mind from functioning rationally. She can’t breathe, she can’t swim, she can’t escape.

Her lungs start to burn. Everything is dark and murky. The cold embraces her and her muscles lock up, so she couldn’t flounder to the surface even if her limbs were working properly. Her heavy winter coat is weighing her down. Veronica swallows convulsively and bubbles explode from her lips.

It hurts so much to keep fighting and she’s so tired. She doesn’t want to die, though. Not like this.

She kicks her legs and tries to swim to the surface. For a moment, she’s lucky, managing to get a quick breath before she’s yanked back down by...something.

Veronica’s screams were muffled as she was pulled down into the depths of the lake. She thrashed wildly, the adrenaline rush helping her counter the cold. She kicked out her legs and paddled for the surface once she got free.

It was only a moment of relief.

After getting air, she thought she was home free, but something breached the surface and practically leapt onto her, weighing her back down. Her ears popped as she sank. When she
struggled, something sharp slashed across her stomach, stifling her squirming for a moment.

She folded over and flapped her hands around, trying to touch whoever was pulling her down. She felt what she thought was a shoulder and kicked her foot into the body. She heard a grunt and was released for a moment before two feet drove into her scathed stomach.

Veronica hit a jagged rock and coughed up red bubbles. Crimson mist filled her murky vision as she began to sink.

Was this it? Was she going to die like this?

Something sharp digs into her shoulders and wrenches her upwards until she breaks the surface. She can’t barely take a breath before she’s yanked to the side and hauled onto solid ground. There, she collapses into the mud, gasping for air and expelling water from her mouth in return. She’s shivering uncontrollably, the sting of the freezing air almost hurting as badly as nearly drowning. Over her hacking and retching, she hears a voice.

“That was too close.”

Kurt and Ram are staring down at her, water sliding over their soft blue skin. They looks worried answers frightened, but a little amused at the same time. If it wasn’t her on the ground floundering around like a dying fish, Veronica might have felt the same way.

She forces out a thank you through her chattering teeth and the ghosts smiled slightly with pity in their eyes.

“It seems like a waste for you to leave us so soon,” Ram says.

Veronica tries to get up, but her limbs are refusing to work. She curls her fingers into the mud and coughs again. The cold is making her feel much worse. The fear brings curiosity. Her stomach throbs and she presses her hand against the fresh wounds. Scratches.

“Wh-wh-wh-what h-happened?” She asked in a horrible stammer.

“You slipped at first,” Kurt says, “Then that fucker JD thought it would be a fun opportunity to fuck with you.”

“I don’t think he was going to kill you,” Ram states, “He wouldn’t gain anything from that.”

“We tried to do something sooner, we really did.” Kurt adds, a little nervous.

“It’s okay.” Veronica says through breathy gasps, “I really appreciate it.”

The boys smile proudly.

Veronica feels something grab her shoulders and ease her upwards, which makes her jump. She sputters, but it’s easier to pull air into her lungs like this. She shakes out her hair like a dog would, and Heather makes a noise from behind her. Kurt and Ram laughed slightly.

“I’m going to bash JD’s skull in the next time I see him,” Heather says, then focuses her attention on Veronica, “You need to get inside.”

Veronica knows this, so she attempts to her on her feet. She hobbles like a hose with broken legs, but manages to regain some balance. The chill is wending it’s way into her bones. It’s so cold and it’s making her feel like she was dying.
Dripping wet and shivering, she made her way home, entering through the basement door. Hot air attacked her bare skin with razor sharp teeth. A burning sensation ripples up through her limbs, and she wonders if her flesh is sizzling.

“Veronica?”

Janis sits up from the couch, blinking at the girl. She hides her worry with a disgruntled and amused look.

“What the hell happened to you?”

“I fell in a pond.” Veronica grumbled.

Janis snorted and watches as her cousin swerved around the couch to get to the staircase.

“I can tell. You look like a mess.”

“I’ve been through worse.”

“Oh yeah? Wanna talk about that?”

“Oh my god,” Veronica groaned, twisting around on her heels, “Haven’t you learned anything from me storming out last night? Don’t even try.”

“What can I say?” Janis shrugged, “Curiosity killed the cat.”

Veronica’s heart clenches at that. She remembers what JD has told her, and she hated the tiny part of her hat considered going through with his offer. She wouldn’t do it, though. She couldn’t.

“Like I said before, you have no right getting in my private business. What do you think you’ll gain from knowing? Comfort? Will it make you feel better knowing that other people hurt more than you do?”

Janis is quiet. She almost looks impressed.

“You don’t know me.”

Veronica went to walk up the stairs, but slows down to listen when she hears Janis start to talk.

“Oh yeah? I know that your favorite color is blue and that you’re asexual.”

Veronica snorted.

“I also know that you’re claustrophobic and loud noises startle you. You’re sensitive to bright lights and fires make you nervous. You laughed for six minutes straight at the video of two trash cans opening in sync, proclaiming it to be the ‘best video ever’. You get very interested when Damian talks about plays and musicals because you think it would be fun to be in one. You have the voice of an angel, but are too shy to sing in front of people. Lara Croft and Katie McGrath are the only two people you would date if you weren’t asexual and one of them wasn’t a character. You’ve never read Harry Potter in your life, and you’re not planning to ever, but you still downloaded the Hogwarts Mystery game on your phone because you thought it looked cool. And you know that you would be in Gryffindor, even thought everyone else says you’re a Ravenclaw because of your appeal for the color blue. You’re not a virgin, but you’re not proud of it in the slightest. You’re shy about admitting that you like to play video games. Your favorites are Majora’s Mask, Alien Isolation, and Little Nightmares. You cried when Astrid died in Skyrim.
Dark Souls is the game you play to get your anger out. You think Stranger Things is utter garbage.”

Veronica doesn’t realize she’s crying until her breath comes in shakily. Hot tears run down her cold skin and she winces. Her lip quivers pathetically.

“I know you love the smell of vanilla. Driving makes your anxious. You don’t like when things get too close to your face. You sometimes stress-chew. You’re a huge Shakespeare nerd. And I know that you put up walls around yourself because you’re scared of getting hurt.”

She hears Janis take a step forward and pulls her bottom lip in between her teeth. Not wanting to feel so weak in front of her cousin, she wipes her eyes and chokes out a tight little laugh.

“I share too much about myself to you,” She says.

“Not everything, though,” Janis points out, then shakes her head. “Listen, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t pressure you like I do.”

“It’s okay.” Veronica says, “I don’t blame you for being so curious. I would be, too.” She pauses. “Just... give me a little more time.”

Janis nods, then smiles slightly.

“Want a hug?”

“That would be nice.”

———

It’s the cold fingers around her throat that wakes Veronica up that night. JD is on top of her again, but this time she isn’t trapped in sleep paralysis.

“She’s not dead.” He says. “Why?”

This grip is loose enough to speak, so she does:

“I wasn’t going to kill my cousin.”

“But she deserved it!” JD growl, wringing his fingers around her neck. “She should be dead! I want her dead! Kill her! Kill her! Kill her!”

Veronica makes a strangled noise and clawed into the cake of charred flesh over JD’s hand, making him hiss and yank backwards. The cobalt girl coughs below him. He looks furious.

“You are such a stupid, ignorant little gir-“

JD topples forward onto Veronica when something smashes into the back of his head. The girl shoves him off and he rolled to the ground, deteriorating into grey-blue embers. There had been a jagged piece of a lamp sticking out the back of his head. Heather stands a few feet away, holding the other half.

“I said I was gonna do it.” She says, tossing the lamp to the side.

“Thanks,” Veronica says, trying to catch her breath, “Where’d you get that?”

“Ghost IKEA?” Heather shrugged and she and Veronica walked downstairs, no longer wanting to
stay in that room.

Small, colorful Christmas lights glowed inside the den, spiraled along the reefs above the fireplace. Veronica sits down on the couch with a blanket and watches a random holiday movie with Heather until they both fell back asleep listening to the sound of reindeer talking to Santa Claus.

Chapter End Notes

buckle up kiddos the next chapter is fuckin wild
and blood
also- Veronica playing Benvolio in a possible production of Romeo and Juliet: Yes or no?
The air is thick and heavy with rain that has yet to fall. Dark grey-blue clouds blanket the sky, making that evening look more like the middle with the night with all the light that was blotted out. Thunder rumbles in the distance. There’s a whimper and Veronica realizes it’s her.

She doesn’t know why she was choosing to go out this way, on the roof about to slit her throat with a goddamn garden shovel, but there was no going back now. At least it would be bloody. That’s what she wanted, or at least that’s what she thinks.

She made a disgruntled noise when headlights glared into the driveway. Three people jumped out of the car.

“Veronica Autumn Sawyer, stop whatever the hell you think you’re doing right now!” Duke yelled like she was Veronica’s mom or something.

The cobalt girl stared down at them with a blank expression. She says nothing, does nothing.

“Veronica, please,” Martha speaks up, but there was no effect. “Why do you think this will help you?”

“I know it will.” Veronica’s voice is weak and hoarse when she finally speaks up. “I can’t deal with this anymore.”

It’s been two months since all the deaths and, even though summer is right around the corner, sophomore year feels like it’ll never end. All the grief and guilt has become too much to handle. Veronica doesn’t think she can keep going.

“I can’t do it anymore! I can’t!”

“Veronica, honey, do you think you can listen to me for a moment?” McNamara tries and she takes the cobalt girl’s glance over at her as a yes, “This isn’t going to help you. It’s only going to
make things worse.”

Veronica makes a face and McNamara starts talking again before she completely loses her attention.

“I wanted to kill myself before,” She says, “I wanted nothing more than to be done with this world and to just die. I thought that it would make me better - being dead, I mean. But you stopped me. You helped me. If you hadn’t stepped up like you did, I wouldn’t be here. I wouldn’t have seen everything get better if it wasn’t for you. So let me- let us help you.”

Duke and Martha nod in agreement.

“I know that it hurts. I won’t try and sympathize by saying I know what you’re going through, because I don’t. I can’t even begin to try and fathom how much pain you must be in, but there’s better ways to deal with things. You can talk to us. We can get you help. But this? This won’t do you any good at all. I promise you that.”

Veronica sniffles.

“It’s hard now, I know, but things will get better. So, please, come down. Don’t do this. We love you.”

Veronica’s eyes started to water. Despite all the pain, she didn’t didn’t want to leave her friends.

It was decided, then. She turned to go down the ladder she had set up and slipped, toppling right off of the roof.

Time seemed to be going in slow motion. Duke, McNamara, and Martha were all screaming. Veronica didn’t make a sound, even when her body crashed into the pavement.

There was a horrible pain when she hit the ground, which was caused by her landing on one of her arms. The bones crack and splitter audibly under the weight and force. A momentary sting accompanied the burning sensation of the limb breaking, cold, yet scorching, and she would later find out it was from the shovel impaling her leg when she broke her arm. It digs completely into her upper thigh, with only the handle sticking out. With her hand still holding onto the tool, she falls hard on the handle, wrenching the shovel into a more slanted position, tearing a larger gash in her flesh.

Finally, she screams. Shrieks of pure agony and terror rip out from her throat with such intensity and volume that her voice blows out within seconds. Her body convulses violently in the driveway. Duke and McNamara are the first to snap out of it and dove down to her side, while Martha dials 911, all yelling the whole time.

Veronica had landed on her stomach, so Duke flipped her onto her back as gently as possible and grimaced. Since the shovel had shifted, the maw of the wound was opened wider, stretching the skin into a gaping red mouth. Strips of muscle and mangled flesh attempted to tie the gash back together, but it only succeeded in making the sight even more sickening. Blood gushes out freely, pooling in the snow. The once fluffy white powder looks more like brain matter that’s the color of the insides of a freshly gutted deer.

Duke took off her jacket and pressed it to the wound to try and stop the flow of blood, causing Veronica to flinch and whimper. Tears and blood ran down her face, thanks to the scrape near her crown from when she smacked her forehead into the pavement.

McNamara lifted her halfway off of the cold, hard ground and into her lap, trying to provide as
much comfort as possible. She glances at the wound and studies it for a moment. Since she was in MedTerm, the sight didn’t really bother her, which might have been shocking to some.

“Do I-?” Duke’s hand hovered over the handle of the shovel and McNamara shook her head.

“Don’t. That might be the only thing keeping her from bleeding out.” The yellow Heather says. “There’s a major artery in the thigh. I don’t know if it got punctured or not, but we have to leave that there until the ambulance arrives.”

Duke nodded and went back to pressing her jacket down on the gash. The green blazer was almost completely red from all the blood. Not a good sign.

“I’ve never heard anything scarier than the way she screamed,” She admits softly and McNamara gave her a sympathetic look. “That was terrifying. It—it still is.”

She didn’t like being so scared like this, but she couldn’t keep her emotions contained. She was surprised she hadn’t blacked out herself from shock. Or throw up.

“I know what you mean.” McNamara said. “Watching her fall...God, I thought the world ended right then and there.”

From below her, Veronica said a slur of jumbled words. Her eyes opened slightly and she stared up at McNamara, blinking dazedly. When she wasn’t acknowledged at all, she tries again:

“I can’t even...feel my....toes..” She drawls, and what she said was true. Everything was numb.

McNamara looks down at her and gave a comforting little smile. She strokes her hair.

“Oh, I bet, honey.” She said softly.

Veronica, who was obviously very dazed, looked around at everyone: Duke attempting to stem the bleeding, McNamara running her fingers through her hair, Martha on the phone, begging the ambulance to hurry. Her heart clenches at the desperate tone the last girl has and her head spins when she sees all the blood on Duke’s hand. A strangled whimper escapes her throat, reminiscent of a distressed kitten mewing.

“It’s okay,” McNamara soothed, smoothing out her brown locks again, “It’s okay. You’re going to be okay.”

Veronica didn’t she agreed. Painful numbness flared through every inch of her body. There’s so much blood. She feels like she’s going to die. A noiseless sob breaks from her lips.

It takes seven minutes for the EMS and a police car to pull up. When the paramedics hurried out, even they winced at the scene set out before them: A teenage girl sprawled out in a driveway with a broken arm and a shovel in her leg. Without context, what would this even look like? Slipping off of a roof after getting talked out of suicide via garden shovel would probably be the last thing to cross anyone’s mind.

Veronica was hauled off to the hospital, but she could barley remember to ride in the ambulance. What she could remember, though, was the panic and all of the pain. Every touch seemed to hurt her. The IV going into her wrist felt like strings of fire shooting up her arm. She remembered wanting to rip it out.

By some stroke of luck, there was no nerve damage in Veronica’s leg, meaning she wouldn’t be left with a limp. Only an ugly scar. Even after the wound was sewn up, it took awhile for the flesh to
fully mend itself, but that was the least of Veronica’s concerns. Because all of this happened due to a suicide attempt, she was almost put in a mental hospital. She refused the entire time, practically crying because of how much she was begging not to be taken there. The doctors took pity on her and suggested counseling and therapy, which she agreed on.

That’s where she was diagnosed with PTSD.

Veronica doesn’t know why her mind enjoys going back to memories like that. She hated it. She hated thinking back to such dark times for her. The suicide attempt was a big mistake on her part. With a shovel, too, nonetheless.

Like most things, only a few people know about this. She doesn’t know how she feels about it.

Damian always believed his precautions would protect his friends, but like a child’s security blanket, it was only a paper-thin illusion of safety. Neither he or Veronica had expected to her chased through a blizzard, but just like you can never tell when Mother Nature is in one of her moods, these things can happen at random.

They were walking home from rehearsals and decided to cut through the park for a nice little scenic route. Both Damian and Veronica had tried out for the school play Romeo and Juliet awhile back and they both got in, so they were often staying late for practice. The sky turned that bright orange color and the golden beams made the snow glimmer.

Despite the beauty, it soon became apparent that there were other footsteps. Damian and Veronica stopped and turned around to see two teenage boys walking through the trees. They looked like seniors and appeared to be high out of their minds.

“Well, well, well,” The one with brown hair says, “Look who it is. The Fag of North Shore. And that weird little one.” He waved a hand at Veronica.

“We were just leaving,” Damian said, grabbing Veronica by the arm.

“Don’t leave!” Whined the second, “Let’s have some fuuun! You like sucking dick, don’t you?”

Damian grit his teeth, mainly out of annoyance and not anger. He was used to comments like that.

“We’re leaving.” He repeated, swerving around the two with Veronica in tow.

“Hey.” Growled the first, “Don’t move.”

He was pointing a handgun at the two juniors. They froze in their spots. The snow began to fall harder.

“What do you want from us?” Damian asked.

“Take did your clothes.” The second guy demanded bluntly.

Veronica did so slowly, like her muscles were sticky with syrup. She unzipped her blue coat and dropped it to the ground. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Damian’s hand moving. At first she thought it was just nervous tremors, but then she realized he was fingerspelling.
She looked at him and nodded. As risky as it was, they had no other choice.

Veronica took off in some random direction, not looking back even when she heard a gunshot from behind. There was no pain, so she didn’t stop.

It was dark and the fierce snowfall didn’t help at all. The blizzard hit fast and came down hard. Sharp takes cut through her clothes and slashed deep into her bones like freezing claws.

She doesn’t know where she was when she finally came to stop to catch her breath. She doesn’t know if she was followed or if Damian got away. She remembered the gunshot and felt her stomach twist in fear. She had fled without making sure her friend was okay, and he might have been dead. The bullet could have shattered his skull or ruptured his head. He could be bleeding out in the snow at this very moment. Dead. Alone.

Veronica looked around frantically and started calling out Damian name desperately. The howling wind blocks out her voice. She shivered harder.

She finds a big stick and decides to keep it around for some sort of protection. She’s looking around in every direction, but it’s hard to see anything with the flurry of snow and her swaying vision. She was scared out of her mind, but kept going for Damian’s sake. She had to make sure he was okay.

Every sound scared her. She’s constantly looking over her shoulder, afraid that someone might be trying to sneak up in her. Her fears come to life when she heard snow crunching to her left.

Standing there, a few yards away, was one of the ratty-looking teenagers. He smirks widely when they make eye contact.

“Hey there, baby,” He purred.

“Get away from me!” Veronica yelled, holding the stick up like she thought it would actually protect her.

“Cool down,” The guy drawls, stumbling forward, “This doesn’t have to get messy. I just want to get a piece of that sweet ass of yours.”

“Stay away!”

The guy’s expression turns to one a toddler would make when they don’t get the toy they wanted. Coming from a teenager makes it ten times more disturbing. He points the gun at Veronica.

“Get down on your knees, bitch. Now.”

Veronica doesn’t listen, instead making a beeline in the other direction. There’s a gunshot and a burning sensation in her right arm. She gasps in shock, expecting to see a bullet hole in her forearms, but only found an angry red-orange streak in her skin. It was just a graze.

Pressing forward, and feeling a little lucky, Veronica turned sharply in a different direction to try and trick up her chaser. Thistles and burrs sticking out of the snow tore up her ankles. Eventually, she had to slow down to catch her breath. She wondered if this was how Kurt felt when JD chased him through the woods.
Manic footsteps suddenly stomped through the wind and Veronica was tackled to the ground. She screamed and threw her arms out in front of herself. She kicked out her legs and claws with her fingernails, refusing to give in to this guy. They tussled in the snow, probably looking like two angry cats fighting each other.

The boy yells out in pain when nails scrape across his face. He drops the gun and Veronica lunges for it. She jumps to her feet and stands above the guy, pointing the muzzle at his face.

“W-woah, hey,” He stutters, holding his hands up, “I-it was just a joke!”

Veronica gives him a hard stare as she clicks the hammer of the gun. She saw every muscle in the guy’s body clench when a bullet clinked into place. This feels so natural to her and she hates it.

“H-hold on! Hold on!” The senior begged, “P-please don’t shoot! Please! I-I have a girlfriend!”

A few feet away, the ghosts watched. The girl holding the gun with a vacant expression doesn’t look like the Veronica Sawyer they know. This person was a stranger.

Everything about this situation wasn’t right. It struck a nerve inside Kurt and Ram.

“Don’t.” Heather said firmly.

Veronica looks at her, then back at the senior. She puts her finger on the trigger and says through her teeth,

“Go. Get the hell out of here and never mess with my friends again or I’ll shoot your fucking brains out.”

The guy listens and scampered away like a dog with its tail between its legs, tripping a few times as he made his escape.

Only then, once the danger is gone, can Veronica relax. She drops the gun into the snow and starts to walk out of the forest. Kurt and Ram won’t even look in her direction. Her body feels numb, and not just from the cold. It’s on the same high as it was after JD killed himself. She felt like a zombie.

Veronica didn’t know where Janis was when she entered the house. She didn’t call or even bother looking around, she just went straight for the staircase to go take a shower. While grabbing a few things, she thought of Damian, and could only hope that he got out, too.

Sitting under the torrent of hot rain, she watched blood run from her thighs. It doesn’t hurt- not anymore. She’s numb to the pain she craves so badly. She picks open some of the thin cuts on her arm.

Staring at the ugly scar on her leg makes her feel worse, therefore making her feel better. She remembers back to the suicide attempt and cringes. Sometimes she wonders why she even tried, other times she wishes she actually died. At that moment, she’s in between.

After the blood flowing from the fresh cuts on her thigh clotted, Veronica got out of the shower. She didn’t bother drying off and checked her messages before looking at her diary, which she had brought in.

“Dear Diary,

Have you ever seen blood on snow? Let me tell you, it’s one of the worst things to look at, ever...”
She flinched in pain when she dipped her quill into one of the open scabs on her arm, then continued to write, watching red letters appear on the page.

Chapter End Notes

it’s exactly what you think.

The Romeo and Juliet plot came out of nowhere, but I was impatient! what is possibly my favorite chapter is next!!
the girl who lived

Chapter Summary

She only wanted to help.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is much more than it seems. Read in between the lines. There are references and hints to past chapters. Any detail can connect to things in the story.

The yelling nearby was starting to get out of hand. A fight was going to break loose and the last thing anyone needed was a dead body lying in the streets. They were on their last straw with these quarrels, and everyone will pay if they’re caught again. Veronica quite liked having her head on her shoulders, so she took matters into her own hands and ran out.

“Part, fools!” She yelled, holding her hands out to try and keep the two groups away from each other, “Put up your swords. You know not what you do!”

Clad in a heather grey-blue wool tunic and fur pants with a brown cloak and charcoal colored scarf, she spins around to make sure nobody is striking. The single fire orange, diamond-shaped earring jangles from her earlobe.

There’s a harsh laugh and she wheels around to face none other than Jason, a brute by nature with an ego big enough to fill all of Verona. Veronica narrows her eyes at him, but kept her body language loose. She didn’t want to fight.

“What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds? Turn thee, Benvolio; look upon thy death.” Jason says and his sword gleams under the rays of light.

“I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword,” Veronica said. “Or manage it to part these men with me.”

Apparently she said something wrong, as anger crossed Jason face.

“What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word.” He spits. “As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee. Have at thee, coward!”

He lunges forward with his sword brandished and Veronica jumps back, scrambling for her dagger. The groups began to shout and attack again- so much for that attempt at peace. People are speaking but it’s covered up by all that yelling. The only voice that can reach the fighter’s ears is that of the prince, who yells his commands. It’s a good thing, too, as Jason had knocked Veronica to the ground and had his blade to her throat. He lowers his weapon and backs away with a “tsk” under his breath. Veronica fixes her cloak and listens to the warning that’s being stated.

After that, she’s sent out on a hunt to find her cousin, who just happens to be the one and only Glen
Coco. She finds him monologuing to himself in a tree; classic Romeo.

Her case of the shakes has worn off significantly. Going to the market and chasing after her cousin weirdly soothes her nerves. Anxiety rushes back every time she steps under the light, but it filters out each time.

“Tut, man, one fire burns out another’s burning; one pain is lessened by another’s anguish.”

Glen glances down at her with an arched eyebrow. They’re going to the market to pick up some fruit.

“Turn giddy, and be helped by backward turning. One desperate grief cures with another’s anguish. Take thou some new infection to thy eye. And the rank poison of the old will die.”

Glen rolls his eyes.

“Your plantain leaf is excellent for that.” He grumbled.

“For what, I pray thee?” Veronica asks.

“For your broken shin.” Glen deadpans.

Veronica swerved around Glen and stops in front of him, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Why Romeo, art thou mad?”

“Not mad, but bound more than a madman is.” Glen answers.

He puts a hand to Veronica’s face and pushes her away. He steps forward with a dramatic look in his eyes.

“Shut up in prison, kept without my food. Whipped and tormented, and-“

He stopped when he saw a boy looking around confusedly with a note in his hand.

“Good e’en, good fellow.”

The boy perks up and trots over.

“God gi’ good e’en. I pray, sir, can you read?” He asks.

Veronica looks over from the fruit stand she was over at, a curious look in her eyes.

“Ay,” Glen answers, “Mine own fortune in my misery.”

“Perhaps you have learned it without book. But I pray, can you read anything you see?”

“Ay,” He says again, “If I know the letters and the language.”

“You say honestly. Rest you merry.”

“Stay, fellow. I can read.”

The boy passes the note over to Glen and he begins to read from the paper. As he does, Veronica’s expression increasingly lights up at what is being recited out loud.

“A fair assembly.” Glen says after he finished, “Whither should they come?”
“Up.” Says the boy.

Glen tilts his head.

“Whither? To supper?”

“To our house.”

“Whose house?”

“My master’s.”

“Indeed I should have asked thee that before.” Glen nodded.

“Now I'll tell you without asking,” The boy starts, “my master is the great rich Capulet; and if you be not of the house of Montagues, I pray, come and crush a cup of wine.” He smiles and bows, “Rest you merry!”

He exits.

Veronica does an adorable little dance once he is gone and Glen turns to look at her with an eyebrow raised.

“At this same ancient feast of Capulet's sups the fair Rosaline whom thou so lovest, with all the admired beauties of Verona: go thither; and, with unattainted eye, compare her face with some that I shall show, and I will make thee think thy swan a crow.” She said.

Glen blinked and then snorted.

“When the devout religion of mine eye maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires; and these, who often drown'd could never die, transparent heretics, be burnt for liars! One fairer than my love! The all-seeing sun ne’er saw her match since first the world begun.”

“Tut, you saw her fair, none else being by, herself poised with herself in either eye: But in that crystal scales let there be weigh'd your lady's love against some other maid that I will show you shining at this feast, and she shall scant show well that now shows best.”

Glen stared at Veronica for a long time before sighing.

“I'll go along, no such sight to be shown, but to rejoice in splendor of mine own.”

After exiting for the next scene, Damian walks over to Veronica and smiled. He gave her an encouraging and comforting side-hug.

“You’re doing amazing, sweetie,” He whispered.

She’s still shaking a little, but that’s natural. This is her first performance ever, after all. And it’s opening night. She didn’t think she would last her first few lines, but they she heard Janis and her friends cheer loudly from the audience when she went on, and suddenly she could say everything with ease.

“Thanks,” She grins, “Your first scene is coming up. You ready?”

“Of course!” Damian beams, “I’ve been waiting all day. I was born ready!”

Veronica chuckles and watches from the wings before it was time to go back on. She grabbed some
masks and tossed two over to Damian and Glen. They all enter together, with Damian’s arm around Glen’s shoulders and Veronica walking backwards to face them.

“What, shall this speech be spoke for our excuse?” Glen said, practically dragging himself, “Or shall we on without apology?”

Veronica groans audibly at his statement.

“The date is out of such prolixity!” She exclaims, “We’ll have no Cupid hoodwink’d with a scarf, bearing a Tartar’s painted bow of lath, scaring the ladies like a crow-keeper; nor no without-book prologue, faintly spoke after the prompter, for our entrance: but let them measure us by what they will; we’ll measure them a measure, and be gone.”

Glen isn’t interested.

“Give me a torch. I am not for this ambling.” He said, “Being but heavy I will bear the light.”

Veronica and Damian exchange unamused looks.

“Nay, gentle Romeo,” Damian says, “we must have you dance.”

Glen shook his head, worming out of Damian’s arms.

“Not I, believe me: you have dancing shoes with nimble soles: I have a soul of lead so stakes me to the ground I cannot move.”

“You are a lover. Borrow Cupid’s wings and soar with them above a common bound.” Damian tries to persuade.

“I am too sore enpierced with his shaft,”

Veronica raises an eyebrow at what Glen had said.

“to soar with his light feathers, and so bound, I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe: under love's heavy burden do I sink.”

“And to sink in it should you burden love-“ Damian reprimands, “Too great oppression for a tender thing.”

“Is love a tender thing? It is too rough, too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like a thorn.”

Damian groaned at Glen’s stubbornness. He crosses over to Veronica and gestures for her.

“If love be rough with you, be rough with love!” He said while pushing Veronica over, “Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down!”

Veronica scrambled away from him on her hands and knees.

“Give me a case to put my visage in: a visor for a visor! What care I what curious eye doth quote deformities? Here are the beetle brows shall blush for me.”

Veronica stands up, finding an opportunity to jump back into the conversation with something to say.

“Come, knock and enter, and no sooner in but every man betake him to his legs.”
Damian and Glen look at her for a moment before turning back to each other. Veronica looks insulted.

“A torch for me: let wantons light of heart tickle the senseless rushes with their heels, for I am proverb’d with a grandsire phrase; I’ll be a candle-holder, and look on. The game was ne’er so fair, and I am done.”

Glen tries to walk away, but Damian grabs him by the arm and pulls him back.

“Tut!” He says, “Dun’s the mouse, the constable’s own word: if thou art dun, we’ll draw thee from the mire of this sir-reverence love, wherein thou stick’st up to the ears.” Damian waves an arm and starts to walk, “Come, we burn daylight, ho!”

Glen doesn’t move.

“Nay, that’s not so.” He said.

“I mean, sir, in delay we waste our lights in vain, like lamps by day. Take our good meaning, for our judgment sits five times in that ere once in our five wits.” Damian urges.

“And we mean we’ll in going to this masque, but ‘tis no wit to go.” Glen argues.

“Why, may one ask?”

“I dream’d a dream tonight.”

“And so did it.”

“Well, what was yours?”

“That dreamers often lie.”

“In bed, asleep while they do dreams come true.”

Damian smirked, then began:

“O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you. She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes in shape no bigger than an agate-stone on the fore-finger of an alderman, drawn with a team of little atomies athwart men's noses as they lie asleep; her wagon-spokes made of long spiders' legs, the cover of the wings of grasshoppers, the traces of the smallest spider's web, the collars of the moonshine's watery beams, her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film, her wagoner a small grey-coated gnat, not so big as a round little worm prick’d from the lazy finger of a maid; her chariot is an empty hazel-nut made by the joiner squirrel or old grub, time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers. And in this state she gallops night by night through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love; o'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight, o'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees, o'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream, which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues, because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are: Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose, and then dreams he of smelling out a suit; and sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail tickling a parson's nose as a' lies asleep, then dreams, he of another benefice: sometimes she driveth o'er a soldier's neck, and then dreams he of cutting foreign throats, of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades, of healths five-fathom deep; and then anon drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes, and being thus frightened swears a prayer or two and sleeps again. This is that very Mab that plats the manes of horses in the night, and bakes the elflocks in foul sluttish hairs, which once untangled, much misfortune bodes: this is the hag, when maids lie on their backs, that presses them and learns them first to bear, making them women of good carriage: this is she--"
“Peace, peace, Mercutio!” Glen yelled, holding his hands over Veronica’s ears, “Peace! Thou talk’st of nothing.”

Damian lowers his arms and snickers. He pulls Veronica over to his side, making Glen grab for her before giving up.

“True, I talk of dreams,” Damian says, “which are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain fantasy, which is as thin of substance as the air and more inconstant than the wind, who woos,” He spins Veronica around and then dips her, “even now the frozen bosom of the north, and, being anger’d, puffs away from thence,” He dramatically drops Veronica, “Turning his face to the dew-dropping south.”

Veronica scrambled to her feet. She fixes her hair and smooths out her shirt and speaks:

“This wind you talk of blows us from ourselves,” She points out, “Supper is done, and we shall come too late.”

“I fear too early.” Glen grumbled, “for my mind misgives some consequence yet hanging in the stars shall bitterly begin his fearful date with this night's revels and expire the term of a despised life closed in my breast by some vile forfeit of untimely death. But He, that hath the steerage of my course.”

He sighs heavily. Veronica and Damian perk up, looking excited.

“Direct my sail. On, lusty gentlemen.”

Veronica and Damian laugh.

“Strike drum!” Veronica cheers.

They all exit.

Little did they know that someone from above with red glowing eyes was watching them in the wings.

After two servingmen finished talking, the partygoers entered, along with Veronica and Damian in masks. Glen didn’t come on with them, but they just figured he ran to the bathroom real quick.

But he didn’t come back on. He wasn’t there to say his lines to one of the servants, but the others managed to work around it. They couldn’t skip around the whole meeting scene between Romeo and Juliet, though.

Veronica and Damian stood near the back, as they didn’t really have any lines. They were exchanging worried looks.

“...Now seeming sweet, convert to bitt’rest gall.” Jason finished, which was Glen’s cue line.

Nothing.

The actress who played Juliet, Lea Edwards, loitered around up on the apron. Guests were dancing behind her. Classical music was playing, but nothing was being said. Something had to be done.

It was Veronica who moved up and approached Lea. She bowed a little before offering a hand.

“Shalt we dance?”
Lea looked her up and down for a moment before catching on. This was about to be all improv.

“How kind.”

She took Veronica’s hand and the two of them begin to dance. Veronica had to be at least a foot shorter and never did learn how to ballroom dance, but she made it work.

“And who shalt thee beest?” Lea asked, probing to be quiet fluent in Shakespearean. “A knight in shining armeth’r?”

Thank god that Veronica has read enough Shakespeare to have picked up on how his characters talk.

“Nay, fair lady,” She replies, “I am a Benvolio.”

Lea quirks a brow.

“A Benvolio?”

“That is what those gents calleth me, yes,” Veronica smiled, “May I know yours?”

“Juliet.”

Veronica nodded. She quickly fell into the gentle steps of the waltz.

“What bringeth thee to this party?” Lea asked, “The fine wine? Love, perhaps?” She shifts her shoulders and smirks.

Veronica snorts.

“Nay. That is not for me.” She says, “Nay, I’m hither to escape family. The lord- mine uncle- can beest so smothering oft, and thither is so better way to get thee hence of his lectures than to sneak out!”

“I know what thee mean.”

This improvision scene was going on a lot longer than either of them thought, but they couldn’t back out now. At least the audience looked interested.

“Thee hath said thee wast avoiding family, yes? You maketh those folks sound as they are lacking much valor. Is that true?” Lea tilted her head.

“Nay. I might beest just squealing nonsense.” Veronica says, “They are not bad. I like mine cousin. I think thee wilt, too, if ‘t be true that gent ever showeth up.” She says that last part through her teeth, and Lea can’t help but laugh. She stifles it quickly.

“Not an early bird?”

“Nay.”

The dance continued. Veronica’s hands started to get sweaty.

“Wherefore didst thee decide to come and waltz with I, might I inquire?” Lea asked, “Don’t receive me wrong, thee seem v’ry sweet, you are just a little...well, little.”

Veronica stopped and dropped her arms to her side. The onlookers laugh.
“I do not know how to take that.” She said, “Hither I bethought ‘twas because of mine breasts.”

“Nay, nay, thy breasts behold just fine.” Lea says quickly.

More laughter- always a good sign.

“It’s because I an already courting someone. Well, that gent is mine suitor.”

Veronica crossed her arms over her chest and tilted her head.

“Thee doth not sound joyous about that. Wherefore?”

“I don’t very much has’t a choice in the matter. My lord wanteth to befall and I must went with to make him happy.” Lea explains.

“Would that make you happy?”

Lea is quiet. A spotlight comes down on the two of them.

“Now, I’m not saying to wend against thy father’s wishes or anything, it’s your life, but I’m simply saying that maybe thee should liveth it to how thee please.” Veronica paused. “Ah, but what fantasies do I speak of? If be true that wast to ever befall, I wouldn’t trouble myself with that of what mine own lord wants. Bad example-“ She shakes her head, “What I’m trying to tell you, Juliet, is that you shouldn’t at each moment alloweth someone to guide thee around by a leash. Live a little. Take risks. Find true love. Get wild!”

Lea laughed a little.

“A natural poet, aren’t thee?” She sighed slightly, “Well, what would you doth in mine situation?”

“Oh, I doth not know.” Veronica shrugged, “Kill myself.”

Lea snorted.

“Thank you, Benvolio. Really.”

From behind her, in the wings, Veronica noticed one of the stagehands waving and pointing to Glen, who looks a little weary but ready to go.

“You’re welcome, but forsooth, our time hath come to an end. I must make my leave now. But doth not forget what I said. And I desire we can meet up again.”

She takes a step back and bows.

“Farewell, Juliet!”

“Farewell, Benvolio!”

Veronica turns and walks upstage. People applaud, but she doesn’t know if it’s for her and Lea’s improvised performance or Glen, who just entered. Either way, she’s relieved.

One of Damian’s arms wrap around her and she leans into the embrace.

“...Oh my god!” She mouths to him and he chuckled lightly.

“...You did amazing!” He mouths back.
They turn to watch Romeo and Juliet meet. When her cue came up, Veronica shook herself free from Damian and walked up to Glen, who looked much calmer.

“Away, begone,” She says, waving her hands, “The sport is at the best.”

Glen signs and smooths out his shirt.

“Ay, so I fear. The more is my unrest.”

They exit, along with Damian and the guests.

“What happened to you?” Damian asked Glen once they were in the wings.

“I really don’t know.” Glen sighed, “One moment I was backstage, and then I’m in some storage closet.”

Veronica and Damian exchange looks.

“Well, at least you’re back now.” Veronica says.

A chill ripples through the air and she shivered. She could sense the ghosts nearby, but she couldn’t call for them since there were people nearby. A bad feeling nagged at the back of her head, but she tried to just push it away.

Scenes go by and Damian starts to get more and more excited. Veronica knows why and they soon walk on for a very important scene.

“I pray thee, good Mercutio, let’s retire.” Veronica sighs tiredly, dragging her feet as she walked.

The earring she’s wearing feels like a piece of the sun scorching in her ear. The stage lights are powerful, casting bright beams of heat onto the floor. They make her feel like she’s standing in the middle of the Sahara desert and not an auditorium.

“The day is hot, the Capulets abroad, and, if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl. For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring.”

“Thou art like one of those fellows that when he enters the confines of a tavern claps me his sword upon the table and says ‘God send me no need of thee!’ and by the operation of the second cup draws it on the drawer, when indeed there is no need.”

Veronica listens to what Damian says, then raises her eyebrows. She crossed her arms over her chest.

“Am I like such a fellow?” She asked.

Damian blinks before laughing and wrapping an arm around her.

“Come, come, thou art as hot a Jack in thy mood as any in Italy, and as soon moved to be moody, and as soon moody to be moved.” He states.

Veronica looks up at him with a questioning look.

“And what to?”

“Nay, an there were two such, we should have none shortly, for one would kill the other. Thou!
Why thou wilt quarrel with a man that hath a hair more, or a hair less, in his beard, than thou hast: thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but because thou hast hazel eyes: what eye but such an eye would spy out such a quarrel? Thy head is as fun of quarrels as an egg is full of meat, and yet thy head hath been beaten as addle as an egg for quarreling: thou hast quarrelled with a man for coughing in the street, because he hath wakened thy dog that hath lain asleep in the sun: didst thou not fall out with a tailor for wearing his new doublet before Easter? With another, for tying his new shoes with old riband? And yet thou wilt tutor me from quarreling!

“An I were so apt to quarrel as thou art, any man should buy the fee-simple of my life for an hour and a quarter.” Veronica says.

“The fee-simple! O simple!”

The two of them laugh, but Veronica stops abruptly.

“By my head, here come the Capulets!” She yelped.

“By my heel, I care not.” Damian growled.

Jason and others enter.

“Follow me close, for I will speak to them.” He says to his followers before walking up to Damian and Veronica. “Gentlemen, good den: a word with one of you.”

Damian steps in front of Veronica protectively.

“And but one word with one of us? Couple it with something; make it a word and a blow.” He said and Veronica prayed he wouldn’t start up more unnecessary drama.

“You shall find me apt enough to that, sir, and you will give me occasion.”

“Could you not take some occasion without giving?”

Jason narrowed his eyes and straightened out his tunic, clearly trying to stamp down his temper.

“Mercutio, though consort’st with Romeo—“

“Consort?!” Damian barked, cutting him off, “What, dost thou make us minstrels? An thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords: here's my fiddlestick; here's that shall make you dance. 'Zounds, consort!”

Veronica dares to step out from behind Damian and gets in between the two, holding her arms out. She would have to continue her duties as peacemaker. Bodies on the floor would not look good.

“We talk here in the public haunt of men.” She says, raising her voice, “Either withdraw unto some private place and reason coldly of your grievances or else depart! Here all eyes gaze upon us.”

Damian seems to be in no mood to talk of peace. He bats Veronica out of the way and steps forward.

“Men’s eyes were made to look, and let them gaze; I will not budge for no man’s pleasure, I.” He says, and Glen enters sooner after.

Veronica watches as aggressive banter is exchanged with a worried expression. Glen is trying to be passive, attempting to truce with Jason by saying that they were now kin or something, but Jason
isn’t having any of it. She must have jumped three feet off of the ground when Damian draws his sword.

“Mercutio!” She yelped.

“Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?” Damian growled, ignoring her.

“What wouldst thou have with me?” Jason says.

“Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives; that I mean to make bold withal, and as you shall use me hereafter, drybeat the rest of the eight. Will you pluck your sword out of his pitcher by the ears? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out.”

The snarl on Damian’s face is startling and unnatural for him.

“I am for you.” Jason says, drawing his sword.

“Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up.” Glen says, stepping in front of Damian.

“Come, sir, your passado!” Damian barks.

Veronica gets in front of Jason to try and keep him away Damian.

“This is not needed!” She tried and one of the Capulet followers must have thought she was attacking Jason, because they leapt out of line and slashed a knife at her.

“YOU BLOODY GIT!” Damian shrieked in rage, shoving Glen to the floor to lunge at Jason.

All hell broke loose. The street erupted into pandemonium. Glen is running around trying to separate everyone. Damian and Jason are hacking and slashing away at each other, fury and bloodlust dancing in their eyes. Veronica is on her knees, tying her scarf around her bloody arm.

“Draw, Benvolio; beat down their weapons!” Glen yelled, waving his arms around.

Veronica leapt to her feet and jumped into the fray, attempting to stop all the fighting. She ducked under swings and pushed people out of the way of oncoming blades. Metal clashing against metal echoed in her ears, along with Glen’s panicked babbling.

“Gentlemen, for shame, forbear this outrage!” He continued to shout, “Tybalt, Mercutio, the prince expressly hath forbidden bandying in Verona’s streets! Hold, Tybalt! Good Mercutio!”

Everyone ignored him.

Jason ducked under Glen’s arms when he tried to block him, lancing his sword forward. Damian howled sharply, his cry reverberating of the walls of the auditorium.

“I am hurt!” He shrilled in pain, staggering backwards while clutching at his stomach, “A plague o’ both your houses! I am sped. Is he gone, and hath nothing?”

He collapses to the ground and Veronica dove to his side, clasping one of his hands in hers. Blood is hot and sticky on her fingers, coating both their palms. She notices the dark red growing on his tunic and swallowed hard.

“What, art thou hurt?” She asked.

“Ay, ay,” Damian gasped, “a scratch, a scratch; marry, ’tis enough. Where is my page? Go, villain,
fetch a surgeon.”

“Mercutio, I doth not think-“

Veronica stopped and took off her cloak, pressing it to Damian’s wound. He screwed his eyes shut and hissed between his teeth. She held it there, hoping to stop the bleeding.

Glen shuffled over, shaking a little. He knelt down and lifted Damian’s head off of the hard ground.

“Courage, man; the hurt cannot he much.” He said, a slight hopeful tone in his voice.

Damian gave him a hard stare.

“No, ‘tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door, but ‘tis enough, ‘twill serve. Ask for me tomorrow, and shall find me a grave man.”

Veronica tried to say “no” but she could only mouth it, as her voice didn’t seem to work. She shook her head and looked at Glen, who was equally as pale. His eyes were wide and horrified.

“I am peppered, I am warrant, for this world. A plague o’ both your houses!” Damian howled again, “‘Zounds, a dog, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death! A braggart, a rogue, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic! Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm.”

Glen winced.

“I thought all for the best.” He muttered, his voice weak and soft.

Damian gave a gravely laugh that turned into a painful wheeze as blood splattered from his lips.

“Help me into some house, Benvolio, or shall I faint.” He tried to move and yowled again when he did, “A plague o’ both your houses! They have made worm’s meat of me! I have it, and soundly too, your houses!”

Veronica helps him up and they exit while Glen went on about Juliet in a solemn tone. When the girl walked back on, the copious amount of blood on her hands glimmer under the light. She stares at her palms for a long time, then finally looked up to make eye contact with Glen, who is still. Her lips quiver as she opens her mouth and a tear slid down her cheek.

“O Romeo, Romeo, brave Mercutio is dead!” She wailed, running to Glen to hug him.

They don’t part from the embrace for a few long moments, but when they do, anger and despair are contouring Veronica’s face.

“That gallant spirit has aspired the clouds, which too untimely here did scorn the earth.”

Something snapped in her chest when she spoke of her dear friend’s death. The truth hit home and fury bubbles to the surface.

She lunges at one of the gawking Capulets, screaming and cursing the family’s name. It takes Glen and a Montague servant to pull her off before she could claw the bystander’s eyes out, as much as they would love to see a Capulet’s eyeball rolling across the floor. Veronica struggled, kicking and scratching.

“The day’s black fate on more days doth depend; this but begins the woe, others must in.” Glen said, his voice nervous and shaky, but also slightly angry.
“Here comes the furious Tybalt back again.” Veronica snarled, jerking against the people restraining her.

“Alive, in triumph! And Mercutio slain! Away to heaven, respective length, and fire-eyed fury by my conduct now!”

Jason’s boots clack against the polished wooden floor, stepping around droplets of blood. Wet trails of Damian still drip down his blade.

“Now, Tybalt, take the villain back again, that late thou gravest me; for Mercutio’s soul is but a little way above our head, staying for thine to keep him company: either thou, or I, or both, must go with him.” Glen announced, drawing his own sword.

Veronica’s eyes bulge. For a moment, her rage is smothered and replaced with fear of what might happened next.

“Romeo, what do you do?” She demands, but is ignored.

“Thou, wretched boy, that didst consort him here,” Jason said, “shalt with him hence.”

“This shall determine that.”

They fight.

The yelling started again, but not as many are fighting anymore, just staring and screaming. One brave Capulet went up behind Glen and Veronica yelps. Driven forward by fear, she takes out her dagger from her belt and drove it into the Capulet’s back. He screeched and toppled over, clawing back at his spine.

With Veronica defending him from any other attackers, Glen kicked Jason to the ground. Jason yells in shock and says a few stuttered words, trying to apologize and get away. While on his knees, Glen grabs Jason roughly, brings his dagger in front of his face, and slits his throat while he’s still blubbering. Blood bubbles out from Jason’s lips and he makes choked noises while pawing at his neck before slumping to his side, no longer moving or making a sound.

“Romeo, away, begone!” Veronica shouted, “The citizens are up, and Tybalt slain. Stand not amazed: the prince will doom thee death, if thou art taken: hence be gone, away!”

Glen jumped away, his hands flying to his head in shock.

“O, I am a fortune’s fool!” He cried.

“Why dost thou stay?” Veronica said and Glen finally ran.

She stood there stiffly, answering to a citizen when she was spoken to. She was shaking again, hurt and angry and afraid. She had to answer to the prince, too, shakily explaining to everyone about what happened.

Then, there’s a blackout.

Intermission rolls around after the scene where Romeo and Juliet definitely have sex and that’s when Veronica started to notice the pain in her arm. It was a dull, but persistent throb that almost took her breath away at some points. When she was changing out of her bloody shirt for a clean one, she unwraps the scarf, peels off the blood packet on her forearm, and realized there is an actual cut in her skin. Her breath hitches in shock.
“You said you needed pain before. Too bad you haven’t noticed until now.”

She whirls around and there he is. Jason fucking Dean.

“Oh fuck off!” Veronica yelled, “You switched out that knife for a real one? And, let me guess, you also locked Glen in that closet?”

“Bingo.” JD smirks, “And I’m not done yet, darling. Let’s just hope the show can still go on.”

Veronica didn’t know what he meant until the scene where Juliet is about to fake her death. She sees him up on the metal bar that holds up the lights.

Lea didn’t get to finish her speech before drinking from the vial, as someone yelled and then she was quite literally tackled to the ground. There was a loud crash and the audience gasps, some people scream. She didn’t understand why until she notices that a spotlight has fallen and smashed on the floor. Veronica is half-sprawled our on top of her, blinking rapidly. It’s dead quiet for a moment, and then curtains close so the director can apologize and clean up.

Veronica was thanked profusely after she basically saved Lea’s life. She was more happy about the fact that the other ghosts found JD and beat him up for his stupid actions.

The show could go on.

It did, and scenes went by. Veronica watched Juliet’s funeral and then ran to the next city go tell Romeo, who had been banished. The news was hard to get out, as she got choked up multiple times while trying to get the words out. When she did, Glen made a point to ride all the way back to Verona to see his bride, with Veronica following him the whole way. But she couldn’t follow him everywhere.

Enter Romeo and Benvolio.

“Benvolio, you can go no further.”

“But-“

Glen held up a hand, silencing Veronica.

“Take this letter and give it to my lord and father,” He slips a note out from his best and gives it to Veronica. “Farewell, Benvolio. Let us say goodnight.”

They embrace. The hug lasts a long time, but Glen eventually has to push away.

“Why?” Veronica squeaks out, catching Glen before he was move away, “Why must you do this? Why must you ascend upon death and leave? Leave me?”

Her head is tilted down to the ground, not daring to look at the man who will soon be a corpse upon the ground. Her fists clench tightly. Tears stream down her cheeks.

“You can’t leave me. Please. I-I have nobody left. Mercutio- A-and now you- You don’t have to-“

“For my lady’s faith.” Glen said, and Veronica wanted to scream at him for that answer. She doesn’t, and he continues, “I must be by her side. I will return this precious ring she had given to me. And I’ll be gone.”

Veronica jumps into another hug, clinging tightly and pressing her face into Glen’s shoulder as she wept softly. People in the crowd coo. Some were crying just from that scene alone.
“I will miss you.” She mutters.

“I will, too.” Glen says, and he squeezes her shoulders after they part. “Live a good life. I love you. Goodbye, dear friend.”

“Farewell, Romeo.”

Glen ruffles her hair one last time before crossing over to where Lea laid on a stone slab, Veronica lingers around near the back, reading the letter over. The notorious Paris- Kevin G- enters, and starts to stride downstage.

“Stop!” Veronica yelled, “You must not disturb them.”

Kevin turns to her and spits.

“You. Aren’t you one of those filthy Montagues?”

Veronica sucks in a deep breath and stands up as tall as she can.

“I am a Benvolio.” She said, “You cannot go in there.”

“Oh yeah? Like a little nat like you can stop me.”

Veronica lashes out, but Kevin smashes a glass bottle on her head and she collapsed. Things are getting black.

“That’s what I thought.” Kevin snorted from above.

Cool darkness.

Veronica stirs eventually. She crawls and drags herself at first, but then is able to stagger up to her feet. She moves to the group huddled a few feet away and pushes through to see three bodies lying sprawled out on the ground. Two with bloody wounds in their chests and one with something poisonous oozing from its mouth.

**Well isn’t this ironic.**

She falls to her knees beside one of the bodies and holds it close, ignoring the things the other people are saying. Something about a suicide. More than one. She had been expecting this, and yet it still came as a shock when it happened.

“This-family-is-poison.” She said with so much force it sounded painful.

The prince and attendants enter. She doesn’t let go of the body. Someone says something about a truce. She thinks that’s utter bullshit.

Veronica does cry during the funeral. Because when you’re the one who lived, and all your friends are fucking dead, it’s hard to keep the tears at bay.

Then, nothing.

Cool darkness. Let us say goodnight.
Chapter Summary

Giving gifts to ghosts doesn’t mean you’re facing your fears, it just makes you a good person.

Chapter Notes

Chapter warnings- Heavily implied rape/molestation/sexual assault and self harm, Mentioned suicide attempt, Explicit descriptions

“Do you want to play music? I have an aux chord.”

Veronica lifted her head from the window and blinked at the driver for a moment.

“I have earbuds. Thank you, though.”

The driver nodded and focused back on the road.

Veronica hadn’t even known Uber driver’s can take you across states until she looked it up, but if you have the money, they’ll take you anywhere you request. So now she’s being driven all the way to her hometown from Evanston. It was going to be a little over two hours.

She put her earbuds in and scrolled through some music, eventually finding a good playlist.

“Hey, I’m going to try and take a nap.” She said before closing her eyes and preparing herself for the long drive ahead.

———

Technically, this all must have started with Romeo and Juliet.

Never before had Veronica heard so many people cheering. Cheering for her.

When the lights came back on and cast members went out one by one for curtain call, the audience screamed and clapped so loudly. Veronica had gone out with Damian to bow and the people shrieked. Her smile was wide and genuine. She allowed herself to dance with the others at the end, not gripped by the fingers of anxiety that were usually wrung around her throat. She was free.

Just then, she realized that this was something she wanted to do.

All her friends loved the performance, complimenting both her and Damian profusely. Regina and Janis looked so proud.

Despite all this, Veronica still doesn’t know why she cried. Four shows and she bawled in every single one of them. It was all fake, just acting, and yet she found herself sobbing up on that stage.
The audience must have thought she was just a really good actor that knew how to bring out true emotions and cry on command, but that was only half true. She felt spite for crying during a fake funeral and not her best friend’s real one.

She tries not to interpret Romeo and Juliet into the reason, though. The play was something she actually really enjoyed and wanted to do more of. (Though she would prefer to not have a bottle smashed over her head, even if it was just a breakaway)

Moving on, there was Karen prodding her about the ghosts. Veronica cursed to herself. She had completely forgotten that Karen had momentarily seen Heather in the bathroom during her...breakdown.

“Karen, there is no such thing as ghosts.” She would say, trying to swerve away from the blonde to get to her next class.

“But I saw one!” Karen said, “In the bathroom! You were there! Didn’t you see it?”

“No. I had been too busy throwing up in the sink.” Veronica deadpans, “Besides, that happened awhile ago. Just drop it. You were probably seeing things.”

Karen huffed and stomped her foot.

And then there was the diner incident where she met Satan’s father. Actually, that’s offensive to the devil...

Aaron had been going on about how he had to work the graveyard shift at his grandparent’s diner for the night. To say the least, he wasn’t excited, as there was one more day of midterms the next morning and, again, he would be there basically all night. Veronica still isn’t sure why she spoke up when she heard this.

“I can work with you tonight, Aaron.” She offered.

He perked up.

“Really? You don’t have to if you don’t want to.” He said, even though there was a hopeful look in his eyes.

Veronica shrugged.

“I don’t mind. Let’s do it.”

Aaron sighed in relief, happy that he wouldn’t be all alone that night.

That evening, around nine, he picked Veronica up and drove to the little diner on the side of the road. “Dusty’s Diner” is what the red glowing sign on the roof said.

“It sure is...a building.” Veronica said while stepping out of the car, “No offense.”

“None taken.” Aaron laughed slightly, “I don’t really like it, either.”

A little jingle chimed when the front door opened. Aaron hugged and greeted his grandparent’s, while also relieving the other workers from their shift.

“This is my friend, Veronica Sawyer,” He introduced the cobalt girl standing next to him, “She agreed to work with me tonight.”
“How sweet,” His grandma cooed.

After a short conversation, the two teenagers were given the keys and are left alone in the diner.

“They’re very trusting, aren’t they?” Veronica said.

“Yeah, pretty much.”

The diner was eerily quiet, even with the music playing from the overhead speakers. That’s just one of the great perks of working the graveyard shift. That, and staying up until ungodly hours of the morning. Veronica was struggling more with boredom than sleepiness, though. She could tell it was the same with Aaron.

This was a ratty little diner that stayed open for twenty-four hours on some days, and yet nobody really came in. The aura the place gave off was starting to make Veronica a little paranoid. She kept thinking she saw black figures standing out in the parking lot. She distracted herself from looking by washing the dishes.

Aaron looked up from the coffee he was pouring for a trucker who stopped by to get a hot drink and could immediately tell something was agitating his friend.

“Yo, Veronica, everything okay?” He asked while walking to go give the customer their cup.

“Yeah,” Veronica answered when he came back over, “Just a little paranoid, I guess.”

Aaron gave her a sympathetic look.

“That’s natural for working at one in the morning.” He said and patted her on the back.

The door chimes and they were the only ones left in the building again.

“Hungry?” Aaron asked while poking through one of the cabinets in the kitchen.

“I could eat.” Veronica answered.

They began to pull out ingredients to make pancakes, talking quietly, even though there was no one to disturb. While mixing the batter, a black pickup pulling up into the parking lot. At first, Veronica didn’t recognize who it was at first, but then she saw the squinted eyes and bear-like body structure.

The doorbell chimed and Big Bud Dean entered the diner.

The man didn’t seem to realize who he was looking at at first, but he did, he gave a loud laugh.

“Well I’ll be damned! Veronica!”

The cobalt girl was paralyzed, white-knuckling the menu she was holding.

“I was wondering what happened to you after...” Unreadable emotion, maybe fury, flitted through Bud’s eyes for a moment, “Well, you know.”

“Yeah.” Veronica finally said slowly, “I moved.”

“Doing the same as me then, huh? Running away from your sins.”

Veronica clenched her jaw.
“What can I get you, sir?”

Bud laughed harshly.

“Coffee.”

Veronica hurried into the kitchen, trying to keep her breathing steady. Aaron gave her a worried look.

“What’s wrong?” He asked, setting a hand on her shoulder.

“That’s my ex-boyfriend’s dad out there,” The girl whispered.

“The abusive boyfriend that killed himself?”

“Yeah.”

“Holy shit. What’s his dad doing here?”

“I have no idea.”

“Do you want me to kick him out?” Aaron asked and Veronica shook her head.

“He hasn’t done anything yet...not really.”

Her friend offered to go serve Bud for her, but she declined. Maybe confronting the man could help her with facing her other fears.

She walked out with a mug of steaming coffee and Bud gave a pleased hiss upon seeing her.

“So, how have you been, girl?”

“Umm... Good. What are you doing in Evanston?” Veronica asked.

“My work, of course.”

Veronica nodded slowly. That meant some building in the city was going to be blown to pieces soon.

“Listen, I’m sorry about, umm...about Jason.”

The words came out with her even thinking. Referring to JD like that sounded unnatural, but using his other name just made her feel sick.

Bud’s grip tightened on the cup and Veronica is sure he’s grinding his teeth.

“Oh, don’t be.” He said, “It was inevitable, really. The kid was sick in the head and there wasn’t much anyone could do anymore. He liked you a lot, though.”

“I know,” Veronica says, “Can I, umm, get you anything else?”

“This is fine.”

Veronica nodded and started to walk back to the kitchen.

“It’s a real shame, though,”
She slowed down to listen to what Bud was saying.

“We didn’t even have a body to bury. Not an empty casket, though, either. Just bits and pieces. Strips of cloth. An arm. You can’t run from what you’ve done, girl. Don’t even try.”

“Hey, we’re here.”

Veronica blinked her eyes and sat up, stretching out the sore spots in her neck and back. The Uber driver was turned around in his seat to look at her.

“How...?” She mumbled groggily.

“We’re here, kid.”

Suddenly, everything came back to Veronica. She nodded and grabbed her coat. When she stepped outside, snow crunched underneath her shoes. Drizzling rain pattered gently against her face.

“Thank you again.” She said to the driver, who had rolled down the window, “Umm... What are the chances that you could stick around? I won’t take long, and I-I know that might sound weird since there was a long drive here, but...I can pay. It’s okay if you can’t, though.”

The driver has pity in his eyes. He didn’t seem to willing about leaving a sixteen year old a state away from her home with a for sure ride back.

“How is thirty minutes?”

“That’s perfect.” Veronica smiled slightly, “Thank you.”

She took a deep breath, slipped on her jacket, and then walking into the cemetery.

JD hadn’t let Veronica watch Heather get lowered into the ground. He was bored of the funeral and she was dragged away with him. She had still been trying to keep up a front and not cry, but a strangled whimper had escaped her throat when she realized this. JD just looked at her. He didn’t even let her have a proper goodbye.

She went to Heather’s grave first. She read the writing on the tombstone over and over again. After the eleventh time, she crouched down a set a charm bracelet in the patch of dirt.

“So that’s why you bought that.”

She looked up to see Heather standing beside her. She stood.

“It’s beautiful. Thank you.”

Veronica smiled slightly and dipped her head, but sadness still clawed at her heart.

She went to Kurt and Ram’s graves and also put an offering down for them. All of the three ghosts were mostly silently, mainly out of respect. Heather was standing in between the boys with her head on one of their shoulders, all just quietly watching as the drizzle of rain turned into fluttering snow.

Veronica had come here to try and prove that she wasn’t from what she did. She willingly visited the graves of the people she killed. That had to mean something, right? If she had known where JD was buried, she would have gone there, too. Mainly to spit on his grave.
After a few more moments of silence, just soaking up the serenity, she took in a shaky breath and turned back to the car to take the ride home.

———

It was a little past eight-thirty was the front door opened and closed. Janis and a few of the others looking up from the TV when footsteps cross over to the staircase entrance. Veronica walks down into the basement, smiling at her friends.

“Hey, guys.”

Multiples voices chirped her name and that made her happy. She walks over and perched on the arm of the couch.

“Where were you?” Gretchen asked.

“Oh, you know...just visiting a place.”

Aaron snorted.

“Nice.”

Veronica joined in on watching the movie they had on until Regina asked about a journal she had borrowed for notes. Even though it was now winter break, it would still be nice to have it back for when school starts again.

“Oh, right!” Veronica said, “That’s up in my room. I can go grab it for you.”

“Don’t worry. I can go get it real quick.” Regina says while standing up.

She walked up to Veronica’s bedroom and, while grabbing her spiral, she noticed another journal sitting on the nightstand. Feeling a little snoopy, Regina tiptoed over and started to read.

Dear Diary,
It’s the first day of sophomore year and everyone is just as wild as I remember. Absolutely no one has seemed to mature one bit. Except me, maybe. I think I’m a mature person. A good person, too. Everyone else? Not so much.”

So this was a diary. Now Regina had to continue reading it. She nodded to herself, knowing anyone else would do the same, and flipped to another page.

“Dear Diary,
I had my first sleepover with the Heathers yesterday...and didn’t die. Yeah, you heard me right, diary! I survived a whole night with the demon queens of high school! And apparently my sleeping medicine made me basically high and I climbed a tree or something. I have no memory of it, but there are the texts I sent as proof.”

Regina laughed softly and continued on with another entry.

“Dear Diary,
The Heathers can’t seem to understand my love for Shakespeare. Not even Duke! It’s understandable, though. Not a lot of people get it.”
The pages were filled with innocent little stories about Veronica’s day, mainly including the Heathers, which Regina remembered the cobalt girl talking about. Or, at least they were innocent at first. Then things took a turn for the worst, but, at that point, Regina was too sucked in to put the journal down.

“Dear Diary,
I want to cry and throw up on myself and die. I can’t believe what I’ve done. I slept with the creepy trench coat kid- Jason Dean, JD for short. I had just left the party after being exiled and I was drunk and so, so stupid. I was screaming in my head, but my body didn’t say no. I just got out of the shower. I still don’t feel clean.
That’s not even the worst part, though. He- we-I have done something horrible. Terrible. I don’t know if I should write it here. I’m so scared.”

Regina continued on, now needing to know what Veronica was talking about. She got her answers quickly through a series of entries that made her stomach churn in horror.

“Dear Diary,
I killed her. I killed my best friend. I’ve been trying to deny it, but today was Heather’s funeral and it all came crashing down. JD didn’t let me cry. I didn’t get to see her casket get lowered into the ground. He just wanted to touch me.
But that doesn’t matter. I deserve his filthy hands scraping my body of all its innocence. I deserve all the pain he brings. I killed Heather Chandler, the demon queen of high school, my best friend.
I am a monster.”

“Dear Diary,
My teenage angst bullshit has a body count.
I thought I was funny when I came up with that, but I think I’ll throw up if I laugh. Two more people are dead. Kurt and Ram. Sure, they made up that sex rumor about me, but I never wanted them dead. They were only seventeen. But now they’re apparently homosexuals with bullet holes in their chests, almost completely naked in the woods. JD isn’t phased. I wish I could not care like he does.
The burn I gave myself earlier today in his car isn’t enough. I’m cutting a lot more, lately. I hope JD will take the hint of the scars on my thighs the next time he forces open my legs.”

“Dear Diary,
I’ve cried a lot lately. Thank god for birth control, though. JD is like a rabbit. He always has to have his hands on me. He’s suffocating me.
It hurts to walk, but I don’t know if that’s from me cutting my thighs on a daily basis or my boyfriend’s violent thrusts that leave me sore for days. I think he knows that he’s hurting me. He sees the tears. There’s no way he thinks my sobs are moans of pleasure. I think that turns him on even more. I swear to fucking god his dick is thorny and covered in quills because it hurts every time he penetrates me. I’ve never gotten used to it.
I don’t know what I’m going to do. I think I need to clean myself again. Maybe read Twelfth Night. It might help.”

“Dear Diary,
I just had a seizure.
It’s been only three hours since JD tried to blow up Westerburg and his suicide. My ears are
still ringing. I feel really sick. Mom and dad are at the bar. I wish Heather was alive.”

“Dear Diary,
I think I’m going to kill myself later. I don’t need to explain why. I don’t need to write a
suicide note, either. This diary is enough of a reason to explain my decision. People will
understand. In fact, they probably would be happy with it.
If you told me that I was going to commit suicide during the beginning of the school year, I
probably would have laughed you all the way out of Sherwood. But this is really going to
happen. I’ll admit that it’s actually really scary. This might be the last time I’ll see the sunset.
Why does true beauty only come out when it’s about to be taken away?
This is probably going to be my last entry. I want to apologize to anyone reading this for the
horror they’ve just read. I know. I’m a monster. Monsters need to die.
Don’t pray for me. Don’t weep for me. Don’t look for me, because I’ll be in hell.”

“Dear Diary,
That’s was a fucking bust.

P.s. The therapist said I have PTSD. That explains it.”

Regina felt like she couldn’t breath. She could not believe what she was reading. She doesn’t know
what disgusts her more, now knowing that Veronica killed three people or that she was constantly
being molested and horribly abused by her boyfriend. “Boyfriend,” really.

She can’t stop reading, though. The entries go on and on. There are multiple written from when she
had moved to Evanston. They aren’t that bad, in fact they’re actually harmless and cute, but they
get bad again. One page was written in a brownish color, like rust, which definitely was not red
ink.

She was so interested in the diary that she didn’t even realize someone was watching her until it
was too late to put the journal back into place.

“So,” Veronica said, standing in the doorway, “now you know.”
Regina jumped to her feet and spun around quickly. The light from the hallway glowed eerily around Veronica, casting distorted shadows across the floor. She stepped inside the room and shut the door.

“Are you going to kill me?” Regina blurts out.

Veronica gave her a hurt look.

“No...”

“Then why did you kill them?”

Her muscles tense up. For a moment, there’s the flicker of flaming fury in her eyes, but it’s chased away by fear and sorrow, like she was the one just finding out about murder.

“You don’t understand...”

Regina purses her lips and tilted her head a little.

“Explain it to me, then.”

“I didn’t know the cup was full of drainage cleaner,” Veronica stutters out, “I had to write a suicide note. We wouldn’t have gotten away with it if I hadn’t...”

“So this is what has been upsetting you.” Regina says more to herself than to the other girl.

“Upsetting?” Veronica echoed, “That’s an understatement for all the pain. I did terrible things to people. I’m guilty of so much. I only wanted to get back with the Heathers, but now I’m just...”

Her body convulses violently as she pounds her fists against her temples.

“Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!”

Veronica stumbled backwards into the wall and slumps to the ground in the corner, hugging her knees. She’s shuddering and sobbing, rocking back and forth.

“What are you guilty of?” Regina asked and Veronica looks at her like there at elephants parading
out of her ears.

“You saw what I wrote in that diary. I killed people. I hurt my friends. Two of them tried to commit suicide and the other one turned into a she-devil, all because of me. Everything lists me as the culprit.”

Parts of Regina wished she could be writing this all down. She was surprised by how open Veronica was, so she continued with more questions.

“Why did you do it?”

“I don’t know.” Veronica answers, “I thought the mug w-was full of milk. A-and he said the bullets were just tranquilizers and wouldn’t kill them. By the time I realized the truth, it was too late. They were dead, a-all of them.”

Veronica took a few shaky breaths to try and compose herself, but it didn’t work. More tears came down.

“JD wasn’t satisfied. He wanted more and he used me as leverage to get just that. He used fear and pain so I wouldn’t leave him, but...that isn’t an excuse for what I did. It doesn’t justify my actions. His abuse...I deserved it.”

“Is it true that he sexually abused you?”

Veronica wasn’t expecting that. She whipped her head up, staring at Regina like a deer with a gun in its face. It’s almost like she forgot that she had written about that. Her silence was enough of an answer, but she still spoke up after a moment of hesitance.

“Y-yes. But I deserved it.”

Regina made a disgruntled face. She can’t even begin to try and process the pain her friend must have been through- what she is still going through. When she looks over Veronica, she doesn’t see a murderer, but a trembling, frightened girl who was forced into hell against her will and robbed of her innocence. She doesn’t want to run away or yell or call the cops at all. She wants to hug her.

“He...wanted to blow up...our school.” Veronica continued, but it sounded like she was hurting herself just to get the words out, “I broke up with him. I pretended to hang myself because he was going to kill me for it. He settled with making a bomb and killing everyone in the whole school when he found me.”

Her breathing picks up and she screws her eyes shut.

“That’s how he died, Regina. He blew himself up after I stopped him. He died and I was left scarred by what he did.”

Her voice finally breaks off and she buried her face in her knees, violent sobs racking her body. The pain she’s in is so obvious that it even hurts Regina.

The blonde swallowed hard. She took a small step towards the corner Veronica was huddled in, her hand reaching out slightly.

“I didn’t know what to do, ‘Gina.” Veronica whimpered, looking up, “It hurt so badly, and yet I needed the pain. I want to beg for forgiveness. I know I don’t deserve it in anyway, but that’s what I want.”
She put her hands over her head and pulled on her hair, scraping her scalp with her fingernails. She coughed and wheezed, almost choking on her sobs.

Regina moved again, this time getting close enough to crouch in front of the crying girl. Whatever she did next, she had to think it through. One wrong word could make Veronica unresponsive to her.

“Veronica, look at me.” She said, “Breathe. Can you do that for me? Just breathe. It’s going to be okay.”

“No it’s not!” Veronica cried, “What I did...i-it’s not okay! None of it was okay!”

“Veronica,” Regina said more firmly, “I understand. You’re scared. Just know that I’m not going to hurt you for this, okay? Nobody has to know.”

Veronica’s eyes shined with tears and she looked up at Regina in shock.

“R-really?”

Regina nodded.

“Really. It can be our little secret.”

Veronica sniffled and nods her head. Regina settles down next to her and she leans against her, still trying to steady her breathing.

“This JD sounds like a huge asshole,” Regina said, “He hurt you and tricked you. I know that you wouldn’t do it again and you certainly would have never done such a thing if it wasn’t for him.”

She gently strokes Veronica’s hair, trying to help soothe her. It seems to help, as the girl leans into the touch. She can feel her trying to curl against her.

“He did horrible things to you. I’ve only read about them and it’s already hard for me to bear. I can’t even begin to try and imagine what you’re going through.” Regina says, and she tightens her embrace on Veronica, tucking the girl’s head under her chin, “You are so unbelievably strong, Veronica. I’m proud of you. Thank you for fighting.”

A few more tears slip out from the cobalt girl’s eyes and she leans closer. It’s getting easier to breathe thanks to Regina’s secure and warm presence. Veronica is able to calm down, but the older girl doesn’t loosen her embrace.

“So this is why you have panic attacks, huh?” Regina asked after a moment of silence. “What do you feel when it happens?”

“Fear.”

There is deep shame on Veronica’s face. Her cheeks are tinted red, eyes to the floor. A gentle hand grasps one of hers.

“I don’t know what I fear. Everything. Sometimes I don’t even know what it is.”

“What does it feel like?” Regina presses. She’s trying to put herself in Veronica’s shoes, understand what everyday life is for her. It’s hard to image the burden of trauma, a heavy rock crushing down on you every moment of every single day.

There’s a pause.
“Like I can’t breathe. Like I’m suffocating or drowning and I can’t get enough air no matter how hard I try.”

A river of words flooded from Veronica’s mouth.

“Everything starts to burn and I can’t see and- It feels like I’m dying, Regina.”

Regina squeezed her hand before she continued:

“When I came here, I thought I would be okay, but I learned real fast that I couldn’t run from what I did. It followed me here. Everything.” She says, taking a few uneven breaths, “I can’t tell you what sets me off sometimes. Not even I know what they are. Dead animals, fire, the smell of sulfur, gunshots, explosions, the dark, yelling, loud noises, the color red, tight spaces, being left alone- I hate being alone. And sometimes it’s nothing at all. Nothing I know, at least.” A pause. Choked laughter, “Then it hurts so badly. I-I can’t do anything and I’m so helpless…”

Her fingers curl and she digs her nails into her palms. Regina stops her before she can draw blood, easing her hands out of the fists. The touch is gentle, little things like this are what Veronica relishes. She speaks again, her voice soft, but calmer:

“Thank you. Really. Thank you so much. I...I trust you, Regina. I trust everyone here, even if I don’t act like I do. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Regina says, smiling, “We won’t let anyone hurt you, okay? I promise.”

Veronica nods and the two of them remain on the floor for a moment before uncurling. Regina helps the smaller girl to her feet.

“We should probably get downstairs now. Everyone must be wondering what we’re doing. I’m surprised Janis hasn’t run up here yet. She really cares about you, you know.”

Veronica laughed slightly.

“Oh, yeah. I know.” She pauses for a second, licking over her chapped lips, “One more thing, though... This’ll stay between us, right?”

“Of course.”

Veronica sighed in relief.

“Thank god.”

She knew that Regina had to be pretty anxious and concerned, despite what she said. Veronica’s secrets were not an easy pill to swallow. She just hoped she wouldn’t see her any differently than before.

The two of them walked down to the basement, and everyone turned to look at them.

“What took you so long?” Janis asked, hints of worry in her eyes.

“We were making out.” Regina replied coolly.

They all burst into laughter.

“I don’t know how to feel about that.” Veronica blinked.
“Regina and Ronnie?” Cady said, “No. I cannot see that.”

“Regina is like Veronica’s mom!” Damian added. “It would be weird if any of us dated the team mom.”

“Veronica’s not my type anyway,” Regina said, walking back over to the couch.

“What is your type?” Aaron asked.

Regina glanced at Veronica, looking her up and down.

“Taller.”

“Hey!!”

—

Eventually, everyone ended up leaving and Janis and Veronica were soon left alone in the house. Janis stands up and stretches.

“Hey, we go to our grandma’s house tomorrow for a Christmas party,” She said, nudging her younger cousin, “I forgot to tell you.”

“How do you forget something like that?” Veronica tilted her head, but just ended up shrugging. “Sounds good. Can’t wait to see the people I barley know.”

Janis laughed slightly and patted her on the shoulder.

“You coming up?”

“Not yet. I’ll be up soon.”

Janis nodded and walked upstairs, leaving Veronica alone on the couch. She sat there in silence for a moment before kneeling down in front of the Xbox and turning on Dead Space II. Maybe playing a horror game at the middle of the night wasn’t a good idea, but she didn’t care at this point. She just kept cursing herself for leaving her diary out in the open like that.

———

Shadows followed Regina home that night. They crept after her car and spilled in through her window, materializing in her bedroom while she slept. JD was the clearest, while the other three were flickering, since they were so far from their host. They kept a distance from each other, standing on either sides of the room.

“Now she knows.” Kurt spoke first, “This is great.”

“She can keep a secret.” Heather said, “I trust her.”

“I mean, I do, too, but still,” Kurt sighs, “It’s worrying.”

“She might snap.”

JD’s smirk was wide, thick black liquid oozing out from between his teeth. Madness and mischief (not the good kind) glinted in his sunken eyes. He glides over to the bed and stares down at the sleeping blonde.
“It would be such a shame if that were to happen. Not everyone can keep secrets like that. Veronica only does it because she doesn’t want to get arrested.”

Heather narrows her eyes.

“Great. Now we have to deal with you going after other people, too?”

“There’s no need.” JD said, his words coming out with surprising smoothness, “I have a proposal.”

“And what would that be?” Ram crossed his arms.

“Oh, not with you.” JD laughs, and then he’s gone, black wisps of smoke and the smell of burned flesh left in his wake.

Chapter End Notes

Reginald is such a team mom
Fridge Horror

Chapter Summary

JD makes a proposal. Veronica dissociates in a state between reality and nightmares. Janis sleds down a hill and into a ditch.

Chapter Notes

Chapter Warnings: Dissociation, Emotional manipulation, Minor bug gore, Graphic descriptions of death, Bones protruding from skin, I’m not sure how to mention this one but just JD continuously hurting Veronica because he enjoys it.

Rain and snow were falling in a flurry of white and grey. It was hard to see three feet in any direction, but the ugly corpse was easy to be seen. Veronica scowls.

“Oh don’t give me that,” JD said cooly, “I just want to talk.”

“That’s what you said all those other times.” Veronica spits.

“Good, you were paying attention.”

JD circles around her, and she follows him with her eyes. Lightning cracks overhead and the world opens up. They’re standing in a football field with a school looking in the distance. The smell of sulfur floats through the air.

“I want to make a proposal,” JD says, “You want me to leave you alone, yes? Well, I will, if you let me have one of your friends.”

Veronica stares in disbelief.

“I was thinking that gay guy. Or that tall blonde. She does know your secret now, after all. With her out of the way, there’s no risk of her getting you caught.”

“You can’t be serious,” Veronica said.

JD just shrugged.

“I knew you would probably refuse. You’re modest like that.”

Veronica growled deep in her throat. She marched up to JD and swung at him, but he grabbed her by the wrists. A smile spread on his face when he watched her squirm and try to get away.

“It’s cute how you think you can do anything to me.” He says.

His knee drove into her stomach and she wheezed in pain. Veronica doubled over and fell to the ground, hugging her abdomen. She notices JD looming over her and tries to kick him, but he seized
her ankle, shaking his head.

“You don’t learn, do you?”

He begins to twist and Veronica grits her teeth, trying to ignore the pain. It starts to become too much to handle when her bones splinter and her muscles strain.

“Stop!” She yowled, “Stop it, JD! You’re hurting me!”

“Has your begging ever stopped me before?” JD croons, smirking.

He only lets go when he hears a pop and then a crack and watches Veronica roll in the mud, screaming. He chuckles.

“Stand up, darling. I rather not make a deal when you’re on the ground.”

Veronica takes her time, but she does eventually wobble onto her feet. She lifts her throbbing leg off of the ground like a deer with a bullet in its thigh. The broken bone presses against her skin, shifting audibly whenever she moves. Pain contorted her face.

“There you go,” JD cooed, “Now, let’s shake on it.”

He holds out his hand, but the girl slaps it away.

“No!” Veronica growled, “You aren’t going to touch any of my friends!”

JD narrowed his eyes and then sighed.

“So stubborn,” He said, “It’s a simple deal. Don’t you want the pain to end? Just let me have one of your little ‘friends.’ It’s not that hard.”

“Why does there need to be a deal? Why can’t you just leave me alone?” Veronica yelled into the storm. “I’m so...tired of you! Every day of every month, you’re here! You’re tormenting me! Just leave me the hell alone!”

Her knees buckle and she crumpled into a puddle. Angrily, she smashed her fists into the ground over and over again, gurgling on her words as her fury builds. Her rage turns to agony when her skin tears and a jagged bone rips out from her thigh. Choking on the pain, her shaking hands hover around the fresh wound. Shrieking broke from her lips.

JD just watches with surprising patience.

“You really shouldn’t do that,” He said.

“F-uck you!” Veronica spats, her words broken apart by gasps and sobs, “I h-ate you! I hate you so fu-cking much!”

“You’ve said all of this before, Veronica.” JD says.

The cobalt girl ignore him. She cried and yelled until she felt like she couldn’t breathe anymore. The pain in her leg has dissolved into burning numbness. Wet and shivering, muddy and sticky, she slowly comes out of her outburst. She wipes snot from her nose and looks up at JD, who raises his eyebrows.

“Feeling better?” He asked, but there is no concern in his voice, “Are you ready to agree to my deal now?”
“No,” Veronica grits, her voice hoarse from all her crying.

JD is quiet for a moment. Thunder booms and lightning splits the sky as the world around the two of them began to twist together. The rain and snow picks up into a violent torrent before abruptly stopping. They both stand in a hallway, which Veronica recognizes as the corridor leading to Regina’s room.

“Why are we here?” Veronica asked, narrowing her eyes are JD suspiciously. She’s using the wall for support to try and get up.

“To show you all the good will come out of this.” JD answered. “Darling, hear me out. She knows your secret. If she ends up snapping, she’ll tell everyone. All your precious little friends will be gone. They’ll leave you. Nobody can love a monster, after all.”

He smiled wickedly. Maggots wriggle in his teeth.

“But...if you give her to me, that won’t ever happen. I’ll take real good care of her, my dear.”

Veronica scans his facial features. He seems pretty sincere about his offer, which isn’t much of a surprise given the situation.

“What are you going to do with her?” She asked softly.

“Oh, you know,” JD rolled his wrist, “Torment her, whisper in her ears, maybe some possession. I’ll make her death look natural, darling, I promise. There will be no leads to you at all.”

“Death?!”

A shiver ran up Veronica’s spine and she jumped.

“You never said anything about killing her! I-I don’t want Regina dead!”

JD blinked at her.

“It’s the only way to make sure our secret doesn’t get out, darling. Of course, it won’t happen immediately. I need to have some fun, too.” He said, “It’s a win-win, my dear. I’ll get a new plaything, so then I won’t be around you. Isn’t that what you want? For me to leave you be? This is how you can do it.”

Veronica shook her head wildly.

“I don’t want her dead! She’s my friend! I can’t...handle anyone else dying...”

JD tilts his head, but there is no sympathy or pity in his eyes. He purses his lips.

“Darling, death is a natural thing. You have to get over it sooner or later.”

He turns and walks into Regina’s room, with Veronica staggering after him. When he notices her giving chase, he turns and kicks her hard in her shin, causing her to collapse to the ground. He snorts in amusement and grinds his heel against the protruding bone, causing Veronica to keen sharply and whip her head back, cracking her skull against the polished wooden floor.

"Stop,” She gasped, “Please stop-“

“Stop? You want me to stop?”
JD smirks and presses down harder, almost like he was trying to set the bone. Except it was horribly painful and Veronica cried out, fresh tears springing to her eyes. Her entire leg burned like it was on fire, white hot agony rocketing through every nerve.

Her pleads become watery and she thinks she might be black out. JD lifts his foot, snaps his finger a few times, then savagely drove his boot underneath her chin with a sickening crunch.

"You can’t fall asleep yet. There’s still things I have to show you."

Veronica is unresponsive. Stars explode in front of her eyes. Blood and saliva dribble from her mouth. JD has to haul her up to her feet, digging his fingernails- which seem more like claws- into her shoulder to keep her upright when she nearly collapses again.

"Please stop," Veronica gasped breathlessly, trying to hobble away from him, “I can’t- It hurts too much... Please just leave me alone.”

"Not so tough anymore, are we?” JD said before walking over to the bed. “Now we can get back to our deal.”

A knife materializes in his hand. Veronica’s heart sank in fear.

“JD-“

“Good will come, Ronnie. I’m telling you.”

He plunges he blade into Regina’s chest. He stabs and stabs until the blonde’s chest becomes a gouged hole of red and pink. Blood and mangled strips of skin drip onto the mattress. The smell is almost overwhelming to Veronica, and she covers her mouth. She had tried to stop him, but the pain was too much; she was on the floor again.

“No...”

“Yes.” JD smirks, “Of course, I wouldn’t kill her like this. It doesn’t look natural. I just wanted to emphasize my point. The gore helps.”

Veronica scrambled into the wall while backing up, practically dragging her broken leg, which has become a mess of crimson blood, red tissue, and white bone marrow. She’s breathing heavily and shaking her head. The gruesome stew of gore made her stomach churn and she felt like she was going to be sick.

“I understand your hesitance, but just think of your freedom. One life doesn’t matter. She’s probably only pretending to like you.” JD said, turning to look at her. “You’re very strange, my dear little Veronica. I’m giving you an amazing chance, and yet you don’t take it.”

His eyes flash burning red and he gets closer to her. The smell of fresh blood and exposed muscle wafts around the room. Black smoke whirls around him. His expression becomes sickly sinister.

“It’s you or them, darling.” He said, “I don’t even care which one you give me. I’m not picky."

“No.” Veronica said, forcing a growl into her voice, “No! You’re not touching any of my friends! Nothing you say can make me change my mind.”

Anger. Fury that’s as hot as fire.

JD lashes out, grabbing Veronica by the neck. His charred fingers wring around her throat and
she gags helplessly, clawing at the grip, but it does nothing to help. He lifts her up with terrifying strength and slams her against the wall, leaning in close.

“I’ll have to wear you down until you can’t take it anymore, then,” He says through his teeth.

Veronica wheezes and coughs, strangled sound just barely worming out from her lips. Her lungs start to burn, but JD doesn’t release his grip. It tightens. The world starts to go dark and she can’t breathe, can’t breathe, can’t-breathe.

Veronica jerks up in her bed, gasping for air. She feels around her neck and there are no burned hands digging into her skin. A dull ache fades from her chest, but she assumes it’s from waking up from that nightmare. She looks at her alarm clock and it reads “7:30”. Pale sunlight filters in through her curtains. Might as well get up now.

———

AfricaByToto: have you guys ever wondered what kind of animal you would be

troybolton: that has never once crossed my mind ever

AfricaByToto: lucky for you i did it for everyone!!

Gwetchen: this is what she does in Zoology when we aren’t doing anything

team.mom: Did Cady really find animals for all of us?

AfricaByToto: me- Barbary lion

Gwetchen: Yes

AfricaByToto: Damian- spectacled bear

Big Gay: seems about right

AfricaByToto: Regina- Kalahari Lion

AfricaByToto: Gretchen- Southdown

AfricaByToto: Aaron- secretary bird

AfricaByToto: Janis- ferret

AfricaByToto: Karen- penguin

AfricaByToto: Veronica- hedgehog

Gwetchen: JANIS IS A FERRET OMG

Gaylien: bitch

team.mom: Personally, I see her as a breed of rat, but ferret is good, too.

Gaylien: BITCH

AfricaByToto: that’s all
“Veronica?” Janis asked one of her other cousins, her head tilted and one hand splayed open in a confused gesture.

The older girl grip tightened on the glass she was holding and she straightened up.

“You lost her?”

This wouldn’t be such a problem if it wasn’t Veronica Sawyer they were talking about. Janis already knew that most of the family realized there was something not quite right about the cobalt girl.

“I told you she shouldn’t have come.” Tristan hissed. “She’s...weird.”

“Cut it out and help me look for her,” Janis snapped back. “I’m sure she’s fine, though.”

There were many people at this Christmas party, and Janis knew Veronica probably wasn’t enjoying it. She just wanted to know where her cousin was, she didn’t have to stick around her the whole time. Veronica could handle herself, but it was still a relief when she found the cobalt girl in the kitchen.

After that, a few of the other kids wanted to go sledding down the mountain nearby. Their grandparents lived on a big property with hills dotting the area. This would be the first time Veronica went down one of them.

The snow was thick and deep, nipping around her-

crushing her. she tries to take a breath, but there’s no room to breathe. it’s not even snow. it’s a coffin. old wood surrounds her and she claws at the top. splinters jab underneath her fingernails like stakes, almost uprooting them. she’s trapped. buried alive

-ankles as she hiked up the hillside with six others. When they all got to the top, they were looking down on the house and the other residents on that street. Some boy Veronica never remembered the name of went down first.

Sledding was fun-

she lies in the snow, laughing and coming down from the thrill of riding down the slope. the white powder hugs her limbs in a cold, but soft embrace. her muscles relax. when her eyes open again, she sees her cousins standing around her. one of the taller ones lean down, rays from the setting sun glinting on the blade of the knife as he begins to cut open her stomach

-but it apparently got old after awhile, because the others wanted to do something else again. Manhunt is what they came up with, and Veronica was a little hesitant, since it was getting dark. She didn’t refuse though, as she didn’t want them to dislike even more. At least she got to be on a team with Janis.

Manhunt was basically the “older” version of hide-and-seek, even though there were younger kids playing, too. To explain it quickly, there are two teams (hiders and hunters) and the hiders have to get back to a base (the front porch of the house) without getting tagged. Seemed harmless.

It got dark really quickly, but nobody wanted to stop. Veronica’s team was hiding, and they all split
up after a moment to go find a good spot. After slinking through the tree-line she ducked into-

the smell of frost and evergreen is overcome by something more sickly. snow doesn’t crunch her under feet, it squishes, but that doesn’t seem right. when she squints and looks down, the ground it goopy red and looks like brain matter. she’s ankle deep in the guts that have seeped into the snow

-she ended up stumbling upon Janis, who was-

a corpse with the throat ripped out. swollen and blue from the cold, dried blood all over-crouched behind a shrub. When they were caught, they made a beeline for the sledding-hill to try and lose their chaser.

“Janis, this was a terrible idea,” Veronica panted once they got to the top. The sound of snow crunching under feet has yet to seize.

“We did not just run up this hill for nothing!” Janis declared before grabbing Veronica and pulling her down the hillside.

At first, the sudden ride was thrilling, until Veronica realized they didn’t go down the front of the slope, but the back. She could see the forest and plato in the black fog, along with the ditch down below. She remembered it being there because she had hid there during the second round. It was relatively deep, she could stand in it and not be seen if you were at a certain angle, maybe even Janis could, too, and the snow bank on the other side was a thick white wall spotted with rocks. At the rate she and Janis were going, they were probably going to be flung right into the ditch.

For a moment, Veronica just flapped her arms around in a panic before yelling for her cousin, which caused Janis to look to her instead of realizing the danger. Watching her fall over the edge and disappear from sight was simultaneously frightening and hilarious.

Veronica scrambles for a hold, but ends up tumbling over the edge, too. She narrowly misses Janis, landing in a heap nearby. Through her wheezing, she actually finds herself laughing-

and she draws a breath, but coughs up the dirt and snow and blood she has inhaled into her lungs. things don’t feel right for a moment. she tries to breathe again, but a second shovel of snow and soil has been dropped on her face. the stars disappear from sight. she would scream, but her mouth is filled with dirt before she can

-despite the ache in her back. She sits up and is lifted to her feet by Janis, who is shortling.

“God, we are so stupid!” Her cousin tittered, wrapping an arm around her shoulder. “You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good!”

Janis looks relieved.

The two of them start to slink back to the house, as they were probably still in the game, but also wanted to go have dinner, since all the food was probably ready. They made it back safely and herded inside to start eating with everyone else.

Supper was delicious, as expected with so many people cooking. Veronica-

feasted on a variety of food that all made her mouth water. while cutting into the last of the ham on her plate, it is only then that she notices the squirming. she coughs blood and larvae began to eat their way out of her stomach
sits with Janis, of course. She’s the only person there who she-

wouldn’t kill. would she kill? no. she can’t. not her, at least. everyone else, though? yes. she should kill. all of them

-actually really knows and enjoys being around.

After dinner, presents were opened and Veronica managed to bear the squealing of-

children being burned alive

-younger kids as they tore apart wrapping paper. Over all the shrieking, she heard a noise, quickly realizing-

the smell wafting through the house. it was foul. smoke hazed in the living room and Veronica rubbed her eyes, staggering to the kitchen, but it was worse in there. she squints and notices the whorls of dark smoke streaming out from the oven. she opens it and sees one of her cousin’s toddlers stuffed inside

-it was her uncle (at least she thinks that’s who it was) testing a few firecrackers outside. Apparently you could light fireworks around Christmas, and she was already preparing to have her hands over her ears the whole time.

Christmas there wasn’t too bad, really. She actually kind of-

wanted to kill herself. she wants to hang herself. cut her wrists. waste away in her sleep via pills. bleed. blow her brains out. poison herself.

-enjoyed it. Manhunt and sledding were more fun than she was expecting. She also got a few good things, despite that side of the family not really knowing any of her interests.

While pulling out of the driveway, she looked back at all the twinkling lights and-

saw blood. fire. guts and innards. rot. everywhere. dead. dead. dead.

———

Heather watches as Veronica tosses and turns in her bed and sighs. She extends a hand and brushes her fingers against the girl’s sweaty face. A strangled whimper escapes her lips upon contact.

“You are such an obsessive fuck.” Heather spat, glaring at JD, who stands a few feet away.

The mangled ghost shrugs.

“It was either her or her friends. She chose herself, but she’ll change her mind over time.”

“So I assume you won’t leave her alone until that happens, right?” Heather said and JD nodded.

“You.”

Heather growled deep in her throat. A tear ran down against her finger and she brushed it away, turning her attention back to Veronica. Tonight was bad, she could tell. The cobalt girl’s body was trying to wake her mind up, but her brain was being unresponsive, trapped in the night terror. She was doing so well, too.

The ghost decided she would stay by Veronica until she woke up. She settled in a more
comfortable and stared at JD, making him realize she wasn’t going to leave. Heather had become a guard dog and she wasn’t going to stand down.
Janis knew something was wrong with Veronica. She wasn’t stupid.

Ever since her cousin came to live with her, she always knew something was up. Even if she wasn’t told the cobalt girl had PTSD, she would probably still think the same thing. Veronica was a quiet kid, even more so with her trauma. Janis desperately wanted to know what was bothering her, not because she was dying to know for her own entertainment, but because she wanted to know how to help her cousin.

But Veronica was very secretive, she had learned that awhile ago. She didn’t enjoy talking about what was scaring her, probably out of shame and even more fear. Janis respected that, she really did, she just wanted to know how to help.

Lately, Veronica has been a lot more irritable. She was fidgety and looked paler than usual. It worried Janis a lot, but there’s nothing she could do, as her cousin just said it was a little cold and nothing more.

If she knew, though. If she knew that Veronica did want to talk to her, she just didn’t know how.

———

The ghosts were the only ones who could get really anything out Veronica. She could easily talk to them openly, and it almost upset her. There was nothing they could really do for her.

Ghosts were such odd beings. Never had Veronica thought she would wake up with three spirits sharing her skin, her thoughts. The four of them became one.

Some ghosts possess human entirely, leaving no room for personality, burning away anything that could get in the way of their hex. Some ghosts slip into hosts like clothes and wear them for an amount of time before leaping to another, preferring to keep their meddling in human affairs as clandestine as possible. In the end, Heather and the boys chose her and her alone. That made Veronica happy, oddly enough. She didn’t know how she would live without them.

Over time, the ghosts became closer to her than anyone else. They were always there with her, more than a voice in the back of her mind. Without them, she wouldn’t be whole.

A few nights later, Veronica dreams of life without her ghastly companions. Her skin feels hollow.
She’s left alone in her mind. Never before has she realized how quiet the world actually was. Almost a full year of noise buzzing in her ears is now gone, and she hates it. She wasn’t expecting to miss the voices, but she truly did. Everything seemed black and white. Nothing moved. It was terrifying. She awoke in a cold sweat.

It was Christmas that morning. Veronica went downstairs to greet Janis and her aunt and uncle. Her cousin was already awake and gazing at the gifts under the tree with a mug in her hand. She flashed a smile at Veronica.

“Morning, Vera,” She chirped. “Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas,” Veronica returned the same grin while walking over.

Christmas was...amazing. It was spent at home, and Veronica loved just hanging out with Janis. They opened gifts and then basically binge watched movies all day, commenting on random things about the film.

While watching the credits role and waiting for the next movie to switch on, Veronica noticed that something was obviously bothering her cousin. She was toying with the hem of her shirt and kept pulling her lip between her teeth. The cobalt girl finally turned to regard Janis on this.

“Is everything okay?” She asked, tilting her head.

Janis gave her a wry smile and finally let go of her shirt. She got up to put more fire in the fireplace, Veronica watching her the whole time.

“Something seems to be bothering you,” The cobalt girl continued.

“Yeah, kinda,” Janis said, “I don’t know if this is the best time to get into it, though. I mean, it is Christmas after all. I don’t want to ruin anything.”

Veronica recognized that excuse. It basically meant: “I say I shouldn’t get into it but I’m really hoping you’ll urge me to talk.” She went to get up, but Janis held out a hand.

“But that won’t stop you from wondering, huh?” Her cousin sighed, “I usually talk to Damian about this, but it’s Christmas and he’s with his family. And I know you’re already going through a lot and-“

“Janis.” Veronica cut her off, “Just because I’m going through things doesn’t mean you aren’t, either. I can help you, too, you know.”

Janis rubs her hands against her thighs and nodded. She walked back over to sit back down.

“I know.” She said. “It...happened...when did you show up? Early October? Yeah. So it happened a week before that.”

She paused for a moment, then continued.

“Homecoming party. It was Cady’s idea to go, and we all decided to go together, since the squad does have to stay together. Well, that was one of the stupid choices of my life. I don’t even like parties.”

———

Damian was just starting to tear the house apart when he finally found his best friend. She had left
his sight just half an hour ago and he was worried sick about her, asking all of their friends if they had seen her before taking matters into his own hands. He would have turned that place upside down looking for her, but, luckily, he located Janis. Except it wasn’t in the situation he was hoping for.

The bathroom was a mess. Things were sprawled across the floor and the shower curtain was pulled off the railing, showing an obvious struggle. Janis was huddled in the area between the bathtub and toilet, chin tucked to her chest and knees pulled in close, breathing heavily. Her long sleeves were torn, stains of red and brown being seen even on the dark material. The rest of the shirt was shredded, mainly around the torso, and dangled off of her shoulders, barely staying on, and the tank top Janis wore underneath was bunched up and torn at the seams.

Everything about her appearance screamed “assault”, but it was the thin trail of blood snaking out from one nostril, her busted lip, the bright red streaks of scratch marks on her forearms, the particularly nasty gash near her collarbone, and oh dead god-

“Janis!!”

Damian dove down to his best friend’s side, making her jump and dart her eyes over to him. She appeared to be in some sort of shock, trembling under his hand when he touched her shoulder. She didn’t speak, her teeth just chattered.

Damian texted the others to get their asses in there. The small bathroom was soon cramped with all the juniors; Gretchen was holding a glass of water, which Damian was able to get down Janis’ throat with minimal difficulty. The reaction to the liquid was immediate, and Janis threw up in the bathtub. By the redness growing on her cheeks must have meant her senses were gathering.

“We need to call the police!” Damian spoke first, whipping his head around to the others.

“We can’t,” Regina said, “If we call the police, then the party gets ransacked with cops. I don’t know how many parties you go to, but if someone calls 911, then people end up getting arrested. And the caller gets hunted down for ruining everything. Do you want that on her?”

“Look at her!” Damian reprimanded. “She needs medical attention!”

He had taken off his jacket and draped it around Janis’ shoulders. She was white-knuckling the rims of the coat, pulling it close and burying her face in the warm cloth. She was shivering badly, but at least her eyes looked better, even though they were still glassy and unfocused.

“We are looking.” Regina clipped.

“Hang on.” Aaron said, “What don’t know if...”

The others swiveled their heads around to stare at him.

“Well, uhh-“ Aaron cleared his throat, “There was an obvious struggle. Someone must have wanted to hurt her. Maybe she pissed them off or they were drunk, I don’t know, and Janis put up a fight,” He gestures for the grazes on her knuckles, “But what if this is the aftermath of...rape?”

Anger lit up in Damian’s eyes, making him look like a king cobra ready to strike. Regina’s mouth pulled back in a snarl at the thought. Karen audibly gasped. Cady and Gretchen exchanged scared looks.

“Wait, wait, wait-“ Aaron said hurriedly, grabbing Damian by the arm before he could charge out of the room to find who did this, “That’s just a theory. It would explain why she’s in here, in an
upstairs bathroom. It’s isolated. Maybe she was dragged in here. But on the other hand, all her
clothes are still on, just ripped up. What rapist dresses their victim afterwards?”

“Janis, honey,” Damian turned to her, “Is that what happened? Did someone press themselves on
you?”

Janis slowly shook her head, relieving the others of their fear.

“Okay, but she still needs help. She’s hurt. We need to call an ambulance.”

“Well... Maybe you should listen to Regina. There are consequences to calling someone.”
Gretchen said. “Even if rape wasn’t involved, this is still a big deal. Janis is a minor, too. And then
there’s us. We’ll all be in this. Our names will be on the report they’re bound to write. We could be
accused. They’ll make us suspects; They always do. I don’t want this on my record.”

“This isn’t about us!” Damian growled deep in his throat.

Gretchen straightened herself up. Her normally timid voice hardened when she spoke.

“I know that, but am I not allowed to protect-“

“Stop.”

The voice was so soft and hoarse that it was almost unheard. The juniors whipped around to face
Janis, who was heaving her shallow breaths. She’s blinking rapidly, trying to get her vision to
focus, or to, possibly, keep tears at bay.

“Stop fighting.”

The voices are grating in her ears. Everything was too loud, too much. Her senses are gathering
slowly and everything was in high alert. Damian scuttled down next to her again, and Janis
flinched under his hand when he touched her shoulder.

“What do you want us to do?” He asked.

“Nothing.” Janis answered, “Just-just give me a minute and I’ll be fine.”

She sucks in a deep breath, nearly throwing up again. She screwed her eyes shut for a moment.
Grainy colors and spiraling static starbursts under her eyelids.

“I’ll be fine.” She repeated, slightly louder this time.

“Janis...” Cady murmured, sympathy lacing her tone.

“Can I-“ Janis swallowed thickly. “Can I have some space to clean up?”

Shock was wearing off and she began to feel the full extent of her wounds; Every stab of pain, every
pinprick of agony that jabbed her nerves and then ripped downwards. Even when she was sitting
down, she felt as if she were being crushed by something. Like she was holding a heavy burning
log as a charm of some unruly sin. Her mouth tasted like old pennies, making her feel even more
nauseous, and she now wanted nothing more than to be alone.

“Janis-“ Karen tried, but the girl shook her head.

“Please?”
Janis wobbled on her feet, probably in an attempt to prove that she was fine. She was barely able to inch forward before her knees buckled, and Damian and Regina both lunged to catch them. Aaron had hopped off the small desk he had been sitting on, his arms extended outwards.

Damian got to her first, obviously. When it came to his best friend, he practically grew wings and moved at superhuman speeds. He steadied Janis and she leaned into him entirely. He could feel her trembling against him.

“What do you want to do?” Gretchen asked quietly.

“I’m going to drive home and sleep forever.” Janis said she as if she could get there on her own.

“At least let us help you then,” Regina says, and everyone in the room already knows she’s not taking no for an answer.

Janis winced at what she said. She shuddered, wiggling in Damian’s grasp for a moment.

“Who did this to you?” Regina asked, softening her voice to be more gentle. “I’ll find them and rip their eyes out and shove them down their throat so they can catch as I-“

“Regina-“ Aaron hissed, getting a look from the blonde that made him jump a little. “We shouldn’t get into that at this moment. Maybe we should focus on getting Janis out of here.”

Regina was quiet for a moment and then, surprisingly, backed off. She sighed and nodded her head.

“I like your idea of going back to the house. Someone’s house.” Cady said. “Just let us help you out.”

Janis swallowed a painful lump in her throat and nodded. At that point, she’d be willing to do anything to get people out of that bathroom. It was cramped and she didn’t like that they were seeing her like this.

“Great!” Karen said with a smile.

“Aaron will go start the car and pull up as close as he can. Gretchen and Karen will make a distraction if needed. Cady can help them; just make sure nobody gets to Janis.” Regina looked at each teenager when she gave the order and they nodded without arguing. “Damian and I can help you get down to the car.”

Janis nodded against, rubbing her eyes with a loose fist. She leaned closer to Damian, who wrapped his arms around her protectively. Recalling the plan going into action was blurry, as her consciousness began to slip from her again.

—

Janis became quiet for a moment, licking her tongue over her lips. When she spoke again, her voice came out in rough laughter.

“That wasn’t even the worst part. When I went back to school that next week, apparently there was news of what happened at the party. The guy who attacked me told everyone what happened, but changed the story. Horribly.” She clasped her hands together tightly, “I was taunted constantly. More than usual. ‘I thought lesbians don’t like dick!’ was one of the things I was told. They called me a whore, slut, stuff like that. A few people actually slipped condoms and other ‘relics’ into my backpack. God, it was not fun.”
She shook her head and laughed gravely.

“It felt like it was too much. I was trying to redeem myself from sophomore year, and this was not the way I wanted things to turn out.” A pause, “I was planning on killing myself the day after my parents told me you were coming to live with us. I got a full dosage of sleeping pills and I wanted to just waste away. But then they told me the news and that plan went out the window. They told me about your post-traumatic stress and I thought, ‘Wow. PTSD is the real deal. If she can withstand that, then I can withstand this.’ If I couldn’t be strong for myself, then I can be strong for you. And that’s exactly what I did.”

Veronica’s mouth was ajar, eyes wide at what she had just heard. She didn’t know what to say and could only mutter her cousin’s name in shock.

“Janis...”

Janis grinned at her, a bit more confidently this time.

“I wasn’t actually planning on telling you all of that, but things happen, I guess! Still, I wanted to thank you. Really.”

Veronica moved closer to Janis and the two of them huddled against each other. She reached down and took her hand, squeezing tightly. All of that alone, what Janis said about her, was the best gift out of them all.

Chapter End Notes

hhhhhhgghghghghh i love these girls so much
Making a Molotov is Common Sense

Chapter Summary

Veronica traumatizes her friends: the story
Ronnie and Janis are dragon nerds confirmed

Chapter Notes

Chapter warnings: Slightly graphic descriptions, Nightmares, Mentions of self harm

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Years Day

troybolton: everyone tag yourself as things that happened at the party im Janis sticking her face directly in a smoke bomb and then immediately having an asthma attack because of it

team.mom: Myself having to literally stop Janis and Damian from firing fireworks at each other.
cornHub: when the Troy Bolton T-Posed with sparklers in the middle of the yard
Gaylien: everyone running around with sparklers and then Vera runs by with a fuckin stick on fire
Gwetchen: how everyone scattered when a fireworks randomly full on exploded and flew out in everyone direction
Big Gay: THE RAINBOW FIREWORKS AND THEN JANIS LITERALLY SHRIEKING AT THEM
smol: Karen throwing MULTIPLE firecrackers in the fire pit.

After New Years

Gaylien: do y’all ever think about what kind of dragon you would be
team.mom: No. Please no. School starts tomorrow and it’s almost twelve at night, please don’t do this. Please. I’m begging you. Just let me be free. Oh god, Janis, please. No.
Gwetchen: i,.think we broke Regina,..
smol: Hot take- I really fucking love dragons. Usually I would be mad at this disruption, but I’m not. Go on, Janis.
team.mom: VERONICA DON’T ENCOURAGE HER.
Big Gay: what a betrayal
Gaylien: Wings of Fire is my childhood tbh so that’s why I’m here

Gaylien: Glory was a fuckin lesbian like it’s too late for you to force her into a hetero relationship, Tui, she’s gay

troybolton: is she going to pull a Cady and name what dragon we would be

AfricaByToto: pull....a...Cady??? nice

Gaylien: TROY THAT’S AN AMAZING IDEA WHERE’S MY PEN

team.mom: I’m going to shoot myself.

cornHub: Dragons???

Big Gay: okay but the relationship Deathbringer and Glory is actually pedophilia and yet it’s canon???

Gaylien: W AHT

Gwetchen: wow Janis forgets how to type over fictional dragons in a children book

smol: Yeah, Damian’s right. When the two of them met, Glory was six and Deathbringer was thirteen, which already makes him old enough to be her dad. A dragon is full grown at age seven, therefore making Glory a child still and Death a full grown adult. And when you do the math, multiplying the dragon age into human years (which is essentially 3 x 6, and then you add the remaining numbers for a dragon over six, but there’s also other ways), their ages come out to be around sixteen or seventeen, maybe eighteen, for Glory and Death twenty-five through thirty. So, yeah. It’s pedophilia, as Glory is still a child in dragon years.

troybolton: wow

AfricaByToto: have you ever considered moving into a higher math class

Gwetchen: i didn’t understand any of that but how does an author let something like that happen???

Big Gay:Tui doesn’t know what a timeline is lol

smol: And she doesn’t know how to follow the rules of her fantasy world.

Gaylien: im gonna riot on Twitter after this but first

Gaylien: i have created the list!!

team.mom: Here we go.

Gaylien: me and Vera would be RainWings

smol: explain?

Gaylien: no

Gaylien: Caddie- SandWing cause she grew up in Africa and it’s apparently hot there

Gaylien: Karen and Regina would be SilkWings because they seem elegant enough for them. and they’re the only other dragon species that can be pink and i don’t want to share the RainWings
Gaylien: Damian- MudWing so he can be the Bigwings

Gaylien: Troy- SeaWing because I’m pretty sure he was a swimmer at one point

Gaylien: And Gretchen shall be a HiveWing because she once called herself a worker bee so

Gwetchen: oh nice

smol: Man, I love dragons.

team.mom: Please let us sleep now, I’m begging you.

Gaylien: sure because I’m going to go rile up the soccer moms on Twitter now

———

Much to everyone’s dismay, school did eventually started back up. Students dragged themselves into their first period class, clearly annoyed and exhausted, as most of them probably had gotten used to sleeping in. Even the teachers seemed disgruntled about being there.

One thing Veronica noticed was Regina’s new mannerisms. The pristine lion queen seemed a little fidgety and anxious. It wasn’t hard to realize what was bothering her, especially with how she would steal glances over at Veronica. She was worrying about what she had found out. Veronica wonders if it haunts her dreams, too.

The two of them didn’t really talk about it, though. Veronica wasn’t sure how she felt about comforting someone due to her problems. It was too awkward, so she never presses the matter. Luckily, though, her cousin was a lot more nosy and could basically do it for her.

Regina was in one of the bathrooms doing her makeup, as she didn’t have the time that morning, when Janis walked in. The brunette looked a little surprised before grinning.

“I was wondering where you were, SilkWings,” She said, referring to the conversation on the group chat a few nights ago.

Regina rolled her eyes in a good natured way.

“Just fixing my mascara.”

“Nice.”

Janis hung her backpack up on one of the hooks on the wall and leaned against a sink. Regina raised her eyebrows at her.

“Yes?”

“Wanna talk?” Janis asked. “You’ve been acting weird lately.”

“God, you are so nosy.”

Janis does jazz hands.

“You are very correct. Now let’s talk. A one-on-one.” She hopped up onto the sink to sit down. Regina went quiet for a moment. She closed her blush tray and sighed.
“It’s not a conversation I should have with you.”

Janis furrowed her eyebrows and leaned forward.

“What are you talking about?” She asked, “If it’s something I did, you can tell me. I should know so I don’t mess everything up again.”

Regina whips her head around to look at the other girl, her eyes widening slightly.

“Woah, Janis, calm down.” She said quickly. “That wasn’t your fault. It was me. Don’t blame yourself when you didn’t do anything.”

Janis looked down at the floor for a moment, nodding a little. She didn’t like to think her relationship with Regina was rocky, it really wasn’t, but it was fragile. They were still mending the wounds that were caused from sophomore year and even the time before that. Both of them were afraid that one wrong comment could ruin all the process they’ve made.

The ties started to come together again around the end of their second year of high school. Regina had fully healed from the whole bus incident and joined the lacrosse team as a way to get out all that anger. She and Janis would occasionally exchange glances in the hallways, rarely a tiny smile, but never any words. Their first exchange was completely silent.

Janis had missed the notes in the Chemistry class she had with Regina, probably because of exhaustion from her obvious sleep deprivation. She got an ugly look when she asked to borrow another student’s notebook and then was hit with an arsenal of poisonous and highly unnecessary comments. Once the bell for passing period rang, she fled the classroom. Regina saw her make a beeline for the bathroom and decided to do her good deed for the day by following her in.

Janis looked like a panther bearing its teeth when she walked in. The girl had been hunched over the sink, pawing cold water onto her face and was clearly not in the mood for any Plastic bullshit at the moment. Regina held up her hands in truce gesture before slowly pulling out her Chemistry journal.

A startled-surprised look appeared on her ex-best friend’s face as she scanned the item for any kind of trap before finally taking pictures of the notes with her phone. Regina nodded and offered a small, kind smile before walking out.

It was little things like that, afterwards. Slipping each other notes and even randomly vouching for one another when there’s a problem with a teacher (though it’s mostly Regina, since staff usually doesn’t dare accuse her of anything). Then, finally, a text exchange. It was timid and went slow, but, eventually, the walls around the two of them fell down. They started meeting up in places like Starbucks or the mall to try and rekindle the relationship, and it actually worked, with time, of course. It wasn’t easy, but it was definitely paying off, so neither of them wanted to cause everything to crumble once again.

“It was both of our faults,” Janis said, not wanting to pin the blame all on Regina. “We can both be bad people.”

The blonde blinked before chuckling lightly.

“Sure. Sounds good.”

Janis grinned before hopping off of the rim of the sink. She stretched and then grabbed her backpack. Regina seemed slightly calmer and, even though she really wanted to know what was up with her friend, she didn’t push the past matter.
“Ready to go?”

“Yeah.”

Business at the diner was slower than usual. It had been an hour since anyone has come in, and Aaron and Veronica finally decided it was safe to pull out their 3DS’ and play with each other.

Yes, Veronica was back there. Aaron had asked if she wanted to help him again and she obliged because she was way too nice to say no. Even though it disrupted her nonexistent sleep schedule, she did enjoy hanging out with Aaron more. He was a cool guy and he had a copy of Pokémon Ultra Sun (she had Ultra Moon), so it was a deal, as they could battle with each other. They both got very competitive.

While switching out her Absol with her Decidueye, Veronica thought she heard something coming from outside. A tap on the window, to be specific.

She looked up from her 3DS screen and scanned the windows, but saw nothing. Aaron noticed her scouring the parking lot and tilted his head.

“What’s up?” He asked.

“Nothing,” Veronica said, shrugging off the noise as her imagination, “Thought I heard something, that’s all.”

For a moment, Aaron looks a little nervous, but it disappears once they both get back into the battle.

During a move exchange between Psybeam (Aaron had a Golduck) and Leaf Blade, both teenagers looked up when they heard the sound of the metal trash cans in the back of the building clanking around. It seemed like someone was messing with them. Bears weren’t common in Evanston, but a raccoon wasn’t out of the question. Animal or not, neither of them had the balls to go out and check on what was making the noise.

Once the noises from outside stopped, the only sound left was the battle music from the 3DS’. Aaron swallowed hard and looked at Veronica, who’s muscles were tightened in nervousness. She looks to him and shrugged helplessly.

Suddenly, the lights went out, as the power was probably cut. Both of the teenagers yelped audibly and shut their DS’, jumping out of their chairs. They had to use their phones for lights, and attempted to call the police, but there wasn’t any service. Aaron cursed under his breath.

“What the hell is going on?” Veronica whispered, “Is this a break in? Robbery?”

“Maybe.” Aaron says, running his fingers through his hair, “I don’t know why anyone would want to rob this place, though. There’s nothing here.”

“Unless they’re here to just murder us.” Veronica points out.

She’s surprisingly nonchalant. Her body feels numb, practically making her immune to terror. Yeah, she was nervous, but she couldn’t let it cloud her judgement.
“Oh god,” Aaron muttered.

A bell chimed as the front door was pushed open with force. What sounded like five, maybe six, middle aged men with crazy voices entered the diner and began to talk. Through the walls, the two teens were able to hear stuff like, “I know someone was in here” and “If you’re going to kill them, make sure there’s a scene left behind” and “I want the girl”. Now Veronica was pale.

“What do we do?” Aaron whispered in a panic.

For a moment, Veronica’s jaw hangs open in utter helplessness, and then she notices the fridge. An idea comes to her and she tiptoes over. She pulls out a bottle of beer. Aaron gives her a strange look.

“Veronica, I don’t think now is the time to-“

“No!” She snapped softly, “Aaron, don’t you see what we can do? Molotov cocktail!”

Aaron blinked at her for a moment before his eyebrows raise in surprise. He looks a little stunned.

“What?”

“We have everything we need in here to make a molotov. It’s the only thing I can think of, okay? There’s two of us and a lot of them. They might have guns. A Molotov can take out a majority of them.”

From outside the kitchen, they can hear the creeps stumbling around, knocking into the tables and chairs while laughing like psychos. Aaron seems to be sold on the idea after one disturbing cackle rings through the air.

“What do we need?”

While Aaron is instructed to find a lighter, Veronica soaks a rag in alcohol. She mixed some dish soap and oil into the bottle before tucking the hand towel into the opening. They didn’t have motor oil, but the rust remover would have to do. The kitchen was illuminated slightly when the wick was lit. Veronica held the bottoms carefully and nodded at Aaron, who was going to grab the largest knife he could find.

“Wait,” Veronica stopped him and he looked over at her, “Wrap the handle up.”

“Why?” He asked.

“So fingerprints won’t be left behind.”

Aaron furrowed his eyebrows.

“Just in case. We did just make a molotov, after all.” Veronica added.

“Yeah, that’s fair.”

He wraps the handle of a butcher knife in a rag before picking it up and creeping over to the door. The intruders were still bumbling around, but now their laughter sounds like a human that never learned proper English dialect was being gutted alive. He did a full-body cringe.

“Here’s the plan,” Veronica whispered. “Get to the car. If I go down, just get away from here. Call the cops, and make sure my eulogy is kick ass.”
Aaron looked at her with wide eyes.

“You’re telling me to just leave you behind?”

“I know you would have said the same thing if you made the plan.” She said and Aaron nodded a little. “Don’t kill anyone if you don’t have to. We just run. But remember- we kill out of self defense. Nobody can fault us for that. Except the molotov. Maybe.”

Aaron found himself laughing a little at that.

“Right.” He reached for the door handle and then paused, “Hey...if we don’t make it out alive, I just wanted to say that I think you were really cool. You’re sweet, Veronica. I’m glad we’re friends.”

“Aww, don’t get sappy on me, Aaron.” Veronica said, lightly punching his shoulder, “But thanks. That means a lot.”

Aaron smiled a little.

“And if we do make it...well, I hope you won’t see me any differently. If I kill someone, I mean.”

Veronica shook her head.

“Of course I won’t. You were trying to protect yourself.”

“Right.” A deep breath. “Well. Let’s do this.”

The click of the lock felt painfully loud. The door pushed open slowly and the two teenagers, crouched down low, crept into the dining area. They peeked over the counter and, thanks to the glow from the moon and burning wick, they could see the intruders. The crazy men’s heads snapped around almost fully in sync. Their eyes seemed impossibly wide. One cackles.

Veronica hurls the molotov forward. Upon impact with the floor, the glass shatters and an inferno of gold and orange explodes outwards. Fire spews out in seemingly every direction, followed by a thick grey haze, thanks to the dish soap that was added into the mixture. Four out of six men are caught in the firestorm and their shrieks of agony reverberate off of the diner walls. Flames lick at their legs, flying embers ignite their dirty clothes, smoke clogs up their airway and turns their face blue, leaving them staggering and clawing helplessly at their throats before finally collapsing into the mess upon the ground. The fire leaps onto any bodies in victory, eating away everything on the newly dead people until it’s satisfied. Three out of six intruders die from the molotov, while the other clings onto his life, howling in pain and pleading for mercy. Veronica tackles him to the ground.

The man has to be in his fifties and has a wild look in his eyes. His hair, half charred, is greasy and stringy, hanging in long black strands from his head. He’s very thin, probably because he was homeless. One side of his body is badly burned and his clothes have melted onto his pale skin. The pain twisting his face is obvious.

Veronica has her knife at his throat, preparing to slice right through his esophagus, when she stops. Her hands tremble a little and she looks down at the old man. A little more sanity returns to his eyes.

She didn’t want to kill him. Sure, he broke into Aaron’s family diner and was probably batshit crazy, but she didn’t want to end his life. He was just a human being, exactly like her. He was trying to survive. She was doing the same thing, and she sure as hell wouldn’t want a knife pressed
to her throat.

Veronica’s hands pull back a little and she opens her mouth to say something, when the man lashes out. She’s violently hit to the side and he practically pounces on her, straddling her hips while curling his fingers around her throat. His thumbs press down on her airway, causing an immediate struggle from the teenager.

Every part of Veronica’s body is screaming. She curses herself for being so impossibly stupid. How could she think that a clearly insane person could come to their senses? She couldn’t ponder it for long, as the burning in her chest worsened and her eyes began to roll around in their sockets.

There was a crash from above as Aaron appears in her vision, smashing one of the wooden chairs into the burnt man’s head. He sways and then collapses forward onto Veronica. The smell of charred flesh overwhelms her and she inhaled a breath full of air that’s tainted with smoke and melted skin. The tang of death sticks to her tongue. She nearly throws up before she can even shove him off.

Finally, once there is no corpse reclining on her, she can breathe. She sucked in another breath and it eases the stinging in her chest, even if it is tainted with smog. She choked out laughter, draping an arm over her face.

“Aaron, oh my god,” She wheezed, “I love you. Thank you so much. I thought I was a goner.”

“Me too,” Aaron admits with a small smile. He extended a hand and helped Veronica to her feet. His nose is bloody and it looks like he might have a black eye forming, but there’s no stab wounds, which is good.

“Are you okay?” He asked, “Sorry for the wait, I was taking care of the other one.” He points to the body laying face-down on the floor. “He’s not dead. Just unconscious.”

“That’s okay,” Veronica assured him, “And I’m fine. What about you?”

Aaron tentatively touches his nose, winces a little, then nodded.

“I don’t think it’s broken. So I should be fine once we get out of here.”

“Agreed.”

The two of them began walking to the front door, planning on putting all of this behind them, when Veronica remembered something. Wasn’t there six intruders?

With a crazed battlecry, a man lunged out from the shadows and at Aaron with his arms raised. Veronica slammed her body into the dark silhouette, sending them both toppling to the ground. The guy on top of her struggles, pushing his hands against her shoulders like he was trying to get up. Veronica’s leg swings up, nailing him right in the nether region. She shoved his frail body off of her.

On the tile ground, she tussles and struggles with the guy before finally pinning him on his stomach. She sits on his back and hooks her fingers in his hair for a better grip. But, once again, that feeling of denial sweeps over her.

The sharp throb in her temple nearly makes her release the man. When she looks up, JD is standing there, a smile on his emaciated face.

“Well?” He said expectantly, “Go on. Kill him.”
He waves a hand, as if signaling her to begin, but she doesn't do anything. He scoffs. Veronica eyed him warningly, tightening her grip on the weirdly gelled brown hair between her fingers.

“Come on,” JD says, “Where’s that monster I saw back in Ohio? Let’s bring her back out.

Veronica can only growl. Baring teeth isn’t monstrous enough for the ghost of her abusive boyfriend- no surprise there.

“I should have known. You’re too weak to do anything.”

That was a flame lighting a fuse. In one swift movement, Veronica snaps the man’s neck with a horrible **CRUNCH**, staring at JD the whole time as if saying, “This is you.”

JD tips his head back and laughs loudly, which takes Veronica aback slightly. What was so funny? Was her threat not, well, threatening?

“Oh you stupid, foolish little girl,” He said lowly, smirking widely. “You’re too ignorant to realize what you even do sometimes. Blind, even. Learn to control your anger before you kill your friends.”

...What?

Veronica looks down and is horrified to see Aaron’s head almost twisted entirely around, broken in a sickening position. His tongue is caught between his teeth, oozing blood and saliva out from his lips. She doesn’t even realize she’s crying from the sight.

If Aaron is dead then where is...

A leg from the broken chair plunged directly through Veronica’s throat with a spew of blood. Her hands instinctively snap to the piece of wood, pawing helplessly before her arms go limp. It pulls free and her final breath leaves her.

—

Veronica wakes up screaming. Her eyes pop open wide and she sits up straight, breathing heavily. Her body is soaked in sweat and she’s shaking uncontrollably. She puts her head in her hands and sobs quietly until rapid footsteps race to her room. She screams when someone throws up the door, but was relieved to just see it’s Janis.

Her cousin hurried over, but slowed down once she got closer. She slowly climbed onto the bed next to Veronica and her younger cousin rested her head against her shoulders. She didn’t have to ask what was wrong, even if the screaming didn’t give it away. Instead of exchanging words, she rubbed Veronica’s back and stayed by her side until she eventually passed out again.

While sliding out of the bed, Janis noticed the scars hiding under Veronica’s sleeve. She moved up the sleeve slightly and brushed her thumb over one of the fresher cuts. Her heart clenches a little and she looks down at her own scathed arm.

“We’ll get better,” She whispered, even though her cousin was asleep, “I’m here, Vera. I’ll always be here.”

Chapter End Notes
Before anyone says anything about the way I chose for Regina and Janis to make up, it is possible. Me and my ex-best friends have resented each other for the past two years. We don’t go to the same school, since I moved, but we constantly bashed each other on social media. Just recently, she contacted me again, in a truce attempted. She wanted to start over and try again, and I did too. Our conversations were smal at first, but we eventually met up in person again. Everything was fragile and we talked carefully, but it’s starting to work out. It can happen. Not everyone holds grudges.

Second- making a molotov is actually really easy
And third- you can physically fight be on that Glorybringer thing. It’s not a good ship at all
Rated F

Chapter Summary

Rated F for FUCKING NASTY.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is similar to W e b s in a way, but PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE read the warnings. I’m not exaggerating with that summary, this chapter is honestly disgusting. W e b s had more gore, but this one is just...a doozy. It’s really gross, y’all. If it’s too much to handle, please skip it. The point of this chapter is to highlight the terrors in Veronica’s mind. It’s a step into her trauma-ridden world. The setting is a morphed reality of real life. Read with caution.

Chapter warnings: Hyperrealistic nightmares, Blood and gore, General horror themes, Disturbing content, Mentions of rape, Implied rape, Disgusting imagery, Force feeding, Vomiting, Vomit ingestion, Graphic descriptions of eating literal vomit, Forced cannibalism, Monster humping, Non-con elements, Nonconsensual sexual themes, Long tongues going down throats

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Veronica’s eyes opened, she’s standing in a dark hallway. The loud sound of one of those big metal fans whirs somewhere in the distance. Rust covers the walls. At least, she thinks it’s rust.

The door she stood in front of is locked, though she can’t remember walking through it. There’s a croquet mallet in her hand, perfectly clean. She finally takes a step forward, and rubble crunched under her feet.

The passageway is long. Any other hallways are blocked with trash and other objects that she doesn’t have the strength to move. Pieces of metal stick out of these heaps, and she would prefer to not get tetanus, so she leaves it alone. Most doors she comes across are locked.

Besides the fan, wherever it may be, the walk is mostly silent. Veronica isn’t really scared, just confused. She grips her croquet mallet tighter.

The walls open up; she’s standing in what seems to be like a cafeteria. There’s a rustling sound coming from a far corner and Veronica squints in the darkness. There’s a fleeting figure of something. She moves on.

Weaving through the tables, some dirty or overturned, she notices claw marks engraved in the benches. Dried blood seems to be permanently stained on the tabletops. Her heartbeat raises slightly.

While reaching for the handle of what she assumed to be an exit, there’s a long hiss from behind. Slowly, Veronica turns and she sees this creature crouched on all fours.
It’s perched on one of the tables, staring with bright yellow eyes. It has molted grey skin and tufts of blonde hair sticking out of its head. Long claws extend from each fingers and each toe; Veronica doesn’t even want to think about what that could do to a human’s throat. This thing almost seems like a cross between a person and a cat in a way. Still, she’s intimidated, so she backs away. Moving was a poor choice, as the creature lunges forward with another hiss.

Acting quick, Veronica raises her mallet and smashed it into the side of the monster’s skull, sending it rolling across the floor. Mewling in pain, it scrambles up the wall and into a vent on the ceiling. There’s blood left on the weapon.

Veronica hurried through the door, escaping that darkened cafeteria. She finds a handgun in a classroom, tucked away in a discarded backpack. The thought of why it was there makes her a little queasy.

Slightly more confident, Veronica continues on her way. She kept thinking she hears things coming from different directions. Like banging in the ceiling and distant yelling, even though she can’t seem to find anyone else.

Pushing open a rusty door, Veronica steps outside. The sky is pitch black, no stars, no moon. Big, looming trees grew all over this courtyard. She scrambled up into one and perched on a branch, feeling slightly safer.

She took note on the voices she started to here. Crawling across the long branch, she saw three figures standing a few feet away. They were clad in football gear, making her guess that they were jocks, and one was fidgeting like it was scared. They were all speaking, but she didn’t know from where, as they had no mouth. Or eyes. Or noses.

“I saw it,” Whispered the fidgety one. “I-I don’t know which one. Maybe the green one? It doesn’t matter. We have to get out of here!”

“Will you calm down?” Hissed the second one, “Screaming like a pussy won’t help any of us.”

“No you don’t understand,” The first whimpered, “We’re going to die!”

His movements and body language were exaggerated, showing his fear.

“Get your head on straight!” Growled the third one. “No one is going to-“

Timed almost comically, something leapt out of the bushes in a blur of grey and green and tackled the jock that was speaking. It dragged him into the shrubs while the other two screamed in horror.

“It’s here!!” The first wailed, “We’re going to die!”

“Not if I can help it.” The second one said, pulling out a gun. He went to investigate the bushes, leaving his friend behind.

Veronica looked at the weapons she had. A handgun could give her away and her swing with the mallet would be too clumsy. She checked her pockets; there was a knife. Good enough.

Shimmying across the branch, she jumped down onto the first jock, stabbing the knife into his back. He didn’t have time to scream as he was yanked to the ground, blood rushing from the fresh wound. Some spurted into her mouth; it tasted foul.

“Hey-!!”
The blade sunk beneath the second jock’s chin, halting his battlecry. He collapsed a few seconds later.

Veronica exhaled shakily and cleaned the knife before putting it back in her pocket. She stepped through the tall grass carefully, holding her mallet at the ready. When a twig snapped from a few yards away, she whirled around to see them. All of them.

There was the yellow-eyed creature she had encountered in the cafeteria, along with two others. They all looked similar, naked with grey skin. The biggest had red eyes and a mane of crimson hair. When she rose, her muscles popped and she stood much taller than Veronica. She says something to the other two in a weird language and then climbs up a tree, disappearing through an open window.

The two left behind darted in opposite directions. Veronica spun around to try and catch them, but they were much too fast. The green one leapt out and slammed into her, knocking her to the ground. When its mouth opened, Veronica thrusted the end of her mallet at it, jabbing the back of its throat. The monster reeled back and then vomited. It was a horrible, chunky pool of red, green, and brownish goop.

Veronica tried to flee, but the yellow one grabbed her ankles, yanking her back to the floor. She hit her chin on the hard ground, rendering her helpless for a moment. It was enough for the creature to seize her arms and hold her still. Its fingers pried open her jaw. She noticed how the green one had webs between its fingers, making a perfect basin for the throw up it was gathering in its hands.

Veronica began to shake her head wildly. She attempted to beg with the monsters, but a handful of vomit was already smooshed in her face. Her mouth filled with it and the monsters forced her to swallow. They keened and clicked in satisfaction; the yellow one showed its appreciation by grooming her hair with its tongue.

Handful after handful, Veronica is force-fed monster puke. The chunks roll on her tongue and get caught in her teeth. She can feel it oozing down her throat like molasses. The taste it indescribable. Just imagine the worst thing you’ve ever tasted and then throw it out the window, because this was now that. Her tastebuds were practically screaming for mercy, but none was given.

The monsters were laughing like hyenas, lashing their short, furry little tails. They seemed pleased by what was going on, entertained, even. The yellow one made a series of clicks and the green one perked up. It pads over to one of the bodies and then returned with a large chunk of skin. It holds the piece out to Veronica, who shook her head wildly.

Green frowned and then began to chew a piece of flesh. After that, it spits into its hand and stuffs it into Veronica’s mouth. Human skin and blood, added with monster saliva and bile was not a good mix. This almost felt (and tasted) worse than the throw up. For a moment, Veronica couldn’t breathe. Her throat was clogged up, but Yellow began to rub her neck, coaxing the “food” down into her stomach. She was left gasping and pleading for no more, but more was given.

Green stops chewing the food for Veronica and just starts putting whole chunks and strips in her mouth, nearly choking her. At least Yellow realizes she couldn’t swallow, so it helps her chew it up by working with her jaw.

Finally, it becomes too much and Veronica vomits all over herself. Absolutely thrilled, Green chirps and claps in glee. It began to lick the bile off of her thighs, tail wagging. Yellow is distracted by watching, so Veronica slips her knife out and stabs Yellow in the back.

The monster shrieks and falls backwards on the handle, forcing the blade in deeper. When it
lurches upwards, it bites Veronica in the arm, making her thrust her mallet into its neck, leaving it gasping. It collapses eventually, but Veronica has already scrambled for the open window she saw the red one go through.

Green is still up, though, and it slinks after her. Veronica freezes and watches it approach her, paralyzed by fear. It sniffs her, growls, laps up a trail of bile dribbling down her leg, then walks over to its friend. Veronica doesn’t wait around to see what it does, she flees the courtyard.

The window leads into the building again. Veronica takes a moment to try and calm herself down. She’s covered in vomit and her arm is throbbing. She presses her hand to the wound to try and stem the bleeding. At the end of the hallway is an elevator, and she has no choice but to go down.

“Oh, poor little girl,” Says an echoey voice.

Veronica looks up and sees the red creature looking in from a hatch in the elevator ceiling. She backs herself into the corner, breathing heavily. Pain flares through her arm and she clutches at the bite mark.

“It hurts, doesn’t it? My friend is known for her painful bite.” Red continues, watching Veronica sink to the ground, “You must be so scared.”

She hops down into the elevator. Garnets and rubies seem to be embedded in her skin, decorating her collarbone and the crown of her head. She stands in a slightly hunched position thank to her hock-jointed legs, but she’s still around six feet tall. A devil tail whips behind her and a crown of crimson horns stick out from her head.

“Yes, you are such a poor little girl,” She cooed again, “What will you do? Humans don’t belong here.”

The elevator makes noises and Red looks up, narrowing her eyes at the hatch. She looks back at Veronica before climbing out, disappearing somewhere in the elevator shaft.

The sliding doors open and Veronica steps out, rubbing her wounded arm as the pain finally recedes. A cold breeze hits her and she’s standing out in a forest.

No, she wasn’t kidding. She was smack dab in the middle of a fucking forest from an elevator ride. It didn’t make sense, but, then again, nothing about this did. She turned around, and the elevator was gone. There was nowhere to go but into the tree line.

Veronica walked for what felt like hours. The forest was dark, but it didn’t seem to be nighttime. When she looked up, through the dense treetops, she couldn’t see a thick grey sky full of clouds. The lack of sunlight made it so dim. It was silent, too. No birds chirping or bugs buzzing, just Veronica’s feet crunching under fallen leaves and twigs.

Then, there was the rustling.

The new and sudden noise made Veronica stop. She looked over her shoulder and saw nothing, so she kept going, a little faster this time. Almost twenty minutes pass before she heard the rustling again, so, once more, she turns around and sees nothing. The third time is when she finally spots it.

Around fifty yards away is a large object. When she squints, she can see it move. An arm shoots out and grips the floor, followed by a second. Legs push the creature up and it stands fully. There’s only a mouth on its face, no other features. One arm is short and pale, that of a person’s, while the other is clawed and covered in black fur. The rest of its body, aside from another furry leg, is sickly white skin with red splotches like blood. Swollen muscles press grossly under its flesh.
Veronica runs and it follows.

It’s way too fast for her. Its arms fly out and she’s knocked to the ground. The beast pounces on her, making her think her spine had just snapped for a moment. It begins to shred her clothes, hissing and chuffing, before leaning forward, engulfing her in its bulk.

Its belly presses against her now bare back. Moist flesh, clammy flesh, crusted flesh, hot, feverish and sickly flesh pressed down on her own skin. The monster grabs her shoulders tightly and slides her down, like it was trying to bundle her beneath it. Its feet dig into the dirt for a better position, and then it snorted in satisfaction.

Veronica is thrashing but it does little to help. She’s being crushed by this thing. Her head whisks around for a place to breathe, but the inhale she takes it tainted by the monster’s sour musk. She gags. She was so close to it that she could hear its guts churning inside of its stomach.

The creature shifts its weight around a bit before chuffing. Slowly, with small groans, it began to grind its hips against Veronica. A sharp moan of horror escapes her lips, and it mistakes it as a sign of lust.

It wrenches its new mate onto her back. Its arms pressed onto her stomach, groin still moving, and extends its head downwards. It opens its mouth and a horrifically long tongue slithers out. It slides all over Veronica’s face, leaving snail-trails of thick saliva on her skin. Then, it pushes into her mouth.

The intruder clogs up Veronica’s airway. The taste that fills her mouth is horrible. She can almost feel it reaching her stomach, lapping at the contents inside like a thirsty dog. The tongue is wriggling, deepening her anguish with how horribly uncomfortable and painful it was. Right when she thinks she might suffocate, the monster pulls out with a happy grunt, licking along its lips.

Veronica is gasping, struggling harder as tears slip free from her eyes. Her abused throat aches and burns and she coughs weakly. The monster hears her and looks down after it finished cleaning its chops.

With a small, disgruntled noise, it starts to shift again. It scoots back a little and then reclines forward. The little light in the forest is gone as Veronica is crushed under its girth. The bubbling of its innards gets louder; it is sickly.

Thrashing violently, Veronica finally gets her arms free. She shoves at the monster’s shoulders, making it pull back with a surprised noise. It bares its teeth and forces its tongue down her throat again. This time, she bites down.

The beast shrieks.

Scrambling for her gun, Veronica aims and shoots. The bullet rips through the monster’s forehead, but it still moves. She shoots again and again until its face is a mess of red and pink. Finally, it tips over and lands in a heap upon the ground.

For the second time, Veronica throws up, but at least it’s not on herself. She pushes herself up to her feet and shudders. She feels violated.

No comfort will come to her if she just stands there, so the only thing she can do it keep walking. Every part of her body hurts. The bite mark is starting to burn really badly.

Finally, she stumbles upon a literally door in a cliffside. She can only go that way, so she does. It leads to a wide open room with machinery everywhere. A boiler room. A monster is waiting for
her, perched on a pipe.

“ Took you long enough.” The Thing said, “ You still look pretty, though. I’m glad you’re here.”

Veronica holds up her croquet mallet in a defensive stance. The Thing laughs.

Its body is blackened and charred, splotches of pink flesh stick out where skin has fallen off. The limbs are swollen and pieces are missing, like something bit chunks off. It stands awkwardly on its malformed legs, but is still so much taller. The all-too familiar human face splits open and a mouth full of razor sharp teeth smirks at her.

The Thing leapt off of its perch at a frightening speed, despite its large body. It slams into pipes and other machines when Veronica flees. Hissing, it climbs over railings and furnaces, knocking one of its limbs into the girl.

It lunges when Veronica tries to stand up, pinning her to the ground. Thousands of voices began to whisper in her ears as it shreds her clothes, pressing into her.

“Do You rEmEmBeR hOw YoUr FiRsT tImE hUrT?!”

———

“If you don’t mind me asking, why do you need to go to a hotel if you live here in Evanston?”

Veronica looks up from the window and at the Uber driver. She smiled slightly.

“I just need a night away from home.”

The man nodded knowingly.

“That’s perfectly fine, kid. I hope whatever is going on gets better.”

“Thanks.”

Really, Veronica had to get out of the house because she needed space. Her last nightmare was horrifying. She woke up crying and achy, like all her wounds transferred into the real world. Nobody at home understood, so being alone was her only choice for now.

The hotel she was dropped off at was one of those places. You know the one. Not a rundown place, but still enough to give you chills. It wasn’t much, but it was enough for this one night. And if anything was going to drive her back home, it’ll be the scratchy blankets.

The receptionist at the front desk seemed mildly concerned about checking in a sixteen year old girl who looked like she hadn’t slept in years. By the glint in the woman’s eyes, Veronica could tell she was expecting room service to clean up a dead body the next morning. That wasn’t why she was here, though.

Veronica took her key and lumbered over to the elevators. There were quite a few people eating dinner in the dining area. Children stared at her like she was an alien.

She stepped into her cookie cutter of a room, similar to those of every hotel room all across America. It was nothing fancy. Two beds, a table, TV, and a bathroom.

She collapses onto the bed and wondered about how many unborn babies had seeped into the fabric of these blanket. How many un-recepticled loads of cum had sprayed across those white headboards? It made her snort in weird amusement.
Veronica changed into a t-shirt and some shorts and then crawled into the bed furthest from the door. The blankets were as scratchy as she had expected and crinkled audibly when she moved. The pillow was lumpy, but it hugged her head enough for her to fall asleep in that stale-smelling room.

Veronica couldn’t even check the alarm clock when she woke up, because it hurt too badly to move. Pain was spiraling from her stomach and she couldn’t seem to figure out why. She had attempted to remove the blankets, but her flailing limbs only made it worse.

“Oh dear, oh dear,” She heard JD say from the chair he was sitting on, “Someone looks to not be doing so well.”

Veronica tried to growl, but it came out more as a gritty noise. She manages to push herself up, nearly screaming, and yanks the blankets off. When she pulls up her shirt, she sees a gash in her stomach. The edges are crusted with black and infected purple. Blood is soaked through her shirt and drips down onto the sheets of the mattress. She doesn’t know what caused this and it scares it.

“Does it hurt?” JD asked, watching Veronica tip her head back and hiss between her teeth. “I have something that might help.”

He pulls something out from his coat. Veronica recognizes it as an ampoule.

“Do you want it?”

It might be the only thing that can soothe her wound, so she nods vigorously.

JD approaches her and holds it out, but pulls his arm back when she grabs for it.

“Ah, ah, ah,” He tuts, “Not without a deal. Give me your friend.”

The need for the medicine recedes slightly from Veronica’s eyes. She gives JD a hard stare, still gritting her teeth.

“It’s a fair trade, darling. It’ll only get worse that longer you wait.”

The pain does, in fact, get worse. First it feels like she’s been lit on fire, and then she’s being ripped in half. A choked noise similar to a short scream escapes from her clenched teeth.

JD holds out the ampoule again and, this time, Veronica snatched it from his hand. She cracks open the neck and takes the syringe in her other hand. The needle is frighteningly long, but she wasn’t going to cower about it right now. She needed this medicine to badly.

Pulling back the plunger, she fills the contents of the syringe and then quickly inserts it into her wound. The needle sliding into the mangled flesh is painful, but it started to soothe the agony.

JD waits until half of the medicine is gone before ripping the ampoule away, causing Veronica to cry out in shock and pain. She clutched at her side, curling in on herself as the white hot agony comes rushing back. She thinks it’s gotten worse.

“Give me your friend.” He said, waving the syringe in front of her face. She weakly tries to reach for it, but she’s unable to grab it. JD continues to tease her. “Come on, darling. Let me have your friend. Give her to me. Let me-“
“Fine! Fucking take her!” Veronica yells without even thinking it through, “I don’t fucking care anymore! I’m so tired of you!”

JD smirks widely.

“Good girl.” He said before stabbing the needle directly into Veronica’s bloodied wound. Her eyes pop open wide, spine bows, and that is enough to wake her from that dream.

She sits up straight in the hotel bed, breathing heavily. The only thing that goes through her head is: “What the fuck have I just done?”
Ash In The Air...and love

Chapter Summary

Veronica and Janis share the similar trait on not being able to handle anyone close leaving, Janis is super soft (and anxious and flustered), some good Janis/Regina platonic friendship moments, and my favorite side character Danny DeVito (who probably has a real name i just don’t know it) makes an appearance

Chapter Notes

tw: Panic attacks, Murder attempt

See the end of the chapter for more notes

team.mom: Janis has a Tik Tok account.
troybolton: WHAT
Gaylien: What the fuck no I don’t
Gwetchen: spill the tea Regina
Gaylien: LIES

team.mom: Janis, I literally just saw a video that said “Take a step if your Minecraft girlfriend broke up with you” and then it showed you stepping on a treadmill at full speed and flying into the wall
Big Gay: OH MY GOD
Gaylien: LIES!!!!
AfricaByToto: OP WHERE’S THE LINK TO THIS VIDEO
Gaylien: wait if you saw this video that supposedly features me, that means you, too, have a Tik Tok account so HA

team.mom: Janis, I literally saw it on a cringe compilation.
Gaylien: WHAT THE FUCK IT WAS FUNNY
Gaylien: shit

troybolton: JANIS JUST EXPOSED HERSELF
Gaylien: DAMNIT
—
Veronica allowed herself to smile as she stared down at her phone. Regina seemed to be just fine. Nothing had happened yet, so she could relax, at least for now.

She took a deep breath and then exhaled slowly, calming her heartbeat. She reached over to her nightstand and grabbed the script she had been given. After Romeo and Juliet, she had realized that acting was something she was actually really passionate about. For the second semester, she quit Piano class and joined Theatre, luckily getting into the same period as Damian. From there, she tried out for the school’s UIL One-Act and had surprisingly gotten in, along with her Theatre partner-in-crime.

The play was called Lockdown. The teacher wanted to go for a more dramatic approach, hoping their performance would bring chills to the judges that watched. The cast was small, the set was dark, and the ending was open. That’s one thing they all liked about it, how the play leaves you wondering what might happen to the characters.

The experience was definitely going to be real, given that there had been a real lockdown in North Shore. Veronica had been casted as Liz; she couldn’t wait.

———

“Alright, does everyone have a card in?” Lea asked, shuffling up the white cards in her hands. The others nodded. “Okay then: Now featured on Broadway. ‘Blank’ the musical.”

She began to read from the white cards, giggling through each one.


Everyone is snickering; Damian has fallen on his back, laughing. Glen is actually wheezing, which makes everyone laugh louder.

Lea starts to remove cards from her hand until the only ones left are “Masturbation” and “Poor life choices”.

“Masturbation: The Musical,” Glen said, “I’d pay big money to see that.”

“If you choose that, Lea, I’m leaving.” Veronica threatens and Lea smirked, putting down the ‘Poor life choices’ card. The cobalt girl throws her arms up. “I’m leaving!”

“Wait!” Another boy in the cast, Jesse Reynolds, cried, “Who’s going to be Liz?!”

“Me.” Damian puffs out his chest.

“But you’re Mark.” Jesse points out.

“Did I fucking stutter?”

Veronica snorted and settles back down in her spot. Playing Cards Against Humanity was a great idea. Afterwards, while she was collecting her stuff, Lea approached her. She smiled at the taller girl.

“What’s up, Lea?”

“Need any help?” She asked, noticing that a few books were falling out of an unzipped part of Veronica’s bag. She knelt down to pick them up. “How do you think the performance will go?”
“Good, hopefully.” Veronica answers, “Since there’s a smaller cast, there’s less to worry about.”

Lea nods.

“That’s true.”

Ever since Romeo and Juliet, Lea has been a lot more social. Not that she wasn’t before, but even her friends would talk to Veronica in the hallways. Many of them had thanked her for saving Lea from that falling light. The fame actually felt really nice.

Janis has voiced her jealousy of it before. When Veronica inquired her about it, her cousin said she was really lucky to talk to Lea Edwards. It seemed like Janis might have had a crush.

Veronica was thanking Lea when she noticed the bisexual pride colors on a bracelet on the girl’s wrist. She tilts her head.

“You’re bi?”

Lea blinks and then glanced at her wrist before laughing.

“Oh, yeah,” She said coolly, “A freewheeling bisexual, you could say. Why do you ask? Got the hots for me?” She shifts her shoulders.

“No, but my cousin does,” Veronica blurts on accident. She bit her tongue after realizing what she said.

Lea blinks her eyes a few time before smiling a little. Before she can say something, Danny, another cast member who got that nickname because she apparently looks like Danny DeVito and it just stuck, steps in with a curious looks.

“Janis Sarkisian?” She said, “You lucky duck.”

“What’s the tea?” Glen asked while walking over with Damian and Jesse.

“Crushes,” Lea informs them.

“With Janis?” Damian tilts his head after he heard his best friend’s name, “She has a lot. What about them?” He’s getting a little defensive.

“She hasn’t been able to pull of any relationships, though, right?” Jesse tilted his head and Damian nodded very slowly.

“I’m not surprised,” Lea said, “She had hell thrown at her. Not that I really believed much of it. Especially the homecoming party sex rumor. I’ve seen Janis. She would never sleep with a guy, even if she was drunk and out of it.”

Veronica frowns a little. That’s what Janis had told her about on Christmas.

“I still think she’s a cool kid,” Danny shrugged, “I would be so down for dating her. Sure, there’s dirt on her, but it’s the same for everyone else.”

Damian seems to perk up a little and he and Veronica exchange looks. He’s soon smiling about something, but shakes his head and bumps his friend with his elbow.

“We gotta start heading home.” He said and waved, “See y’all tomorrow!”
He and Veronica walk out of the school to start walking back to their houses. For a moment, it’s quiet, aside from Damian humming to himself and the pebble Veronica had kicked rolling across the ground.

“So...” Veronica starts slowly, “Janis wants a girlfriend?”

Damian looks at her with a raised eyebrow.

“I mean, of course she would.” The girl continued, “Danny seems like a good match for her. Janis seems like the type to be into butch lesbians.”

Damian chuckled.

“I was thinking the same thing.” He said, “I’m just nervous. I don’t know if Janis will go for it, though.”

Veronica nods slowly. She could understand her cousin’s hesitance. Hopefully Janis will branch out sooner or later; maybe she and Danny could hit it off.

———

Big Gay: okay Janis is in Geography right now and taking a test right?

troybolton: can confirm that, yes

Big Gay: okay okay okay i have to do this fast

team.mom: What?

Gwetchen: oooo what’s the tea?

Big Gay: okay so there’s this girl who has a crush on Janis and i want to make a plan to hook them up before she comes on the chat

team.mom: Why not just make a new chat without her in it?

Big Gay: she and i made a pact to never make a group chat without each other in it

Gwetchen: what about ur family chat??

Big Gay: did i stutter?

Big Gay: Troy what question is she on

troybolton: fifteen out of thirty

Big Gay: okay let’s do this quick

Gwetchen: who’s the lucky girl?

cornHub: yeah whos gonna be JanJans new wife

Big Gay: female Danny DeVito

team.mom: Oh, Danny? I love her! Janis has a huge crush on her.

Big Gay: wait really
smol: Wow, that makes this ten times easier.

Big Gay: here’s the plan guys

cornHub: who would top

Big Gay: THAT’S NOT APART OF THE PLAN

troybolton: Danny

Big Gay: ..... 

Big Gay: yeah probably

Big Gay: anyway, here’s the plan. take screenshots because im deleting these messages since im mod and i don’t want Janis to see them

—

“What kind of flowers do you think Janis would like?” Veronica asked, then paused. “Buying flowers for my cousin in a romantic situation is weird.”

Regina chuckled from the driver’s seat.

“She loves white roses,” She said, “Which may be surprising.”

“Yeah, it kinda is.”

The two of them were driving to a flower shop as apart of Damian’s plan. It was after school and a flurry of snow was starting to come down. Regina didn’t seem bothered by it at all, though. When you’ve lived in a snowy state like Illinois all your life, you get used to driving in the elements. Her tires had good treads, so she wasn’t worried. That didn’t stop Veronica from digging her fingernails into the seat.

“You good?” Regina glanced at her, laughing slightly.

“Yup,” Veronica smiled at her. “So, do you think this’ll work? Janis and Danny?”

“Janis has wanted a girlfriend ever since we were friends for the first time.” Regina said, “I’m sure it’ll work out. Danny’s real sweet. She’s my partner in Chemistry.”

Veronica nodded. She went to reply when she noticed something in the middle of the road. A charred corpse.

It turns and smiled and suddenly two white dots appeared. They’re way too close, but Veronica doesn’t realize that until something smashes into the side of the pink G-Wagon.

Glass shatters in every direction. The sound of squealing tires and tearing metal is reverberating through the air. The car is rolling off the road and into a nearby ditch, where it comes to a halt upside down.

Veronica is breathing heavily. She blinks away black spots that sway around her vision. The seatbelt is cutting into her stomach and she claws to get it off. She lands hard and crawls outside, relishing the cold air on her hot skin.

That’s when she remembers her friend. Regina.
She whips her head around and saw a mess. Her side of the car was completely shredded off. The front was on fire and that made Veronica more terrified than she already was. She struggled to her feet and stumbled around to the other side, not stopping to check if she was injured. If she was conscious and could walk, then she was fine.

She pulled her phone out of her pocket and dialed 911. She shakily told them about the situation while pulling on the handle, eventually getting the door open. Despite what the operator said about staying on the line, she put her phone away because she needed both hands to get her friend out.

Regina was dangling upside down from her seat, still caught in her seatbelt. Her eyes were shut and she wasn’t responding when Veronica called her name. Blood is streaming down her face in multiple trials from the scrape on her forehead. Scratches criss-cross on her legs. The fire is getting bigger.

Veronica stands up as tall as she can and starts to jerk with the seatbelt. Flames lick at her arms, and it hurts like hell, but she doesn’t pull away. There’s a click and the seatbelt finally unlatches, sending Regina falling backwards when Regina toppled onto her. She scrambled up and drags her friend further away as the entire car is swallowed by raging gold.

Her breathing is heavy. The air tastes like smoke. Ash and snow whips into her eyes and she has to squint. For a moment, she thought she saw a dark shadow cast across the floor.

She looks around. It’s one of the darkest days of her life- sky grey, thunder booming, friend possibly dying in her arms. The thick clouds are making this four-thirty afternoon look like the middle of the night.

Her eyes flick over to the other car. It’s slid halfway into the ditch, the front completely smashed up. Jagged pieces of metal stick out in various directions. She can’t see the driver- not that she cares.

Veronica shuts her eyes tightly and ashy tears slip free. She exhaled a shaking breath and held Regina closer to her.

“Don’t die, don’t die, don’t die.” She mutters to her unconscious friend, “Please don’t die. Please. Please. Stay with me. Don’t leave me. Please, I need you.”

That’s how the EMS found her two minutes later. When red and blue lit up the mist, Veronica snaps her head up, tear tracks glowing on her cheeks. Over the wailing sirens, she screams.

“Help!” She yelled, “My friend needs help!”

The side of the road suddenly exploded with action. Paramedics rushed over, hurriedly lifting Regina onto a stretcher. Veronica gets hauled up to her feet and guided over to the back one of the ambulances. A blonde woman gives her a comforting smile.

“Is my friend going to be okay?” Veronica asked.

“We’re going to do everything we can,” The woman replied, “I’m going to check on you, okay? Can you tell me your name?”

“Veronica. Veronica Sawyer.”


“I-I don’t know.” Veronica says, “One minute we were driving smoothly and then...the car was
“flipped. That truck came out of nowhere.” She shudders and paused for a moment. “I’m fine. Please just make sure my friend is okay. Please.”

She thinks she knows what happened, but it’s not like the medics will believe her. That was JD in the road. He wasn’t lying when he said he was going to try and kill Regina. Or maybe he was just trying to scare them. Either way, it pissed Veronica off.

Another paramedic shines a light in Veronica’s eyes and she lightly swats it away.

“N-no, I’m fine. I promise.”

“Your arms are burned.” Alessa points out.

“Have you seen my friend?” Veronica said, “I-I’m sorry. I just-“

“It’s okay.” Alessa says, “I’m going to treat your arms, alright? Let’s get you in the ambulance.”

Veronica hadn’t realized how much her arms hurt until that moment. She swallowed the lump in her burning throat and nodded, letting the paramedic help her into the vehicle. She saw Regina in the other one before the doors shut.

—

Veronica was released from medical care shortly after getting to the hospital. Her condition wasn’t critical, unlike Regina, who was in a worse state.

After she sent a text out to the others explaining the situation, the waiting room was soon filled with six panicked juniors. All of them were pale and had fear in their bulging eyes. They couldn’t go see Regina, as she was still being worked on. It pained them to have to wait around. The intensity of the situation was getting to them, especially Janis, who has already snapped at a group of people.

It had been a family that was called back to see the baby that had just been born. Fury flared in Janis’ eyes at the reason.

“What the hell?” She had yelled, “How is that fair? It’s just a stupid fucking baby! We deserve to see our friend more! She-“

By this point, Damian had grabbed her and covered her mouth, pulling her away. Aaron and Gretchen shuffled forward to try and awkwardly explain.

“I’m so sorry,” Aaron said, “She didn’t mean it. Our friend got, umm, hit by a car and we haven’t been able to see her yet, so everyone is a little...antsy.”

The family was surprisingly understanding and sympathetic so the teenagers got off easy.

It’s not until an hour later that they’re all finally called back. By this point, everyone had fallen silent. Janis, Damian, and Veronica were all curled up on one of the couches together, asleep from the exhaustion of worrying, Karen and Aaron were watching a game on the TV to try and distract themselves, and Gretchen was up on her feet, pacing and biting her nails. The Georges were there, too.

“Are you here for Regina George?” A doctor asked, making everyone snap their gaze towards him.

“Yes, we are!” Gretchen said before the parents even could.
Aaron and Karen shook the other three awake. Janis jumped up immediately.

“How is she? Is she okay? Is she alive?” She began to ask rapidly.

The doctor held up his hands, but smiled a little.

“Your friend is stable.”

Before he could go on, Janis screamed. It was a joyous scream, a cheer of relief and happiness. She threw her arms up into the air, then immediately crashed into Damian’s arms, full on sobbing in relief.

“She’s emotional under pressure.” Gretchen informed the doctor, who was very understanding.

“No, it’s okay. This is one of the best parts of my job, telling people their friends and children are okay.” He said, then glanced down at his clipboard, “Regina sustained scratches that had to be sewn up in some areas, but nothing severe. Her head had hit the steering wheel, but no break or concussion. Her legs were damaged the most, but only a few fractures and cracks. First to second degree burns. She was very lucky.”

A collective sigh of relief went through the group.

“Which one of you is Miss Veronica Sawyer?”

The cobalt girl, who had been quietly celebrating to herself, raised her hand and stepped forward.

“That’s me, sir.” She said a little meekly.

“I was informed you were in the crash, too?” The doctor said, making the other teenager’s snap their heads towards her.

“You said you weren’t in the car!” Damian said.

“Sorry, I lied. This wasn’t about me!” Veronica replied quickly before turning her attention back to the doctor, “Yes, I was. But I’m fine. I was already treated.”

“Then we have to thank you for Miss Regina’s survival. I’m afraid she would have burned to death inside of that car if you hadn’t pulled her out.” He nods at the bandages around the girl’s arm.

Mrs. George pulled Veronica into a hug upon hearing that, thanking her at least a hundred times. Mr. George joined in on the embrace, too, before finally breaking apart.

“You are welcome over anytime!” Mrs. George said, which made Veronica smile.

“Can we go see her?” Karen asked.

“Of course.”

Regina was still asleep when they all filed into the room. It almost seemed wrong to look at her like this, unconscious and in a hospital bed. A monitor beeps steadily, which is still a little unnerving to hear, even if the doctors said she was in a stable condition.

For some reason, Janis stood near the back, looking at the floor. A few of the others noticed, but it was Mrs. George who spoke up about it.

“Would you like a moment with her, dear?” She asked, smiling kindly at the teenager.
Janis perked up.

“Really? Could I?”

“Of course.”

Within a few seconds, Janis is alone in the room, aside from her unconscious friend. She loitered around for a moment before walking over to the bed and kneeling down.

“I know those doctors said you are going to live, but things can always go wrong and- What I’m saying is that you better not die. I won’t forgive you if you do. I just got you back in my life, I refuse to lose you again.” Her breath stutters and she reaches out to grab Regina’s hand, “I know you’re a hell of a lot stronger than this. So don’t you dare die. I’m being serious.”

“You forget that I was hit by a bus before, Janis.”

“Ohmygod-!!”

Janis yelped and fell backwards when Regina spoke. Her eyes were wide, almost like she wasn’t expecting to friend to get up. Regina grins at her, looking like the pristine lioness she was even when she was dressed in a hospital gown and had a oxygen mask in her nose.

“Hey, Janis.”

Janis jumped up and hugged Regina tightly, making the taller girl hiss a little pain, but she returned the embrace.

“Guys, she’s awake!” Janis practically yelled in Regina’s ear, still not breaking apart from the hug.

The others all quickly herded in, lighting up at the sight of the blonde sitting up.

“Hey, guys,” Regina said, “Okay, Janis, you’re gonna have to let go. You’re kinda hurting me.”

Damian has to pry the girl off, who grins sheepishly.

“Sorry.”

“I’m so happy you’re okay,” Gretchen said.

“That was pretty wild, Regina.” Veronica spoke up, smiling wryly.

“Oh shit, you were in there!” Regina exclaimed, “Are you okay? How are you doing?”

“Just a few scratches and burns,” Veronica waved a hand, “I’m fine. I was already treated.”

Regina sighed in relief and nodded.

“Good. Glad you’re okay. Now,” She glanced at Damian, “Don’t think this calls off our plans, okay?”

Her parents and Janis look confused about that.

“What plans?” Janis tilted her head.

“Oh nothing.” Regina grinned.
Janis had no idea what these “plans” were until the next day. While at lunch with the others, she noticed Danny walking over, which caused literally all of her friends to scatter from the lunch table, leaving her alone, blinking and confused.

“Uhh...”

“Hey, Janis,” Danny said, smiling a little, “I heard about what happened to Regina. Is she okay?”

“Yeah,” Janis nodded, “The doctors said she’ll recover soon, so she’s okay.” She began playing with her tater tots, “Umm...y-you look nice today. I like, uhh, the way you do your hair a lot.”

From their hiding spot behind the utensil cart, Veronica looked at Damian confusedly.

“What is she doing?”

“Janis may seem like a confident butch lesbian, but she’s totally clueless when it actually comes to flirting or even dating,” Damian whispered.

“In other words, she’s an awkward mess.” Aaron titters.

Back with the gays, Danny grins and ran her fingers through her chestnut bangs.

“You think so?”

“Y-yeah! If I had short hair, I’d probably style it like that.” Janis said and then cleared her throat, “Hey, do you, uhh...want to...” she rubbed her arm awkwardly.

“Hang out sometime?” Danny finished for her. “I’d love to.”

The way Janis lit up was similar to a puppy dog seeing a bone. If she had a tail, it would be wagging at a million miles an hour.

“Y-yes! That’s what I wanted to ask! You worded it perfectly,” She said, “A-anyway! I’m free this Saturday!”

Danny writes her number on a folded piece of paper and smiled brightly.

“Let’s do it. Text me the details, okay?”

“Y-yeah, of course! Thank you!”

Janis froze after that, her face turning redder than it actually was. Danny laughs.

“Thanking me for agreeing to a date? You are so adorable. See you this Saturday, Janis!” Danny waved and then walked back over to her table.

Janis was left in a flustered state of shock, mouth hanging open. She finally reacted, cheering so loudly the classes on the other side of the campus could probably hear her. And if her personality hadn’t made Danny fall in love with her, than that definitely had.

———

Gaylien has added therealdannydevito to the chat

Gaylien has changed therealdannydevito’s name to BestGirl
Gaylien: GUys I HaVE A GiRLFRIeND

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it’s been awhile since I updated...I had no plot after chapter 26. Completely lost. But now I have the final chapters down, haha! It’s time to write, baby!!

Also, I lied when I said there was gonna be no romance I present to y’all my latest crack ship...Janis and the Danny DeVito girl. This wasn’t actually supposed to happen but it did oof Sorry if that annoys anyone. This story isn’t that popular because it doesn’t have ships lol and now that I added one (1) it’s not something anyone ships ha

Also in two out of three drafts of this chapter, Regina actually died. I didn't go through with it because I needed the team mom character to stay alive.
Chapter Summary

January just keeps getting worse and worse for Veronica.

Chapter Notes

tw: Suicide attempt, Aftermath of traumatic experiences

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ever since Janis and Danny got together, Veronica has noticed a huge shift in her cousin’s demeanor. She smiles so much now. It makes Veronica happy.

Despite being in a relationship now, Janis still spent a lot of time with her friends, especially since Danny was welcomed into the little squad. Everyone loved her, even if Damian had to warn her about not breaking his best friend’s heart.

Janis switched on Veronica’s bedside lamp, causing her to stir and open her eyes a little.

“Huh...? What the...? Janis?” She slurred out tiredly.

“Come on, Vera. Get up. We’re sneaking out!” Her cousin urged.

Veronica just stared at her before getting up.

“Yeah, okay.”

Much to her surprise, Janis drive to the school. When asked about it, the older girl smirked and held out some keys.

“Troy let me borrow his pool keys. We’re going for a swim tonight!”

“Oh my god,” Veronica said, “You are going to get us in so much trouble.”

“Not if we don’t get caught.”

The two of them got out of the car and creeped up to the pool building. Janis unlocked the doors and the slipped inside.

“Ahh, I love that smell!”

“Chlorine?” Veronica looks at her strangely.

“Ohhh yeah.”

“You’re weird.”
They walked through the locker room and into the room with the giant pool.

“Man, this is awesome!” Janis cheered, “Come on, Vera, let’s get in! Soak that little white ass!”

Ignoring the weird comment, Veronica says, “But I didn’t bring my bathing suit!”

“Neither did I!”

Thank god that Veronica had taken her phone out of her pocket because Janis drags her into the pool. Her pajamas got heavy and would smell like chlorine for days.

“Gah, my bra is all wet and soggy,” She groaned, “Doesn’t feel nice.”

“Suck it up!” Janis chortled, “We’re here to have fun! Ya know, splash splash!”

Veronica laughed.

“Yeah! Splash splash!”

Even though she soaked clothes felt weird, Veronica still enjoyed herself in the pool with Janis. They swam and had a splash fight and talked, just genuinely enjoying themselves. It was great cousin bonding time. Of course things had to go wrong.

Veronica was wading around in the deep end by the diving boards, taking in this moment when her head pounded. It was similar to the pain when the ghosts appeared but it was much longer than a few seconds. It became so bad that all her attention turned to her headache and not keeping herself afloat.

She couldn’t quite remember how she got out of the water, but when her eyes opened (though she hadn’t even realized they were closed) she was on the side of the pool, halfway lying in Janis’ lap, who was running her back.

“What the...?”

“Veronica!” Janis exclaimed, “Oh my god, thank the lord you’re okay. I didn’t think you swallowed any water and you still had a steady pulse, but- Vera, you scared the shit outta me!” She shoved her, “Don’t ever do that again! Mom would have killed me!”

“Not planning on it,” Veronica grunts, sifting up, “I don’t even know what happened, Jan. Too tired to swim, I guess.”

That wasn’t it, but she didn’t want to worry her cousin anymore.

“Guess that’s our cue to go, then.”

“It is going to be freezing.”

“Ohohoho, yeah.”

———

It wasn’t until two days later that Veronica got another one of those really bad migraines. She was in English class with Damian and Regina (she had been released from the hospital finally) when her head started to feel like it was splitting open. She grips her pencil so tightly she’s surprised it hadn’t snapped in half. Damian noticed.
“You okay, darling?” He asked.

“Headache,” Veronica answered through her teeth.

“Oh.” Damian reaches over and rubs her shoulder.

A commotion erupts in the hallway, halting Mrs. Dowel’s lecture. Some kid bursts in, eyes wide with wild excitement.

“There’s some crazy shit going down on the roof!” He yelled.

That made everyone jump up and run out to the courtyard to go see what was going on, ignoring their teacher, who was trying to get them to sit back down. She eventually gave up and followed as well. Veronica was going to, too, but her headache worsened and she had to stop for a moment. When she looks up, she sees that she’s next to the door that leads up to the roof. Her heart clenches and she felt like she just had to go up there, so she did.

When she reached the top of the staircase and pushed open the door, wind and rain battered against her face. Just like she had been fearing, there was someone standing at the edge of the roof. A girl. Veronica thinks she’s a senior. She’s pretty and is dressed nicely. When the door shuts, she spun around, eyes wide and puffy.

“What are you doing up here?” She asked and Veronica stepped forward to hear better, “Don’t move! I will jump!”

That halted Veronica in her spot. She froze and held her hands up.

“Okay,” She said, “Okay, I won’t. Can we just- What’s your name? I don’t think I know you.”

After a second, the girl answers:

“Erika,” The girl said, “If you don’t even know me, then why are you up here?”

“I want to help you.” Veronica said, “Why are you doing this?”

“Life fucking sucks,” Erika spits, “Everything sucks. I don’t want to live anymore. My life is falling apart. I am nothing but a stupid, dirty slut!”

Veronica winced.

“I’m sure that isn’t true.”

“How would you know?” Erika hissed, “You don’t even know me.”

“That doesn’t mean anything.” Veronica says, “I don’t think you should do this. I know that things may hurt now but it will get better. I promise.”

Erika’s nose curled and she made a bitter face.

“You think I’m going to believe that bullshit?”

“I didn’t, either, but I’m still here, aren’t I?”

For a moment, there is no sound between the two girls. Veronica can hear the murmuring of everyone down below. The rain falls harder.
“...What?”

“I wanted to kill myself, too. I had everything prepared, but I didn’t go through with it. You can be strong, too, Erika. I can tell than you are. You’ve made it this far haven’t you?”

Erika says nothing.

“I understand that it hurts like hell, but please try to hang on. Keep fighting. I know you can do it. So, please, come down from there. Come stand by me, okay?”

Another beat of silence. Erika shakes her head wildly.

“No. No! It’s not true! Shit like that doesn’t happen in real life. This isn’t a movie!”

Adrenaline sent Veronica rushing forward when Erika turned her back.

“Wait! Wait! Please wait, Erika! Listen to me, please!”

Erika stood and looks back a little.

“Don’t do this, please. Please don’t jump. There are people who need you. There are people who don’t want you to die!”

“Then why aren’t they up here?”

“I-I don’t know,” Veronica admits, “But just trust me!”

“I want to trust you. I want to believe you, I really do, but it hurts too much. I have to do this.”

“No you don’t!” Veronica cried, tears brimming for someone she doesn’t even know, “N-nobody is making you! Nobody but yourself wants this to happen! You can stop this. You don’t have to do this.”

This is so much scarier then what happened with McNamara and Veronica can’t figure out why. She’s shaking and felt numb all over but it doesn’t make sense.

“When a dog is suffering you put it to sleep.” Erika hummed wryly.

“You aren’t a dog!” Veronica yelped, “You’re a person, a human being. Your life is still your own. Things can change and get better. Believe that it can and keep fighting. The pain won’t last forever.” She extends a hand, “Come down. Let’s get out of this storm. Together.”

For a moment, Erika just stared.

“Not everyone can be saved, Veronica.”

That was the moment that would haunt Veronica for years to come. Just another experience to taint her mind.

She had lunged forward, but she wasn’t fast enough. One moment Erika was there, and then she wasn’t. Even over the rain, she heard the sickening thud. People screamed. Erika was dead, no longer a student, but a mess upon the pavement.

Once she got to the edge, where everyone could see her, Veronica didn’t want to look down, but her eyes moved without her consent. Blood and a broken body. Guilty bystanders who are all the cause of this death. Over a thousand people at this godforsaken school and not a single other
A person ran up to the roof to help. This place was a web, you may get in, but nobody ever gets out.

Veronica blames the students who probably caused this. She blames the teachers who did nothing. She blames this hellish school for leaching the life out of an innocent students and the god she doesn’t even believe in. Veronica blames herself. She blames herself for not being fast enough and not Erika jumping is burned in her memory.

As she stared out at the crowd holding up phones and looking terrified, the tears come down fast. She sees Janis clutching onto Damian and Danny with fear in their eyes. She sees Aaron standing with his sports group, but none of them were laughing like their normal jock demeanor. She sees Karen and Gretchen clinging to each other, shaking. She sees Cady whose eyes are fixated on the dead body; this was probably her first time seeing someone actually die. She sees Regina, staring up at her with with a mournful expression. Veronica stares back at all of them and sobbed, soaked to the bone by rain and misery.

———

School ended early. Veronica had to talk to the principal and other faculty members before she was finally let go after a counselor took pity on her.

“Mr. Duvall, she just saw someone die. Let the poor girl go home.” The woman has said, which made Veronica wince, but at least it got her out of that office.

Even at home, though, Veronica still felt like she was in shock. She walked home, which took awhile, but it gave her time to think. Her mind was a painful cyclone.

When she walked into the house, Janis jumped up from the couch. Her aunt and uncle greeted her, too.

“Hey, honey,” Mrs. Sarkisian hugged her gently, “We heard about what happened...and what you did.”

“What you did was amazing,” Mr. Sarkisian says, “We are so proud of you.”

“You’re a hero, Vera,” Janis added.

The other three were quiet for a moment.

“We were going to go out to eat,” Mrs. Sarkisian said, “Would you like to come?”

Veronica shook her head.

“Thanks, but I kinda want to be alone right now...”

“That’s okay!” Her aunt days hurriedly, “Rest up, alright?”

“Alright. I-I’m going to go take a shower.”

The girl disappears upstairs.

She spends a long time in the shower, just soaking under the scalding rain. When she does get out and got dressed, she bundled up on the couch in the basement with a blanket and the cat. Janis stayed home, but she gave the girl space.

“Erika!!”
Veronica jolted up, startling Fen from her side. She hadn’t even realized she had gone to sleep.

Sighing, she got up and trudged upstairs. Janis looked surprised when she flipped down beside her on the couch, curling against her. She must not be feeling well if she was this cuddly.

“I thought I could save her...” Veronica mutters, “I thought... I was so close.”

“You tried, Veronica,” Janis said, rubbing her back comfortingly, “You did what nobody else did.”

Veronica made a soft noise, obviously not believing that she had done much good. Erika still died. That’s the thing that mattered.

After a moment of silence, Janis felt her cousin start to tremble against her.

“Can you...” Veronica started softly, “Can you get everyone to the house? I...I need to tell you all something.”

Chapter End Notes

if you thought that girl wasn’t going to jump after Veronica’s emotional speeches then you thought wrong haha
Within thirty minutes, the whole gang (and Danny) was at the house. They all glance at Veronica worriedly, but don’t say anything. They wait for her to speak up on her own, which takes another four minutes.

“I don’t know why I was so startled when... That girl- Erika- she...she wasn’t the first person I’ve seen die.” She’s clearly struggling to piece the words together. She takes a deep breath, “There’s something really important I have to tell you guys. Something I’ve been keeping from everyone...”

Regina seems to catch on and straightened up, giving Veronica an unsure, but supportive glance.

“You can tell us anything, honey.” Damian says encouragingly and he heard the girl in question mutter, “I hope.”

Veronica looks down and takes another deep breath.

“It...started when I met JD. I still don’t know what enticed me to hang around him. He just...flattered me. He was genuinely interested in me!”

Now that she had started, she knew she couldn’t stop anymore. Today was the day. The point of no return.

“Do you guys remember when I told that story about the Remington party?”

Everyone expect Danny nods. The girl looked confused and Janis whispered her the details.

“It ended way differently from what I told you guys,” Veronica says, “I got exiled from the Heathers for throwing up on Heather Chandler’s shoes and then smart-mouthing her like a complete dumbass.” A heavy sigh, “I...was drunk. And mad. And upset. And so, so stupid. JD somehow found his way to my house and I couldn’t think straight, so of course I didn’t question how he got there. But there he was and then we went out to the backyard and...well, you get the point. I don’t like looking back on that night.”

She looked up a little and saw Karen wrinkle her nose. Aaron and Gretchen exchange anxious looks. Cady looks a little disgusted and Veronica hopes it wasn’t about her drunken actions.
“After that, we... The ‘Westerburg Suicides’ were fake. Heather, Ram, and Kurt... They didn’t kill themselves, I killed them!”

Heavy silence hung in the air like fog. Veronica waited for someone to say something, but nobody spoke a word. She realized that was her cue to continue, so she does.

“I went to Heather Chandler’s house the day after my night with JD to ask her to forgive me. She demanded a hangover cure and I was going to spit in the drink. JD had a different idea. I grabbed the wrong cup. Heather drank drainage cleaner and...and died.”

There was a gasp from someone. The ghosts appear behind Veronica, invisible and unheard to the gawkers. They murmur unsurely to each other.

“Ram and Kurt... It wasn’t a double suicide pact at all. They weren’t even gay. JD and I shot them.” Veronica wrung her fingers in her shirt, “He-he told me they were Iche Luge bullets. Just tranquilizers. But he lied. All he did was lie! I was nothing more than a personal plaything for him and he left me like this.”

She splayed her hands open and stared at them as if they were drenched in blood. Her fingers clench into claws.

“His suicide was the only real one. Mine, too. At least, the first one.”

Janis makes a disgruntled noise, unaware of that.

“He scared me so badly I hid in my closet and felt like the only way to get him to leave me alone was to fake my death. I pretended to hang myself by fastening up a harness and just...dangling there. My reason was because he was going to come and kill me because I broke up with him.”

A momentary pause. Anger flashes in Veronica’s eyes.

“But why shouldn’t I have? Was it wrong that I broke up with him? After what he did to me? After how much he hurt and used me?” Her voice is filled with malice and fury. So much pent up rage filled her tiny body. “He was such a fucking bastard. You know, I tried to break up with him sooner. I don’t have much memory of what he did to me, but it left me with so much pain that I-”

She stopped mid-sentence, realizing that she was going on a tangent.

“JD’s suicide was the only real one. With a bomb. Yeah, he fucking blew himself up. Dramatic bitch.” She spits, “Even after I shot him multiple times, too! The fucker just got up and waltzed out of that boiler room like it was nothing. And then he had the audacity to pull something like that! It’s like he couldn’t wait one more second to hurt me again. He just couldn’t leave this goddamn world without damaging me one last time.” Her anger builds, “I was right there. God, and now that’s all I see in my dreams. Explosions, fire, the blood and organs splashing all over my body.”

Another pause. She had to catch her breath.

“Listen, I’m not...I’m not telling you guys this for pity or sympathy. I got a little carried away with what I told you. I don’t want any- I don’t deserve it. I just knew that my friends needed to know. I’m not who you think I am.” A shuddered breath, “You should have met this me a long time ago. I should have warned you before you got close. But...yeah. That’s why I have such bad post-traumatic stress.”

The living room is dead silent. Not even a mouse would make a sound after that.
Veronica raises her head to check her friend’s reactions: Gretchen’s jaw is hanging open, Aaron isn’t even making eye contact anymore, Cady has a hand over her mouth, Karen looks utterly terrified, Damian is as white as a ghost, Danny has realized she probably shouldn’t be here, Regina has a saddened expression, and Janis’s face is completely unreadable.

Then, a laugh.

“Veronica, you’re funny!” Gretchen says, slapping her knee, “I mean, I usually always believe what you say- you are very believable- but this? This is a pretty wild story, Ronnie!”

Veronica is taken aback, her eyes going wide. A few of the others nod in agreement at the statement and laugh along, and she doesn’t know how to feel about that.

“What? No, I’m-“

“Sorry, Ronnie, but I have to agree.” Aaron said, “I mean, murder? Really? You would be in jail.”

“No, listen-“

Veronica didn’t finish that sentence, instead bolting upstairs. She scurried back into the living room with her laptop, diary, and a pen. She opens the MacBook up and did a search on Heather Chandler’s suicide note, quickly pulling up a picture. Breathing heavily like she was a wild animal, she set the computer down on the coffee table so her friends could see the screen.

“Veronica-“ Cady tried to say, looking a little frightened.

“Heather didn’t write this note, I did. JD and I framed all the murders as suicides so we wouldn’t get caught. All of the notes were fake.” Veronica explained breathlessly.

Danny leaned forward a little to examine the screen. A puzzled look crossed her face.

“That’s handwritten.” She said, “How could you possibly-“

“Forger.” Veronica answers before she can even finish, “I can forge almost anyone’s handwriting. I-it’s a weird talent. Watch-“

Before anyone can stop her, she pulled a note out of her diary and set it down on the table. It was a Christmas card from Heather Chandler, something Veronica cherished. Perfectly, she began to copy the writing on a free piece of paper. Once she finished, Damian picked up both sheets and examined them. His eyes widened.

“Oh my god...” He muttered.

“See!”

“Veronica, you really need to calm down.” Heather said, but the girl doesn’t listen.

“Now do you believe me? This is why I’m like this. I’m tainted and haunted and-“

“I think I should be going,” Danny said hurriedly while standing up. The others scramble to do the same.

Veronica stares at all of them in disbelief. Regina gives her an apologetic look; she just looks betrayed.

“Wait!” Veronica cries, “D-do you guys believe in ghosts?”
Karen looks the most interested in that question. Kurt and Ram snapped their heads towards the cobalt girl as if going, “Us!!”

“Karen, you did see a ghost in the bathroom. It was Heather. They’re kind of bound to me and-“

“We have to go, Veronica.” Gretchen cut her off, grabbing Karen by the arm and pulling her out of the house.

This time, Veronica didn’t cry out. She just watched them all go, mouth open a little, like she wanted to say something but thought against it.

They ran from her. They were scared of her.

Tears drip down Veronica’s cheeks and she inhaled shakily, lowering her head to the ground. For around five minutes, she just stands there crying noiselessly while the ghosts hover behind her.

“I am so fucking stupid!” She finally spoke up in a hissing voice, “How could I believe that they would stay after all of that? I don’t know why I...”

She looked down at her diary and got this weird feeling in her stomach.

“Wait.”

Kurt tilts his head.

“What?”

Instead of answering, Veronica runs out to the backyard. The ghosts exchanged looks before chasing after her. They watch as she starts dumping wood into the fire pit.

“What are you doing?” Heather asked.

“I don’t think that’s what you’re supposed to do,” Ram says, watching the girl squirt lighter fluid all over the logs.

“What if,” Veronica turns around to face them, “What if I’m not what you guys are bound to? What if it’s the diary? It has your true deaths written down, not the fake ones.”

“I’ve...never thought about it like that before.” Kurt admits.

“Neither have I!”

Veronica lights a match and says, “I don’t know if this’ll work, but it’s worth a shot, ya know? Might as well. Maybe it’ll be us closure somehow.”

“Maybe we’ll be free to go wherever we want!” Ram pipes up excitedly, “We can go see our families!”

The trio of spirits all talk about how amazing that would be. Veronica remembers that they can’t travel to Ohio to see their relatives, since they couldn’t get too far from her. Or, rather, her diary, if her theory was correct. Her stomach aches with guilt, but knew it would get better if she was right.

At the same time, though, she felt like like was a mistake. She only wanted to get some closure, not lose her friends, even if that was pretty selfish. Still, she tossed the match into the pit and watched as gold and orange leapt to life almost instantly.
“Well...” Veronica took a breath, “Here goes nothing.”

She hesitates, then threw her diary into the fire.

As the pages started to burn, a pain struck Veronica in the head, causing her to stagger backwards. Blood snakes out of her nose and her ears ring. She swore she saw the ghost’s glow grow brighter.

“Oh my god! It worked!” Ram cheered, hugging the other two spirits in joy as they all celebrated.

“We’re free! Oh my god, we’re free! Come on, guys!” Kurt hollered in glee.

Veronica blinks and they’re gone. At first, she’s happy, but they’ve disappeared. Not even a goodbye. She suddenly regrets what she did.

“B...bye...”

She feels selfish for crying. No closure comes, only more misery. An unfathomable weight on her chest presses down on her lungs until they nearly burst. The dam that long protected her heart ruptures at the pressure and a whimper bubbles to her lips, morphing into a full-throated outcry of grief.

A cry for the simple life she’ll never get back. For the people she’s scarred. For all the lives she has ruined. And for the fates of her ghostly companions, a near family of four forged by shared struggle, if not by bloodshed.

Only the unfeeling moon attends her outburst. She knows that it won’t lament her in her time of sorrow, only spotlighting her lost soul under a cold and tyrannical white light. For the first time in her short life, Veronica feels truly alone.
Brain on Fire

Chapter Summary

Janis and Veronica both say regrettable things to each other.

Chapter Notes

i put great use to the ship name for JD and Veronica

Chapter warnings: Really harsh insults, Emotional manipulation, Suicidal thoughts, Gaslighting

Burning the diary was supposed to bring closure, not loneliness and even more mourning. That’s all Veronica got, anyway.

She didn’t go to school the next day. Everyone understood why. She just cooped herself up in her room, barely leaving her bed.

When she woke up, it was so unbelievably quiet. There were no soft, friendly whispers in her ears, no distant voices, no oddball conversations. Nothing. It was silent. She never realized how quiet the world really was, and how much she hated it.

She takes a shower and realizes just how empty she felt. Her skin feels cold, like it was fitted wrong on her skeleton. Maybe this isn’t even her flesh. She seemed unknown to even herself.

Only one reflection stared back at her. The ghosts were really gone. They weren’t coming back and she was all alone.

Veronica didn’t talk to anyone at school. She didn’t even sit by her friends, but they didn’t seem to be too bothered by that. A monster was supposed to be held at arms length.

Two days after the incidents and Veronica finally interacts with one of her friends again, though it hadn’t been intentional. It was Cady who walked into the bathroom while she was washing her hands.

“Veronica!” The lioness yelped, like she was surprised the cobalt girl would be in a public school bathroom.

“Hi.” Veronica grits, her voice drained and dry.

It was awkwardly quiet for a moment.

“Hey, umm... Regina...she vouched for you and your story.” Cady informed, “I’m sorry. About walking out and how I reacted and what happened to you.”

Veronica shook her head.
“Don’t be sorry. Don’t even apologize.” She says, “You guys were in shock. You were right to be scared of me.”

Cady frowned, furrowing her eyebrows together.

“I wasn’t-“

“You don’t have to lie. I know what fear looks like, Cady. Don’t even try to say you weren’t scared for your life.”

The lioness gave her a sad and pitiful look.

“I’ll be going now. Sorry for bothering you.”

“No, Veronica, wait-“

But the girl was already out the door.

After that, the day just continued to spiral out of control. That’s how Veronica wound up practically cornered in the bathroom near the end of school by all her friends. She knew they only wanted to talk and help, but the way they came in as a pack intimidated her.

Hissing words were thrown around in Veronica’s attempt to protect herself. Her friends tried to calm her down but she refused all help they attempted to give. It was Janis who lost her patience first.

“Stop trying to relate to me,” Veronica snapped, backing away from the others, “You have no idea what I’m going through right now. You guys wouldn’t be able to handle it at all.”

“You’re right,” Janis said, throwing her hands up, “We don’t know what you’re going through, but you forget that you’re not the only one who has mental crap wrong with them. Me, for example! But here’s the thing, though. Here’s the difference between you and I,”

The artist clicks her tongue, her agitation rising as she stalks up to the shorter girl. She loved Veronica to death, but she was at her wits end and her patience has already been battered by these past few months. In those few moments, she lost her temper and stood face-to-face with her dear cousin.

“I may not have the same condition as you, but my anxiety has stopped. I’m off my meds. My arms have been clean for four months, which seems like four years compared to you. I’m focusing in school, I’m dating again, I can go out and see people and, if Danny ever wanted it, I could probably get laid without having a panic attack. The only thing that has set me off these past few months is **YOU**.”

For a moment, the bathroom is silent. Someone had walked in, but immediately turned around and went out the second she heard the drama going on. Everyone is looking utterly stunned, eyes on Janis, occasionally glancing at Veronica to see her reaction.

Surprisingly, the cobalt girl isn’t tearing up at this almost betrayal of trust. She’s blank-faced, eyes completely unreadable. Then, she snorts.

“There it is.” She said in a voice that’s hoarse. “It came later than I had expected, but...there it is. I always knew your help was false judgement. The ‘help’ you provided is just pushing me further down this hole. You’re a saint, you know. Does it make you feel good?”
Any regret that Janis had felt is gone and she hissed between her gritted teeth. The girl was pissed off. Instead of saying anything, though, she starts for the door.

“No, no, no,” Veronica said, spinning around to face her, “You don’t get to leave.”

A fire has been started and it was burning everyone, even their friends, who didn’t dare interfere this personal matter. They would have left the bathroom if the cousins weren’t blocking the exit.

“I have lost so much already.” The cobalt girl continued, “Now I want to tell you why I should keep your around if that’s how you truly feel?”

Janis met Veronica’s dark stare and said, “Why do you, then? If you hate me so much?”

For a moment, that flame burning in Veronica’s eyes blazes and then goes out a little. She’s slightly taken aback.

“I...” Her voice sounds conflicted, “I don’t hate you, I just...”

“Detest me?” Janis challenged, “Despise me?”

“No!” Veronica snapped, “Stop putting words in my mouth! If it’s not words then its pills and then the next thing I know you’ll be treating me like glass, too.”

“Oh my god, you are so self-centered!” Janis retorts, “You need help but you don’t want to talk to a professional-“

“I am not a psycho!”

That’s the loudest Veronica’s voice has gotten yet. It was clear that she was offended by that comment.

From the corner, the others just gawked in pure shock. It was clear that Damian wanted to step in, but he didn’t have the nerve to get in the way of these two angry ladies. Mainly because they were kinda intimidating him, looking like two female predators meeting up on unclaimed territory.

“I’m telling you-“

“No you’re not!” Janis interrupted, “You’re not telling me anything except to fuck off!”

She takes a few moments to catch her breath, as Veronica hasn’t answered yet.

“I have tried, Veronica. I’m not the one pushing people away.” She continued, “There is only so much I can do and so much I can put up with and, frankly, I’ve reached my limit for both!”

Veronica narrowed her eyes, snorted, and then actually smiled.

“I get it.” She said softly, “Alright, now say it. We all know you want to.”

Janis blinked and took a small step back. Something about that look her cousin was giving her was unnerving.

“Say what?”

“It. Say it.”

“What?! I’m seriously unsure if you actually want to get better.”
Veronica merely shrugged.

“Yes. No. You tell me.”

The fury and agitation was getting to Janis.

“If you don’t want to get better then why am I wasting my time on your bullshit?!”

She would have stormed out if she hadn’t noticed the bright sheen in Veronica’s eyes. That’s what collapsed her anger and Janis covered her mouth in shock.

“Oh, Veronica...” She muttered, “I didn’t mean it.”

She reached for her cousin, but she backed away from her touch.

Veronica choked a laugh and mock bows.

“Finally! The truth comes out!” She claps.

“I didn’t-“

“You don’t have to say anything, Janis. I get it.”

The cobalt girl turns and storms out, not turning back to look at her friend’s reactions.

———

Veronica got home in record time, throwing her bag to the floor and charging up to her room. She didn’t know if Janis or anyone had followed her, but she didn’t care. She just wanted to be alone, so she was hoping nobody did.

She paced around her room for a long time, biting her knuckles. A headache was coming on and it only deepened her anger and anguish. She glanced over at a picture of her and Janis in the snow and remembered just why she was upset and crying.

Janis, that fucking bitch!

The betrayal stung, even though she knew she brought it upon herself. She just needed someone to blame and needle that wasn’t herself for once.

Damn. If the ghosts were here, this would all be a lot easier to get over.

Veronica growled and stomped over to her beside table, picking up some painkillers and downing two.

“Those aren’t going to help you.” Croons a voice.

Veronica whirls around in circles, expecting to see JD smirking at her. Instead, there was a girl. She spun on her heels and threw the bottle at her, who ducked. She grabbed something else and hurled it, too.

“How did you get in here?!”

“I’ve always been here.”

The girl ducked under a jar that was thrown at her and it shattered against the wall. A pen hit her
and she disappeared.

“Don’t you know who I am?”

Her blue blazer is replaced with melted fabric and dripping black skin. Her face was horrible deformed, drooping and dried together in a horrifying formation. Pus oozes from her cracked lips.

“J-JD?” Veronica mutters in shock.

“Close.” Her double smirked.

Veronica backs up, holding a vase by the neck but not having the balls to throw it.

“You’re-you’re not real! I got rid of all of the spirits! You’re...just a hallucination! Yeah, that’s it.”

The Veronica that wasn’t Veronica- JDonica, if you will- tipped her head back and laughed, gargling on creamy pus and blood.

“Oh, I’m very real, Veronica.” She said in an almost identical voice, except hers was hoarser and filled with more malice. “You’ve just been denying my existence for a very long time.”

“N-no... It’s just the lack of sleep.”

JDonica raised an eyebrow and chuckled deep in her throat.

“Wrong again, sweetie.” She said. “I’ve been with you ever since your very first kill. Don’t you remember?”

Veronica’s vision flickered and she saw Heather’s broken body on the floor, cold and motionless. She jumped back, yelping out loud.

“No, no, NO!” She clutches at her head. “This. This.” She gestured to the space between them, “This isn’t happening.”

“Want to turn around and count to five then see if I’m still here, then?”

Veronica blinked in shock. Was she being insulted by a hallucination? That’s one more thing to beat down her ego.

“You aren’t real.” She merely said again.

JDonica snorted.

“This is the exact definition of insanity.” The voice was coming from everywhere, but the illusion was gone. “Doing the exact thing over and over again and expecting shit to change. Your naivety is so cute, sweetie. And when JD captured that exact moment of innocence breaking- oh, it just gives me chills!”

Veronica doesn’t even want to jump on that bandwagon of a topic. She spun around to try and find the source of the voice before quickly realizing it was rebounding in her skull.

“Everyone treats me like I’m crazy.”

“It wasn’t my choice to tell them.” JDonica said, “Besides, it’s more than that. You believe it, too.”

Veronica jumped around and threw the vase and nothing. The blue and white glass shatters and
shards peppered her shoulder, but she doesn’t react to the sting.

“You believe you could have done better.”

“I could have done better,” Veronica echoed, “I could have been better.”

She remembered all the lives she ruined and bit her tongue hard.

“I could have...”

She looks up and sees her shadow standing there.

“This is your fault!” She spat, drastically changing topics as she needed someone else to blame. She didn’t want it to be her fault anymore.

“Keep pinning the blame on others, Veronica. If that what gets you to sleep at night.” JDonica shrugged, “Keep blaming the world. Does it make you feel better?”

“Veronica? Are you okay in there?”

That was Janis’ voice. When did she get home?

“Veronica, honey, just give us a sign, okay?”

Great, and Damian. Is the whole damn gang here?

“We get it if you want to be alone, though. Just know that we’re here for you.”

And that was Regina. Of course.

“Oh, lookie,” JDonica cackles, “They came back for you. But, oh, you’re just gonna push them away! Like usual. Who would want to be around you anyway?”

Veronica clawed at either sides of her heads before glaring at the illusion. With her hair in front of her face, skin dotted with sweat, her eyes almost looked rabid.

“No! Those are my best friends! I wouldn’t be thinking like this if it wasn’t for YOU!”

JDonica chuckled darkly and circled around the room.

“You still don’t accept it, do you?” She said. The dark undertones in her voice became more clear until she sounded almost exactly like JD, “You chose your path when you pulled that trigger. You made all those choices in Sherwood. You say abuse doesn’t excuse actions, and yet you try to pin blame on everybody but yourself. Why? To make you feel better about yourself? To make your pathetic life slightly less unbearable by making everyone else miserable?”

Blood, bodies, and fire. Red. Red. Red. That’s all Veronica saw for a moment. Everything was red. Everyone was dead. Everyone she has even known, ever loved, have become nothing more than bloodied, blown up corpses upon her bedroom floor. That’s a lot of blood for one body. A slashed throat is spitting like a spigot.

Veronica felt like she was looking in at her soul and it was twisted black.

“How do you come back from something like that?” She mutters.

“You don’t.” JDonica simply said.
If she washed off the blood, why did it keep coming back? Veronica always wondered that.

“Forgiveness is impossible. Forgetting is impossible.”

“They were right,” Veronica said, “I’m a sadist. While people are sacrificing their lives for their country, for honour… I… helped sought teenagers out to kill them. Who does that? How can I even call myself human?” She clenched her jaw and rubbed her face slowly. “Is there… what can I do?”

“There is a way out.” JDonica said.

Veronica watched as her shadow glided over to a drawer. She pulled it open and threw clothes across the room until she grabbed a brown bag and dumped the contents on the floor. The cobalt girl swallowed hard.

“How about it, sweetie?”

“No. Not an option.” Veronica backed up, averting her eyes.

“It’s always an option.”

JDonica tests the syringe and nodded in approval. She held her hand out, offering the needle to the swaying girl.

“No way. I’m not doing it.”

“The painkillers aren’t working, are they?” JDonica says in a weirdly soothing voice that sends a shiver down Veronica’s spine. “Why not try something else? Come on… take it. You won’t feel a thing.” She tilted her head. “Isn’t that what you want? That’s why you got it, right?”

“I… Yes… No…” Veronica mumbled, “I-it was an impulse. I’m surprised I was even got it, but- It was a mistake.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Death.” Veronica said bluntly. She had fought so hard to stay alive and became a monster in the process. “And Janis. All my friends. I can’t leave them like this.”

“Why? They don’t care.” JDonica says, “You’re a waste of time- a hopeless cause.”

Veronica’s back arched when she felt her shadow tickle the back of her neck.

“You’re a murderer, Veronica. Everyone knows that you need to be punished. No one wants you.”

Veronica stares into JDonica’s eyes and saw more correctness than she has ever felt. She felt the morphine slip into her fingers.

“Take it,” JDonica whispered, dissolving into her, “It’ll all be okay. You won’t feel a thing…”

…I promise.

—

Janis had been determined to go confront Veronica alone, but the others desperately needed to make sure she was okay, too, so they all went along.

When she got home, she immediately ran up to Veronica’s room, which was locked, of course. She
pounded furiously on the door, but, like she was expecting, her cousins didn’t answer.

“Veronica! Open up! Come on, I’m sorry! Please come out!”

No answer. She just heard muttering coming from inside the room.

“Veronica? Are you okay in there?”

Damian and the others appeared behind her, but Veronica didn’t answer to them, either.

“Maybe we should just go give her some space.” Cady suggested and Janis hesitantly agreed.

They all went down to the basement to watch a movie, but Janis seemed pretty disconnected. Everyone got annoyed by her leg bouncing and constant glances up to the ceiling until, finally, she slumped back into the couch. Her worry seemed to have subsided into annoyance.

An hour passed and Veronica was still up in her room, talking to herself. Everyone did that every once and awhile, but the girl has officially lost it. Janis wondered how much furniture was going to be destroyed after her cousin’s little tantrum.

There was suddenly a heavy thump from above that made Janis snap her head up. Did that come from Veronica’s room?

“I’m going to go check on her.” Janis said, hurrying up to the bedroom. She knocks on the door.

“Veronica? I know you don’t want to talk to me right now, but, uhh...I left my phone in there. Can you open up for a minute?”

What a horrible excuse.

“Alright, umm... Can you give me a sign that you’re okay?”

Nothing.

“I’m serious, Veronica! I will stand here all night and keep yelling at you.”

Still nothing.

“Okay, if you don’t open up in five seconds I will...kick this door open!”

Five seconds passed and Janis realized she was going to have to use her allowance to fix the door after this was all over.

“Well, shit. Okay...”

Janis backed up and side kicked the door. Pain shuttered up her leg, quickly receding as the door burst open.

“Oh, wow, that worked!”

That mini celebration immediately went away the second she saw her cousin’s limp body lying on the ground.

“Oh, fuck! No, no, no, no!” Janis swore, diving down to Veronica’s side and gently lifting her into her arms, frantically searching for a pulse. “Fuck...! Fuck! Damian!!”

She had turned her head and shrieked like someone was murdering her.
“Someone call an fucking ambulance! Veronica needs an ambulance! She needs help! Oh fuck, someone call for help! Please!” She cried, hugging her cousin closer to her. There was no way her friends didn’t hear her, even if they were in the basement.

Somebody was coming up the stairs, but Janis was already focused back on Veronica. She noticed something dislodging from her arm and felt her stomach turn.

A needle.

———

“CNS depression.” Damian informed the others in the hospital waiting room, “She took a high dosage of morphine. It’s a depressant. Veronica went into a coma, but the doctors were able to pull her out of it by reversing the injections effects.”

A collective sigh of relief swept through the teenagers.

“She isn’t going to die.”

Janis laughed harshly from where she was sitting on the couch, hunched over with her hands clasped together. She had her head down towards the ground and her voice was pained when she spoke up.

“I think she wanted to, though.”
Ouroboros

Chapter Summary

Janis needs to stop getting into other people’s business.

Chapter Notes

Chapter warnings: Non-con undertones, Pornography, Stalking, Drugging, Vomiting, Verbal abuse, Psychological torture, Implied rape, Somnophilia, Veronica literally being held against her will

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Veronica was not happy to say the least. She was confused and dazed when she woke up in the emergency room, but relieved when she realized she wasn’t dead. What made her so pissed off is because she was soon checked into a mental hospital since she had attempted suicide and her friends reported her severe traumatic condition. That’s what left her fuming.

Veronica didn’t scream or struggle when she was taken to that hellhole. She didn’t want the nurses to think she was insane like some of the others there. She wouldn’t deny that she needed help, but a padded cell wasn’t necessary. Not that she got one.

Her room was white and bland. Veronica sat in the bed for most of the days, reading or writing to try and pass the time. Occasionally, she would hear some screaming through the walls from the other patients and covered her ears or put her headphones on. It was clear she didn’t like it here.

She was holding a grudge against Janis and her friends for ratting her out. She knew they only wanted her to get better, but she still had to blame someone that wasn’t her. That anger diminished a little when they didn’t come to see her very often.

Veronica heard that she was going to get out soon, which made her absolutely thrilled. The downside was that she had to continue to go to therapy and take special medications. When the doctors thought she was asleep, she swore she heard them say something about a service dog.

The day before she was supposed to leave, she was walked down the hall and taken to a room she didn’t know. She gave the nurses an anxious look and they quickly coaxed her down, helping her lay on the bed.

“What’s going on?” Veronica asked nervously.

“It’s okay, honey,” A blonde woman said, “We’ve noticed that your anxiety has risen drastically this week and this is just something that’ll help you calm down before you’re released tomorrow.”

After a brief examination, a IV is slipped into Veronica’s arm and these weird electrode pads are
placed on her head. A cuff clasps around one ankle.

“Is-is this going to hurt?” Veronica asked, darting her eyes around the room.

“It won’t, I promise.” Her nurse said, “You’ll be under the whole time. You won’t feel a thing.”

Veronica shuts her eyes tightly for a moment. That’s what JDonica has said before she...well, fuckin’ injected herself with morphine. The nurse slipped a mouth guard in between the girl’s teeth, so she couldn’t ask anymore questions now.

A whir of a machine and the noises of monitors made Veronica glance around wildly. She didn’t like this at all to say the least. She couldn’t panic for long, though, as fluids were pumped into her and she started to drift off.

This electroshock therapy was the real deal. At first, she felt everything, then she felt nothing at all.

———

Janis was conflicted. She was worried and pissed off at the same time. Why would Veronica pull something like this? Even she would have done this!

Damian was the only one home with her at the moment. While walking upstairs to grab something, Janis suddenly didn’t care about how nosy she was. She stomped into Veronica’s room and decided to rummage through her stuff to see what else her cousin was hiding from her.

Janis wished she didn’t do that.

Hidden in a pocket in an old computer bag in the closet, Janis found a flat box with the words “For my beloved Ronnie” scribbled on the lid. Curiosity getting the better her, she pulled it out and started going through its contents.

The first item on top was a note which read:

“Dear my beloved Veronica,
If you’re reading this, chances are I’m dead. No big deal, really. It’s probably inevitable at this point. I can see the vengeance growing in your eyes. You don’t kiss me like you used to. I just wanted to thank you. For everything. You are my angel, my love, my whole world. But don’t worry, not even death can do us apart. I’ll always be with you, Ronnie. I’ll always be right there. Your boyfriend, Jason Dean.”

Kinda weird, but not that disturbing. Only soft alarms were going off in Janis’ head, despite everyone her cousin had told her about this guy.

A few of the other items in the box weren’t that concerning. Just a dead flower that probably used to be alive at one point, some weird petition thing with a ton of signatures, an old lighter, and a used cigarette. But that wasn’t what sent Janis running to the bathroom. It was what was in the envelope that had the words “For your viewing pleasure” on the front. A bad feeling sunk in the artist’s stomach, but her intrigue was still more powerful and she peeled open the packet.

Inside were tons of photos. At first, they were innocent. One was of Veronica and this JD guy in morning light. Janis realized she’s never actually seen this dude before. He was what she was expecting, though. The second was the two of them again, but Veronica looks a little more wry. There’s bags forming under her eyes, but she still makes an effort to try and smile. Then, things got weird. There were printed shots of a backyard, a doorknob, a window, a license plate, a back door.
Other photos were of random scenery and it took Janis a moment to realize these were pictures of Veronica. Pictures that she didn’t know were taken.

Veronica in class that JD wasn’t in, Veronica in the cafeteria with who Janis assumed were the Heathers, Veronica in the hallway, Veronica in a car with her parents, Veronica in her bedroom. Janis didn’t want to keep looking, but she couldn’t stop herself.

The first shot was of Veronica on the floor, curled in a little ball. Her face was covered by her hair.

The second was the same scene but at a different angle. She was lying in a clean, open space of a bedroom, which Janis didn’t think was her own. Still, she prayed that this was just a school photography project.

But, oh was she wrong.

The third was a close-up of Veronica, who had rolled on her other side over some amount of time. Her mouth was half open and her eyes...oh, her eyes. That stare she was giving the camera was not one even the greatest of actors could possibly convey. It was unfocused and dazed. Her pupils were diluted unnaturally wide. She didn’t even appear to be looking at the lens. Then, Janis noticed the scarves tied around her wrists.

The fourth photo was a zoomed out shot. Veronica appeared to be more awake, but she didn’t seem to have all her senses together. It was like she was awake, but doped up on novocaine. She wasn’t staring at nothing anymore, rather whoever was holding the camera. You could almost see the reflection of whoever was doing this because of how glazed her eyes were.

The fifth was of Veronica raising her legs like she was fighting against someone that wasn’t there. She was twisted slightly on her stomach and looked like a fallen fawn trying to flee from a carnivore.

The next few shots were blurry and out of focus, as it looked like the camera was moving a lot. In the haze of terrible quality, Janis thought she saw Veronica staring up with one leg fully outstretched. It seemed like she had kicked the cameraman. That made Janis want to cheer, but then the photos after the messed up ones were of her cousin looking utterly terrified. And angry.

After that, there were more blurred photos of the room, some black shots, and then one of Veronica sitting up against the wall in the mix. She had her knees pulled to her chest, bound wrists at her face. Tear tracks etched trails down her cheeks, but she looked livid. More blackness.

Finally, the horrible blowups ended and there was a image of Veronica with her shirt unbuttoned. She was on her back and her knees were propped up. Her eyes were glassy again and it didn’t take long for Janis to piece together that her younger cousin was probably drugged on god knows what.

Veronica looked terrible. Her hair was a mess and she was drooling with mucus mixed with blood dribbling from her nostrils. She didn’t look scared anymore, just completely out of it. The poor thing probably had no idea what was going on. Not anymore, at least.

Finally, Janis got to the images that made her feel horribly sick. They were snapshots of her naked cousin. Multiple of them. Blood, saliva, and other bodily fluids created a sheen on her skin, and it’s worse that Veronica had no idea what was going on. Or, at least that’s what Janis thought.

---

Veronica was whimpering before she could even get her eyes open fully. It was hard to pull consciousness back into her mind, as it was far from her reach. Every inch of her body felt numb
and she could only squirm helplessly on the dirty floors.

There was a noise from above.

“Oh, you look so beautiful like this...” Cooed her “boyfriend’s” slick voice. “This would make for a perfect photo.”

A shutter and flash of a camera; Veronica has to shut her eyes tightly. She struggled to force her eyelids apart again and moaned softly, head lolling across the ground.

“Ohh, yes. You and those noises make me so...”

For a moment, all her senses were wiped out before coming together again. She didn’t hear what JD had said, but it only took a little common sense to put two and two together.

Colors and light bled together like wet paint on a canvas. She realizes she’s lying on the floor of JD’s room, but her wrists are tied together by what looked like scarves. The knot was incredibly tight and she didn’t think she could get free even if she wasn’t weak and woozy.

“J...J...” She tried to speak, but her voice drowns out as her head falls to the ground again. “S...sto...” She can’t get any coherent words out of her damn mouth.

“What’s wrong, Ronnie? Cat got your tongue?” JD croons, inspecting his phone screen.

A momentary headache throbs through Veronica’s whole skull, making her moan softly in pain. She writhes, kicking out her legs weakly at something that wasn’t there. JD notices and chuckles, snagging another few photos.

“You look so adorable like this.” He said while approaching her, “Like a little baby deer.”

He crouches down, running his fingers over Veronica’s clammy cheeks. She doesn’t even realize she was crying.

“Moments like these need to be savored.”

“F...fuck..y...”

“Aww, can’t even finish your threat.” JD chuckles and shook his head. “Now, stop wiggling around. I want to make sure your focus is on me. It’s the only way I can teach you a lesson.”

Veronica eyed him wryly for a moment before doing the exact opposite of what he said, thrashing as much as she could. She tried to scream, but the sound that came out was completely noiseless. A boot drives into her stomach, making her wheeze and then sprawl out limply.

“What did I just say?” JD said through his teeth before loosening himself up. “Though, I can’t expect you to get it just yet. After all, it’s your fault we’re in this mess. Ronnie, I don’t want to hurt you, but you have to understand that you can’t leave me. It’s not fair to either of us.”

Veronica is in that half state of unconsciousness again. She’s whimpering and squirming around like a hurt puppy, staring up at JD with big amber eyes that only fuels his bloodlust even more.

“My adorable, beautiful little Veronica.” He purred.

Saliva foams and bubbles at Veronica’s lips, frothing over her chin. Her eyes are rolling around her in her head and she’s drooling all over herself, her persistent flow of tears only adding to the mess. There’s another click of a camera.
“Now, let’s-“ JD grunts when Veronica manages to kick him in the leg. It doesn’t hurt, but he still glares evilly at her. “You don’t ever learn, do you, bitch?”

Veronica scowls at her ‘boyfriend.’

“But you are such a little fighter, aren’t you? Here you are, crying on my floor, and yet you still try to get away. That’s what I love about you. You’re not like other girls.”

JD is turned away, but he’s moving his hands around a lot. He’s probably preparing another syringe or photo shoot. Veronica thrusts her legs out again and hits a nearby table, causing the hamster cage on top to topple to the ground. To her surprise, JD snapped his head around when his pet’s pen rattled against the floor.

“You cunt!” He shrieked, diving down to pick up the cage and put it back up. “Do you know what you could have done you dumb whore?!”

He was furious about his stupid hamster falling over. Veronica felt a swell of pride, but that quickly went away when JD practically dropped his full weight on her stomach to claw open her shirt. He took a few bust shots before continuing to undress the nearly unconscious girl. Veronica tensed up when she heard a zipper unzip.

“W-wait...!” Fear formed in her eyes.

JD actually stopped to look at her before smirked.

“Maybe another dosage will calm you down.”

He gets up and produces a frighteningly large needle full of only god knows what. Veronica’s eyes bulge and she began to shake her head, using her legs to try and push herself away.

“No, no...! No...! Please no...!”

JD easily catches and overpowers her, pinning one of her shoulders down to the ground. Veronica whimpers loudly when there’s a prick in her neck, abruptly stopping when everything goes black.

—

Damian found Janis in the upstairs bathroom, heaving violently. He immediately rushed down to her side, lifting up handfuls of her hand and rubbing her back soothingly.

“Are you okay, hun? What’s wrong?” He asked worriedly.

“Oh god, Damian, oh god,” Janis muttered after lifting her head and flushing the toilet. “It’s so horrible. I can’t believe that bastard did that to her.”

Damian tilts his head a little, frowning slightly.

“What?”

“The photos,” Janis whispered.

The boy blinked before getting up and walking to Veronica’s room. He saw the contents of the box thrown all over the floor, including the mess of horrible photographs that almost had him rushing to the bathroom, too.
“Oh my god...” He muttered in shock.

“See?”

Janis has appeared in the doorway, leaning against the frame.

“Her boyfriend did this to her. I know he did.” She said, “And, god...I said so many cruel things to her. How could I?”

“Darling, you didn’t know.”

Damian quickly cleaned up the mess before wrapping Janis up in his arms. They went downstairs together and sat on the couch to finish this conversation in a more peaceful environment.

“I can believe this...” Janis muttered, “She came here to be safe. To get better. If-if anything else were to happen to her...if she had died, I don’t know what I would have done, Damian. She means so much to me.”

“I know, honey.” Damian said, squeezing his best friend tightly in an embrace, “The doctors said she’s doing just fine, remember? She’s okay. She’s coming home tomorrow.”

“R-right...”

Janis took in a shaky breath. She had only seen the pictures and she already felt traumatized by it. She couldn’t even imagine what Veronica felt about them, as she had gone through that. If she even remembered any of it, that is.

She curls up against Damian as a movie started to play. She felt cozy beside him and it didn’t take long for her to fall asleep.

———

“Ugh...”

Janis groaned as she woke up. She looked around for Damian, but didn’t see him anywhere. She would have assumed he just got up to go to the bathroom if it wasn’t for the fact that she wasn’t in the living room. She was in a boiler room.

The air was hot and thick. Metal pipes occasionally hissed out steam and furnaces rumbled from the flames burning within. Janis was lying on her side with her wrists tied together.

“Shit!” She swore out loud, “Shit, no!”

“Oh. You’re finally awake.”

The clopping of boots on stone approached the tied up artist, who scowled when she realized who this was.

“You,” She spat, “Jason Dean.”

“A fan?” JD tilts his head and smirked, “I’m glad to see that my name gets around. It’s about time we’ve finally met.”

“You hurt Veronica!”

JD laughed and began circling around Janis. He seemed to be inspecting every inch of her body.
"You make it sound easy." He said, "That girl was such a fighter. It was a little difficult at first, but it’s like trying to break a horse. After awhile, they’ll let you ride them however you want."

Janis growled deep in her throat, glaring daggers at the other teenager.

"You’re sick." She spits.

"Perhaps," JD said, walking over to a cart that Janis hadn’t realized was there before. He picked up a gleaming needle from one of the trays. "You intrigue me, Janis. You know about all the horrible secrets that Veronica has been keep from you, and yet you still stay around her. I will never understand such a kinship like that. It’s so foolish."

"She’s my cousin," Janis said, "I’m not going to let anything happen to her. Ever. Certainly not from you."

"How cute," JD croons, "It’s too bad you’re never going to see her tonight. You’re going to die tonight, Janis. And when I’m done with you, nobody is ever going to find you."

Those haunting words echo in Janis’s ears as the needle pricks her neck. Instead of making her black out, strings of fire shot through every single vein in her body. It felt like she was being burned alive from the inside out.

"Don’t you wish you could just take all of Veronica’s pain away?" JD said, watching her writhe, "To make her feel better again? Oh, you would be the best cousin ever! But you wouldn’t be able to handle it at all."

Janis’ chest heaved as the sting worsened. It almost made it hard for her to even breathe. This couldn’t be what Veronica wakes up to each morning. Maybe just a combination of all the hurt brought upon her, which is just as bad.

"You would go crazy before the week ended if you lived in her skin. You can’t help her." JD mocks, "You aren’t fit to be a hero, Janis. Just stay out of business and you will be just fine."

He steps closer and Janis attempts to scoot away by just using her legs. It wasn’t as easy as she had thought, though, and the creepy guy closes the distance between them.

"Ah, ah, ah," JD says, "It’s too late, now. You aren’t going anywhere."

He grabs her by the hair and his touch feels too real.

"Face it, Janis. You’re useless. You haven’t done anything to help Veronica. She’s only gotten worse." He draws her face in closer, "Let her fall down the hole she’s dug for herself. She already has one foot in the grave. There’s nothing you can do for her anymore."

He lets go and Janis winced when her skull cracks against the stone floor. JD smiled at her before looking at the furnace and then his cart.

"Once you’re dead, she won’t be far behind. So there’s no need to worry. You’ll see each other soon."

"Fu-fuck you...!" Janis growled, but it takes great effort as the pain and drugs kicking in are taking its toll on her body. "Eat shit and die, asshole!"

JD stares at her for a moment before laughing.
“How cute. You aren’t threatening anyone, Janis. You try to act tough when everyone knows you’re not. I mean, you did think about killing yourself over a few rumors.”

He smirks widely at Janis’s startled expression.

“Oh, look at that... Your face changed color. The look of horror is quite amazing, I have to say. I wonder if you could capture such an emotion on one of your canvas’."

“How do you know about that?” Janis demanded.

“I know a lot of things, little girl.” JD answered while filling a different syringe up with some kind of fluid, “You’re not unfamiliar to me.”

“We’ve never met!”

“And I’m dead, yet here we are.” JD flashed a sly smile while walking back over. “Now, don’t move, or this will hurt. A lot.”

Janis awoke with a gasp, sitting up straight. She immediately pawed at her neck, finding no needle. She looked at the clock to see if was two in the afternoon, meaning it was the next day. Then, she noticed Veronica sitting by the fireplace, looking up from a book with a raised eyebrow.

“You okay, Janis?”

“Veronica!”

Janis immediately flung herself at Veronica, hugging her tightly despite the girl’s awkwardness with physical affections. Her cousin blinked and then hugged back tenderly, resting her head against her shoulder.

“I’m so glad you’re okay.” Janis mutters, squeezing tighter, “Veronica, I- I didn’t mean what I said to you. I don’t know what I was thinking. You mean so much to me and I love you more than life itself. I don’t know what I would have done if you would have died...”

Veronica is quiet for a moment, just soaking in Janis’ words. She smiled at them, feeling good about herself even though she was going to be stuck in counseling for awhile.

“Thank you, Janis.” She finally spoke, “That means a lot to me. I’m glad I’m still around.”

After a moment they break apart.

“When’d you get home?” Janis asked, settling back down on the couch. She decided to not bring up that weird nightmare right now.

“Around eleven,” Veronica answered. “Damian greeted me before he left. You looked tired, so we didn’t want to wake you up.”

Janis nodded idly. When she looked over her cousin- who was looking much better already- her mind flashed back to the pornographic pictures of her and did a full-body cringe. Veronica noticed.

“What’s wrong?” She asked.

“Vera, there’s something I have to tell you...” Janis started softly.
Janis held her arms out as she attempted to balance on the train tracks while walking. She heard Veronica giggling from the other rail as she, too, was trying to stay on.

The fresh near-spring air felt nice on their faces and soothed their lungs. Even though their Drivers Ed teachers had specifically warned them to never play on train tracks, they couldn’t contain themselves when the challenge to see who could stay on the longest arose between the two of them.

In the end, it was Janis who toppled over first, laughing in the dirt.

“Victory!” Veronica cheered, throwing her arms up and smirking.

“Fair game!”

Janis got up and dusted herself off, smiling widely at her cousin. This past week has been nothing but a wild ride, but it was nice to finally wind down a little. Bonding time was always the best time.

“Veroro, the train is coming.” Janis called out while backing up.

“Slow train.” Veronica tilts her head a little at the approaching machine.

“Oh, I have an idea! Come on!”

Veronica followed her cousin as she ran towards the train. This stunt could have ended horribly, but, luckily, both of them were able to jump onto an open train car and sit down with no problem.

The sun was falling faster, now, turning the sky an unreal shade of red. The gradients of marigold and orange made a beautiful backdrop on this ride.

“Do you remember any of it?”

Veronica glanced over at Janis before looking at the painted picture of twilight in front of her. For a moment, she didn’t answer, pondering her answer. She has already spilled a lot this week, no point in stopping.

“I can’t remember anything after that shock session yesterday,” She admitted with a small laugh. “But no. Not really.”

She reclined back a little to get in a better position.

“No pain, at least. I knew he was hurting me, but I couldn’t feel a thing.” She says, “I remember a lot of fear, though. And anger. I can’t believe he slipped those photos into my house when I was still living in Ohio and I never knew about it.”

She grits her teeth and Janis set a hand on her shoulder.

“He can’t hurt you anymore.”

“I know.”

Another beat of silence. They soaked in the serenity.

“Imagine running away from here. Just the two of us.” Janis said, propping her elbows up on her knees, “I mean, I couldn’t leave behind Damian, so he can be our bodyguard. And then the others,
though. And my girlfriend. Urrg. Bad idea.”

Veronica laughed.

“I don’t need to run away anymore,” She said. “I’m right where I want to be.”

When Janis didn’t answer, Veronica looked at her and swore her cousin was tearing up.

“You’re too good, Vera,” Janis said, playfully punching Veronica’s arm. “I’m really glad you’re here.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Veronica moved over and rested her head against Janis’ shoulder, taking her hand in her own. She felt safe around her cousin, safer than she’s felt in a long time.

“We make a great team.” She said, glancing up to meet Janis’ eyes.

“Yeah we do!” The artist smirked.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, through all the pain and drama going on, the cousins shared a quiet moment.

Chapter End Notes

I seriously love writing Janis and Veronica being cousins and I will never stop encouraging others to try it, too, because it’s so damn good
Janis is such a good, supportive older cousin hhh

Also it’s nor over yet, folks. There’s still more!

Also also Janis calling Veronica “Veroro”
Chapter Summary

Art galleries, a return, and the start of something horrifyingly painful.

Chapter Notes

Chapter warnings: Drowning

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“God, I don’t understand,” Janis sniffled, wiping her eyes, “Why does this shit have to happen? They could have been so happy!”

“I don’t know,” Veronica replied, “It’s for the effect.”

“The stupid producers just want us to feel pain.” Janis says, “Oh, fuck off you stupid butterfly. You caused this!”

The two of them continued to cry quietly as the credits for Life is Strange started to roll. Janis made a move to throw her controller to the ground, but just ended up setting it down carefully, as she didn’t want to break it. She laughed and then stood up.

“That was fun.” She said, “And emotionally scarring.”

“Oh yeah.”

They walked up from the basement to go get food from the kitchen, as they has binged multiple episodes of the game, taking turns making choices and bawling. While making toast, Veronica heard Janis cheer from the living room. She peeked out to see her cousin hugging an envelope close to her chest.

“What’s that?”

“I got in!” Janis exclaimed, “Vera, I got in! My painting made it in!”

Veronica then remembered the art contest Janis had been dying to get into. Her eyes lit up for her cousin’s achievement and she ran to go and hug her.

“That’s amazing, Janis!” She chirped, “What did you enter?”

Janis winked and said, “You’ll have to wait and see. You’re coming to the gallery, right?”

“Of course!”

That made Janis extremely happy.
A few days later, she was drove to Chicago where the museum was for an early viewing of her work. She was practically bouncing in her seat the whole time from the excitement.

After dropping all her stuff off at the hotel, Janis scurried off to the gallery, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. This contest was a huge step in her future career. Her painting was going to be among other amazing works by professionals. Real artists!

Stepping into the museum felt like walking into a dream. A dream come true, to be exact.

Although it was a little too classy for her, Janis loves being in that gallery. She even didn’t mine wearing a dress! The minute she signed in she was already starting to explore, inspecting every painting with a look of wonder in her eyes.

“Oh, hey, you’re the winner of that high school art contest,” One man spoke to her, “Your painting is amazing. The way you’ve captured the emotion of the scene is absolutely stunning.”

Her painting. What started out as a regular sketch turned into a mishmash of watercolors and pastels.

It’s a shot of Veronica standing in the warm rays of a sunset that seems to set the landscape on fire. Blue jay wings sprout from her back with white bindings and charred feathers on one. Metal cuffs shackle around her ankles and her shadow distorts into a monstrous form stretched across the ground. Teal wisps rise up from her feet, curling around her arms which are wrapped with bloodied bandages. The piece is titled “Fight” and it gave off a chilling, yet hopeful vibe.

Pride swells in her chest as Janis strides over to where the canvas was mounted on the wall. There are quite a few people hawking at her work and that makes her feel even better.

“You’re the artist of this piece, right?” A fancy lady asked.

“Yes ma’am.” Janis nodded.

“It’s beautiful,” The lady says, “You’ve really captured the light and darkness of human emotion. A brilliant work of art, indeed.”

Janis blushed.

“Thank you.”

She couldn’t stop smiling until she finally left the gallery. By then, it was dark and she decided to walk back to the hotel to observe all the Chicago city lights. It was actually really pretty out there. With her earbuds shoved in her ears, ignoring the world and focusing only on the glow around her, she didn’t even realize someone was following her.

By the time an arm wrapped around her throat, it was too late to flee. She was dragged into a back alley, kicking and screaming.

“Quiet down or I’ll cut you right now, bitch.” A gruff voice hissed in her ear.

Fear pours into Janis’ veins, but her fight or flight instincts also kick in. She chose fight and bit into the man’s arm.

He shrilled in pain, shoving Janis into a brick wall. After recovering, he grabs for the girl again, making her punch at him.
Janis knew that she wasn’t going to get away from this guy if she relied completely on pure strength. He was so much bigger than she was. She wasn’t knowledgeable in combat by any means, but if Lara Croft has taught her anything, is that you need to use tactics. That thought of a possible plan was cut short when the man grabbed her leg when she tried to kick and flipped her onto her back.

Pain rattled up Janis’ spine when she hit the ground. Fingers close around her throat; the man was on her. He was choking her. She was going to die.

“Stop struggling!” The man growled, “Just let it take you.”

Janis gags helplessly, pawing around the ground until she finds a large chunk of asphalt. She smashed it into the side of her attacker’s head, making him topple off of her with a groan.

She tried to scramble away, but her ankle was grabbed and she was pulled back to the floor. Her chin connects painfully with the asphalt and she sees stars for a moment. Long enough for her attacker to practically pounce on her.

Janis tussles with the stranger in a puddle, soaking them nothing in dirty water. He’s slower because of his head wound and Janis uses that to her advantage. Somehow, she’s on top of him, and she thrusts her hands down on the guy’s head, dunking his face into murky water.

It didn’t matter how shallow the pothole was, the man was drowning. An immediate struggle was caused, but Janis managed to stay on his back. She even found herself screaming from the terror of the situation.

Long seconds passed until, finally, bubbles popped in the puddle and the man went limp. Janis immediately scrambled away from him, backing up against the way. Did she just...kill someone?

No. There’s no way. He couldn’t be...

Janis slowly crawled over and shook the man. She searched for a pulse, but found nothing.

A horrible feeling aches in her stomach and she moves away again. Soaked in muddy water that’s splashed all over her face, she started to cry softly. Mainly out of fear.

Is this how Veronica felt when she killed that Heather Chandler girl?

With shaking hands, Janis pulled out her phone and called Damian. She had to talk to someone and his voice always soothed her.

“Hello?” Her best friend chirped.

“Damian...”

“Janis? What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“No... Not really. Damian, I-I... I did something bad. Like, really bad. Can-can you come over? Please?”

“Yeah, of course. Send me your location. Are you hurt?”

“Maybe. I haven’t checked yet.”

“Good thing I always keep a first aid kit in my car. Alright, I’m driving over now. Love you.”
“Thank you. Love you, too.”

It took Damian around forty minutes to get to the hotel in Chicago. He went up to his best friend’s room and was immediately met by Janis hugging him when the door opened.

“Hey, darling,” He said, rubbing her back, “How are you feeling?”

“Shitty.” Janis grumbled.

“Tell me what happened, hun.”

Janis sighed and padded over to one of the beds to sit down. Shock had worn off and she calmed herself down. She reasoned that what she did wasn’t a horrible act. It was self defense. Nobody can fault her for that.

Once she had got back to the hotel, she discovered that she had scraped her knee into an ugly red mess while fighting with that guy.

“Does it look bad?” She asked while showing Damian.

“It looks painful, but not hospital worthy.” Damian said while wetting a cloth with antiseptic. “This is going to hurt me a lot more than it’s gonna hurt you, hun.”

“What?”

Janis screamed when the rag was pressed to the wound. She instinctively hit Damian a few times, but she calmed down when he shushes her and gently brushes hair out of her face.

“Easy, easy,” He soothes, “Its okay, see? I’m done.”

“Ow,” Janis breathed through her teeth.

Damian chuckled and let her cuddle against him.

“If you kill someone out of self defense, does that make you a bad person?”

“If it was self defense and you truly thought your life was in danger, then no. I don’t think so.”

Janis nodded and tucked herself further into her best friend’s side.

———

Veronica’s first instinct was to run outside when she heard dogs barking from the backyard. If there was a chance that an animal was hurt, she had to do something.

She stepped onto the porch and saw a boxer and golden retriever standing near the back fence.

How did they get back here?

She got closer and felt a sharp throb in her head. She pressed her palm to her temple and winced. At the same time, she heard one of the dogs yelp loudly and saw a dark figure grabbing ahold of its ear.

“Hey!!” She yelled.

When Veronica lunged forward, the figure lashed out, striking her with enough force to send her
rolling across the grass. She tentatively touched the place of impact on her side and found claw marks.

Her attacker was a shadowy silhouette of JD, who smirked widely at her. He stalked towards her, but then the dogs jumped into his path. Something about their eyes was so strange...

JD sneered and raised a clawed hand, ready to slash open the animal’s throats, when a blinding light made him reel back with a guttural hiss. He shields his eyes with his arm and squints when he glares. Veronica doesn’t know what he’s staring at until she turns around and sees the pure white wings, the soft blue glow, the strawberry blonde hair.

Suddenly, everything clicks and she realizes who this is and that those dogs are the reincarnations of Kurt and Ram.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone wanted to know, my Tumblr is @om-nom! I’m also on the Heathers and Mean Girls Amino under the name “omelette”
Infection

Chapter Summary

Veronica isn’t doing too great.

Chapter Notes

Chapter warnings: Minor graphic descriptions of wounds

The first thing Veronica felt when she woke up was the warmth of the two dogs laying on the bed with her. The boxer, Ich, had his head on her stomach, while Luge, the golden retriever, dozes near her feet. She had named them the night before, after JD finally left her alone.

They were back. She liked to think that Kurt and Ram reincarnated as these dogs just for her, to watch over her as her new pets. And then there was Chandler. Veronica couldn’t stop hugging her.

Heather had explained that she could come see Veronica anytime if she was called upon. Almost like a guardian angel.

A swell of happiness fills her chest, but that’s quickly chased off when she sits up. Pain throbs in her side. She lifts up her shirt and sees that the scratches are crusted with dried blood and a clear fluid. It’s still a little slimy on the pads of her fingers.

Ich lifts his head and sniffs the injury. He whines.

“Don’t worry, buddy,” Veronica scratches behind his ear, “I’m okay! Look, it’s already healing. And I cleaned it last night.”

Luge makes a doggy noise.

Veronica stretches, which makes her wince. She walks downstairs, the dogs padding along behind her.

“Good morning, Veronica,” Mrs. Sarkisian greets from the kitchen.

“Morning, auntie.”

“And good morning, dogs!” The woman knelt down to pet the animals, “What did you end up naming them?”

“Ich and Luge,” Veronica answers, pointing to each dog when saying their respective name, “Thank you again for letting me keep them.”

“You deserve them, dear.” Mrs. Sarkisian said, “Your uncle ran off to get dog food. He loves them already.”
Veronica smiled and then ate breakfast before going back upstairs. Janis’ art show was today.

Oh how she wanted to just focus on her cousin today. She couldn’t, though. Her side was festering and pulsing, the cloth of her shirt rubbing uncomfortably against the raw edges. She tries to just bare it and takes a few painkillers. This was for Janis. It will all pay off, especially when she saw her cousin’s beaming smile when the car parked at the gallery. Janis hugs her tightly, even lifting her off the ground slightly. It hurts her injury, but she ignores that.

“You made it!”

“Haha, of course.” Veronica laughed.

Their other friends were already there, so Janis finally let them go inside to view the museum.

Veronica was amazed and stunned when she saw that Janis’ winning painting was of her. Her eyes go wide and then she turns to Janis, who is grinning.

“Oh, you big softie!”

People coo when the two of them embrace. A painting of their tight-knit kinship could have probably won the contest, too.

“Thank you, Janis.” Veronica smiled as the artist wrapped an arm around her shoulder, “It’s so amazing.”

“I’m glad you like it!”

The second Veronica untangled herself from Janis is when she felt the stab. She staggered back a little, pawing lightly at her side. Before anyone can suspect anything or worry, she excuses herself and hurried to the bathroom.

The thin scab had broke open. Blood oozes free and Veronica scrambles to save her shirt from a stain.

“Shit, shit, shit!” She hissed.

She couldn’t ruin this for Janis. She had to tough this out, even if the painkillers were wearing off.

Strings of bright red glistens on Veronica’s fingers and she pokes raw flesh with her nails an uncomfortable amount of times. She manages to stop the bleeding and thoroughly washes off her hands before stepping out of the bathroom. For some reason, the art gallery seemed different. She no longer felt safe there.

When she glanced around at all the people, she realized she was sizing them up. Estimating how easy it would be to kill them. She has already located nearby objects that could be used as weapons, doors, and any other exists. She knew that one of these people had a weak left knees and she could probably take down that woman to her left before she could even turn around. Yes, she bet she could have this entire crowd down in a minute.

Her rational mind scolded her for this. It argued that it wouldn’t come down to that. Who did she think she was anyway? Lara-fucking-Croft? Just because she had the instincts similar to an animal didn’t mean she had strength.

“Are you okay, miss?”
Veronica flinches back, away from the man looking at her. It’s men that frighten her the most, but she had to tell herself that not all of them were dangerous.

“Y-yes sir. I’m fine.”

She quickly walks away to a quieter part of the gallery before he could say something else to her. She sat down on a cushioned bench and took a deep breath.

Everything was fine. Everything was okay. If she kept telling herself that then it would come true. It had to.

———

School was going to be utter hell. It’s now Monday and Veronica is still waking up with an ache in her side each morning. Ich and Luge notice every time and will whimper, but she assures them that she’s fine. Even if they’re dogs, she’s almost positive that they don’t buy it.

Veronica walks downstairs to eat and greet Janis. They had the house to themselves again, as Mr. and Mrs. Sarkisian were going out of state again. That was just fine.

While at school, Veronica can’t help but notice Damian and a few of the others eyeing her wearily. She wonders if she’s actively dripping blood all over the hallways. To her credit, though, Veronica is sure that they don’t suspect her.

“Veronica...that doesn’t look too good...”

It’s late in the evening and Veronica is sitting in her bathroom. She’s called Heather to come and hang out for awhile, but the angel only wanted to worry about her. Not that she disagreed.

The thin scab over Veronica’s wound is a gross pink color. The mouth is enflamed, angry red and sick purple with black around the edges. It’s peeling in some areas, weeping a creamy discharge. Not only does the gash look bad, but Veronica does, too. Her skin is pale, paler than usual. Her eyes are bloodshot and tired-looking.

Heather extends a hand and touches the injury. She frowns.

“How much bacteria is in rotting dead bodies?” She said, “This has to be infected.”

Veronica shook her head.

“I cleaned it. It’s just healing slowly.”

She touched her side and it was warm. Too warm. She didn’t want to believe that something was seriously wrong, though.

“You look exhausted, kid.” Heather said, affectionately referring to Veronica with that pet name, even though she was only a year older, “Clean that again and then go rest.”

“What are you, my mom?” Veronica clips in a good natured way, grinning at the angel.

She carefully wipes down her wound with a wet rag before crawling into bed. Sleep came with ease, but that isn’t what worried Heather.

———
Janis is woken up by a fit of horrifying screaming.

She leaps out of bed and runs to her cousin’s room. Unlike the other times this has happened, Veronica isn’t awake. She’s still asleep, thrashing wildly and yelling. Janis doesn’t know what else to do besides straddle Veronica’s waist and pin her arms down. That stops her from clawing, which is a good start.

“Wake up!” Janis yelled, “Wake up, Veronica! It’s just a dream!”

Veronica makes no sign of hearing or understanding. The trenches she managed to scratch in her arms are starting to bleed from exertion and Janis unknowingly has her knee pressed against her deteriorating side.

Heather notices. Heather doesn’t need to be called upon, she knows when she has to come. She wants to throw Janis off of the cobalt girl, but she doesn’t want to risk things getting worse. This situation alone is bad enough. Something in the wound has rooted itself into Veronica. The infection has gotten into her blood and it’s causing a fever dream.

No one has nightmares like this, on normal occasions, that is. Veronica’s movements are too violent, too fluid. She’s screaming like she’s living an endless cycle of torture. Her struggling nearly shakes Janis off. Did she get super strength in her sleep or something, because she didn’t look this strong when she was awake.

“Veronica, come on!” Janis tried again, “Wake up!”

Nothing.

For a moment, Veronica’s eyelids flutter open, but her eyes are turned upwards. She’s still trapped in her night terror.

Heather eyes the girl’s injured side nervously. Veronica was going to be in a world of pain once she wakes up.

“Veronica- shit! Wake. UP!”

The cobalt girl bolted awake, sitting up as straight as she can go. It takes her a moment to register everything, like the fact that she has just been slapped. Janis scrambled off of her.

“Janis...?” She croaked and her throat is insanely dry.

“Oh thank god,” Janis sighed in relief, “Bad night, huh? You weren’t waking up. You were doing so well before.”

What worried her the most wasn’t the intensity of the nightmare. It’s the Janis worked so hard to make sure her cousin is okay during the day and now she’s finding out how easily she can rip herself to pieces in her sleep. Janis wonders what exactly prompted Veronica to claw herself this badly.

She looked up from the scratches in pale skin and saw the glimmer in Veronica’s eyes. The smaller girl turned away shamefully and hid herself in the blankets.

“Oh god, Janis- I’m so sorry.” She wheezed out.

Janis extends a hand and sets it on the small of Veronica’s back, rubbing gently. She eventually got her cousin to lay back down, but she tucks against her, clutching onto fistfuls of her shirt. Not that
“It’s okay, Vera. It’s okay. Nobody is going to hurt you, I promise.”

Veronica didn’t know if she believed that, but she pretended she did. She moves closer to she could listen to Janis’ heartbeat, as it was the only thing that might calm her down.

Pain spirals up from her side and made her nauseous. She began to speak, as the pent up emotions weren’t something she wanted weighing down in her right now.

“He was alive...” She started softly, “We were- we were killing again. But then it was just me. And there were more people. A whole school. Janis, I was hunting them.”

She was sharing her fears again. Janis expected a lot of things when Veronica opened up like this. She expected explanations of nightmares. She expected dark reaches into the past. She expected PTSD and anxiety and paranoia and other crippling effects from torturous experiences.

But never had she expected her cousin to question herself. Her strength. Her sanity.

“Oh god, Janis, I’m a psychopath. I’m no different than him!”

“Don’t say that.” Janis said firmly, “You are not him.”

“I chased them,” Veronica whispers hoarsely, “I chased them to the ends of that place and they ran from me. They were scared of me.”

This was not okay. Janis wanted to bring JD back to life just so she could beat him back into the ground for hurting her cousin this badly. Veronica was forced to kill. Some people...some people never recover from that alone, but added with the abuse Veronica faced must be making that terror haunting.

“It was just a dream,” Janis says softly, “It wasn’t real. You aren’t like that, Vera.”

Veronica doesn’t speak anymore. She’s too tired and just wanted to go back to bed. She mumbles something and closes her eyes, falling back into a pit of delusions.

Neither one of the cousins talked about what happened that night. Veronica appreciates that a lot. She just gets up to go take a shower before school and wraps her scratched arms. Her side hurts more than usual. Ich and Luge whine.

After turning on the shower, Veronica loiters around in the bathroom for a few minutes. She considers just throwing herself into the rain, clothes and all, but she had to keep reminding herself that there wasn’t anything to worry about anymore.

Taking off her clothes took great effort for some reason, like her limbs were made of lead. She shuffled into the shower and almost immediately spits out water that beats into her face. Blindly, like she has never showered before, she paws around for a safe spot from the onslaught.

Normally, a hot shower would be relaxing, but when wounded, it was like a torture segment. Instead of cleaning her, it was scraping her skin off entirely. Claws of fire latch onto frayed edges and tore down, tunneling down into her very core. She covered her wounded side quickly, attempting to protect it from the rain.
Veronica wasn’t going to let herself be defeated by a damn bath. She has been through things that are much worse than this. This was just. Bloody. Showering.

Her knees gave in and she collapsed into a pool of her own pus and blood. The scab on her side had broke open thanks to the water pressure and now it’s leaking everywhere. Slimy yellow-green discharge is slick on her hands, drooling between her fingers. She doesn’t know that’s a natural color, and the foul smell can’t be any better.

Veronica screws her eyes shut and rested her head back against the tile wall. She spreads the edges of the scar so the water can flush out the inside. Maybe it’ll help, even if the fleshy interior looked rotten.

She exhales shakily, letting the pain wash over her. It’s all she could do right now. Until her cells stopped having an aneurism, she would just have to wait it out under this rain of fire.

There was no way she was going to school today.
Survivor Mentality

Chapter Summary

They’ll be okay.

The smell of burning flesh is something that’ll never leave Veronica. It’s not something that you can just forget. The scent is so overwhelming and putrid, and then it just sticks to your clothes and sinks into your skin. Maybe that’s why Veronica was only a little hesitant about what she was about to do.

“Woah, hey, what do you think you’re doing?”

Heather has Veronica by the wrist, snatching away the lighter with her other hand. She’s been too worried to leave.

“Veronica, you can seriously hurt yourself with this! Just because you saw Lara Croft do this in Tomb Raider doesn’t mean you actually know how to cauterize.”

Veronica wrinkles her nose at that, frowning a little.

“How hard could it be? It’s just burning skin together.”

Heather gives her a look and pulls her back into the house. She makes her sit on the couch.

“Why haven’t you told anyone about this yet? You’re in pain. You need help.”

“Hospital bills aren’t cheap, you know,” Veronica mutters, “It’s going to heal. The body can fight infections. I’ll be okay sooner or later.”

Heather makes a disgruntled noise. She sighed and shook her head.

“I can sew it.” Veronica said, “That might help.”

“Let me. I don’t trust you.”

Veronica sticks her tongue out at the angel, but agreed. Heather disappeared and reappeared with some supplies she managed to scrounge up around the house. She made Veronica sit back and lifted her shirt a little.

“This is going to pinch.”

Veronica bites down on her collar. Her entire spine arches when the sewing needle sink beneath her skin. This was a terrible idea.

Dark red bubbles up as Heather began to sew the edges of the wound together. If wasn’t perfect or straight, but it’ll have to do. Her fingertips got covered in a brownish gunk that was gritty with bits of dissolved flesh. Her stomach turns and she quickly finished sewing.

“Fuck...!” Veronica hissed between her teeth, “That sucked!”
“It was your idea.” Heather pointed out, wiping her hand off.

“Right... I know.”

“Can you stand?”

“I’d rather not,” Veronica breathed.

Something about that whole ordeal made the cobalt girl feel sick. She tried to ride it off, but she ended up running to the bathroom to throw up. Heather and the dogs gave her a moment of space before going to check on her.

Veronica looked absolutely miserable as she lay draped on the toilet seat. Sweat drips down her face and she’s breathing very heavily. A thin trail of vomit dribbles down the side of her mouth.

“Veronica?” Heather called out worriedly, moving closer.

The girl turns her head away shamefully, ears turning red. Heather knelt down and felt her forehead.

“Shit, kid, you’re burning up!”

Veronica can only answer in a moan of pain. She barely registers that she’s being picked up by the angel, but she doesn’t do anything about it. She let herself be carried to her bed.

“I died in the explosion.”

Heather’s muscles tensed at that. It was spike in such an anguished, defeated voice that broke her heart and sent chills down her spine.

“This,” Veronica gestured vaguely to herself, “This isn’t me.”

She drapes an arm over her face and exhales a wheezing sob.

“This must be purgatory. Memories are just taunting me. Whatever I am is falling into pieces.”

Heather crossed over and took one of Veronica’s hand, squeezing tightly.

“You are you.” She said, “And you are here. You are the one what has been through all of this. Nobody is stronger than you.”

Veronica peeks out a little and coughs a laugh.

“If you say so.”

———

Janis flung her backpack at the stranger sitting at the couch when she got home. The glowing stare she got froze her in her tracks. It didn’t take her long to realize this person wasn’t human.

“Wh-who are you?” She called out, pressing herself against the door.

“Heather Chandler.” The stranger answered smoothly, “Angel. But I’m not the one you should be concerned about.”

“Where’s my cousin? Wait- an angel?”
Heather rolled her eyes and stood up, stretching out her pure white wings. She glanced at the staircase for a moment.

“Yes, an angel. I died.” She said, “Veronica is upstairs. Sleeping. It’s all she has the strength to do.”

Janis tilts her head at the otherworldly being.

“What are you talking about?”

“She’s sick, Janis. JD wounded her a few nights ago and she’s been trying to hide it.”

Heather glides over to the staircase and Janis follows her up to Veronica’s room. The girl in question barely even stirs when the blanket is tugged down and her shirt is pulled up a little. The thread of the makeshift stitches has snapped in a few areas, but the wound is still being held together well enough. The thread is crusted by bubbles of dried blood and scab. Her skin is a sickly yellow color. Janis is gaping in shock, even though this is the best it’s ever been.

“Do you know what necrotizing fasciitis is?”

Janis shook her head.

“Okay, do you want the good news or bad news first?”

“...Bad news.”

“It’s a flesh eating bacteria. It gets into wounds and causes rot inside.”

Janis swallowed painfully hard.

“What’s the good news?”

“It seems to be eating the infection.”

That was better than what the artist had been expecting, but she was still worried.

“Will she get better?”

“She would be vomiting blood by now, so yes. I’d like to think so. You can’t get better until you get worse.”

Janis purses her lips and glanced at the angel, whose wings are opening and closing slowly.

“You need to keep an eye on her, Janis. She’s not as fine as she tells herself.”

———

Rain was pounding on the window, coming down from the wine-dark sky in heavy sheets. The wind was howling, whirlwinds whisking notes of gale throughout the storm.

The room was dark, only lit by occasional lightning and a single candle that wafted a sweet scent by the bed.

Veronica laid there, unmoving, face buried in her pillow. She couldn’t believe that Heather had basically snitched on her. All of her friends had to have known by now.
When lighting flashed and thunder rumbled, she threw her legs over the side of her bed and stood up. She strode out of her room without changing from her sleepwear. This room was too clammy and hot. She needed air.

The heavy rain felt like arrows in her skin when she stepped outside, but it also soothed her in a weird way. She was soaked within a few seconds of being outside, the unforgiving wind chilling her to the bone. But she liked it. The storm’s tears felt nice on her scarred, scraped skin.

She was crying, maybe. She couldn’t tell with the rain on her face. Starbursts and grains of color flitted across her vision. Was she dying? It almost felt like it.

Her head tilted up towards the sky and she stared, praying for any god to smite her now. Anything would be better than living with what she was going through. But her prayers were not answered.

“Veronica?”

She almost missed her name over the thunder and rain pelting down.

Janis was standing a few feet away, her eyebrows knitted together like the clouds in the sky.

Veronica felt a fresh set of tears well up in her eyes. She didn’t know how her body was still able to produce them after how much she had cried.

“Are you okay?”

Janis finally asked the question. She already knew the answer, but it had to be said.

“No,” Veronica laughed to try and ward off the pain. “Not really.”

She inhaled shakily.

“I’ve been seeing you die ever since I got here. In my dreams. You die so much. I don’t want any of that to come true. I wanted to protect you, but my stupid problems kept getting in the way.”

Janis stepped closer.

“Maybe you’ve been running from this for too long. Who knows, Vera, maybe I’m destined to die. If that’s what it’ll take for you to get better, then I’m fine with it.”

Veronica whirled around to face her. Her hands latched onto Janis’ sleeves, nails digging in slightly.

“This isn’t fucking Life is Strange, Janis!” She yelled, “Our fates are controlled by a set of codes! I can change things. I can stop the dreams from becoming reality. I can keep denying it and defying it all. I just...I just need you to stay with me. Please.”

“Veronica-“

“Please!”

Veronica pressed her forehead to Janis’ chest, clinging tighter. She’s trembling with exhaustion and pain. Her side is bleeding again.

“It’s been for you. It’s all been for you, Janis.” She mutters, lifting her head to meet her cousin’s gaze. Tears shine in her eyes. “I probably wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you. I know I can be
difficult and I know that I’m just a big mess of problems, but I need you to stay. I need you to be here with me. I don’t care what happens to me, I’ll be okay as long as you’re here.”

For a moment, Janis does nothing. Then, she wraps her arms around Veronica and holds her protectively. She buries her nose in the smaller girl’s hair and doesn’t fight the tears. She takes in this grim moment, sniffing and keeping her breathing quiet. Finally, she speaks, twining her fingers with Veronica’s:

“Then we’ll be strong and strong together.”

As the storm whirls around them, the cousins hold each other in a moment of sorrow, but also hope. Hope to get better.

Veronica Sawyer wasn’t okay. JD was going to come back. It was getting easier to endure things, though. And even if she didn’t think she deserved to get better, if Janis was there with her, she’s sure she’ll be just fine.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There are times when the comforts of everyday life become uncomfortable. The room you wake up in every morning feels foreign. The walls, the lights, the bed, they are all out of place. When you find yourself at home and are almost sure that you are in a stranger’s house, the only thing to do is excuse yourself and leave.

I found myself in this position today. Lately I’ve been finding myself in this position far too often. Such is the progress of age. After wandering aimlessly for most of the day, I happened by a river. For some reason, my mind suddenly sparked with life. I was drawn towards the river. Something here stirred my thoughts, called out to me. Perhaps a sense of déjà vu.

Here, this river flowed peacefully, its surface rippling with the soothing breeze. The sun slowly sinking below the bridge, striking the water in just the right way to make it sparkle. Maybe this is home. Even the grass welcomed me, brushing up against my ankles.

And there…

Those flowers that bloomed on the other side.

They waved, greeting me home. Even from this side, I could tell they were the most beautiful flowers I had ever seen. I felt a warm touch on my shoulder and I turned to see you. You glowed while you laughed. Yes, those flowers are only as beautiful as your laugh.

You must have been tired from shining so brightly. We sat down. Your breath ceases and you sleep as your smiling face blossomed.

“Thank you,” I told you. Like usual, like on that day, I have seen this scene before.

“Goodbye,” you said in your sleep. Still smiling and sleeping peacefully you said that word. Oh how I wish you were only sleep talking. But knowing the meaning of “goodbye,” my heart seems to be crushed.

I reached out to hold your hand tightly. But in all honesty, because I want to touch your heart and smiling face, my eyes watered.

Resisting the overflowing tears and staring at you, I tried to let you go, but I couldn’t let this moment end. I hoped it would continue forever, repeating every single day. Every day, to look into
those eyes and see them sparkling back at me. But now I can’t see the shine in your eyes. Did your eyes sparkle because those things are finite?

You didn’t answer me, but I understand. After all, my infinite heart and your heart connect. We are inseparable. I can’t imagine a world without you. I want to be close to you forever and always. **Please don’t let go.** The pricelessness of repeatedly grasping your hand is worth more than you’ll ever know.

The voice that no longer reaches out now quietly smiles. That figure seems so far away, untouchable. You seem so distant even though I am holding onto you.

A sharp pain struck me. Numbness spread throughout my body.

The sun, not fully set, glared an unreal red. **Focus. Stay here.** Its light washing the river a color I couldn’t bear to see. **Don’t look.** I’ll see you instead. The wind gusted, agitating the blades of grass. **Just a nuance.** Concentrate on the warmth of your hands.

But as I fixated on you, ignoring the world around, you started to grow cold. The warmth drained away by the wind. Then to my horror, you started to fade, swept away by that unforgiving wind. **No. Please no! Not again. Don’t take her away!** My memories hazed me, refusing to let me stay. **Wake up! Help me! Help me stay rooted here!**

**But you can’t do anything, in your peaceful rest.** Unable to watch, I denied it all and closed my eyes.

**But this oblivion did not last. Even in this darkness, I could feel the ever chilling wind.** I felt the warmth leave you. I saw those beautiful flowers wilt.

I wanted to scream. Wanted to run. Wanted to hide. But I couldn’t. The numbness I felt, that pain. It consumed me.

**Please… please… melt this scene into an untruth.**

When I finally opened my eyes, I found myself standing next to you. Only you weren’t standing next to me. Here in this grayed out world, in this suffocating fog, I could barely find your outline. **Why are you lying there? Why would you sleep here, so vulnerable? Come on, let’s go home.** But you did not awaken. Reluctantly I stayed here keeping watch over you.

**Your pale, ashen skin, that silhouette of yours, only a fragment from days gone by.** With a shape, without infinity, your figure will someday decay.

**When that day comes, lost will I be, without you next to me.** Wandering, with no shape, with
infinity, my heart, what is it to do?

Just the thought of that judging day sends shivers through me. Right then, the shadow descended from my mind and lifted the veil in front of my eyes to reveal the darkest reaches of my memories.

No, it couldn’t be. But it is. You have worn that sleeping face far too long and will keep that peacefulness far longer. While I am here, you won’t stand. You won’t answer me. You won’t smile. In all honesty, because we can’t walk together anymore, I am paralyzed.

How am I to walk alone, without holding your hand? I fall to my knees. Resisting the overflowing tears and looking up at the sky, I tried to stand. But I couldn’t, not without you.

My eyes watered as I longed for you. I continue to hope forever, searching for you. But only the finite things sparkle in my eyes. Are you infinite now? An infinite heartbeat, that heartbeat, I give to you. Now will you wake?

I waited but you didn’t stir. Why don’t you wake?!?

I want to be by close to you forever and always. I want to no matter what. At least let me hold your hand. Yes, I know the foolishness of repeatedly grasping your hand. But my desires won’t let me, let you, go.

Why? Why won’t this world leave me alone? Let me remain oblivious from these lies!

This pain. This unbearable pain of my mind and heart being ripped apart, increases as I hold onto you. But I’m afraid to let you go. How much pain awaits me if I let go of your hand? You, who have been supporting me, can you take my senses from me? Can I lie there peacefully with you? Let this pain obliterate me so I can join you.

But then, the days that can no longer return now quietly smile. Those days shined through the darkness, onto half of us, me. Those days whispered, “Home, come home.” But where is home?

Meanwhile my memories called out to me, “Here, stay here with your friend.” Yes, that sounds nice.

But something, somewhere, deep down, told me, this isn’t where I belong.

My heart was shouting for me to stay here. My mind was screaming for me to return where I belong. A fierce storm swirled inside of me, muddling my emotions, clouding my thoughts.

The pain of these conflicting wishes rose to a point I couldn’t bear anymore. I momentarily let go
of your hand and clutched my head, trying to stop the piercing ringing in my ears.

And in that moment, I lost you. Your hand, snatched away by the fog, your presence fading.

“No! Don’t take her away from me!” my heart screamed while my brain reprimanded, “No, that is not her.”

“It doesn’t matter if it’s her or not!” I shouted into the darkness.

How many times have I seen this before? How many times must you be taken away from me? How much more will I have to suffer?

A bubble of emotion welled up inside of me. I tried to suppress it, but I had restrained myself far too long, and a scream surfaced.

“GIVE HER BACK!!!”

But the unrelinquishing darkness remained cold and unmoved. You were gone.

No. You couldn’t be gone.

But it was the truth.

My eyes watered once more.

No. I denied it all and closed my eyes.

No... no... I see this scene as an untruth.

I awoke once more in a stranger’s home. Once more I wandered until I happened by that river with the sun setting behind the bridge and those flowers that bloomed on the other side. Once more I saw your laughing face.

Repeating, repeating in a finite time. A time that must end. A time that I never want to end.

My eyes watered. I grasped your hand intending to never let go. But you reflected in my heart. Why do you laugh? Hey, tell me.

Resisting the overflowing tears and staring at you, I waited for your answer. Your laughing ceased, but you still smiled as your eyes watered.
Resisting the overflowing tears and staring at you, I answer.

I continue to hope forever, living here, in your heart.

I understand your pain. Your eyes sparkled because those things are finite. Those tears will dry and you will see clearly again.

Although “you” and “I” may be finite, my infinite heart and your heart connect. “We” are infinite.

I say “goodbye” but know I mean “see you later.” I will be close to you forever and always. Home, in your heart.

Then you flew off with the heavenly wind into the distance, into the golden sunset. I couldn’t take my eyes off of you as you were swept away to an infinite world beyond this finite world. And you took my longing and despair. The overflowing tears and emotions are now beyond time. When I could no longer see you, the sun had set leaving only its golden glow behind. Touched by your answer, I felt at ease, at home. So here I lay, in this blanket of grass. The warm breeze stroked my face, soothing me.

As night fell, I looked into the distance where you had faded. I could swear I saw you amongst those stars. In the dim starlight everything was washed a cool black. But before my finite eyes, I saw the breeze glow. The wind blew pastels in all directions as if the sky was its canvas. Then those stars in the sky radiated color. The likes of pink, magenta, cyan, and turquoise danced across the sky. Only those formless things quietly turned color. I stood to get a better look. I stood with a strength I never had before. I stood thanks to your support.

Thank you for opening my eyes. Thanks to you I glimpsed the infinite with these finite eyes of mine.

Thank you for bringing me home.
In this colorful world I admire those flowers that bloomed on the other side. We still don’t know the name of the flower we saw that day, but I know they were the most beautiful flowers I had ever seen. Almost, as beautiful as your laugh.

Now, in this time, in a finite time, I thank you.

I just barely touch your heart.

———

Veronica set her pen down, beaming with pride at what she had just created. She just did that.
Regular ink. No bloody writing. Real thoughts that weren’t produced from a haze of depression or paranoia.

“What do you think, Chandler?” She presented the notebook to the corgi with a snazzy neon yellow vest that read ‘Service Dog: Do Not Pet’ on either sides. “Pretty good, huh? I think I should try script writing next.”

Chandler’s stubby little tail wagged. Veronica laughs at the memory of Heather meeting her for the first time, as she was the reason for the dog’s name.

“Excuse you, if anyone would be a corgi, it would be you.” The angel had said, “You’re the short one. I would be a pristine dog! Like a red husky.”

“Oi, Veronica!” Janis called from the backyard door. Ich and Luge barked at her side. “It’s time for dinner! Then movie night! Hurry up or you won’t get to vote!”

“Coming!” Veronica called back, waving a hand at Janis.

She picks up her pens and notebook, whistling for Chandler to follow. She can see all her friends at the table, probably debating over which Smash character is the most superior. Before she steps inside, she turned around to look up at the sunset. The cool March air whisked around her and she smiled.

*Happy anniversary, Heather. Kurt and Ram.*

She thumbs away tears, but she doesn’t know why they’re there. Her grin is so real. She was so proud of herself.

*I made it.*

**Chapter End Notes**

And with that, Fur Coat is officially complete! Thank you so much to all the people who came back to read every new chapter of this shitshow! I devoted months to this and now it’s finally over. I’m so relieved. I love Fur Coat, but I was like a slave to this damn story. I’m so happy it’s done and I can finally work on other things. Maybe a rewrite for that last chapter because it didn’t quite live up to my expectations. Eh

But thank you all again! This really was a joy to work on, despite my complaining. I hope everyone enjoyed this and the AU I’ve created. Janis and Veronica are great kids (please help me expand stories with them they’re amazing)

Well. Now I don’t know what to do now. That’s what I’ve worked on since November. Oof

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!