unheavenly creatures

by greenlights_and_rabbitholes

Summary

Alice wants to forget her past in Riverdale. She was a young, lonely, and vulnerable witch who bonded with a malevolent demon named Hal, and their time together resulted in the bloodshed of many of her classmates. The trauma forces Alice to leave Hal and flee from Riverdale. 25 years later, she owns a bakery in Greendale and befriends a young witch named Sabrina Spellman. But when Sabrina refuses her Dark Baptism and is forced to take refuge to Riverdale, Alice panics for the young witch's life. With a new generation residing in Riverdale, old friends to catch up with, and a demon ex-boyfriend waiting to take his revenge, Alice has no other choice but to confront what happened to her in order to stop history from repeating itself.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
It’s quiet here in Greendale; not just the environment, but the people. Everyone in Greendale is respectful of your privacy, and they don’t ask stupid questions. I’m surprised I didn’t come here sooner, considering that it’s close to Riverdale. Yet again, I would rather be anywhere in the world that set foot back in that town.

It’s easy for me to disappear. I’ve been doing it since I was 17 years old. I never graduated from high school, but I did get a degree in the art of disguise. Hiding when necessary. I’ve been called a lot of things over the years. The bakery lady. Miss Alice from the bakery downtown, or just Miss Alice. Aunt Ali, even. I’m fortunate that no one has called me by my real name. Alice Suzanna Smith is a dead name. I haven’t allowed anyone, or myself, to mutter it for the past 25 years. I buried it along with my past in Riverdale.

It’s a tale I don’t wish to tell, but it has to be told one way or another. You see, 25 years ago, when I still was Alice Smith, I had my dance with the Devil. Or someone…..something, that worked in the ways of the Devil. There are these things called familiars: goblins that take form into what their master desires in a pet. Familiars are more known to take forms of animals when a witch is about to have their Dark Baptism. Funny thing is, I had no idea what a Dark Baptism was when I was 16, nor did I have any knowledge about the Church of Night in Greendale, not until my older years. I’ve come to know all the local haunts in that town since I moved there, but those places are nothing compared to what I know. What I’ve seen.

There is a house on Fox Lane, or there was when I still lived in Riverdale. A family used to live there, the Conways, years before I was born and was brutally massacred in the 80s. Rumors spread that a demon resided in that place. Everyone started calling it the Devil’s House. Knowing my skeptical attitude, I thought it was all smoke and mirrors. Yet again, I was still developing my powers without any wise old witch to train me for my Dark Baptism. And I never really had any friends in Riverdale, except for FP Jones. I think about FP every once in a while, but I try not to dwell too much on the past. I want to forget my life in Riverdale as much as I can. Everyone thought I was a Southside slut, a bastard even. I was a pariah wanting to just be noticed for once. I never should have summoned him that night I went to the Conway house on a dare. All because I wanted to prove them all wrong. But this tale is not so much about me. This tale is about my familiar. To witches who know their history on medieval witchcraft, he was known as the Black Hood. But to me, he was Hal Cooper. Of course it wasn’t his actual form; it was what he created for me. A boy that I could befriend, one I could love, give my heart and soul to. And I was so blinded back then that I didn’t know what he could do until the blood had dried on my hands. Sometimes I still find myself scrubbing imaginary blood off at the end of the work day. I did what I had to in order to stop him, to save myself from him. But it was all too late.

I try not to dwell on my past life in Riverdale. I want to leave Alice Smith in that house with him, to erase my memory along with the rest of the town. I like my life here in Greendale. But you know what they say - you can’t take good things for granted. The past will always catch up to you.

Guess I should start taking that advice. Now more than ever.

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UNHEAVENLY CREATURES
October 2017
ALICE

The shop is always so busy around Halloween. I’m not sure if it’s because of the witch community here, or if it’s these teens are heavily into the supernatural. But I’ve had my fun giving the kids a little scare every once in a while, as long as they’re still willing to buy a slice of pie or any of my other sweets after their reading.

Take for instance - I’m sitting now with this young kid from Baxter High. A football player, really popular. I can look into his thoughts - he treats his fellow classmates like they’re bottomless scum. He likes to get drunk and cause trouble with his fellow football players. Punks like him bothered me growing up, but it’s been a while since I’ve dealt with that sort of behavior.

“Well?” he asks me, his voice cracking. Got him. I study his palms a few more times, crafting my answer. What will get this kid to learn his lesson? His girlfriend recommended he come into my shop, fearing that he was heading down a bad path. Smart girl. Might as well give him his money’s worth.

“I see….” I begin telling the sucker, “Your life line is a little short. You do have a good life, good career in your sports… but….”

“But what?” he starts freaking out, “Why is my life line short? What’s gonna happen to me?” I take a moment, reading the fate line at the bottom of his palm and correlating it with what I can see for the kid. I look him in the eyes, acting as neutral as possible.

“You’re gonna get into a nasty accident in the near future due to your alcohol problems. As a result, you’re gonna get paralyzed and die of a broken heart because you couldn’t pursue your career.” I can see it in his face. He’s shitting himself.

“Oh god.” he panics. “Please tell me you’re full of shit!”

“I wish I was, but that’s what the fates tell me.” I shrug my shoulders at him. “So I suggest you stop partying so much and work on your schoolwork. And take more time to develop your career instead of harassing your classmates. Understand?” He doesn’t have the words to respond to me. He nods his head in fear. I smile.

“How about I sell you a slice a pie before you head out?”

I convince the kid to take a piece of cherry pie that I threw some hints of lemon balm and valerian into earlier this morning. He takes a couple of bites, much calmer now after hearing the news of his “fate”, and leaves. I smile, not because he is leaving for good, but because I saw his real future. He wasn’t going to get paralyzed and die of a broken heart. He was going to end up going to some community college and working for his family at a gas station, and he would grow up to be a cranky old man yelling at his neighbors to get off his lawn. Poor guy, but he kind of needed that push.

Once he leaves, I start working on my signature peach pie, a fan favorite. Baking has always been a
calming remedy for me, and it allows me to use some of my magic in as well, depending on how
the customers treat me that day. I’m glad to have started the business since moving to Greendale
with the help of Hilda and Zelda Spellman, who run the Mortuary out by the forest. They’ve been
so good to me, and they’ve helped me adjust to life here. I’m shocked that no one in the recent
years have made me sit down and sign the Book of the Beast, considering that I’m not affiliated
with the Church of Night and I still have my powers. But maybe that’s because of my
background….

I haven’t opened up much about my past in Riverdale. It’s better to stay buried in that house on Fox
Lane…..if there is still a Fox Lane. But how would I know? I haven’t stepped foot in Riverdale in
almost 25 years.

I use some magic to play some music in the shop. Dreams by Fleetwood Mac is blaring through
the speakers, an oldie but a goodie. Stevie’s singing about respecting someone’s freedom but
wanting them to remember the past. I start humming along, the lyrics like second nature to me.

In the stillness of remembering what you had,

And what you lost….

And what you had….

And what you lost….

I finish laying the top of the pie over the peach filling, examining my work. Satisfied, I fling the
oven door open with my magic and stick the sucker in. I’m so caught up in the song and with my
pie that I don’t hear the door chime open. It’s only a matter of seconds before I turn around and
practically jump back. On the other side of the counter, a young girl about to turn 16 is staring at
me, shivering. Her short blond hair is wet from the mist and rain outside. Her brown eyes looking
all doe like. I place a hand over my heart and catch my breath.

“You could’ve given me a heads up, Sabrina.”

“Sorry, Aunt Ali.” she apologizes. I notice her starting to scratch at herself through her redcoat. “I
just got out of school and…..”

“What happened to you?” I move around and come to her side of the counter, reaching for her
hand. She’s starting to form red patches on her skin, and if not treated, it could turn into blistering.
The younger girl rolls her eyes and huffs.

“Nothing, just….I went out into the woods earlier to perform a burial for a bat I killed in my room
last night. And the Weird Sisters….they came out of nowhere and hexed me.” That’s not good.
I’ve heard some talk of these Weird Sisters from Sabrina; they’re other witches in Greendale, a trio
of girls related to Father Blackwood who think they run the Academy of Unseen Arts. She sighs
and continues, “I tried to use a counteractive removal spell in the shower when I finished gym
class, but I’m not sure if it worked.” Well, of course it didn’t. Hexes like that don’t magically go
away easily, counteractive removal spell or not; I pity her. Girls like Penelope Blossom and her
clan of River Vixens deserved hexes. But girls like Sabrina…..

In a lot of ways, Sabrina is like me. She’s half-witch on her father’s side, half-human on her
mother’s. My mother must have been a witch, but I never knew for sure because she abandoned me
at the ripe age of 5 years old. Leaving me with my father….a drunken Serpent on the Southside. I
was caught between coming to terms with my magic and wanting to fit into the mortal world, just
as she is now.
But in other ways, Sabrina is different. I was all alone. I thought I was the only witch in Riverdale….on top of being outcasted at Riverdale High. I was the residential social pariah with only FP Jones, another Southside resident, as my friend. At Baxter, Sabrina has friends, Roz and Susie. She has a boy, Harvey Kinkle, who is crazy about her. I would have killed to have lived a life in Sabrina’s shoes, getting to live with these options with people to turn to for support. But I have to be there for her, since it is her 16th coming up on Halloween. On top of that, I want her to live the best life she can. It’s best for her not to fall down the same path I did.

“Take it easy for the next few hours, okay?” I lead her to a barstool and sit her down. “I’ll get you a brew that can help treat that hex. It won’t remove it entirely, but it will make the process easier.”

“Thanks, Ali.” she smiles, and I return the gesture before moving behind the counter to my work station. I whip out some of the herbs and milks I need for the concoction, crushing and mixing the ingredients to the texture I need for it to work. I finish making the concoction and pour some into a glass for her. “Here you go, Miss Spellman.” I slide the glass to her, which she immediately takes.

“I can give you the rest in a jug if you need it later on. But for the rest of the week, just take plenty of salt water baths and light any reversal candles you have lying around in the house. Your hex should be gone by the end of the week.”

“Alright.” she wipes the corners of her mouth. “Did this ever happen to you?” I raise my eyebrow at her.

“What do you mean?”

“Did these kind of things happen to you before your Dark Baptism?”

I stiffen at the question. She doesn’t know I didn’t have a Dark Baptism. Or a book signing. Or a ceremony at midnight. Sabrina doesn’t know about my times as a young half-witch, or any other dark details of my past. “Not that I can remember, sweetie.” I try to keep the conversation going. She doesn’t pick up on my worry.

“What about the whole name part during the Baptism? I think I might go with Edwina Diana. You know…..to honor my mom and dad.” She went quiet. I only heard some wind about what happened to the former High Priest Edward Spellman and his human wife, Diana. They both unfortunately died in a place crash when she was only a baby, leaving her with Hilda and Zelda. All I knew was that my mother disappeared long before my coming-of-age, and my father spent most of his time drunk off his ass with other Serpents at the Whyte Wyrm. While I never had a Dark Baptism, I performed some painstaking dance to initiate into the Serpents per my father’s demand at the ripe age of 13. And that’s where I want to leave it. Sabrina’s lucky she can get her fellow witch peers will get to call her Edwina Diana. All I ever got called was

“Hey, Acid Queen Alice!” the football players would snicker at me as I passed by them in my Serpent jacket. They would all laugh, and I would fight back tears.

It was October 1992, my senior year. Back then, phones still had cords. Winona still had Johnny. Everything smelled like teen spirit. And, just 25 years before I was Sabrina’s Aunt Ali, I was Alice Suzanna Smith, a girl from the wrong side of the tracks with one big secret.

I didn’t belong with these kids at Riverdale High. All I wanted to do was listen to my music on my cassette tape and practice whatever magic was brewing in me. It was kind of hard when River Vixens like Penelope and Hermione were calling you names behind your back and laughing with their high ponytail friends. I hated being an outcast. I hated my human father for making me join his gang against my will. And I hated my witch mother for abandoning me. Maybe that’s why Hal preyed on me....
I tried to focus my energy on my academics, I really was smart. But half the time, I couldn’t make myself walk through those doors without people staring or talking about me. One of those days before the night I released him, the bells rang and the halls cleared, but I couldn’t leave. Instead, I found myself sliding down the wall and resting on the staircase, my eyes filled with tears. I squeezed my eyes and rang my fingers through my once darker hair.

I started muttering a blood curse to aim at those boys who mocked me. “Vos omnes ministri odey et destructiones et seratore discorde. Et qui libiter opera facitis et tractibus, quod eat noce.” I repeated it over and over, feeling the hot tears go down my cheeks. After a while, I sniffled and wiped my eyes, unaware of my surroundings.

“Skipping class too, Smith?” his voice caught my attention and I looked up at him. He loomed over me and rested his forearm up against the wall. I snickered.

“Go to hell, FP.” But he didn’t leave. FP never really did. He may have worn the letterman of a football player, but he was a Southsider just like me. He sat down across from me on the staircase, taking in my full range of emotion.

“Did those assholes pick on you again?” he became concerned, “Seriously, Ali. I can go beat them up if they said something to you.”

“You don’t have to keep fighting my battles for me.” I wiped another tear away. He never had to defend me from them, even if they were his teammates. I never knew how FP Jones could tolerate me. But he was the only real friend I had. His father was a gang member, just like mine, and he took most of his time using FP as a punching bag for pleasure. When I heard that FP was a Southsider and his father was an abusive alcoholic, I made a personal promise to keep him safe, even if it meant hexing the daylights out of Old Man Jones. Of course I never shared that with FP, but I did patch him up and allowed him to stay in my trailer for the night. It allowed for us to become closer.

“No. Serpents don’t stand alone.” he stated, which shocked me. FP at the time didn’t want anything to do with the Serpents - he wanted out of there just as much as I did. Yet there I still was wearing that bloody jacket. “Surprised you’re still wearing that to school.” he gestured to my jacket.

“Gotta act tough somehow, Jones.” I teased him, making him laugh. I was happy that he was the only person in that school that didn’t view me as a walking freakshow. Fred Andrews, Tom Keller, and Sierra Samuels were the only other people I could think of, but not as much as him. But he had popularity and a good football career lined up for him. And I was still so lonely.

He stood up and offered his hand to me. “Wanna take an early lunch break to Pop’s?” I sat there for a moment, then I wiped away the last of my tears, grabbed my bag, and stood up with his assistance.

“Sounds good to me.” I replied with a smile. He led us out of the school’s door, out into the streets of Riverdale, heading to Pop’s - I made a mental reminder in my head to use some magic later to fake excused absence notes for the both of us. We ended up spending the remainder of that afternoon in that little diner, talking about horror movies and our plans for Halloween. FP was planning on going to a party that Penelope Blossom was hosting. It was becoming more of a buzz since Hiram Lodge, some new kid in town from a prep school in New York, would be going. Well, he wasn’t exactly new. He showed up spring semester of our junior year, but everyone still acted mesmerized. Well, everyone would go to see this wonder boy from Manhattan. And as for me, just watching movies at home and praying that my father wouldn’t do anything stupid. FP felt bad and offered for me to go, but I declined. I didn’t want people to point me out any further as a monster -
especially on Halloween of all nights.

“Well, if you change your mind, you let me know.” FP grabbed a french fry and shoved it into his mouth. I should have kept my word, my original promise to myself. But that was before Hiram approached me begging for me to come…..because why? Well, back in the day, my father had me act as his little “candy girl” to sell drugs to anyone desperate enough to buy them.

FP and I had to part ways a little distance between Pop’s and school, since he had football practice. We fist-bumped it out and I watched him run off in the other direction. I was tempted to follow him back, but I wasn’t particularly in the mood to face those neanderthals I called my classmates. Instead, I headed back in the opposite direction, to what I realized was heading towards Fox Lane.

My music from my tape was so loud and drowning out any sense of worry in me that I didn’t come to my senses of where I was. I looked up and noticed how dead the street was at the time. No one had really lived on Fox Lane since the Conway Family massacre some odd years ago. But the street urged something in me. Something…..someone…..was calling to me. I stopped in front of the Conway home, the little voice whispering to me. It begged me for freedom. For the taste of the light. For the chance to cleanse the souls of the damned. It wanted blood.

I freaked out and ran off. I returned to my trailer on the Southside and drew myself a salt-bath I learned about in some book about witchcraft. In my youth, I had no one guiding me through my magic. I taught myself half of what I could do through books I found in shops on the Southside, and through low-budgeted, poorly scripted horror films. But the magic was flowing through me naturally. And whatever resided in the Conway home….it wanted my magic to set itself free.

My timer for the peach pie goes off, snapping me out of the past. I rush over to the oven and I’m relieved to find that the pie didn’t burn. I set it out on the counter to cool and turn back to Sabrina.

“You should probably head home before it gets too dark out. Don’t want your aunts harping at me. Again.” I joke with her, pouring the rest of her concoction into a transportable jar.

“Nah. They’re probably too busy harping at Ambrose for flirting with the customers in the morbituary. Again.” She mimics my last statement. I laugh at the comment as I hand her the jar.

“You let me know if you need anything before your birthday, alright?”

“I promise.” She gives me a sad smile. I can see her thoughts as if they were my own. She’s torn between the witch world and the human world. She wants to make her family proud, but she doesn’t want to say goodbye to her friends. Or Harvey. I watch as Sabrina exits the shop, leaving me with my freshly baked pie ready to be sprinkled in powdered sugar and a good luck charm for whoever takes the first bite.

There’s a bird cawing outside but it takes a few minutes for me to register it. After a while, I look out to find a black raven staring at me quizzingly. It tilts its head from side to side. I don’t know what it wants or why it’s looking at me that way. Becoming more creeped out by the minute, I wander over to the area where the raven is and bang on the window. “Get lost!” I yell, the raven jumping back slightly and raising its wings. It caws at me, and this time I truly pay attention to it. A sensation is building inside me, and it’s a notion I don’t feel with normal animals. Is it someone’s familiar?

I bang on the window again at the raven. It finally takes the hint and flies away. Whatever….whoever….is spying on me, why come here on this day? Why not come in themselves? The whole thing weirds me out, but I try not to let it ruin the rest of my day.
I don’t close up shop until almost 10:30. Some teen stragglers from the movies like to come in and grab some pie and other treats, so I allow them their little pleasures. Luckily, I live right above the shop so I can tend to my work easier. My little apartment complex smells of lavender and vanilla when I open the doors. I’m not particularly hungry so I head straight to bed. It’s quiet here in the nights. Back in my youth, I hated the loneliness and the quiet. Now, it’s a comfort. Whatever I can use to make me forget about what happened in Riverdale is almost a blessing….and a curse. To this day, I still kick myself for going into that house. For releasing the Black Hood and playing the role of his Persephone. For making me put that memory removal spell on the entire town after binding him to that house. For making myself disappear.

I just hope that binding spell is still working.

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I’ve gotten used to the idea of Halloween in the recent years. Halloween was never good when I was younger. But watching the little kids come and go with their parents into the bakery has brought me some good spirits over time. Especially since Greendale is practically known for always being the land of Halloween. But it’s not just these younger kids I have to stay in good spirits for.

Today is Sabrina’s Dark Baptism. Her 16th birthday. And her aunts won’t let her attend school so she can prepare for tonight. Luckily since I run my own schedule, I decide to take work off early so I can spend some time with her and Ambrose while Hilda and Zelda rush around later tonight for last minute details for the Dark Baptism. I arrived earlier at Spellman Mortuary around 3 and was lucky to find that Sabrina’s hex had faded for the most part.

“Did the baths and candles just like you said, Aunt Ali.” she explained to me. Hilda made a wonderful dinner for us a bit later, but I could notice the young girl was shifting uncomfortably, not from the hex.

By the time we finish, Hilda and Zelda leave. It’s now just me, Sabrina, and her cousin Ambrose in the house. Sabrina’s upstairs in her room trying on her mother’s dress, and I’m in the living room with Ambrose. I’ve always gotten along with him, considering that he got bound to the place for trying to blow up the Vatican. A rebel and a lover, he loves good music. We’ve bonded over Fleetwood Mac, David Bowie, and Jimi Hendrix. One year for my birthday, he made me a mix CD to play in the shops, and I still have it to put on in the bakery.

“You seem to be in high spirits, Ali.” he comments to me from a corner of the room. “Trying to be optimistic for ‘Brina?”

“I’m trying.” I admit. Do I know how much this night means to her and her family? Yes. But am I of the opinion that Sabrina can have a life outside the Church of Night….just like me? Yes.

There’s a knock on the front door. How did Hilda and Zelda come back here so quickly? I follow the young man out of the living room and watch as he opens the front door. Harvey Kinkle is standing on the other side dressed as a mine worker.


“Upstairs. Why?” The other witch responds warily, but I can’t stop staring at Harvey. Was he here to take her to a party? One last hoorah before she turns over to the Church of Night? Does Harvey even know…

“I’ll go get her.” I make my decision and announce to the two by the door. Harvey smiles and Ambrose stares at me funny. I shoot the other witch a “I’ll explain in a minute” look as I head up the stairs and towards Sabrina’s room. The door is open when I enter. Sabrina’s sitting on the bed in a slip that’s meant to go under her mother’s dress. She notices me and stands, shaking.

“Harvey’s downstairs.” I tell her. “I’m guessing to give you well wishes before your Dark Baptism.” She blinks at me. Then she laughs, looking as if she’s about to tear up. Something’s off. “Sabrina….”

“I wanted to tell him. About what I was and what I had to do tonight.” Sabrina croaks, her voice going hoarse, “I tried to….but he panicked. I was scared….I’d never seen him that scared. So I had to wipe his memory of our whole conversation.” Wipe his memory. My spine straightens and my heart drops to my stomach. She used a memory removal spell. I feel like I might faint. But I have to stay strong for Sabrina. I place a hand on her dresser to keep me upright and take a deep breath. This is her night.

“I just want this to be a good night.” Sabrina sighs. “And I feel bad….because I know Roz and Susie wanted to plan this big birthday party for me and go get cupcakes at your bakery this afternoon….” My mind goes back to that boy’s costume. It’s Halloween. And it’s Sabrina’s birthday. Harvey has to be here for a good reason. I never liked going out on Halloween in my teen years. Too many bad memories. But I at least didn’t be held in my house like some hostage. If Sabrina wants to enjoy one last night in the human world…..on her birthday of all nights…..I wouldn’t see a problem with that. As long as Hilda and Zelda are out for the rest of the night. I think it’s time for me to play a little Fairy Godmother in this situation.

“Then you better get dressed. And let me help with your hair.” I smile. “We don’t want to keep Harvey waiting.” Sabrina must have caught on because she’s smiling back at me.

We finish hair, makeup, and wardrobe in the span of 10 minutes. I help smooth out her dress one last time before I guide her down the stairs and lead her over to Harvey. He’s glowing at the sight of her, and her at him. Ambrose joins my side and leans in.

“Aunties are gonna freak if she’s not here when they get back,” he whispers. I turn to him in confusion and he smirks. “And I thought I was the rebel in this household.” He winks and pats me on the arm. He moves over to the younger two. My eyes turn back to Sabrina and Harvey. They look so happy together. So in love. I envy her. No. Alice Smith envies her.

“Go have fun, you rascals.” Ambrose goes to open the door, allowing them out of the house. Sabrina waves me goodbye and I return the gesture. “And Sabrina….” he calls out, “Don’t forget the family get together. At midnight.” he warns and raises his brow. She waves him off and walks out the door with Harvey, hand in hand. I join Ambrose by the doorway and we watch the teens heading out into the dirt road through the woods. To wherever it was they were going. I’m content. Let the girl have a good night. Let her have the life I wanted to have for myself. The life that was far from my reach.

He sighs next to me. I almost forget he was there. “Well….now we wait.” Ambrose heads back into the house into whatever room but I stay out by the doorway. The autumn air is cool. Leaves rustle in the trees and fall onto the ground. It’s deadly silent. I have found comfort in the silence over the years, but tonight….it makes me worry. Something’s off about tonight. I can’t tell if it’s the Baptism or that it’s just Halloween. But something is in the air. Something in my gut is telling
me that something will go wrong. Something bad is….

“You coming in or what, Ali?” I hear Ambrose yelling from the living room. I leave my fears outside the house and retreat to the living room. Some 80s music is playing on the stereo and Ambrose is dancing along with a drink in his hands. I need to relax, to get this….whatever it is, bugging me off my shoulders. I decide to pour myself a drink and flop onto the couch.

“I like that Harvey guy.” he laughs. “Too bad he might have to leave the picture soon…..you know, if Sabrina does sign her name in the Book.”

“Her parents made it work.” I remind him, taking a long sip. And it’s true - Edward Spellman was able to still be the High Priest and be with Diana. They still had Sabrina. They made it work, but it cost them their lives. “Why can’t Sabrina and Harvey? She could….right?”

“Might have to pay a risky price with the Church….but yet again, I’m not too familiar on all that business.” he chuckles and finishes his glass. Whatever song was just playing ends, and a new one starts slowly. I’ve heard this before…. wait .

“Ahhh….hell yes!” Ambrose laughs and gets into the groove of this song. “I haven’t heard The Smiths in years.”

Wrap her up in the News Of The World

Dump her on a doorstep, girl

This night has opened my eyes

And I will never sleep again….

My heartbeat stops at the lyrics. I’m stiff and I want to vomit. But Ambrose doesn’t know any better. He’s just nonchalantly swaying and making the best of this experience.

“You know, I saw them in Liverpool back in ‘86. Had their records for a while and finally….” he continues on but I can’t pay attention. I’m trying my hardest to keep it together, to keep from exploding. This song brings back too many memories. All with him.

We were sitting in my car after ditching Darryl Doiley’s body in the woods. I was out of breath and wanted to cry. I just wanted to play a simple prank on him, just to get back at him for how he treated me during class. I didn’t want to kill him.

But that was what Hal wanted. Hal, my familiar, was worse than any demon residing in Greendale. He didn’t appear that way to me at first. He only took the form of a human just so he could be with me at school. To be my friend. My lover. My puppet master.

Oh, he said he'd cure your ills

But he didn't and he never will

That damn Smiths song was playing as he drove. He was giddy….ecstatic. He had Darryl’s blood all over his mouth and chin. He took note in my worried expression and took my chin in his fingers.

“Wipe that frown away, sweetheart. That’s one less Bulldog who doesn’t see you as a queen.” he told me. I couldn’t calm down, though. I just killed one of my classmates….or watched as Hal killed him, I don’t know anymore. It was a gruesome scene. He made me frame it like a bear had
mauled him in the woods when he got drunk and decided to go for a late night stroll. That was the
story we fabricated, but I still had to bare the truth. I still do now. He let me go and slammed on
the gas pedal. He sped off into the night, bopping his head along to Morrissey’s woeful lyrics. My
breath rose and fell uncontrollably. What if we got caught? What if someone saw us? What kind of
familiar did I summon?

“I didn’t ask for you to kill him, Hal.” my quiet voice shook. I assumed that he took no recognition
of my fear after he started driving, but I didn’t want to confirm it. I didn’t want to look him in the
eyes.

“Well, think about it! You got your payback…..and I got a meal.” he chuckled gleefully. I looked
down at my hands, still covered in Darryl’s blood, and shut my eyes, trying everything not to cry.
“Are you afraid, baby?” Hal finally took note in my state of distress. “Are you afraid? Of ME?” I
didn’t respond. Of course I was afraid of him. He killed one of my classmates with no remorse in
his eyes. Why shouldn’t I be? Another moment of silence between us passed, but Morrissey just
wouldn’t shut up. Then, he stopped the car, took my face into his hands, and grimaced.

“No….. no no no. This is only the beginning, Alice.” he growled. I could smell the blood behind
that damn smile. I wanted him to let go of me. I wanted to leave. “You have no reason to fear me.
Because, you and I? We can start something great together. With your witchcraft and my
abilities…..baby, no one can stop us. Ever.” His expression grew with every word, leaving me even
more paralyzed. He let out a roar, then pulled me in for a rough kiss. “We. Are. GODLIKE.”

We. Are. GODLIKE.

I hear his voice holler and screech in my head, like a broken record-player. The glass slips from my
hands and some magic waiting in my conscious seeps out, turning the music off. Ambrose stops
and looks at me. He rushes over and kneels down in front of me.

“You alright, Ali?” he approaches me, worried and cautious. He tries to reach out to me, and I
flinch. The room is spinning and I can’t breathe. My eyes dart down at Ambrose, almost hesitant to
help me. I blink a few times, then I find some strength to stand up.

“Sorry….” I apologize and start to back away, “Do you….do you mind if I go and take a bath or
something?” I start rambling, just out of nerves. Staying in his spot, he nods and lets me leave. I
turn and leave the living room. I’m making a break for the stairs….no, I’m sprinting. Running to
the bathroom. Throwing my back against the door, frozen until my legs give out.

I can hear his voice clear as day in my head. It makes my chest tight and my body shake. I use
some magic to draw myself a bath while my knees hug my chest. I could sob right now, the pain
hurts. But I force myself to shut my eyes and breathe. It takes a couple of minutes, but I do calm
down. I get up from my place on the floor and strip myself out of the dress I was wearing. I
sprinkle some salts and herbal remedies into the tub before hopping in. Whatever snake was
slithering in me, it’s released in a matter of a few minutes. I hate having these panic attacks. I hate
that it takes over my current state of being. But whenever something from my past, like that song,
 pops up now, I…. I don’t really know how to describe it. I just panic and start to think about him.
And that house. And what we did.

I thought familiars were supposed to help you make the best decisions. To provide you comfort.
Maybe I was an idiot for letting Hal Cooper out of that house. For letting him take his human form
and get to know the people in my cruel life. For letting him inside my body. For allowing him to
commit these horrible actions, and making me participate with him. I squeeze my eyes shut. Don’t
think about him, I have to tell myself over and over like a mantra. I try to focus on other things.
What will I bake tomorrow? Who will come into my shop? Is Sabrina okay?
I open my eyes and I notice that the water is now cold. And my hair is wet. Did I fall asleep? How long have I been in here? I jump out of the cold water and wrap a towel around myself. I look at the clock on the wall. It’s almost midnight. Sabrina must already be heading towards her Baptism. Ambrose must still be downstairs. He probably thinks I drowned myself. I slip back on my dress and use some spell to dry my hair. I’m running down the stairs hoping that he’s still in the living room. I don’t even see Ambrose until I bump into him.

“There you are, Ali.” he catches hold of me so we both don’t fall over. “I was worried something bad happened to you up there.”

“No. I just…..” I stumble on my words. I didn’t mean to freak out on him earlier, and I hope he knows that. He must have read the expression on my face or read my thoughts, because he leads me back into the living room and sits me down.

“Sorry….about earlier.” he apologizes. “I didn’t realize The Smiths was a trigger for you.” I open my mouth to tell him it’s okay, but my mind is still in a sticky place. I clamp my mouth for a moment, then open again.

“It’s not that, Ambrose. It’s….that song, it…..”

“Something bad happen to you?” he asks. I know it’s a genuine question, but it’s a jab in my brain. It’s like they want me to split my head open and see what my brain has. And I hate it more than anything in the world. I haven’t told Ambrose about what happened to me. I haven’t told anyone in the Spellman family, or anyone else in Greendale. I’ve kept my demons and my secrets to myself for so long. But I trust him. Despite the rebellious behavior, I know he’s good-natured and willing to keep that strong of a secret. And I need something stronger than a salt bath to get this weight off my shoulders. I need to tell someone about this. Someone I know won’t call me crazy or delirious or……

Something’s seeping into my head. I can’t tell if it’s a memory or a vision of what’s happening now. I hear panting. Leaves crunching. Soft crying. And there’s a herd of people behind whoever is running. I blink, trying to straighten my sights out, but I know this isn’t a memory. It’s Sabrina right now.

“Ali?” Ambrose snaps me out. I stand up and head over to the front door, opening it and walking outside. I look out into the woods, my heart racing. Why is Sabrina running? Where is she? Who is chasing her? Ambrose joins me outside and picks up on where I’m looking.

“Is that….” he points and I turn in his direction. A small, frightened figure comes out of the woods in a sprint. She’s covered in dirt. She no longer has her mother’s dress on. There’s a crowd of witches from the Church of Night marching in with torches behind her.

“Sabrina.” I mutter. I move down the stairs and rush down the walkway. Sabrina sees me and sprints in my direction. I pick up my pace and attempt to meet her halfway but she’s getting closer. She runs into my arms and is sobbing. “Sabrina….what…. What happened?” I feel her shaking in my arms as she clings to me tighter. What happened to her? Did she sign her name? What went down in the woods? The new High Priest, Father Blackwood, comes closer to the house with more witches behind him. I hold onto Sabrina and back up towards the house. Ambrose runs over to us.
and stays back a distance, just as concerned as I am. Sabrina lets go of me and turns to face all of them.

“Chase me all you want! But you won’t hurt me! Or my family!” she yells to all of the approaching witches, making them stop. Ambrose and I turn to each other than back at Sabrina. She continues her speech. “There is another path for me, just as there was for my father and my mother. A third way. And even if there isn’t…. My name is Sabrina Spellman, and I will not sign it away!”

Everything is silent. No one speaks, Not even me or Ambrose. I’m stunned more than anything. She didn’t sign the book. Sabrina didn’t join the Church. What made her run? In the distance, Father Blackwood steps towards us. I grab for her and hold on.

“A circle of protection rings this house!” Ambrose yells from behind us. “And no witch, save a Spellman, may cross it. Any unwelcome witch that tries shall BURN! So please, go ahead.” No one dares to step forward. Not even Blackwood. He probably knows it’s smoke and mirrors, since I’m standing here with Sabrina. And I would have known if Ambrose did cast a protection spell. Eventually standing down, Father Blackwood shrugs and walks away, prompting the other witches to leave. Hilda and Zelda are the only two of the crowd remaining.

“When did you put a protection on the house?” Sabrina turns to Ambrose. He’s freaking out right now.

“I didn’t. Though I should probably start.” he starts to walk away. The older Spellmans come up the walkway and glare at Sabrina. Zelda can’t even look her in the eye. They both follow Ambrose into the house. Sabrina and I are the only two left outside. I see her lip tremble for a moment, then she latches onto me again, sobbing harder than before.

“I’m sorry, Aunt Ali…” she mumbles into me. “I couldn’t do it……I couldn’t…..” I’m helpless. I don’t know what to do in this moment. I pity her. I’m worried for her. She chose not to sign away, and now almost everyone is turning against her. I need to stay with her. Now more than ever.

“It’s okay.” I embrace Sabrina with as much warmth and comfort as I can provide. It will have to do for now, these little bits of reassurance, because who knows what will happen to Sabrina or her family after tonight.

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They’re putting Sabrina on trial. We don’t know when it is, but it will be Judgement Day for us all. The result of her not signing her name in the Book of the Beast may cause her to lose her powers. And it’s going to affect everyone involved with her. Maybe even me.

It’s been a couple of days since, what would have been, the Dark Baptism and Zelda won’t mutter a word to Sabrina. The young girl has been staying with me above the bakery. She won’t stop talking about it. She’s scared to even go back to school for the rest of the week because of it.

“I made a mistake.” she would say over and over. She shouldn’t have to worry, she should move on. Believe me, I’ve been through worse. But I have to be strong for her.

“We’ll get this figured out.” I tell her when I’m working on some pastries downstairs. She’s sitting on the other side of the counter twirling her straw in her drink.
“Aunties won’t even say a word to me. Ambrose is the only one at least trying….but it’s not much.” And I know he has. Since that night, he reached out to me to make sure that I was okay. And since Sabrina’s been staying with me, I’ve given him some updates. He and I have both agreed that Sabrina and her aunts need to talk this out while we await for the news on Sabrina’s trial.

“They have to start acknowledging your presence at some point.” I remark with a huff. “They can’t go on ignoring you forever.”

“What if I cause them to lose their powers if the trial doesn’t go well?” she gets quiet. I turn to her and notice her head is hanging for a brief moment. Then she looks back up at me. “What if your powers get taken too?”

I almost drop the dough in my hands. My heart sinks. I set the dough down and take Sabrina’s hands into my own. She doesn’t need this guilt consuming her youth.

“Nothing is going to happen to me, okay?” I speak sternly. Sabrina doesn’t respond, she just stares at me. I sigh and continue, “Or your aunts. Or Ambrose. We will find a way to help you when your trial comes. But…. I pause, thinking of what to say. In all honesty, I have no clue what will happen to me or Sabrina’s aunts. We could rot or get excommunicated. Anything, really. But that’s worse case scenario. Right now, I need to be optimistic and hopeful. She’s young, she has friends and a boy who loves her, she can have a good life. That is if the Church of Night lets her stay human.

“But….I want you…. I have to choose my words carefully, “I want for you to enjoy your life as it is right now. With Roz and Susie. And with Harvey. Enjoy it while you can.” And I mean it. I want Sabrina to live the life I’ve never had. The youth I never got to maintain.

“I want to. More than anything.” Sabrina squeezes my hands. “But I want to be with you guys too. Why can’t I have the power and the freedom?” I don’t know how to respond. And it’s a question I’ve even asked myself over the years. How am I free from the Church yet still have my powers?

“I wish I knew, honey. I wish I did.” I give her a sincere look. She frowns slightly. She frees her hands and takes a sip from her drink. This whole ordeal is breaking her. Zelda and Hilda need to stop dragging her through the dirt like this.

“What?” Sabrina takes note in me watching her. I wipe my hands on my apron before taking it off.

“When you’re done, grab your things. We’re going to have a nice little chat with your aunts.”

We arrive back at the Spellman household in 15 minutes. The November air settles in as we make our way up the stairs. Ambrose is sitting on top of the little fence surrounding the porch and sees us.


“Where are they?” I immediately cut in. Ambrose steps back, slightly afraid. I march into the house with Sabrina behind me and slow my pace before entering the kitchen. I peer in - Hilda’s cooking something while Zelda’s at the table smoking and reading her newspaper. Sabrina slips in from behind and approaches Zelda. She sits down, hoping to get the older witch’s attention. Zelda glares, then brings the newspaper up, blocking Sabrina from her view.

“You can’t ignore me forever, Aunt Z.” Sabrina huffs. “I know what I did brought shame onto the family…..”
“Shame?” Zelda pipes up. She sets the paper down and leans back in her chair, holding her cigarette in her hand. “You embarrassed us in front of the entire Church of Night. Including Father Blackwood. And now you’re heading off to trial….”

“If they ever confirm her trial, dearie.” Hilda pipes in from one area of the kitchen. Zelda darts her eyes at her sister, and for a moment, I feel awful for Hilda. Zelda turns back to Sabrina and takes another puff of her cigarette.

“Well, since you’re here now, we need to discuss the details on your arrangement.”

“My arrangement?” Sabrina raises her brow. I’m just as equally unsettled listening to the conversation. I shoot Ambrose a look of confusion and he shrugs.

“The community for the Church here in town is still…..disturbed by your course of action. And since we have to wait until the confirmation of your trial…..” she pauses, taking another long drag, not even looking Sabrina in the eye.

“What? Aunt Zelda, what does that mean?” The older woman at the table blinks. Then, she finally looks her niece in the eye.

“We can’t guarantee that you’ll be safe to stay in Greendale with those…..others around.” The girl is stunned into silence, and so am I. They’re making her leave Greendale? Unable to keep my silence, I finally pipe up.

“You’re making her leave?” I throw out. “Where do you expect her to go, Zelda? Please, tell me!” My anger is rising, but at this point I don’t care. This is Sabrina’s life on the line. Zelda huffs at me and rolls her eyes.

“It’s not temporary, Alice. She’ll be close by.” I grow quiet. Define close by, my mind screams. But I don’t need to ask - she gives her answer. “I have a contact in Riverdale that is willing to help you adjust for the time. You’ll stay there until your trial is underway.”

I stop breathing. I almost fall over in the kitchen. No. Not Riverdale. Sabrina could stay anywhere. She could stay with Harvey or Roz or Susie or anyone else from her high school. She could stay anywhere…..but not in goddamn Riverdale. I can’t tell if I’m terrified or angry or confused or a combination of all these emotions. I have so many burning questions for Zelda. What makes you think Sabrina will be safe in Riverdale? Who will she stay with? Who is your contact? WHO ELSE IS A WITCH IN RIVERDALE AND HOW DID I NOT KNOW?

“Riverdale?” Sabrina mutters, breaking the silence and my racing thoughts. “As in….Baxter High’s number one enemy, Riverdale?”

“It won’t be that bad, dearie.” Hilda stops her meddling in the kitchen and wanders over to her niece. “Maybe you can get a fresh new start and...make some friends.” I know she means it with kindness, but Sabrina does not look happy. She stands up and faces Hilda.

“I have friends here!” she barks. “I have the chance to be someone….you can’t just send me away like this!”

“It’s set in stone, Sabrina.” Zelda rises as well, her voice stern and cold. “You’re leaving and that’s final.” I feel so helpless standing there watching this argument go down. I want to protect Sabrina at all cost, as if she were my own daughter. I don’t want to watch her life get thrown away only for her to find her way to Riverdale, to that house. To him.

A nasty thought comes to me. I have to go with her. To keep her away from Fox Lane. To make
sure she doesn’t set him free. Don’t say anything, Alice, my mind warns me immediately, but my mouth already jumps ahead.

“Well you’re both out of your minds if you’re sending her to that place alone.” I speak up, catching the women’s attention. I should have kept my mouth shut, but it’s too late. I come over to the table and take a deep breath, glaring at Zelda. The words slip from my mouth, “If she’s going to Riverdale….then I’m going too.” Hilda gives me a sad smile. Zelda raises an eyebrow at me. Sabrina comes over to me, concerned.

“Ali….”

“I’ll make sure she doesn’t get into any trouble.” I continue, the memories of my youth coming back to me. But I have to do this. I have to do it for Sabrina. “I can find someone to cover for me at the bakery. Just…..don’t send her to Riverdale by herself. Let me go with her.”

“How kind.” Zelda addresses me dead-pan. “But what makes you think you can watch over Sabrina in Riverdale?” I stare at her in silence. How do I even respond? Is it a good time to finally admit what happened to me? Or is it better just to….. No. I have to face my demons one way or another. And I’m tired of running.

I exhale and respond, “Because out of all of us in this kitchen…..I’m the one who grew up Riverdale. Spent half my life there. So, I guess that makes me an expert on how to get around.” I want to say more, but I leave it at that. It’s enough for Zelda to nod at me, a sign of confirmation.

“Then it’s settled.” she confirms for me, “You and Sabrina leave for Riverdale. Tomorrow night.” She turns to Sabrina and, for the first time I see, she gives her niece a mournful look. “You might want to say your goodbyes to those….mortals you call your friends.” The conversation ends there. A cry rings in the air, and I stand there helpless as Sabrina runs out of the room. I try to call after her, head off in her direction, but it’s too late. She’s already run off.

“Give her a few, Ali.” Ambrose reassures me. “Just needs to process it all.” He pats my shoulder and leaves the kitchen. Behind me, Zelda returns to smoking and reading her newspaper, and Hilda continues cooking. I stand by the doorway, my heart sinking not only for Sabrina…..but for myself. And what I have to do.

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I flip the sign on the door so it says “CLOSED”. I’ve been dreading this day since the talk at the Spellman’s house yesterday. I’m hoping for the sake of Sabrina that Riverdale has changed for the better since I disappeared. I hope that maybe the town has gotten some sense of what it actually means to be a good person. And I hope……. I hope that Hal has not preyed on any other person in Riverdale to free him. Just as long as Sabrina doesn’t find her way to that house.

I head back up to my apartment and stare down at my half-packed luggage. I have almost my entire wardrobe and some candles packed in there. I’m considering bringing my baking supplies, but would it be too much? Would I even get work in Riverdale for the short amount of time I’m there with her? Stop, Alice, I mentally command myself. Be strong. And I’m trying, I really am. I sigh and continue. I don’t know how much time has passed, but now my bags are all packed and it’s starting to get dark out. I head down the steps one last time, walking out of my little bakery, my home for the past few years, and head out into the world.
Sabrina is waiting for me on the steps of her house when I pull up into the Mortuary. She stands up slowly as I approach her. She has two bags on each side of her, tiny of course, but I’m hoping it’s enough to hold her over for the time we have to be there. She’s nervous, and I can tell, because I’m feeling the exact same way.

“Got everything you need?” I check in with the young girl.

“I think so.” she nods. “We should get going. It’ll be harder to drive if it’s too dark out.” She grabs her bags and moves past me. I look up at the looming building, absorbing its dark nature. It’s silent tonight. Are her aunts or cousin not going to come out to say goodbye to her? Granted, no one did when I left Riverdale. Not even FP.

I begin to follow Sabrina down the dirt path when the door opens behind us. “SABRINA!” Ambrose comes running after us. Sabrina drops her bags on the ground and acknowledges her cousin. He stops in front of her and I notice that he has something in his hand. Some sort of necklace. “This belonged to your father.” I could hear him whisper to her, “He had this kept here before he left on his trip to Italy with your mum.” I came over closer to get a better look at this necklace, but I’m still too far away. The necklace drops into her hand. “I’ve put a summoning spell on it, so if you ever have trouble, use this and one of us will get to you. Okay?” Sabrina looks him in the eyes and nods. I see his lips tremble. The two embrace and I swear I can hear her quietly sobbing.

“Hang in there, cousin. You’ll be home soon.” The two break their hold, and he gives her hand a quick squeeze. Ambrose turns to me and extends his hand out to me, which I take. “Take care of her.”

“I will.” I respond. He nods and heads back into the house. I watch him disappear into the Mortuuary, the darkness consuming everything again, and I turn back to Sabrina. I catch up to her and grab one of her bags.

“You want me to take you to see any of your friends? Harvey?” Her gaze becomes distant. A lone tear streams down her cheek. She glances back up at me and looks wounded.

“I told them I was transferring due to family troubles. But….but I. . .” she goes quiet. My heart is breaking for her. She has to leave this life behind against her will….. And I thought I went through worse. A motherly instinct kicks in me, and I cup her face with my free hand, trying to keep my emotions together. Not saying anything, I pull her in and hug her. She clings to me and I can feel her tears on the fabric of my dress.

I don’t like getting close with people, not after what happened. I try to make my connections short-lived, keep people at arms-length. But I’ve known Sabrina as long as I have lived here in Greendale. She and her family, as self-centered as they are, welcomed me here, and she sees me as part of the clan. In a way, Sabrina is the closest thing I have to a family. And I don’t know how I would react if something more horrible were to happen to her. She needs me in her life, and in a way, I need her too.

After a while, she frees herself from me, grabs her bag, and heads over to my car. I help shove her stuff in the back seat of the vehicle. I wait for a moment before I turn on the ignition. It’s quiet in here, and I want to put on the radio or one of Ambrose’s CDs or something. Anything, really, to drown out these memories.

“You said you lived in Riverdale, right?” Sabrina croaks. My eyes widen as I face her. She blinks up at me. “So how did you end up here? What made you leave?” I stare out the windshield, paralyzed. I have no idea what to even tell her. I want to tell her the truth. I need to tell her. She needs to know about that house. About him. Just not now.
“Let’s just say I have bad blood there.” And I start driving.

It takes us about an hour to drive into this town I used to call home. My heart is racing with every mile. I’m tempted just to turn around and drive back. I’m tempted just to go into a different town all together. But I can’t go and betray Hilda and Zelda. They’re relying on me to look after Sabrina. And I want to find out whoever this contact is that Zelda mentioned. Just until the trial, I have to remind myself. You’re only here until the trial, I hear Sabrina fumble with the radio, twisting the dial to find some music. Stevie Nicks is singing her heart out to Edge of Seventeen.

She looks out ahead and points to an area in front of her. “It’s official. We’re in the Town with Pep.” I look out and see the sign welcoming us to Riverdale. I grit my teeth and my body shakes. I can’t tell if I’m speeding up or slowing down. The concept of time for me is going out the window. I can’t look at this anymore. I shut my eyes and drive past. We’re officially in Riverdale. The town with pep and a former life I want to forget.

Welcome home, Acid Queen Alice, a voice stirs in my head. It’s his voice….or maybe it’s someone else’s. Someone familiar that I can’t put my finger on. Would his spirit even know I’m back in town? Is he rattling a storm in that house waiting for me to set him free? To have him come get his revenge on me? My head is spiraling, and I almost lose my focus on the road ahead of me. I try to focus on what Stevie is saying in her song.

I went today maybe I will go again

 Tomorrow

And the music there it was hauntingly

Familiar

“Were you excommunicated from your witch community in Riverdale?” Sabrina’s voice pulls me back into reality. I turn to her every so often while trying to keep my eyes on the road. “Did something happen to your family?” If you only knew, Sabrina, I think to myself. If you only knew what really happened to me ….

“I was never part of any witch community here…..” I begin to explain to the best of my ability without mentally losing it, “I was only seventeen, Sabrina. I was on my own. I had no friends…..” No, I had FP. But he probably won’t remember me anyway. But maybe he will….. I couldn’t bring myself to put the entire memory removal spell on him. I only wiped away the memories of Hal, and that I was a witch. He didn’t get the treatment like everyone else here. Maybe I should have, considering….

“So what was it, then?” Sabrina keeps trying to pry answers out of me. I open my mouth then close it, not knowing how to respond. I’m so caught up in my train of thought that I don’t notice the deer ahead of me. It’s only after Sabrina grabs my arm and yells for me to look out that I panic. I swerve in attempt to not hit this damn deer and slam the brake. The car stops and there’s a loud thump. My heartbeat is out of control now, I’m panting. I put the car in park and check Sabrina. She’s okay, that gives me relief. But I’m not sure if the deer is. There’s blood on the windshield, and it’s slightly cracked.

“I’ll be right back.” I yell over Stevie and get out, leaving Sabrina in the car. I move slowly, the headlights blaring out in front of me. I look down and my mouth hangs open. The deer is twitching on the ground. There’s a gaping wound in its chest, blood is coming out, and it’s on the verge of dying.
Great. First night back in Riverdale and I already kill a deer. Just my luck. I sigh in frustration and kneel down. Might as well make some attempt to bring this deer back to a walking state. I hover my hands over this thing and begin reciting a healing spell. The words flow out of my mouth with every bit of magic I can provide to this poor creature. I’m caught up in my hymn…. It’s only a short amount of time before I hear a dark bellowing laugh from the distance. I stop for a moment, glancing out into the wilderness beyond me. Nothing to worry about. I get back into it. The laughter picks up again, becoming louder. More ominous. I realize too late that the laughter is not coming from the woods. It’s coming from what’s under me. I glance down and see the deer shift its position. It looks up at me and grins. My mind is just playing tricks on me, but it’s real. I blink a few times, then the last time, I become paralyzed. The deer is no longer the deer. It’s him.

“Hi, Alice.” this manifestation speaks to me in his voice. I can’t speak, I can’t cry out for help. I’m trapped, my mouth hanging open, my eyes struggling to absorb the sight in front of me.

“Ali?” Sabrina calls out but I can’t move. “Alice! What’s happening?” I stay there with my eyes glued on him. He repositions himself and now he is standing over me.

“Did you forget about me, baby?” he grimaces, his expression becoming more sinister. “Because I certainly haven’t forgotten about you.” He lunges at me, his hands wrapping around my throat.

“ALICE!” Sabrina screams from the distance.

He pushes me down to the ground and hovers over me. I can’t breathe with his hands on me, I can’t fight back, I can’t place any spells to make this stop. I’m stuck here gasping for air. My vision is blurring. I can’t tell if he’s there or not anymore. I can’t tell what is real and what isn’t. And Sabrina is still screaming.

I see my life flashing before me…..No. One memory in this moment. When it all began.

It was cold out. My heels clicked on the pavement. I was naive for taking on this dare. Ignorant, really. My teeth chattered uncontrollably, my jacket wasn’t doing much to keep me warm over my simplistic Halloween costume, and I just wanted to go home. But not in that moment. I didn’t want to go from being Acid Queen Alice to being Alice the Coward. Especially not under Penelope’s reign. Maybe even Hiram’s too.

I stopped in front of that house. It was dark and empty on Fox Lane. I felt like I was the only living soul there. But that voice from earlier, the same one calling to me, I could hear it from outside the house. Maybe it was just Marty Mantle or some of the other jocks from school playing a prank on me.

“Alright. Let’s get this over with.” I muttered to myself and headed up the stone path. My footsteps sounded like waves crashing violently into walls of stone. That little voice in my head grew louder the closer I came to the front door. I stopped for a moment, glancing behind me to make sure no Bulldog goons from the party had followed me. I turned back to the door, taking a long, staggered breath.

I pushed the door open, listening to it creak. The house was empty and cold. Its darkness was overwhelming, a sensation I didn’t know how to handle at the time. I hesitated for a moment, then I walked in. I was engulfed into this dark world the more I walked in; the door blew shut behind me. “Very funny, guys.” I yelled out into the nothingness. I can’t believe I actually thought it was a genuine prank being pulled at the time. But yet again, I didn’t know any better. Nothing responded back to me. The silence was unsettling. I really wished there was someone there to keep me company.
I walked into what was the family’s living room and knelt down. I only knew of a few summoning spells at the time, still practicing my summon spell for a familiar. I learned about it from some shop lady on the Southside just days after I first stopped by this house. I figured at the time that if familiars were supposed to be guides, maybe it was time I needed one. Maybe they could help me with my issues. I didn’t have a bell or a wooden stick on me, but I had to make due with what was available. So I exhaled and began my chanting, drawing symbols in the dust on the floorboards.

“Spirits of this house, I pronounce my intentions to thee. Come forth and seek me, and equal we will be.” Something creaked and crawled, startling me. But I had to keep going. “Not master and servant, but familiar to familiar, to share our knowledge.” the creaking became louder, “our spirit, and our traits.” I felt like a large animal would bust through the house and murder me. I recited the last line rushed and afraid, “And now, spirits, we will wait.” I clamped my mouth shut, the silence consuming everything once more. I waited a few minutes for something to happen. Nothing. “Just what I thought. Waste of time.” I muttered. I got up and was about ready to leave.

A gust held me in my place, coldness overcoming my body. The lights, which were shut off when the house went under and lost power years ago, flickered on and off. Something was swirling in the air, I didn’t know what at the time. That thing, whatever it was, formed one cohesive being on the staircase, its eyes glowing in the dark in front of me. It directed its voice at me.

“Alice…..” it spoke to me, the same voice from my head. “You called for me…..and I came.” It shapeshifted in front of me, I couldn’t tell what. What was it forming into? A deer? A bear? A…..a human? Could familiars take the form of humans? One single light flickered then went out. The familiar stepped out in front of me, in its final form….it took the form of a man. A teenage boy. He had short blonde hair and blue-green eyes. His face was soft, yet there was something that made him look older. He smiled at me. A smile that I was so easily fooled by.

“I've been called many things over the years, Alice. A lot of nasty names which are inaccurate of my character. But…..you can call me Hal.”

I was an idiot back then. And I’m an idiot for coming back here. And he’s out, pinning me to the ground, choking me…. No. No, he’s not here. He’s still in that house. There’s no hands on me. There’s no one over me but Sabrina screaming my name in a panicked state.

I’m not being choked. I’m having a seizure.
End of Chapter One

Chapter End Notes

So....what do we think so far? I can't wait for you all to read the rest! Also, this fic has some chapters up on Wattpad, so if you came from there, please don't spoil anything in the comments! Thank you, and HAPPY HALLOWEEN!
Do I Know You?

Chapter Notes

Hello! We're back! Have a good time reading yal!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SABRINA

It’s taking Aunt Ali a long time to revive that deer. I don’t know if she needs help or if it’s the Riverdale atmosphere. I still have so many questions for her regarding her life in this town. But my thoughts are blurred out by Stevie Nicks on the radio. I can hear her softly murmuring the spell, but then she stops. Worried, I get out of the car and see her frozen in her state.

“Ali?” I call out to her, but she’s not responding. She wheezes for a moment, not even noticing me. “Alice, what’s happening?” I start panicking, not sure of why she’s acting this way. Then, she falls over. Her body is shaking violently and her eyes roll to the back of her head.

“ALICE!” I scream and run over to her. I collapse onto my knees, grabbing for her head. It’s rattling uncontrollably against my hold. I’m crying, I’m freaking out for Ali. What can I do? I start to murmur a calming spell. I know it probably won’t work but it’s worth a try. I have to get help.

I use my telekinesis to lurch the car closer to us. Ali isn’t shaking as violently now, but her seizure won’t stop. Using more of my magic, with tears in my eyes, I carry her as best as I can into the passenger’s seat, hopping into the driver’s seat myself. I barely know how to drive - well, Harvey let me practice with his truck a couple of times. But Aunties won’t let me get a license, don’t want me associating too much with the humans now. I wish Harvey, or Roz, or Susie were here with me to help. They would know what to do if someone was having a seizure. But I can’t take Ali to the doctors. I don’t know where I am or where I’m driving? Where can I go? WHERE CAN I GO?

I carefully drive down the highway, my heart flying out of my chest, as I look back and forth between the road and Ali. “Hang on, Ali. I’m gonna get help.” I whisper to her shaking body and my throat aches. I remember the charm hanging on my neck that Ambrose gave me. Part of me wants to use the necklace to signal for help. Part of me wants to drive back to Greendale. But how would I get back without Ali guiding me? And would Aunties, or even Ambrose, allow me to return? I wrap my fingers around the charm, hoping for some sort of answer to appear out in the dark roads of Riverdale.

I keep driving for a few minutes, looking for any sort of living bodies in this town. I’ve heard about some of the hot spots in Riverdale from when Harvey and his brother, Tommy, would visit for a weekend. There’s a diner called Pop’s, some movie theater with a French name, and of course, Riverdale High. But how far away are they from where I am on the highway?

I don’t know where exactly I am, but I see a sign a couple of hundred feet away. Sunnyside Trailers. A TRAILER PARK. There’s a few trailers with their lights on. A fire is glowing somewhere in the distance. PEOPLE. I quickly turn into the trailer park, feeling the steering wheel burn in my hands, and pull into the lot’s driveway. Ali’s still shaking, no matter how hard I try to use my magic non-verbally to stop her seizure.
I get out of the car and feel the cold air hit me. “HELP!” I’m screaming at the top of my lungs. I call out again, but no one in that park is responding to me. Is anyone even home? My breathing becomes stagnant. I run over to Ali’s side of the car and open her door. Her body is still shaking as I hold her in my arms. I begin chanting my calming spell again, but my emotions are too sporadic to keep a coherent chant going.

There’s a woman coming over to me. I don’t see her at first, since I’m focused on Ali. She’s coming closer to me, I can hear her footsteps. I look up at the sound and stand up to face her. This woman has dark hair and she’s wearing some diner uniform. She has three stars on the side of her eye. “Everything okay out here?” she says to me. I panic for a moment. I don’t know what to tell her. Instead, I run over to her and grab her arm.

“Please…” my voice is desperate. I take her over to where Ali is in the car. “I don’t know…..I don’t…..” I try to explain. But this woman gets the hint right away. She turns to me and takes me by the shoulders.

“Get her out of the car and keep her on a flat surface, okay?” this stranger addresses me calmly. I nod and she lets go of my shoulders. I take Ali and slowly pull her out of the car. The woman is running back into her trailer. She’s calling for someone, I’m not sure who but it’s an unusual name, only two letters or something…. I try to focus on my spell again. Her head isn’t shaking as violently anymore, which is good. I finish the last of the spell choking out tears. She stops shaking. Her eyes flutter open. She’s groaning. “Ssss…..sssa…..” Is she trying to say my name?

“It’s okay, Ali.” I whisper to her, forcing myself not to cry anymore. “Help is coming. Just stay with me.”

The woman comes back outside, and this time someone else is with her. A grown man with dark hair, a scruffy beard, and a leather jacket. He comes over next to me and kneels down. “You got a name, kid?” his voice is scratchy yet smooth. I tell him my name, what happened, and he nods before looking down at Ali. I try to talk to him more, but he is no longer paying attention to me. He’s been staring down at her for a while…..almost like he knows her. Does she know him? Beneath me, she tilts her head up at this stranger.

The man reaches out for her face, his fingers moving slowly across her cheeks. She’s still in a violent daze. She’s struggling to breathe, but her eyes are still on him. She takes a moment to process his face, his hold…..

“FP?”

She passes out in my arms, and I look back up at this man, FP. His eyes are getting wet. How does Ali know him? He slowly turns his head up to me, panic starting to set in. Does he think that I’m her daughter? He fights to blink back tears as he returns his gaze to Ali. Seconds later, he scoops her up from my hold and stands up with her in his arms. I stand up and watch him go away, carrying her into the trailer, not saying a word.

I have never felt so helpless. I’ve never seen Ali in such a state before. I turn to the woman next to me…..his wife? She meets my gaze, and she looks just as confused as me. And just as worried.

“You better come inside, sweetie.” the woman comes over and gently places her hand on my shoulder, leading me towards her trailer. I don’t fight back, I just allow her to guide us inside. Before we go up the steps, I glance around this trailer park once more. Was this where Ali grew up? Did she ever mention anything to me about her childhood beyond her early days of witchcraft? Did she bring up where she lived and….and how exactly she knows who this man is? What happened to Ali that caused her to leave Riverdale all of those years ago?
ALICE

I can barely remember what happened after the deer and seeing Hal. Everything’s a blur. But something’s screaming out to me in my mind’s eye. I can vaguely see Sabrina holding my body outside some place in Riverdale. A brunette with a long face. And a man…..

FP. I saw FP. But was it really him? I can’t remember because I must have passed out. But I swear I saw his face. I never forgot his face, or his eyes, or anything about him. He was the one good thing Riverdale had to offer. And maybe he still is.

FP Jones never knew about my witchcraft, only because I never wanted to scare him away. But there was one night when I came close to telling him everything. It was the night of Hermione’s car accident. I didn’t know where to go or where to run, but I had to stay away from him. Hal couldn’t find me and use me for such dark things again. I was done with him.

I stumbled into the trailer park, wheezing and sobbing, my hands covered in blood. My hair had gotten in my face from the sweat and the tears. I stumbled to his trailer and banged on the door. He had to come. He had to help. But what if he didn’t? What if he saw the truth and turned me away? I was foolish to think of coming here….so damn fool---

He opened the door. He took in my presence from the darkness outside. “Ali…..” he started then noticed my state. “Holy shit….what….what happened?”

“FP, please…..” I mumbled, trying my best not to break down in front of him. I didn’t have to explain much more; he grabbed me and brought me into his trailer. He sat me down on the couch and turned on the lamp. He examined my face then my hands.

“Did something happen with you and Hal?” he won’t stop looking at my hands. I cringed at the name. FP only knew of Hal as the new boy….my boyfriend. So, of course he didn’t know that Hal was actually my familiar. Or my demonic curse.

“No…..” I stammered. It was actually between me, him, and Hermione Gomez. My mind’s flashing to the car. The pedal slamming down too fast. What I had to do to save her. “I did something bad, FP.” I tried to explain. “I…..I should have told you sooner. Maybe something could have been different….” I had to stop myself. He couldn’t know the full truth. Not yet. FP grabbed me and stood me up. I couldn’t tell if he was horrified or angry or worried, but there was a look in his eyes…..it still puzzles me to this day. But it was a look that I’d never seen before.

“What did he do to you, Ali?” his voice went deep. He was talking about Hal. I started gasping for air, not knowing how to respond. My tears became heavier the longer breaths I took. “Ali…..” he repeated, but I cut him off.

“You don’t understand what I’ve done, FP!” I wailed, my voice breaking. “You don’t…..you don’t understand what I’m responsible for…..” I stopped speaking entirely. My sobs filled in the gaps of our silence. He took my face into his hands and held me there for a minute. I thought that we would kiss. I wouldn’t have minded it, but it would have been too soon. Instead, he pulled me into him and wrapped his arms around me, bringing some comfort. I responded to the hug and allowed myself to bury my face into his shoulder.
“It’s gonna be okay….” he told me. I could hear him falling apart too. “I won’t let anything bad happen to you. It’s okay….” We stayed like that for a while.

I wished everything was okay. I wished that I could have stayed with him when everything went wrong. FP wanted to go off and become a professional football player. He wanted a scholarship for school. I don’t know what became of FP once I left. I hoped that he did make it out of that town and went off to pursue his dream. But

He’s here. I saw his face. In this….. I don’t know what time it is or where I am. My brain snaps awake and my eyes flutter open. Everything is grey…..the sky, the wall, the bed sheets. It takes me a moment to realize I’m in someone’s bedroom. I make an attempt to sit up, but my vision spins. My head feels dizzy. A hand grabs for me. Keeps me steady. There’s someone here.

“Hey, you’re alright.” this person speaks to me. I’m still trying to process my sense of location. Where am I? Who is this next to me? Where is Sabrina? I finally look at this person. It’s a woman kneeling in front of me. She looks roughly around my age, maybe a bit older, or younger. I can’t tell. The stars by her eye look faded, but they stand out on her.

“Where…..” I start, then clamp my mouth shut. It’s dry. I look around the room then turn back to her. “What time is it?”

“Just a little bit before 8. You were out for a while last night.” she explains. She reaches for something next to my place and hands it to me. A glass of water. I take it and gulp almost the entire thing down. I stop myself and wipe my lips. I look around the room again. It’s covered in dirty laundry and some old James Dean film posters. It’s too small. Have I been in this room before?

“Sorry ‘bout the mess…..” she notices my gaze and stands up. She picks up some dirty laundry. “We’ve all been rotating in and out of here for the past couple of days. Trailers like these don’t exactly accommodate well for a family of four. But it’s what FP and I can afford.” FAMILY OF FOUR. WHAT FP COULD AFFORD. This is his trailer. FP is still here. In this trailer park. On the Southside. I look up at her in shock. Does that…. does that mean this woman is…..

“I’m Gladys, by the way. Sorry, should have said that earlier. I was with your girl most of last night…. Sabrina, right?” I can’t pay attention to anything she….Gladys, is telling me. FP has a wife. FP has a family. So his life is somewhat better but he’s still trapped here. He’s married. He has kids. He’s---

“Sabrina? Your daughter?” she catches my attention. I blink at her for a moment before responding.

“Niece, actually.” I make up an excuse. She’s not my niece, technically. I’m nowhere near blood-related to the Spellmans. But she does see me as family. I stand up, slowly while bracing my hand on the bed, and give Gladys a small smile. I tell her my name. She wants to know what Sabrina and I are doing here. I sigh and, without all the details, explain most of what happened. I don’t know what Sabrina has told this woman, but I try to keep it as general as possible. Sabrina’s having family issues at home and is staying in Riverdale for a little time, I tell her. I offered to go with her, saying I spent some time here in my youth, I tell her. We got in a car accident and I panicked, I had a seizure, I tell her. She seems to buy into it, which is good. She nods after I finish.

“Yeah, that’s what she explained to me last night.” Gladys confirms. Good girl, Sabrina. She sets down the laundry and begins to head out of the room.

“You want anything to eat, Alice? I can get some toast started for you, but I gotta run out soon. Gotta take Jug and JB to school.” I stare at her blankly, confused by the kids’ names. Jug and JB?
Are those nicknames, or … I nod and follow her out. I see Sabrina on the couch standing up at the sight of me. There’s a boy next to her, black hair, grey beanie that faintly resembles a crown, a flannel. FP’s son?

“Ali!” she runs over and hugs me. Her embrace is loving, and I reciprocate. “Are you okay?” she pulls out slightly and looks up at me. “I didn’t know what happened to you….after the deer…..” My mind flashes to the deer. The choking. Hal. HAL.

“I’m fine.” I croak out a lie. Gladys comes over to us and turns to this boy. She tosses him a pair of car keys. “Jug, go get your sister and get the car started.” The boy catches the keys and snickers. He says something to Sabrina and gives me a nod. I watch him leave…..he has so much of FP in him. Gladys reaches for my arm, catching my attention.

“I have some food going for you and Sabrina. I should be back in about thirty minutes. If not, FP will look after you.” The sound of his name makes me stiff. Does he even remember me? Would he?

I nod. She smiles at me and heads out of the trailer.

“She’s kinda cool.” Sabrina comments after Gladys is gone. “She has a job at Pop’s….you know, the diner….and….her kids are nice too. Their names are Jughead and Jellybean. But there only nicknames, of course….“ she continues to ramble, but I’m fazing out again. I wander past Sabrina to examine the living room. It has a 70s vibe to it with the tiles on the floor, the curtains covering the windows, and the rugged-looking old couch. It’s so vaguely similar to how his family’s trailer was all those years ago. There’s only a few books on a shelf by the TV. How can this family afford to live here? I wander over to the shelf, running my fingers over the spines of the books. Maybe the books are for the kids? For her? For him, even? I don’t hear the door opening at first. I don’t register the voice right away but it starts to seep in.

“Hopefully this is enough for you girls in the bedroom.” this voice is talking to Sabrina. It’s an older voice….it’s one I know. I turn around to face this voice. He stops talking and his eyes land on me. He’s aged, but he looks….sadder, if I’m being honest. But there’s nothing drastically different about him. He’s still the same FP I remember from all those years ago.

“I’ll go….” Sabrina breaks the silence and grabs the blankets that FP brought in off the floor. “I’ll put these in the bedroom.” She takes the bundle and leaves. We’re still standing there at opposite ends of the room. He’s looking at me, up then down then up again. He takes a couple steps towards me. He pauses, his mouth gaping open and closed. I don’t think he knows what to say. And frankly, I don’t either. How can I just tell him Hey FP, remember me? Acid Queen Alice? The girl who disappeared without saying goodbye and no one remembered me but you? Yeah….that wouldn’t exactly bode well with him. Or me.

He eventually breaks this silence. “You…. you changed your hair.” he mumbles. I forgot that I was a brunette back then. I give him a soft smile. I examine his face more. “You grew out a beard.” my voice sounds like a whisper. But he hears me, letting out a small chuckle as he stares down at the ground for a brief moment. Then he looks back up at me. His eyes are getting wet. And so are mine.

He moves closer, his footsteps slow but determined. I want to meet him halfway but I can’t move. The sight of him crying at the sight of me breaks my heart, it makes me paralyzed. But he keeps coming towards me, the tears flowing down his cheeks faster now. He reaches one hand out to my face, then another. I shudder as his fingers rest on my cheeks, his eyes studying my expression.

“You….. You came back?” his voice cracks while he’s examining me. The words shake me to the point that I’m biting my lips so I don’t sob out loud. He remembers me. FP really remembers me.

“FP?” I finally manage to say. He closes the gap between us and pulls me in for a hug. It takes me
a little bit to respond, remembering how loving and soft his touch was after all these years, and I eventually return the embrace. I allow myself to bury my face into the corner of his neck and sob. We stay like this for a while, the memories of the past flooding into my brain. After a minute or two, he leans back and cups my face, the way he used to all those years ago. “How is it…..” he stutters, still in shock, “When did you….. What happened to you, Ali?”

My mouth hangs open, I’m not sure how to respond. I had to wipe his memory of my powers when he did find out….when I erased the town of every trace of me. I slowly clamp my mouth shut and blink, feeling a tear stream down. After a moment, I look back up at him. I attempt to breathe….smile. “Do you remember, FP?” I eventually say to him. “In high school?”

“Yes! I remember! I…” he starts then his speech goes stagnant. How can I re-explain to this boy….man, I know about my powers? My 25 year disappearance? There are days when I wish I hadn’t left Riverdale. Where I could’ve not finished high school but just stayed with FP on the Southside. He would’ve kept me safe. He would’ve have loved me. And I…..

And I remember he’s married now. With children. My smile fades away at this thought. I can’t be back here to steal him away. I can’t hurt his family. Especially since Gladys has been so gracious enough to look after me and Sabrina. *Time to leave things in the past, Alice.*

Sabrina comes back out and takes note of FP and I standing in the middle of the room. “Sorry…..” she stutters, “Did I come in on something important?” FP gapes his mouth open at the girl, but I know that the conversation will have to wait for another time. When I know how to answer his question.

I release myself from his hold and give his hand one last squeeze before wandering over to Sabrina. “No. You’re okay.” I tell her as I move into the little kitchen. “You haven’t eaten yet, have you?”

An hour and a half later, Gladys and I sit on the couch going over rent payments so Sabrina and I can stay here in the trailer park. FP took Sabrina to get my car fixed, so it’s just us women in this tiny home. A spot opened up across the way from FP and his family, so we would at least have some neighbors that we know. She explains to me that the first couple months of rent would cost the most, but the remainder should go down depending on income and family size.

“How are you able to maintain living in here with your whole family?” I ask her, just out of curiosity as I examine the trailer again. And I thought my apartment back in Greendale was tiny.

“Why do you think FP and I had to take multiple jobs? It’s the only way we can afford it without going bankrupt.” she snorts and leans further back into the couch. “When I’m not at Pop’s, I bartend at the Wyrm some nights. And when I’m not at those places, I fix up some cars and bikes.”

“You’re a mechanic?” I turn my head to her, almost impressed.

“Just a side gig-slash-passion project my daddy got me into back when I lived in Toledo. Nothing major, though...” She grabs a stack of forms needed for living in the trailer park and flicks the pen open. “So I think you should be set to fill out your rent. Hog Eye’s a good man, so it shouldn’t take long for everything to get processed.” she admits and starts to pen in my name. *MY NAME.*

“Wait!” I grab for the pen and stack of papers. Gladys raises her brow at me in confusion. My mouth wavers between open and close, trying to come up with a fast excuse that’s buyable. I made all of Riverdale forget about Alice Smith….at least I think. But what if someone still remembers me? What if my spell didn’t even work at all? Maybe I should’ve thought these details out before Sabrina and I came here.
So I eventually tell her, “I had to change my name….recently.”

Gladys’s face lights up in shock. She chuckles and slides the papers to me. “Okay.” I sigh in relief and hover the pen over the line where I’m supposed to sign my name. I have to think of something quick, something that can make me blend in easily. I write out a name, and I huff when I finish. Gladys peers over my shoulder to see my “new identity”.

“Wendy Beauchamp, huh? That’s an odd name to start going by.” I roll my eyes at her comment. I will admit, it is a little odd for a woman like me to go by that name around here….but it has to work for now. She shifts next to me as I continue filling out my paperwork. “Not to get too personal, but…..” She hasn’t even asked yet, but I already know what she’s trying to jab into. “Is there a reason you had to change your name?”

My hand stops moving. I sigh and turn to Gladys, but I can’t bring myself to speak. I sit there in silence for a few seconds, trying to craft some clever reason as to why. I could correlate it to the whole Sabrina situation, but would that be enough? Could I even trust this woman that I just met, the wife of my only friend in high school, the truth of what happened?

“You have to do with Sabrina, doesn’t it?” she inquires and I almost cry in relief. I can work with that. Not able to respond with words, I nod at her. “Understandable.” she responds, “Yeah, trust me. Whatever you and that girl are going through right now….probably ain’t as bad as the shit some of these Serpents go through. FP and I kinda have gotten used to playing damage control around here.” She goes quiet, staring down at the paperwork. Does she know about my relation to FP?

“Thank you.” I throw out. She looks up at me, confused for a moment then mitigating. I sigh and reach for her hand. I continue, “….for looking after FP all those years.” She smirks at me. Does she hate me?

“We were never…….” I stutter out then go quiet, not sure how to phrase it. But I hope she can understand. I need her to understand. I start to ramble, “We don’t have any…..romantic history. I mean…..we never dated, Just grew up on the Southside together. Still…..”

“I get it.” she responds as her smirk fades into a small smile. I’m not sure at first if she is being genuine, but she gently squeezes my hand and her smile softens. “It’s okay, Alice. I take your word for it. You and Sabrina seem like good folks….. actually is a nice change to have good people around this part of town.” Gladys takes the paperwork from me and places it on her lap, examining it. I still have a hold of her hand, her wrist….. There’s a tattoo on her wrist. One I can’t make out quite well at first, but the more I look at it….I swear I’ve seen this symbol before. I try to move her hair tie to the side so I can see the full thing, but I think she caught on. Gladys turns back to me and notices my actions.

“Don’t worry, it’s not an ink smudge.” she reassures me and frees her hand from my hold. She removes her hair tie and lifts her wrist to me, indicating for me to examine her tattoo. I blink at it for a moment then pull her wrist closer. It’s a snake in a circle eating it’s own tail. “Everyone always asking if it’s my Serpent tattoo.” Gladys tells me, “It’s not, though. Mine’s on my back. But this one’s a bit more personal. It’s….umm…..” she pauses, trying to best figure out how to explain it to me, but I already know.

“It’s Ouroboros.” I mutter staring down at the snake. “Symbolizing rebirth and release.” The room goes quiet. I look up at Gladys and her face contorts. Then she lights up, half impressed and half puzzled.

“You know what that means?” I open my mouth to answer, but I have to catch myself. I purse my lips for a moment then speak.
“Just something I’ve taken a recent interest in. That’s all.” I feel awful having to lie to her, but she seems to buy into my answer. She lets out a chuckle and stands up, gripping the trailer paperwork in her hands.

“You are a strange woman, Alice.” She offers me her hand and I take it, feeling her pull me up. “I have a feeling we’re gonna get along just fine. Let’s go introduce you to Hog Eye and get that trailer.”

SABRINA

Being in Riverdale hasn’t been that bad of an adjustment. Whoever Ali’s friend is, FP, and his family have all been welcoming and helped me and Ali get our own trailer, for temporary time of course. We’ve only been here for about a day, and I’m already set to start school at Riverdale High, so that should be good. The only thing I’m confused about is what Ali is doing. She used someone else’s name….someone named Wendy Beauchamp….to sign for the trailer and to get me enrolled here. She won’t give me a clear explanation as to why, but whatever it is, I hope it’s not serious.

I am a little bummed that Ali won’t come with me to drop me off and help get me established here, but luckily Jughead and his mom were kind enough to give me a ride over. I get out of the car and look up. The building’s a lot longer than I thought it would be. A lot cleaner too, compared to Baxter. Yet it still doesn’t feel like home. Jughead comes next to me and leans against the car. “You ready to enter the thunderdome?” he snarks, making me feel a little less afraid. I give him a small nod and we go in together.

Jughead’s actual names is Forsythe Pendleton Jones III. It’s a family tradition, like me wanting to go by Edwina Diana…..or formerly wanting at this point. He’s a loner but makes quite the remarks at other people. He’s into conspiracy theories and unsolved mysteries….. In a way he reminds me of Harvey. The thought of Harvey makes me miss him even more. It makes me miss my life in Greendale and the memories, good and bad. But this is home for now, whether I like it or not. Oh well, might as well try to blend in.

It smells like books and freshly baked cookies when we enter the school. The atmosphere is surprisingly light and cheery with groups of kids running past each other. It’s cleaner than Baxter, and the kids seem much happier to be there. Jughead helps me get past some cheerleaders, the Vixens I’m guessing, so we can go into the administration office. I walk up to the front desk and become checked in while Jughead hangs out in the back. There’s no one frown on the faces of anyone working here. It’s kind of nice but also unsettling. I get my paperwork and now I have to wait for my tour guide to come, to Jughead’s dismay.

“I don’t get why I can’t just go with you?” I express to him while we’re looking at my class schedule at the bench. “We’re in almost the same classes.”

“Prime example of unruly dictatorship in Riverdale High. No slack for us folk on the wrong side of the track.” he comments in a whisper. He’s told me somewhat of his family’s history with this group, the Southside Serpents. His dad joined in high school, and his mom came over from a faction of the Serpents in Toledo, and now they’re having to play backseat drivers to the guys in charge. He’s not exactly sure why they haven’t left if they’re that unhappy. And I thought my
situation was dire.

The door flies open, making me jump in my seat. Someone in a black cape and hood enters, and I’m ready to fight back with some magic at whoever this is. But I regather myself as this person takes off the hood. Just another student…no, wait, she looks important. This girl that just walked in means business, and she turns to Jughead and me. Her medium-length black hair almost blends in to the cape but her makeup stands out. I don’t think she would be the type to be caught walking around the hallways of Baxter anyday.

“Nice get-up, Bacall.” he addresses her. This girl, I guess I’ll call her Bacall too, tilts her head at him, frowning.

“You’ve got light years ahead of you before you become the next Humphrey Bogart, Torombolo.” Bacall fires back at him in Spanish to my surprise. She’s stunning and clever, talk about a one-two punch. Bacall turns to me and forms a soft smile. “Are you Sabrina?” she points a finger at me as she comes closer. I sigh and stand up, holding my paperwork down in front of me. I walk over to her and nod.

“Fantastic.” she smiles at me and starts to give the whole “Welcome to Riverdale” spiel, giving me looks of annoyance to make the experience bearable. When she ends, she sighs and extends her hand out to me. “Sorry, almost forgot to introduce myself. Veronica Lodge.” I think I could be friends with this girl, Veronica. She and Roz share the same passionate energy. Veronica twists her head back to Jughead. “Thank you, Jughead, for being a gentleman and keeping Sabrina company, but I can take over from here.” As she stops speaking, Veronica extends her hand out to my shoulder to pull me closer to her.

“Do you have to take charge of everything, Veronica?” Jughead rolls his eyes.

“You can come with us if you want.” I speak up in between them. Jughead loses his sarcastic meander and walks past us.

“I’m good. Don’t want to interrupt your one-on-one girl talk hour. Have a good first day.” he salutes to me before leaving the room. I feel bad for leaving him by himself, but I want to be able to get to know the students here….at least I should be.

“Don’t mind him. He prides himself on being a loner.” Veronica reassures me and takes my arm. “Let’s go ahead off to class.” Feeling a bit more comfortable, I follow her out of the office and into the hallway. Luckily, Veronica and I have first period together, so she’s there to guide me through this place. The moment we clear from the crowds of people, she starts to ask me about why I decided to come to Riverdale. I can hear Aunt Ali’s voice reminding me to go with the story we fabricated the night before. So I tell her: I’m Sabrina Mullway. I grew up just a couple of towns away from Riverdale. Due to family problems back at home, I’m staying for a bit with a family friend, who is Aunt Ali….Wendy Beauchamp….or whatever it is she’s choosing to go by. As always, I have to omit the whole I’m kinda on Church of Night Witness Protection because I didn’t choose the Path of Night and sign my name over to Satan business. Fortunately Veronica hasn’t asked too many complicated questions, and she’s buying into my story.

“Well it’s a good thing they paired me with you.” she gives me a sympathetic look, “I know what it’s like to be the new girl. I just moved here myself not too long ago.” I’m shocked, purely because Veronica looks like she spent her whole life here in Riverdale. She nods and continues, “Believe me, I loved my life in New York, but I don’t regret moving here at all. I can see why Daddy loves this place so much.”

And now I can see it too. I don’t know what it is about Veronica that’s setting me at ease here in
this school, or even in this town…..but, maybe Ali was wrong about Riverdale. I don’t see any bad blood here.

XXXXXXXX

ALICE

It had to take every bone in my body just to drive into the parking lot of school. It looks a lot cleaner from the last time I was here, and I can sense lighter auras amongst the new student body. But it still has that bad air to it. Something is sticking out in my senses that makes me want to rip my skin off.

I still remember the first day that Hal came with me to school. I wasn’t expecting him to show up at all. But it was a grueling day and the kids were pressing for details on how I managed to leave the Conway home alive. But I didn’t want to answer their questions. I didn’t want anyone talking to me, I just wanted to be left alone. I spent most of my time that day hiding in various bathroom stalls. I eventually had to come out of my makeshift cave just so I could get a bite to eat.

The cafeteria was crowded and seating was limited. I was able to score a back table with no one in it, and no one had tried to come over to me. I was alone yet the whole area was so damn loud. My brain was riddling off some silencing charm but even then I wanted my head to shut up too. I barely touched my food at first. I didn’t know how much time had passed, but someone was coming over to me. I figured it was FP coming over to check on me, but the football team was out of town for a game. Maybe it was Tom, or Sierra….maybe even Hiram Lodge to see if Acid Queen Alice had completed her adventure to that house or what-have-not.

But I couldn’t sense their auras as this person came into my peripheral vision. It had a completely different aura all together. One that wasn’t human….just in a human-like body. I heard his voice before I saw his face.

“Excuse me, is this seat taken?” Hal spoke to me and I looked up. I didn’t notice the smile growing on my face until those demonic eyes of his glowed at me. The naive and idiotic half-witch I was back then gestured for him to sit down across from me, and I never broke that damn smile.

“I’m Harold Cooper, I’m new here.” he teased me. “You think you can show me around?”

His voice still lingers in my head from time to time….I heard it all through this past week. My hands grip the steering wheel and my eyes squeeze shut as I tell myself to breathe. But there’s something cawing outside my car. I open my eyes to find a raven on top of another car…. Wait, was that the same raven from the shop? It waddles towards my direction and flies on to my hood. It caws at me, giving me an eerie glare. Does someone from Greendale know I’m here?

My phone buzzes in my pocket, catching my attention. I stop looking at this damn Edgar Allen Poe manifestation in front of me and glance down at the notification. Sabrina’s on her way. Sighing, I slide the phone back into my purse and get out of the car. I eye the raven one last time as I step out, and purely out of a raging impulse, I slam on the side of the car. The raven caws and flies off.

That’s right, fly away, you little shit, I think to myself. Part of me wants to go chase after this bird to see if it is a familiar to a witch in Riverdale…..if there is another witch beside me and Sabrina. But even so, I’ve done enough running. Let them come to me.
I see Sabrina running towards me with a grin on her face. I’m shocked, quite frankly, because I know she wasn’t keen on being in this town in the first place. Any more than I was. “Hey!” I attempt to call out to her with a positive expression on my face, despite the fact that I want to panic and scream. Sabrina halts in front of me and reaches for my hands. “Take it you had a good first day?”

“Surprisingly so. Yeah.” she beams up at me. “It’s much cleaner, and BIGGER than Baxter….” she continues on but I can’t bring myself to pay attention. I’m still staring around the school’s building and playing fields. Too many memories are seeing back into me.

“Hey, are you okay, Ali?” Sabrina recaptures my attention. I blink down at her a couple of times, unsure of how to respond, and she gives my hand a soft squeeze. “I think it’s changed a lot since you were here. Speaking of, I don’t think I found you in any of the older photos. At least from what I saw. Maybe I just wasn’t looking in the right areas.” Behind her, a girl with raven black hair comes over and places her arm on Sabrina’s shoulder. Something about this girl makes me stiff. I swear I’ve seen that face before.

“I was worried I lost you!” the girl sounds overly ecstatic. The voice has a ring to it but it’s new. She turns to me and becomes pleasant. “You must be the one looking after Sabrina! How nice of you! I’m Veronica.” Veronica. Huh, a name just as pretentious as her looks.

“Hello.” I reply coldly, and I don’t mean to, really. But something about Veronica calls back memories of someone….people I knew.

“You still want to go to Reggie’s soccer game?” Veronica asks Sabrina. “We can take her with us.” And I know she’s talking about me, trying to be nice. They both turn to me….. What has Veronica done to this girl? My body stiffens with every blink of their eyes on me. I feel like I’m losing breath but I can’t tell. I snap back into it when Sabrina reaches for my hand.

“It should be fun. We don’t have to stay the whole time if you don’t want to. But can we just see at least five minutes of the game?” Sabrina’s practically pleading me. A part of me wants to go full Zelda on her and drag her away from this place. But another part of me wants to let her have the adolescence I could never experience. But I’m not sure if I trust this Veronica girl. Her facial structure seems oddly familiar. Could it be….is she….

“Sure.” I find the effort to say. The girls squeal in excitement and begin to head towards the back soccer field. Sabrina’s calling for me to catch up, but I’m dragging my feet through this place. Everything still looks the same as I remember. The bleachers from when I would chain smoke with FP whilst ditching class. The football field where I got into a fist fight with Penelope Blossom and her ragtag of River Vixens. It’s all still standing. Wish I could make that all disappear too.

We wind up standing by the bleachers looking out over the fence at these soccer players. The Bulldogs aren’t up against the Ravens from what it looks like, yet again I never really paid any true attention to sports. Sabrina is typically so Go-Ravens that it’s unique to see her rooting for the Bulldogs. She’s making the effort to blend in…..and here I am still trapped in the past. The game goes on for a few minutes, it’s quite entertaining. I can get out of my thoughts for a few minutes and focus my anxiety on who has the ball and who tries to make a goal. The Bulldogs are winning and Veronica is so proud. And Sabrina doesn’t look so scared. Maybe this girl Sabrina met is genuine and I completely misjudged her. Maybe Riverdale has changed for the better, at least for Sabrina. Maybe….

Veronica’s attention veers off to something behind me. Someone behind me. “Oh no.” Sabrina and I both turn to find quite the expensive vehicle pulling up to curb and stopping. The door opens and out comes….
Hiram Lodge? No. It can’t be. He looks older. Leaner. Much more built than his scrawny, wrestler physique from high school. His black hair still stands out in the sun. He still has that stupid New York prep school smirk on his face. He turns in our direction and the smirk widens. I turn back to Veronica, coming to a dangerous realization. Veronica is his daughter.

“I’ll be right back.” she tells Sabrina and politely moves past us, leaving the soccer game behind. She jogs over to Hiram and stops in frustration.

“Mija, there you are.” he greets his daughter while removing his sunglasses…. Wow, why am I even paying attention to this? Why is Hiram Lodge more interesting than a bunch of high schoolers kicking a ball around? I don’t have the energy to turn away from them, I’m frozen. Afraid.

“Daddy, I told you I was staying after school today.” the girl barks up at him. She definitely has his fierceness. I still can’t wrap my head around that she’s his daughter. And where is her mother? WHO is her mother?

“We agreed on you staying later for Vixens practice. Not some….high school soccer game.” Yep. Same old Hiram. Just when I thought Zelda and Hilda were being controlling of Sabrina. I want to hex him for talking to his daughter that way. But I’m still in my paralysis, hearing my breathing get short. Don’t look over here, my mind repeats like a mantra. Don’t look at me, Hiram. Don’t you do it. Sabrina leaves my side and heads towards Veronica and Hiram. “Sabrina, wait---” I hiss, but it’s too late. She goes over and stands next to Veronica.

“Please, it’s not her fault. She just wanted to help me adjust to the….uh, culture here.” she explains in rushed words. Hiram stands there motionless, directing his attention at Sabrina. But he seems impressed.

“Oh. My apologies.” he owns up to his narcissistic behavior, playing pleasant with Sabrina. “I didn’t realize you were playing ambassador today.”

“No worries.” she’s acting quick on her feet, extending her hand out to him. I’m cringing at the thought of her mingling with these people, but it’s all happening so damn fast. “I’m Sabrina. Mullway. Yeah, Sabrina Mullway. I just moved here, and….your daughter was showing me around.”

“Well, welcome to Riverdale, Sabrina.” he’s beaming at her and I don’t know how to interpret his words. I could spit at him. Burn this field to the ground with just one thought. Make him fall to his feet with just one spell. But he takes Sabrina’s hand and shakes it. He eyes the girls for one more brief moment, then he looks over. Straight at me.

Fuck.

He leaves the girls and heads in my direction. Every part of me wants to run, or push him over, do something instead of letting Hiram douche-canoe Lodge walk my way. I have to grip onto the fence to keep myself from falling over or vomiting. He stops a few feet away from me and takes in the details of my stance. He stares at me for a while. Is he trying to figure out if he knows me? DOES he remember me?

“So you must be Mrs. Mullway?” his voice goes deep and quiet. Breathe, Alice, I have to remind myself. You’re not in high school anymore. You have the ball in your court. It’s the boost of confidence I need. I let go of the fence and lift my chin up at him. Time to put the mask on.

“Beauchamp. Actually.” I tell him, drawing out every syllable. “Wendy Beauchamp. Family friend.” I go silent. I’m waiting to see if he falls for it, but I can’t tell. His smirk gets softer, and it’s
like poison is spilling down my spine.

“Pleasure,” he gives me a smile after that one word. I want to punch his teeth out. Before I can move or say anything else, Veronica and Sabrina rejoin us, and thank goodness. Veronica crosses her arms and grabs her father’s attention.

“So what’s the verdict, Daddy? Can I stay or are you going to make me go home?” she sounds annoyed, and I don’t blame her. Hiram sighs and turns away from me, only for a short time. He looks back and forth between the girls, then stares back at me. Have his eyes gotten darker, or is my memory getting muddier?

Keeping his eyes locked on me, he speaks, “Keep your new friend and her guardian company, mija. Wouldn’t be polite to leave them here by themselves.” To the side, Veronica and Sabrina celebrate in relief. He then turns back to Veronica, not done with his statement, “Only….if you remember that we have reservations for dinner tonight. And I don’t want you to be late again.”

“I won’t! The game should be over by then.” Veronica snarks at him. I admire her confidence. I could definitely use some right now. With one last glance over at me, Hiram gives me a soft, sickening smile.

“I hope we can meet again soon, Wendy Beauchamp. I have a feeling you’ll love it here in Riverdale.” And with that, Hiram turns from us and walks away. I let out the breath I held in for the past few minutes once he’s out of our hair. I’m not facing the girls, but I can hear their conversation.

“Sorry you had to see that, Sabrina. My father…..he can be so controlling some times.”

“It’s okay. I know he means well.”

“I know. But….I guess he’s always been like that. Ever since I was younger, he never wanted me out of his sight. Probably because he got so paranoid after my mom died….“ After my mom died. My back stiffens and my breathing shortens again. I slowly turn my head to the girls eavesdropping on Veronica’s words.

“Oh…I’m so sorry.” Sabrina reaches out to Veronica, all sympathetic.

“It’s fine. It happened years ago.” the raven-haired girl explains. “I don’t exactly remember how it happened, but from what I’ve heard from Daddy, she had a really bad time with….some stuff. I don’t know…..maybe it was because she got into a really bad car accident as a teenager that left her paralyzed…."

Car accident….paralyzed….. I’m about to break down and panic. I have to cover my mouth to keep myself from sobbing out loud. Or even pass out I can’t fall apart out here in this damn football field, but I know what happened. I know who Veronica is referring to.

Hermione Gomez was her mother. Hermione married Hiram. And now she’s dead. She has been dead.

I did this to her.

I can’t stay here anymore. Without making eye contact with anyone, I move away from the girls and head off to the bathrooms by the bleachers. I don’t know how fast my legs are moving, but they hit the door once I reach the bathrooms. The door flies open, and luckily no one is in here, and I stumble into a stall, gripping onto the frame for dear life. I let out a sob, my heart practically flying out my chest, and I let my body crumble to the floor. I feel so numb. I can’t breathe. I did this
to Hermione. I’m the reason she’s dead.

It was never my intention to paralyze her the way I did. I couldn’t leave her there to die in the car….not after what Hal did. I was actually starting to get along with her. We were becoming….friendlier with one another. By this point, I no longer wanted anything to do with Hal or the things he could do to my classmates. I had wanted to get even, but I didn’t want to hurt them that bad. I didn’t want to kill them.

I ditched my familiar in the hallways the past couple of school days, and I began to spend some more time with Hermione and a couple of her more academic friends. And it was a fresh breath of relief from what I had tried so desperately to avoid….from what I had tried to ruin with Hal. But these kids were actually good to me. Hermione was actually trying to care. The night of the accident was the night of the school’s winter musical, Pippin. Hermione was playing Catherine, the love interest, and she was actually a pretty good actress. The performance overall was pretty good. Why did I spend so long protesting this lifestyle? I considered even joining the theater program myself. Maybe I should have.

She had invited me to go to the after party with her, which was strange considering I wasn’t part of the cast or crew. But she had just broken up with Fred Andrews, and she and Penelope were no longer getting along. All and all, she didn’t want to go by herself, so I decided to accompany her. I remember she had taken a while getting out of her costume and makeup in the dressing room….I should have known better. She came out to greet me and she appeared all stiff. I asked if she was okay, and she shook it off, leading me out to her car. That damn, bright yellow car.

I sat in the passenger’s seat as she sped down the roads of Riverdale. Everything had been fine at first. We were talking about plans for Christmas break, Serpent and Vixen gossip, so on. She still seemed like herself for a while. Then White Rabbit by Jefferson Airplane came on the radio. That should have been an obvious sign. Hermione went quiet and starting swaying to Grace Slick singing the iconic lyrics. I couldn’t tell if she had snorted something in the dressing room, but she was starting to act strange. And the car had started to go faster.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Hermione?” I had asked again. Hermione just laughed. I knew her breakup with Fred and fallout with Penelope had devastated her, she admitted it to me earlier, but her behavior was starting to concern me.

“I’m fine…..” she answered, and she placed her hand on my leg, still looking out at the road. “Everything’s okay….since we’re together again.” My eyes widened at the last statement, and I gave her a fearful look. Hermione then turned to me, her eyes glowing bright blue. Exactly like his.

“What? Did you really think you could escape me forever, baby?” The words came out of her mouth, but I knew it wasn’t her speaking. It was him.

“Hal….” He laughed through her voice, and the hand on my leg gripped tighter, almost burning me. How did he possess her like this? What did she do to deserve this cruel fate?

“I thought we were steering clear of the Vixens. Are you already trying to defy me, Ali?” he was making her voice angrier. I saw her foot pressing further into the gas pedal. Whatever it was he was about to do, I had to put an end to this.

“Hal….don’t do this. Please….” I tried to plea, but he wasn’t having it. He made her laugh, Grace’s voice on the radio growing louder.

*When logic and proportion have fallen sloppy dead*
And the white knight is talking backwards

And the red queen's off with her head

“I’ve always wondered since you’ve let me out of that house,” he spoke, “what would a Vixen look like wrapped around a tree?” I had no words. The car started to lose control, jerking side to side. He made her look at me, her hand finally releasing my leg. “Let’s find out, shall we?”

Her head violently turned back to the road.

Remember what the dormouse said

Feed your head, feed your head

“HAL!” I screamed as the car veered off the road, towards the forest, smashing into a giant tree. Glass shattered, the wheels hissed, everything went silent, but my ears were ringing. My head hurt, but somehow I was still alive. I looked up, trapped in my seat, and saw her hunched body over the steering wheel, her head out of the broken, bloody windshield.

“All!” a voice shouted from behind me, pulling me back into the present. I can still hear the car going into the tree in my head, but Sabrina’s voice is growing louder. She appears in front of me, crouching down. I’m not sure how long I’ve been like this, but my eyes are wet and my throat is dry….sore…. Sabrina takes my face into her hands, attempting to calm me down. I struggle to breathe as I find the words to explain my actions.

“I knew her….” I croak out. “I….I knew….” I can’t finish the sentence. I want to tell her everything but I can’t. I physically can’t. Sabrina lets go of my face and hugs me. I allow myself to bury my face into the younger witch’s shoulder and cry.

XXXXXXXX

“Yeah, this town’s kinda gone down hill since Hiram Lodge decided to show back up with that girl of his.” Gladys explains to me and Sabrina as she pours me another cup of coffee. After the breakdown in the bathroom, Sabrina decided to have us go to Pop’s. I was against it at first, trying to tell her I was fine, but in the end, I drove us over to this diner. Luckily, Gladys is on her shift, so she’s able to get us our order without worming her way too much into what happened.

“His daughter’s pretty nice.” Sabrina throws into the conversation. “I’d give her the benefit of the doubt.” I roll my eyes unintentionally, but I think she noticed. I want to trust Veronica….but she has so much of Hiram in her. And so much of Hermione...

Gladys gives my shoulder a gentle squeeze. “I’ll go check on your food, ladies.” She leaves us at our booth, and the silence takes over again. Well, it’s not entirely silent. The Mamas and the Papas faintly sing in the background, but hey, I’ll take it. I drum my fingers on the coffee cup and bite my tongue, still struggling to recover from the panic attack earlier. I try to focus on what I can sense - the warmth of the coffee, the smell of hamburgers and fries, what the Mamas and the Papas are saying.

You know the preacher like the cold

He knows I'm gonna stay
A couple of moments pass before Sabrina speaks up. “Ali, if you don’t mind me asking….” the younger blonde starts, taking a deep breath before continuing, “don’t you think it’s a little strange that Mister Lodge doesn’t remember you? Especially since you went to high school with him?” I let out some air through my nose, not sure how to respond. I feel awful for having to keep my past hidden from Sabrina, and it doesn’t help since I’m back in the one place I never wanted to be.

“25 years is a long time, Sabrina.” I eventually find the words, “And he’s also spent some time in New York, too…..”

“But Riverdale is so tiny.” Sabrina jumps in. “Everyone seems like….they knew everything about each other.” She goes quiet for a moment, and I already have a dangerous feeling of what she is about to ask. “What about Veronica’s mom? She said something about a car accident…. Do you remember anything about that? Did you know about that?” I didn’t just know anything about the accident. I caused it to happen. No, Hal did. And I had to play doctor just to keep Hermione from dying right then and there. I let out a sigh and snap my lips shut, trying to keep myself from breaking down in the middle of Pop’s. My eyes get misty as I look out the window. I turn back to Sabrina, trying my hardest not to let my emotions show.

“Yes.” I respond with a weak voice. “But….it’s not just that. It’s…..” I stop, unsure of how to go forward with my confession. I want to continue but Sabrina takes a firm hold onto my hands.

“I know coming back here has been scary for you, Ali.” she attempts to reassure me. “But you don’t have to worry. Whatever it was that happened….whatever you knew about Veronica’s parents….or Jughead’s…..whatever happened to you all those years ago, you can tell me. I’m not scared.” I know she isn’t scared for me. But I am for her.

If I didn’t tell her

I could leave today

The song wraps up but my mind is too occupied on Sabrina to pay attention. Maybe I am being too paranoid for thinking Hal could still be lurking in that house, waiting for me to come back so he can get his revenge. Maybe even after her. Still….

There’s a commotion behind me. Before I can process what’s happening, Sabrina leans out to see what the trouble is at the other end of the diner. I can hear it before I can turn to see it. An unhappy customer is trying to fight with Gladys over something stupid. Something about running out of pie.

I get up from the booth and head towards Gladys’s direction. The customer gets all confused when he sees me come over. “Can I help you?” he snaps at me, and I have to stay calm. “What’s going on?” I turn to Gladys, trying to diffuse the situation. She tells me that they ran out of cherry pie, and this asshat she’s waiting on is not thrilled. My mind starts to race. I can’t let this man berate Gladys. I have to do something. Luckily, I know a thing or two about making pies.

“How much baking supplies do you have back in the kitchen?” I ask. Gladys raises her brow at me, but I immediately start to head back to the kitchen. Sabrina gets up from our booth, catching onto what I’m about to do, and runs over to join me. Gladys grabs for my arm, stopping me in my path.

“Alice, what the hell are you doing?” she hisses in a low voice. I lean in and take her hand into my own. “Do you trust me?” I whisper. Gladys doesn’t respond, but she turns back to the customer, still miffed, then whips her head back to me.

“Guess we’re about to find out.” she huffs and leads me and Sabrina back into the kitchen. The
chef back here stares at us and tries to ask Gladys what’s going on. She waves him off and starts to pull out some baking items for me. Sabrina finds a can of cherry pie filling and sets it down next to a package of frozen pie crust and a can of whipped cream. I don’t work with frozen or canned stuff (everything I make back at the bakery in Greendale is all fresh) but these will have to do for now.

“Get the oven to 375 if it’s not already.” I command Sabrina and she runs over to preheat the oven. I rip open the package of pie crust and start opening the canned cherry pie filling. The smell isn’t too great, but I have to work with it. I dump the pie filling into the crust, it’s still frozen. Is it worth using my magic to heat up the crust a bit? Just so it can cook faster? At this point, why not? Without making it too obvious, I place my hands around the crust and use some nonverbal magic to make it warmer. I finish placing the top layer onto the pie and look down at this….sad version of a cherry pie. Hopefully this should work.

“I’ll take it from here.” Gladys takes the pie and places it into the oven. Sighing in relief, I lean back against the kitchen counter, hearing the oven close shut. Sabrina smiles and gives me a thumbs up before exiting the kitchen. Gladys comes over and crosses her arms. I purse my lips shut….not due to the anxiety of waiting for the damn thing to bake, but more out of guilt for Gladys. Is she going to get in trouble because I stepped in?

“I’m sorry if you lose your job because of this.” Her eyes widen and she lets out a snort. “Are you kidding? My ass would have been way more on the line if you weren’t here.” she reassures me as she leans against the counter next to me and looks out the pass through window. “Actually glad you know what the hell you’re doing.”

“Pies are my specialty.” I admit, causing her to face me in confusion. I open my mouth, trying to mentally determine how to go forth explaining myself, then give her a smirk. “I ran a bakery back home. I usually….make everything from scratch. Fresh ingredients.” I grab the plastic from the pie crust package behind me and crinkle it in my hands. I sigh, “But this had to suffice.” Gladys lets out another snort and pushes herself away from the counter.

“Shit, Alice, we could definitely use some of your skills around here.” she beams at me. She throws her arm around my shoulders as we head out of the kitchen. Sabrina is standing against the booth near the unhappy customer, giving me a concerned look. I think she knows I used my magic, but I can’t make it obvious. It’s been a minute or two and I’m hoping this damn pie cooks quickly. I’m tempted to use more magic and speed up the process because I don’t want Gladys to get attacked anymore. Well, it’s worth it.

Gladys is still talking to the customer, so I can get away with this. I clench my fist and see the pie in my mind’s eye. I want it to at least be edible. I notice Sabrina looking at me in panic. She looks down at my fist, and I see it’s glowing almost bright orange. I look back up at her to see her mouthing my name. I shake my head at her. Don’t let the rest of the diner know. I get back to focusing on that pie, I can practically smell it. I slip away from the scene and head back into the kitchen. The pie’s all ready when I pull it out and set it to cool.

“That’s her, Pop. That’s the bitch Jones let into the kitchen.” I almost jump in fear to the angry voice behind me. I turn to find the chef who yelled at Gladys leading Pop, the owner of this diner, into the kitchen. I remember Pop Tate, he was a good man. I just hope he still is.

“That’s enough.” Pop silences the cook and shoots me a sympathetic look. He steps towards me and says, “Typically customers are not allowed back here. But….” He stops, noticing the pie behind me. “Did you just make that?” he points to it.

“I heard you ran low so….I just wanted to help.” I try to defend myself, but my confidence is
slipping. The kitchen goes dead silent. What was I thinking of trying to intervene in this? With guilt coming over me, I grab some hot pads and carry the pie out of the kitchen, setting it down on the bar table by Gladys. I give her a sad look before turning back to Pop. “Sorry for violating your policies…I’ll be on my way out.” I have to fight back tears as I turn on my heel to gather my stuff at the booth and walk out with Sabrina.

“Hold up!” the customer calls out to me, and I turn back to face him. “You made this thing?” he points down to the cherry pie, almost impressed. I can’t find the words to respond, so I just nod. He grabs a fork from his booth and immediately takes a dig at the pie, not even bothering to wait for anyone to cut out a slice. He chews on it for a bit. My heart’s pounding. Did I mess up making this? Oh no, what if the ingredients I used were all expired or rotting or….

“This is good.” he chuckles, looking over at me in giddy. The tension in my upper body eases and I can breathe again. “This shit’s good, man! No one else is gonna have a bite, are they?” he looks at the rest of the crowd in the diner before taking the entire pie back to his table. Sabrina runs over to join my side and watches this kid practically devouring the whole damn thing.

“Gladys, who is this friend of yours?” I hear Pop asking. Gladys eyes me, determining how to respond. I raise a brow, hoping she won’t say my real name. She nods, I think she understands, and turns back to Pop.

“Wendy. She and her girl just moved into my neighborhood.” she goes along with the story. Pop then faces me and smiles.

“What else can she make?”

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SABRINA

It’s been a week since Ali and I have arrived in Riverdale. And so far, everything is okay. Ali has a job waitressing with Jughead’s mom at the diner, and I’m quickly adjusting to life at Riverdale High. I’m making an attempt to get to know the other students and include Jughead, but I feel like I’m becoming very good friends with Veronica. We can relate to one another when it comes to being “new in town” and striving just to make our families happy. In a way, she’s just like me. It’s nice not having to worry about what’s happening with the Auntyes or Harvey or the rest of them back home. I don’t find myself reaching for Dad’s necklace when I get anxious or the slightest bit homesick. I can just relax and be a teenager for once.

I’ve been staying after school a little later to watch the River Vixens practice, since V wants me to join the team and she’s offered to teach me the routines. I have an audition for the team at the end of the week, which is amazing! I haven’t broken the news to Aunt Ali yet, but hopefully with her new job at Pop’s she can adjust to life in this new Riverdale. Whatever happened to her, I hope she can move forward. This might be good for her, and for me.

It’s a little after Vixens practice, and I’m all worn out from V helping me with my audition routine. I head down the hallway past some photos from the 90s….around the time Ali would have been here. I look down at some of the photos, they’re of the older sports teams. I see Jughead’s dad posing with the football team. Mister Lodge on the wrestling team. But where is Ali? Maybe there’s some yearbooks around the school that I can scour through. I see a light coming from one of
the classrooms, I think….maybe in there? I head over to the room and open the door. It’s an old archival room with newspapers up on the wall. It smells of coffee and newspaper ink. I look around the room then stop at one area, gasping. Jughead looks up from his computer and almost jumps in his seat at the sight of me.

“Sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you.” I throw out, still looking around the room. He notices my state and lets out a stiff laugh.

“So, you found my secret lair.” Jughead sighs and gets up from his seat. He holds out his arms, gesturing around to the empty classroom. “Welcome to the Blue and Gold Room. It’s where I write the school newspaper…..not like anyone reads it anyway.” I’ve heard some things about the Blue and Gold. I’ve seen a couple of copies around the hallways. But I had no clue that he’s in charge of it.

“You write the school paper?” I ask in curiosity. He nods and sits down on top of his writing desk. He grabs a copy of one of the papers and hands it to me. I’m pouring through this newspaper….this is well written. Way better than the news in Greendale. It’s all conspiracy theories that are local to Riverdale. One story catches my eye - how there might be a demonic knock-off game of Dungeons and Dragons that originated from this place called the Sisters of Quiet Mercy. I’m quite intrigued. If only the Church of Night had their hands on this game.

“Oh yeah, Gryphons and Gargoyles.” Jughead sees me reading this article. “Surprised no one has drank the kool aid to that game yet around here.” he jokes, and I laugh. “Speaking of drinking the kool aid, take it the Park Avenue Princess has convinced you to try out for the Vixens?” he gestures to my gym outfit. I lower the paper and roll my eyes at Jughead.

“Maybe….” I respond. “But I’m not a hundred percent sure yet! I just want to try something new.” I admit, and it’s the truth. Back home at Baxter, I never really mixed with the jock crowd, or the cheerleaders. I mostly hung out with booksmart kids like Roz and Susie. But this isn’t Baxter High, and the Vixens actually seem well verse in their academics and athletic lives. If they can do it, maybe I can too.

“I get it. You want to blend in.” he gets up from the table and moves back around to his seat. “I don’t blame you….it’s tough being an outsider. I know exactly how it feels.” He goes quiet, staring down at his computer. I feel bad for him. He’s been here most of his life without many friends. And he’s grown up on a bad side of town. I look back down at the newspaper and try to find other writers. I only see his name on most of these articles. I haven’t talked that much with Jughead, but with everything he’s covered in this paper, and what hobbies of his I’ve learned from his sister, I can bond with him on this information. Maybe I can provide some of my own stories from Greendale….well, if I don’t give away every aspect of my life.

“Do you have people helping you with these articles?” I put the question out there. Jughead looks back up at me and contorts his face in confusion. “What if I help you with some future stories? Maybe….I can write an article on what it’s like to be the new girl? What Riverdale is like to an outsider?” Jughead’s face grows soft.

“You’d do that?” his voice loses its sarcastic demeanor, and I beam. Jughead Jones may be a self-classified loner, but it doesn’t mean he should be writing the school paper by himself.

“Yes! Or…” I walk around over to his side of the desk and crouch down, examining his computer screen. “Or I can help you get started on….whatever this is you’re writing about.” I lean in closer to have a better look at the laptop screen. There’s a couple of tabs open, one about tips to finding your first demon, another about ancient witchcraft…. I didn’t realize Jughead was this into the supernatural….or at least into demon-hunting.
After eyeing his screen for a moment, I turn my attention back to his in-progress article. There’s no official title, but he already has a paragraph or two of content. Jughead pulls the laptop closer and holds it in his hands. I slowly read the paragraphs.

“Who’s the Riverdale Reaper?” I ask, blinking at the screen.

“Urban legend around here.” he puts on a Rod Serling impression as he starts to tell the tale, “Back in the mid to late 60s…well, 1967 to be exact, a madman terrorized the town, committing unspeakable murders on unfortunate citizens. No evidence or pattern was ever found….no one’s even sure who done it all. Maybe a ghost for all I know….” he teases, his voice getting all spooky. I’m not sure if the story is supposed to terrify me, but I’m quite intrigued, and I want to know more.

Jughead opens his mouth to continue the story, but the door flies open, making us both jump. I stand up in defense, but I see it’s Veronica and I sigh in relief. “I was worried I lost you, ‘Brina!” V smiles as she strides over to me. She then sees Jughead and gets quiet.

“Jughead was just telling me about this….Riverdale Reaper.” I go on to explain, but V still stares at him.

“Really? That’s how you’ve been recruiting people for your newspaper?” she snarks. “By telling them the false tales of a murderer that doesn’t exist?” He rolls his eyes and stands up, setting down his laptop.

“The Riverdale Reaper does exist.” he defends himself, “Well, he did exist at one point. And if you brushed up on your local Riverdale history, Veronica, you would know that this year would mark the 50th anniversary of the Conway Family massacre.” Conway Family massacre? In full curiosity, I turn to Jughead.

“What massacre? Who were the Conways?”

“A family that was “allegedly” murdered out in their home. Killer wasn’t found.” V attempts to describe the event, causing jughead to grow irritated.

“It’s more than that, Veronica.” he pipes in, letting out a sigh. V gestures for him to tell me the events of this massacre. Jughead turns to me and begins the story. “There was a family living out near the forest, on Fox Lane. The Conways were your stereotypical suburban nuclear family. Mother, father, two kids. One night, they were all asleep, and…..someone broke in.” he pauses for the sake of emphasis.

“People say it was a boogeyman, but everyone knows it was the Riverdale Reaper. According to the police files from that night, he went room to room with a shotgun. Killed the mom in the kitchen first, then the dad in the living room, then the two kids upstairs. No survivors.” He stops for a while, allowing for me and V to absorb the information. My heart goes heavy in mourning for this family, even though they’ve been dead for many years. But the Reaper must have done more than this.

“You think this was the Reaper’s doing?” I inquire.

“Only plausible theory out there.” he tells me.

“But were there more after that?” I continue. “This couldn’t have been the end. What happened to the Reaper?” Jughead stays quiet for a moment. V and I look to each other then back at him. He drums his fingers on the desk, probably thinking of what to say. He looks back up at me and
“No one knows what became of the Riverdale Reaper. Some people say the lynch mob got him. Hung him from the tree near Pickens Park. Others think he hopped a train and went out to California. Started praying to the Devil……” he goes quiet once more, lifting a finger in thought. “I think he never left Riverdale. That….maybe some part of his soul, or a family member, is still out there lurking. Waiting to find his next victims." The room goes dead silent. A ghost in Riverdale? I knew what strange, supernatural elements came out of Greendale, considering my abilities and the Church of Night. But could it be possible that maybe Riverdale has its fare share of magic too? Can there be something evil in this town hiding in the shadows? Something that could explain why Ali had to leave all those years ago?

“That’s what this whole ghost bullshit was when I walked in?” V breaks the silence. Jughead faces her as she crosses her arms and regains her unbothered attitude.

“Well, how else can you explain what happened to the Reaper?” he grows agitated. “It’s like no one gives actually cares about this part of Riverdale’s history that left everyone shook!”

“It’s a conspiracy theory, Jughead! Just another geeky thing to be made fun of on BuzzFeed Unsolved!” Veronica fires back. The tension is dangerously escalating, and I don’t want to see them fight. My head is whirling with so many questions. What became of the Reaper? Are there any members of the Conway family, or anyone who knew the Conway family, still alive? And what about the house they lived in? Is it still standing? What if there could be something…. 

“What if we went there?” I finally speak up, making both Jughead and V stare at me. My mouth flies open for a short bit before I continue, “Maybe there can be answers at the Conway home!” Jughead points a finger at me slowly, almost like he can see what I’m telling them.

“That could be smart….only problem is no one has been to that house in years. Probably because there’s a ghost.” V rolls her eyes at him in frustration. But I can see her contemplating the idea in her eyes. Perhaps I’m jumping too full-heartedly into this idea…but there is so much history in this town that Ali hasn’t shared with me. And maybe there is some magic and supernatural activity in Riverdale. It could be dangerous, but it’s worth a shot.

“Then let’s prove it.” I confirm my stance. “We can go to the Conway house to see what became of the area. That way,” I gesture to him, “you can get a first hand account and photographic evidence for your article, and” then I turn to V, “we’ll truly know if the place is haunted or not.” V uncrosses her arms and smiles at me….a slow malicious smile that kind of sets me off a little.

“Already a week in this town and you want to rebel. I’m impressed.” she compliments my decision. “Only problem is, how will we slip past our parents?”

“You saying you’re gonna join us on this one, Holly Golightly?” Jughead throws in.

“I’m not confirming anything…..but, we’ll have to make this trip quick because I can’t risk my Daddy berating me for late-night frolicking again.” I can understand her fear. While I do want to trust Mister Lodge, he does seem awful cruel. But it’s not just her….if Ali ever found out that I went to a possibly dangerous place without telling her, it would break her heart.

“Okay, so we’ll slip in for five minutes,” he begins to strategize, “get whatever evidence we need, then get out.” It’s a smart plan, but there’s only one more thing we need to work out. V most likely doesn’t have a car. Jughead’s parents are going out somewhere on the Southside, and Ali is working a late shift at Pop’s. Which means that we have no mode of transportation.
“How will we get out there then?” I state the question. Jughead rests his fists on the desk, coming up with a strategy. V looks back and forth between us, not sure of how to respond. Then, Jughead’s eyes widen. He looks back up at me and smiles.

“I know the Bulldogs aren’t exactly my crowd….but there is one mutual redhead acquaintance Veronica and I know of that can help.”

We all move outside the school and wait for Jughead and V’s “mutual friend” to show up. The weather isn’t too bad, but because it’s the middle of November, the temperature has dropped significantly. I’m tempted to use some magic to keep my hands warm, but I can’t expose myself to my new friends. Just yet.

The wait goes on a little longer, then an old truck pulls up to the curb. Jughead gets up and hustles over, V taking me by the arm. I finally look into the truck to see who exactly Jughead recruited for our ghost-hunting adventure. He has bright orange hair, just as Jughead mentioned, and he has an innocent face.

“You better have a good reason for making me sneak out this late with my dad’s truck, Jug.” the redhead sighs as he opens the doors for us. The boy looks down at me and V, his face growing soft. “Ronnie! Who’s your new friend?” V goes to answer but Jughead interrupts.

“New Vixen recruit, Arch. From Greendale.” he replies. I climb into the truck, with V slipping in next to me, and I get a better look at this boy, Arch. He’s got a Bulldogs jacket on, yet he doesn’t look as aggressive or as grueling as some of the other guys here. As a matter of a fact, His features this close up remind me so vaguely of Harvey’s….

“Sabrina, right?” the redhead’s voice snaps me out of my thoughts of Harvey. I put on a smile and nod. He extends his hand out, “Archie Andrews. Nice to meet you.” My smile becomes more genuine. I take Archie’s hand and shake it. “Yeah, I’ve kind of known Jughead for a while. Friends since elementary school.”

“Yeah, until you joined forces with those neanderthals you called your football teammates.” Jughead snarks as he takes shotgun next to Archie. Next to me, V rolls her eyes before letting out a chuckle.

“Ignore him, Archiekins.” she turns to Archie. “And thank you for taking all three of us out to Fox Lane this late at night.”

“No prob, Ronnie.” Archie turns back to the road and starts up the truck. “I was actually hoping to get a break anyway. Got serious writers’ block.” This peaks my interest.

“You’re a writer?” I ask. He lets out a nervous laugh that’s almost inaudible.

“Songwriter, actually.” he admits. “I hope to have some form of a music career if football doesn’t work out. I have some songs that I’ve recorded if you’re interested in listening.” He turns back and begins to fumble with the radio. V and Jug both start to bemoan and protest, to my shock and sudden amusement.

“Just drive, Troy Bolton.” Jug waves Archie away from the radio, and we hit the road to Fox Lane. The drive overall is pretty quick, and this group in the truck with me is quite entertaining. Archie did get his chance to play one of his songs for us on the radio, and it’s good. I can see him going off into the music industry, maybe even become the new Shawn Mendes or something. V and Jug continue to bicker over whether ghosts do exist and if they haunt the Conway home, but my mind is going to other places. I wonder if anyone in Riverdale really remembers what happened or
why… I wonder if Aunt Ali knew of this place and its legacy.

The truck rolls to a stop, just a couple of houses down the road from our destination. The boys climb out first, leaving me and V alone in the truck for a small bit of time. I look out the window, absorbing the atmosphere around me. The winds are whispering. Something hidden in one of these houses is talking. Calling. Begging to be let out.


“Just worried about….Wendy. That’s all.” I tell her. She forms a sad smile and nods.

“I get it. But it’s great that she has a job at Pop’s.” she attempts to cheer me up. “Surprised my Daddy hasn’t gone over yet. Her pies are supposed to be phenomenal.” I smile and turn back to the road. Fox Lane looks darker now, much darker than how it looked when we showed up just five minutes ago. Outside, Jug and Archie yell for us to catch up. V and I slide out of the truck and I shut the door. The air has gotten cooler, I’m shivering.

“You really think Jughead is telling the truth about this place?” V’s teeth chatter. “That it could be haunted?” I survey the scene one last time. If something….wicked really made Ali leave all those years ago…. maybe it came from here. Maybe it’s time I found out.

“Let’s go find out, shall we?” I take V’s hand, and we catch up to the boys.

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ALICE

It’s been a slow night at Pop’s, but I appreciate the quiet of it all. The environment is nowhere near how my bakery operates, it’s much more busy and loud, but nevertheless, it’s an environment I can easily adjust to. Everyday, the diner fills up with bustling teens, happy families, and no bad memories. It allows for me to forget about the past for a while and place my energy into my baking. Since the pie save last week, Pop now has me making fresh pies and they’re slowly gaining popularity with the customers. I can use my own ingredients and cook it how I please, which makes me thrilled. And Gladys and I have worked out a good schedule - I come in to bake the pies in the early hours before breakfast, Gladys takes the morning shift after dropping off her kids, and I take over in the afternoon until close, or whenever Gladys isn’t working later into the night.

Overall, working as a waitress for Pop’s hasn’t been too bad. And life at the trailer surprisingly is smoothing out. The neighbors were a little nosy at first, but Gladys and FP cleared them all away by pretty much threatening to fight their asses. I don’t spend much time there, due to my work schedule at the diner, but when I do have time off, I’ve worked to make the trailer at least liveable for me and Sabrina, which has been good. The only downsides to living in Riverdale again are that I’m not able to spend a lot of time with Sabrina so I can check in to see how she’s adjusting. Also, whenever I drive through town, I’ve been sensing some bad auras, ones that I can’t put my finger on. I can’t tell if there even is another witch in Riverdale or Hal, but it makes me want to vomit during my trips, and it makes me want to hide out in my little trailer. Go back into my bad coping habits. But I have to stay strong, not mess this up for her.

And then…..and then there’s FP. We’re not fighting, to be clear, but we haven’t really talked since
my return. It’s not that he’s been avoiding me, but it’s…. I am grateful for Gladys helping me and Sabrina, and for Jughead watching over Sabrina at school. And I’ve wanted to reach out to FP, let him know that I never wanted to leave him behind. But I’m scared that these emotions I used to feel for him will rise, and I don’t want to ruin his relationship with Gladys. I want him to spend time with his family. And….and I feel like he’s angry at me. For leaving and then coming back with no clear explanation. “Trust me, he’s not angry.” Gladys keeps telling me, “But just give it some time. He’s still trying to process it all.” she reassures. I know that’s the most likely truth, yet I still choose to keep my polite distance. Hopefully there is still time for us to talk. I hope we can find some way to reform the friendship we had all those years ago.

It’s a small collection of fears, but they haven’t bogged me down as much as I thought. My priority is on the pies and on the diner. A good 70s song is playing on the jukebox, setting the right mood for this atmosphere. Gladys had wanted to plan a date night with FP on the Southside tonight, so I’ve offered to take the late shift. But tonight is not all that busy, which is odd considering how crowded Pop’s usually is before the weekend….not that I’m complaining or anything. Once the last little group of teenagers leaves the diner, I place the leftover pies into the fridge, starting to slowly clean up. Pop’s waiting for me as I come out of the kitchen.

“If you want to get a head start on cleaning up for the night, I’m thinking about closing the shop early.” he addresses me. I furrow my face in confusion before grabbing the dustpan and broom.

“This early? Isn’t only like 9:45, Pop?” I comment.

“Maybe the town doesn’t crave my place tonight.” he jokes. “Besides, you could use a break for one night, Miss Beauchamp.” Pop moves around me to start cleaning up the kitchen, and I start sweeping the aisles without another thought. The song that’s on the jukebox ends, and a new one starts. I didn’t know Pop had a taste for Queen. The familiar chords of “I Want to Break Free” start up….I forgot how good of a song this is. I start my cleaning in the diner as Freddie Mercury sings his heart out. I bob my head to the song, allowing myself to relax into my cleaning. I even catch myself starting to sing along to the lyrics.

I've fallen in love

I've fallen in love for the first time

And this time I know it's for real

I've fallen in love, yeah

It’s a moment of peace for me, being almost entirely alone in the diner, jamming to an old favorite. But the moment doesn’t last long, because the doors chime open, catching my attention. My stomach churns as Hiram walks into the diner. He doesn’t see me at first, he peers into the kitchen window looking for Pop.

“Mr. Lodge!” The older man comes out to see who just entered.

“Good evening, Pop.” Hiram greets him, then he faces me. He removes his hat and gives me a lingering smile. “Hello, Miss Beauchamp.” I don’t say anything in return. I just stay in my position gripping onto the broom.

“I don’t think I’ve seen your face around here for a while.” Pop goes on, not aware of this tension. Hiram turns away from me and sits down at one of the barstools, nonchalantly engaging in conversation with Pop. I continue to sweep as I overhear the discussion. “I get plenty of Veronica, but it would be nice to see both the Lodges here at once.”
“I would if I wasn’t so busy with work. But, tonight I figured I needed to enjoy some of staple Riverdale cuisine. Besides, I’ve been hearing many excellent things about these…pies Miss Beauchamp has introduced into this town.” That catches my attention. So Hiram Lodge is actually interested in what I have to offer? I walk over to join the conversation and set the broom to the side of the bar top.

“We were lucky to have this wonderful, hardworking lady arrive when she did. Her pies draw the crowds.” Pop acknowledges my presence. I grin at him, trying as hard as I can to not make eye contact with the…..elephant in the room. “She has a lot of good recipes, but her most popular are the peach, apple, and cherry.”

“Those all sound appetizing.” Hiram comments. “Tell me, Miss Beauchamp….” he calls to me, making me want to rip his vocal chords out. I turn to him at a slow pace, locking my eyes onto him. “Which one would recommend for me to try?” I say nothing at first. I’m contemplating on how to go forward with this request. I don’t want Hiram in this diner. I just want to clean to Freddie Mercury and retreat to my trailer for the night. But he’s asking for my services. My pies. I rest my forearms on the bar and lean forward. I have the upper hand here.

“Depends on what you crave.” my voice comes out more monotone than I anticipated. He brings his arms up to the bar, placing them down in front of him. His fingers curl together in a strange way…. He stares down at his hands for a while. Why is he acting like this? Eventually he looks back up at me, still having that damn look on his face.

“Surprise me. Pick my poison.” he eggs me on. I lift my forearms off the counter and stand up straight. Maybe I will. I move past Pop, heading into the kitchen towards the fridge. The cool air strikes me as I open the doors. I look down at my creations. Part of me wants to poison him. Part of me wants to watch him choke on a piece of the filling and do nothing to help him. Everything in me wants to see Hiram Lodge enjoy his last dessert.

It’s a sick thought. One Hal would persuade me to act on. But I’m not back here in Riverdale to make a scene, or to act back out on my former high school enemies. I’m here to keep a low profile and to stay out of trouble until Sabrina goes back to Greendale for her trial. Even if that means I have to let Hiram out of my vengeful, imaginary grip. I pull out the cherry pie, cut up a slice, and slide it onto a plate. My finger pushes down too hard as I spray on the whipped cream. My hands flick too fast putting a damn cherry on top. My insides are screaming for me just to do something to him. Breathe, Alice, I have to tell myself. You’re almost done for the night. Just feed this son of a bitch his pie and don’t cause trouble. I walk out of the kitchen, my hand holding the plate of pie shaking, and I plaster on some sort of a positive facial expression the closer I come to Hiram. I set the plate down in front of him.

“Cherry. What a classic. You read my mind.” he comments with that stupid smile, and he takes a dig at the pie. My fake expression slowly fades unconsciously as I watch him take his time. Yeah, have your cake and eat it too, asshole. He twirls the fork in his hand and looks back up at me when he finishes. “Absolutely divine.”

“Glad you approve, Mr. Lodge.” Pop chuckles next to me. “Maybe this can convince him to come back here more often.” I know he means well, it’s his business on the line here, but I would be just perfectly fine if Hiram Lodge never showed his face around when I’m here.

Hiram continues twirling his fork around for a few seconds, then takes another dive into the slice. Pop claps me on the back and grabs my attention. “I’ll be out back when you two are done here.” He gives me a smile then heads out, towards the back of the diner. Strange….why is Pop leading me to my own devices here? Especially with a customer around? Whatever, I think to myself.
Hiram’s too busy slowly devouring the slice, so I decide to slip away from the bar area and get back to my sweeping. Freddie Mercury’s no longer playing, the jukebox is completely silent. I wish something was playing though, just so I don’t have to face this awkward silence.

“It’s a nice night out.” I hear Hiram trying to make conversation with me from the other part of the diner. “I love quiet nights like this in Riverdale. Gives me a chance to get lost in my thoughts…..or come to this place for a late night snack. I will admit, pies are one of my guilty pleasures.” I don’t look in his direction, I just continue my sweeping. I can hear the fork clinking over and over on the plate, and every ounce of me wants to go over at him and tell him to stop. “I meant it, by the way. This is one of the best slices of cherry pie I’ve ever consumed. Where did you learn such a skill?”

I want to ignore him, I don’t want to give him an answer. Just in case he does try to pry at where I came from….where I’ve been. I tilt my head back to him and sigh, gripping tighter onto the broom. “Taught myself, to be honest with you.”

“So this has been a long-term practice?” he tries to dive further. I relax my face and my hold on the stick.

I begin to answer in all honesty. “It’s taken a few years, if that’s what you mean. It was difficult to jump into at first, but now…. It’s second nature to me. It helps me get my mind off some things. Relieves stress.” I find myself becoming more comfortable, which is strange considering he’s in here. But it’s the first time in a while someone has asked me about my craft.

He seems satisfied with my answer. “Maybe that’s why this tastes so good. You practically put your heart and soul into this.” he replies in a manner I’ve never heard him speak. Ever. His voice is soothing and genuine. I think this might be the first compliment Hiram has ever paid me, even if he doesn’t know it’s me. For a moment, I forget all the negative thoughts I had merely minutes ago, my guard comes down. I give this man a soft smile before I turn away and continue sweeping the diner floor. I can hear him clanking around more with the dish, and he speaks up again. “I’m actually glad that we finally have a chance to be alone….to talk one on one. To get to know you better.” His voice develops a serious tone, making my head lift a little. It’s nothing too severe, I don’t think I need to worry much. If he wants to dig into my “backstory”….well Wendy Beauchamp’s backstory, I think I can make up something.

“Well…..we’ve got until close.” I keep the conversation lighthearted without sounding too weary. “Where would you like for me to start?” He goes quiet….it’s making me a little concerned. Whatever, maybe he needs time to digest and think of questions to ask. I go back to my work.

“How about by telling me where you’ve been…..Acid Queen Alice?”


*What the fuck did he just call me?*

I hear him setting whatever it is he had in his hands down and get up from the stool, but I can’t turn to face him. “25 years is an awfully long time to be away from Riverdale.” I hear his footsteps inching towards me with every word coming out of his mouth. “I know I was in New York with Hermione and Veronica for a while, but I at least didn’t leave without saying a proper goodbye.” I’m having trouble processing his words, I’m having trouble focusing on my own breathing. I turn my head and find him standing right behind me. His face looks concerning, yet he still wears his pride on his sleeves. My mind has entered full panic mode.

I thought I wiped out his memory along with everyone else. How does he remember me? How does he still know who I am? There’s no other way he could possibly know who I am, unless I forgot to
remove his memories of..... Unless there’s someone in Greendale who told him of....

Unless.... UNLESS....

“I must say, Alice. You left quite the powerful memory removal spell before your mysterious exit. You really made everyone in Riverdale believe that Alice Suzanna Smith doesn’t exist.” He pauses, letting out a long sigh. “Shame, though.…. Whatever you conjured, it didn’t work on me.”

The broom shakes in my hands, my teeth chatter, I’m still frozen standing inches from him. Hiram Lodge knows who I am. He knows what I can do. Everything I worked so hard to hide at this point since returning to Riverdale is slipping from my reach, even if I could use my magic to fix it all. I go between fear and sadness, building into anger. No, it’s a rage burning inside. A rage I haven’t felt since all those years ago. He shuts his lips together and reads my face. I can no longer hide my emotions. At this point, I no longer care if anyone is watching or if the newspaper paints what happens into some small-town tragedy. I want answers.

No. I want him dead.

“I should probably explain myself.” he mutters in regret, but he already made his wrong move. He steps out to me, and that’s when I explode. Using my force, I push the broom out, jamming the middle into his stomach, and let out a banshee-like scream.

The moment feels like slow-motion. The broom snaps in two as my might, and my magic, send Hiram flying back across to the other end of the diner. The lights flicker violently, almost going out entirely. Some windows shatter from pure reaction. Broken glass hits the diner floor, and the broom, now broken into two nasty-jagged pieces, slips from my hands. The jukebox jumps through songs uncontrollably. I’m blinded by rage and fear that I don’t process the damage I just created. I haven’t used magic this powerful, this violent, in a long time.

My blood pulses in my ears. My eyes dart to Hiram trying to push himself up from the other end of the diner. I eye one of the broken halves of the broom, and with concentration, I use telekinesis to lift the stick off the floor, along with some shards of the broken windows. He’s still on the floor, scanning the scene around him then turning to me. I make my way over, my little inanimate army lined up and ready to attack, and the lights above me go out. The neon lights outside projecting the diner’s logo flicker from after shock. My hand raises, causing the objects around me to aim at him. Hiram doesn’t look terrified. He doesn’t have any outward emotion, or fear, showing. More than anything, he still appears dazed from what I just did….he looks disappointed. Like he knew I would do this. But I don’t have time for whatever answers he may have. I don’t want to know why he knows, or how. I want to do what I should have done to him when Hal and I had the chance. *I’ll show him what’s become of Acid Queen Alice.*

The dark magic seeps out of me all at once. I flick my hand forward, sending the broken glass and the sharp end of the broom straight into his ---

Except there’s nothing. No cries of pain. No blood. There’s no damage to him at all. The broom and the shattered glass are hovering around Hiram, everything is dead still.

This isn’t my doing.

Is my mind playing tricks on me? Or is it…. Is it…. I blink and stare down. Hiram has his hand up in front of him. The objects floating in thin air are happening because of....

Wait. No. NO.
Hiram pushes himself back up to his feet, still keeping the objects around him at bay, the broom levitating in front of his hand. He glances from side to side at the glass before making direct eye contact with me. He looks calm and collected. Like this is second nature to him, because it is. Before I can process anything, he snaps his fingers.

The shattered window glass turns to sand, falling to the ground. The windows I shattered just minutes ago are seamlessly fixed, all while the lights flicker above us. My breath goes short, I begin stumbling back. It can’t be…. How is this possible? He turns his palm up and places it under the broom shard, which falls into his hand with ease. He takes time to stare down at his hands so he can adjust his grip on it. A moment later, he looks back up at me, the broom shard tight in his hand. He heads in my direction. I want to fall back, run out the back door or even into the bathroom. I can’t tell if it’s of my own doing or his, but I’m trapped. The other half of the broom slides into the air past me, straight into his other hand. Hiram connects the broken ends together and mends the breakage. The broom is whole again in his hand by the time he is five feet away from me.

My eyes start watering, and my nose is…. Wait, is my nose bleeding? Something slow is oozing out, but I can’t pay attention to my body because I’m too focused on what just happened. I can’t begin to process what happened. I don’t want to believe it. I want to think it was all just some feverish dream that resulted from my seizure. But this is real.

Hiram Lodge is the other witch in Riverdale.

_End of Chapter Two_

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Chapter End Notes

Well then, looks like Alice won't have an easy time escaping her past.... On a scale from 1 to WTF how shook are you at the plot twist? Lol, let me know whatcha think, and I'll come at yal again next week.

Peace!
Hi pals! Happy Thursday! Here's another chapter to get yal through the weekend!

ALICE
I should have known there was something off about Hiram Lodge. I never once suspected that he came from a witch community.....well that was because he never came off that way. He was the prep-school, golden boy wrestler. He was Riverdale’s living, breathing version of Jay Gatsby. He was one of the people that made my life hell. At least that’s how Hal made me think of it.

I remember the day Hiram actually first talked to me. It was a day or two before that damn Halloween party that sent me to Hal, that shaped out my future. I didn’t make him come and talk to me, I had no interest in his crowd. But it was after classes and I was just minding my own business. It was with every intention that I finish the day, get home, and practice my spells. I was so caught up in shoving my books into my locker that I didn’t even know he was there. I didn’t see him until after I shut my locker.

I remember jumping at the sight of him. Back then, Hiram was not as tall or as muscular. His hair was all glossed back, it looked so stupid on him. I didn’t know why he was there or what he wanted, maybe it would have been better if I had just walked away. But had the balls to lean against the locker and give me a damn smirk.

“So you’re the infamous Acid Queen Alice, huh?” were his first words to me. Acid Queen Alice, I wanted to slug him. Everyone in our class had something to say about him, but I never saw anything. To me, he was just in my way.

“Can I help you, asshat?” I spat out at him, hoping that could make him disappear, but he stood his ground.

“It’s Hiram, actually.” his voice went deep before he extended his hand out to me. “Hiram Lodge.” he repeated, like I didn’t already know who he was. I didn’t want to touch this pompous prick. I didn’t even want him breathing near me. He must have taken the hint because he lowered his hand, in defeat, and continued, “I have a business proposition for you. I’m assuming you’ve heard about a little get together Miss Penelope Blossom’s having? On Halloween night?”

Of course. He wanted drugs. And I was the candy girl....retired by that point. I rolled my eyes at him and crossed my arms. “You got the wrong girl. I retired that act a while ago.”

“But you have Southside acquaintances that do?” he stepped in closer, making me claustrophobic more so than the Serpent jacket on my back.

“You think I enjoy being associated with them?” I snorted out. That seemed to shut him up real fast, but not for long.

“Could give you an excuse to get away from your Serpent friends for the night.” He was quite the impressive negotiator....probably was using magic to get me on his side, but I wasn’t buying it. I
rolled my eyes again, causing him to speak more. “Besides, it’ll be Halloween. You gotta have a little fun on Halloween. It’s not trick or treat for nothing.” I didn’t know what he wanted to poke further into but I no longer wanted any part of it.

“I already told you…” I lifted my chin up, my confidence growing. He began to back away as I broke it down for him, “I. DON’T. DO. THAT. SHIT. ANY. MORE. Got it?” His face lost its smirk and turned into a frown. “Find another candyman to get your party favors, Manhattan.” I took the little victory and shoved past him with my shoulder, ready to make my great escape.

Well, I was ready to make my escape until Hiram reached for my hand. His grip wasn’t hard, he was barely holding onto me, but it was enough to stop me. I slowly turned to him, about to hex the daylights out of him, and…. Should I have known of his magic back then? Was he holding me back with magic? Whatever kept me there in that moment, with his fingers having their gentle hold on my hand, with his New York schoolboy face all soft looking at me, I stayed. I stayed, staring at Hiram, as he spoke, “Maybe you could just come? For a few minutes? You don’t have to be all alone, Alice.” I stayed, and maybe I shouldn’t have. I stayed, and I went to that house. I stayed, and I released Hal and killed those classmates. I stayed, and Hiram was trying to tell me something…..

Hiram is a witch. He’s Zelda contact in Riverdale. He’s the other witch. He was trying to tell me, maybe as early as our first conversation. Hiram was going to tell me. And now here I am in the middle of Pop’s with the lights flickering, and….. and….

“Alice?”

I can’t pay attention to him. My head is throbbing, my vision is blurring, something is coming out from my nostrils, the corners of my mouth and my eyes. I reach my shaky hand up to my nose and feel something wet. Sticky. I pull back and blink. Blood. My heart races as the blood drips off my finger. My fingers blur in front of me, the silhouette of Hiram behind my bloody finger.

“Alice?”

I see his figure step in closer, and out of sheer panic, I send my hands to my ears, a shock wave violently rupturing the diner. He slides back slightly, but he has a grip on the bar counter. He holds a hand out to me, I guess showing he’s not going to harm me.

Part of me feels guilty for attacking him. But he came after me first. He knows what I am. He called me by the one name I never wanted to have uttered by anyone I knew. And I…. I feel nauseous and my knees are buckling. My hand flies to my mouth and I can’t look at him. I can’t have Hiram see me like this. I bolt into the diner’s bathroom and use some magic to lock the door. Big mistake, because the little wave of magic makes me fall to my knees and vomit.

I know my magical limits. My body loses control when I use too much of it. Whenever I do go beyond these limits, I go into shut down mode and collapse. The last time I used such powerful magic was after I left Riverdale, when I bound Hal to that house and cleansed the town of its memory of me. I don’t exactly remember what happened to me in the course of those 48 hours, but what I had to do drained me. So now whenever I strain myself, my nose bleeds and I become nauseous. No matter how little I use my current magic, or even attempt to cure this thing, I haven’t healed right since. It feels like part of him is still bound to me.

I begin to notice that what’s coming out of me is not vomit, but it’s blood. It’s dark red…..no it’s black, I can’t tell. I feel as if I will pass out if I keep this up, so I have to push myself away from the toilet seat and lean back against the wall. My eyelids feel heavy as they struggle to flutter open and shut. Everything feels heavy, even my eardrums. I might pass out.
I’m too drained from the magic and too engrossed in my thoughts that I don’t hear him pounding on the door from outside, calling my name. I don’t even notice the lock to the door being undone. The door creaks open, I see his shadow standing at the doorway. But I can’t face him. I don’t want to look at him. My gaze drifts upward, ignoring him walking into the bathroom, standing over me.

“Alice?” I hear him, but I choose not to answer. I want to kill him, but I’m too damn weak to fight. At this point, I just want him to go away. But he doesn’t. I’m not sure what he’s doing or why he hasn’t left the bathroom, but he goes over to the sink and starts running the faucet. This goes on for a couple of seconds, then the water stops running, only little droplets plinking into the sink.

Hiram kneels down in front of me, so I’m forced to look at him now. And I see what he was doing over by the sink. He has a damp piece of cloth in his hand. Wait a minute…… He comes into this diner to corner me when I’m vulnerable, and now he wants to help me clean up? What the actual---

He brings the hand holding the damp cloth closer to me, and I inch closer into the wall behind me, my back straightening along the wall and my breathing intensifying…. No, it’s struggling to regulate itself back out. My eyes dart down to the cloth in his hand, my gaze softening when I realize that….that he’s not going to hurt me. At least that’s what I’m trying to make myself believe in this moment.

“I’m not going to hurt you.” his voice goes soft. “I didn’t mean to frighten you out there, Alice.” Then he goes quiet, I’m guessing to figure out how to tell me why he came here. But I think I have an idea of why he came tonight. Before he can speak, I grab the cloth from his hand and swipe it over my mouth and nose, trying to get rid of the blood coming out. I inhale sharply once my nostrils clear up, but the air coming in stings. I bring a hand to the wall behind me so I can prop myself up, my legs almost sliding out from under me. I’m able to push myself away from the wall, but I teeter forward. I almost forget Hiram is there until I stumble into him. He gently places his hands on my biceps to keep me steady, and he rests his forehead against my own. I shut my eyes and breathe, in and out. In and out. When this wave of nausea and weakness happens to me, I have to keep this rhythm going….it’s the only way I prevent myself from passing out, or worse.

My eyes flutter open and I look up at him. He exhales and clamps his mouth shut, the same way he did earlier when he wanted to confess his magical abilities to me. But he’s not here to catch up on the good old days, or to even force me to face my old demons. He’s not here for me.

“Alice….we need to talk about your situation with Sabrina.”

XXXXXXXXX

SABRINA

The house is smaller than what I had envisioned. It’s a white little two-story home with its windows broken, its roof collapsing, and ghosts of its former inhabitants whispering. Or just one inhabitant. Archie and Jug have wandered in already, but I remain outside, caught by the tragic beauty. I look out at the house, hoping for some sign of supernatural elements to scream out at me. But it’s only a tiny voice saying my name.

Sabrina, it whispers to me in a slow, repetitive pattern. I don’t know what lies within these walls or why it wants me. How does it even know me, let alone my name? SABRINA……

“Are you okay, girl?” V comes next to me, pulling me out of my dreamlike stance. I turn to find
her concerned eyes growing soft. “We can just stay out here if you want,” she starts to offer, “and just…let the boys have their fun. Only if you want to. No pressure.” She stops talking, her mouth clamping tight shut. She’s not suggesting this for me - I can see it in her expression. She’s the one who’s afraid to go in.

She eventually continues, “Sorry…it’s just, my Daddy mentioned to me about this place. Back when I was a niña. I don’t exactly remember the details of what he brought up, but it just makes me a little paranoid. That’s all.” Her eyes fixate on the house, all lit up and fearful. I follow her gesture and return my gaze to the house. Maybe there is something here….whether benevolent or sinister, it has to lead me to finding my familiar. Or any familiar really that can bond with me. And maybe it can give Veronica some courage too. I turn back to her and grab her hand.

“We’ll go through together, then.” I tell her with a determined stance. “If something scary does pop up, we can protect each other. Okay?” And I mean it, I truly do. If something does happen while we’re in there, I can use my own magic to ward it off. It would risk me exposing everything about me to Veronica, but at this point, she’s the only real friend I have in this town. Someone who could understand. Her fearful expression fades at my words, and she forms a small smile, squeezing my hand gently.

“Okay.” she mutters, and we make our way up to the front door. We stop a couple of feet from the door, slightly open, and I take a deep breath. How would this be any different from what I see in Greendale? With my free hand, I push the door open, the creaking growing louder as the house waits for us to enter. V and I look at each other one last time, then we make our way in.

The inside looks like an abandoned horror movie set - it’s like the house in Psycho was vandalized and robbed overnight. The windows are covered with wooden planks, the air is musty. No wonder everyone in this town wants to forget this place. I cough as I inhale some dust, still holding on tight to V’s hand. I look around the house as I try to figure out where would be best to perform the familiar summoning spell. The whispering voice blows through my ears like a gust of wind. The voice bounces off the walls, and I turn to find the family’s living room. The voice is stopping in here.

“What is it, ‘Brina?” V asks in a hushed voice. “I can’t see! What’s wrong?” It is dark in here, and I wish I had a light or something---- A light. I can make some light appear. But is it worth showing my powers to her? Will it just frighten her more?

I turn to V and make my decision. “Promise me you won’t freak out? At what I’m about to do?” Her eyes widen at me, confused at first, then she slowly nods. I turn back to the room, inhale deeply, then shut my eyes.

I begin to work my magic, a spell to foster electrokinesis. I mutter the chant a couple of times, and I can hear the lights slowly flickering above me. I can see a light burning in my head, and I hope it can provide some light. When I finish my chant, I open my eyes to find the overhead light of the living room and a lamp by the corner fully on. I smile at my work, the house no longer as dark and gloomy.

“Sabrina….” V breathes out, “How did you…..” she stops, stunned from what I just did. I turn back and let go of her hand. She glances around the room one more time, then she faces me. “You’re a witch.” The words come out of her mouth, and I can’t tell if I am relieved that she knows or if I just made the biggest mistake of my life (well, not as big as not signing my name in the Book). I can’t respond back in words, so I just nod. I might have made a mistake by telling her the truth, but she doesn’t look afraid. Instead, she hangs her head slightly then looks up at me with a somewhat guilty expression on her face.
“What is it?” I try to pry out of her, hoping that I don’t have to use a memory removal spell on her too. V takes a deep breath and clasps her hands together in front of her.

“Sabrina…. I think there’s something I need to confess to you, too.” I don’t process her words at first. I blink at her once, then a few times, then my mind races as to what she could be talking about. Before I can even think of what she could mean, V races her hands up to her heart, like she’s praying, and lets out a sigh, shutting her eyes. The lights flicker around us at a steady pace then uncontrollably. I look around, not sure if it’s me or if the house really is haunted, or….

The lights go out completely for a moment. I struggle to see in the darkness, my breath becoming harder and slower. Then the light returns, which stuns me, and I find that V is gone. My mouth hangs at the sight….or lack thereof. I don’t know what’s happening. I don’t know if V just played a trick on me just to run off with the boys. I’m about to call out her name and cry for help when the lights flicker again, and…..

Veronica reappears all of a sudden, making me jump in my place. The wind gusts through her hair. She has to take a strong stance to keep herself from falling over. She looks up at me and her eyes start to get misty. I stare at her blankly for a little bit, and I begin to realize what she wanted to confess.

Veronica is a witch too! I’m not the only teenage witch in Riverdale! I can feel a smile forming on my face, my fear slowly disappearing. “You’re magical too?” my expression grows at my words. I’m so caught up in my happiness that I don’t register V’s state of panic and guilt. Once I do recognize it, I try to ask if everything is okay.

She immediately jumps in before I can speak. “I know who you are, Sabrina Spellman!” her words come out rushed and her voice is cracking. I notice that she is about to cry. “It wasn’t an accident that the school had me as your ambassador when you came. My Daddy….. He’s a representative of the Church of Night in Riverdale. He wanted me to watch over you and keep tabs so he can send back information to Greendale.” My lighthearted mood falls a bit at her confession.

Auntie Z said something about a contact in Riverdale before Ali and I left. Is Mister Lodge that contact, making him a witch too? Are they trying to gather information so they can punish me once my trial begins? Or did Auntie Z and Mister Lodge make this agreement…..to keep me and Ali safe? I have so many questions swirling through my head, but my thoughts are being clouded with V’s teary state of being.

“I don’t want to hurt you by betraying you, Sabrina.” she lets out a small sob. “I actually kind of like you, and I…..I just don’t want you to feel alone. Because I know it’s hard having to be a half-witch and not tell your human friends.” I start to fully focus on her words. Half-witch? So she is like me! That must mean her father is a witch and her mother, when alive, was human!

My smile comes back slowly, and I reach out and hug her. It takes her a moment to understand my reaction, then she fully returns the embrace. After a while, V pulls back and gives me a puzzled look. “You’re…..not mad at me?”

“Mad?” I let out a chuckle. “How can I be? I finally have a friend that knows what it’s like to be me.” And I mean it. I’m so overcome with happiness right now. V is just like me! Auntie Z is protecting me by having another half-witch look after me! I’m not alone!

V begins to smile, the weight of her confession no longer holding her down. We both go in for another hug, solidifying our friendship and our shared secrets.

“I’m sorry, by the way…….” V voices after our little moment of silence. I pull back a little and give
her a confused look. She continues, “About your Baptism. I’m sorry it didn’t go well.” My mouth clamps shut and my eyes wander down to my feet. I don’t admit this to her, but the mentioning of that night still bugs me. I still have dreams of all those people from the Church, including the Weird Sisters, and even both Aunties, chasing me. No one is there to help me. Not Ambrose. Not even Aunt Ali. Whenever I get close to reaching them for sanctuary, they vanish into thin air. Then something pulls at me from behind, making me fall to my knees, dragging me by my ankles to wherever it is before I wake up. Perhaps it’s anxiety or guilt, but I hate having this weight on my shoulders.

I don’t blame V for bringing the subject up - she wasn’t there to witness the pandemonium. Without another moment of hesitation, I sigh and return my gaze to her. “You have nothing to apologize for. At least you can learn from my mistakes when it’s your turn.” I pause for a moment. Did Veronica tell me when her birthday was, or when it would be? “If….you already haven’t. Have you?”

“Not yet.” she goes quiet. “I’m set to have my Baptism in February. I would have a confirmation, considering my Mom’s family is Catholic. But seeing that my Mom is dead, and with Daddy and his whole side being deeply rooted with the Church of Night…..Dark Baptism it is.” She tries to sound optimistic but I can tell she dreads the thought of her Baptism. Just the same as me.

I place my hands onto her shoulders. “I’m going to be honest, V. It’s nerve racking, and there is so SO much pressure.” I speak truthfully. What I’m saying might not help give her emotional strength, but knowing what I’ve been through, she can at least be somewhat prepared. “But now you have me to walk you through the rituals and what to do….and what not to do.” I joke, making her laugh. Her same little mischievous look in her smile begins to creep in again. I take notice in the color of her eyes….or the mixture of the color in her eyes. There’s layers of black amidst the brown and gold, and I swear there’s traces of something more….

I shake myself out of my focus and return to the conversation, trying to see if there’s other advice I can give to her. “Also,” I start up, a thought coming to me, “you’ll have your familiar by then.”

“Good luck trying to find one in Riverdale.” V huffs. She turns away from me and begins to pace around the living room. She takes a moment to glance around, running her fingers along the dusty, untouched furniture. “It’s rare for people with magical capabilities, like Daddy and myself, to reside in a dead zone like this town - nothing really supernatural resides in Riverdale, and if anything does….it doesn’t stay for long.”

“Is that why you think Jughead’s theory on the Riverdale Reaper is false?”

“Partially. But don’t tell him that.” she confesses with a wink. Then, V stops in her tracks and she stares at me. “Speaking of supernatural presences, are YOU still without a familiar?” My mouth hangs a little bit, gaping like a fish. I struggle to find the words to explain that nothing…..not one familiar, came to me the days leading up to my birthday. I’m about to tell her when she jumps in, “Is that why you came here?”

“Maybe.” I shrug and glance around the living room again. V may be right…..Riverdale could very well be a dead zone for magic. Yet, I can still feel something within me, something in this house calling to me. Something is hiding in these walls wanting to be let free. Maybe it’s just what I need to help me out in this town. I eye a pile of dust on the ground. This can be my starting point to help me with the spell. “But it’s worth a shot.” I head over to the dust and kneel down. I take notice in the floorboard…..Somebody must have tried to do the summoning spell before, many years ago.

“Do you want me to keep watch?” V nervously whispers behind me. “I can make sure the boys
“I’ll be alright.” I turn to her and give her a reassuring smile. “Shouldn’t take too long.” I return my attention to the dusty floorboards. I inhale, deep, I want this spell to work. I NEED this spell to work. Now more than ever. I exhale, and begin.

“Spirits of this house, I pronounce my intentions to thee.” I start to draw the symbols on the floor. A rattling echoes through the house. A voice mutters in the distance. Yet I carry on. “Come forth and seek me, and equal we will be.” Something creaks, growing louder with each word of my chant. “Not master and servant…..but familiar to familiar……” The voice in my head becomes louder, like a shrieking laughter. It may be my mind playing tricks or just Archie and Jughead goofing around upstairs, but whatever voice in my head is calling….. It may be much darker than I anticipated in a familiar. I finish the chant with my confidence growing. “…..to share our knowledge…..our spirit, and our traits. And now, spirits, we will wait.”

The silence takes over. All I can hear is my heavy breathing, as well as Veronica’s. I open my eyelids slowly. Nothing stands out. Just the same set up from before my chants. The lights flicker a little bit, but not significantly. I let out a long sigh.

“Well?” V calls out to me in a hushed voice. I wipe my dusty hands on my coat and stand up to face her. I shake my head, my built-up confidence waning out. She frowns at me. “Told you Riverdale was just a dead zone---”

Something appears from the shadows behind V. A hand reaches out, grabbing her by the shoulder. V lets out a bloodcurling scream and whips away violently. My fear kicks in. Whatever I summoned, it’s going to hurt my new friend. I’m ready to use my magic to fight…..only Archie and Jughead. I relax my stance at the sight of the boys coming into the living room, chuckling at their little prank. V winces in frustration and proceeds to whack Jug in the arm.

“Damn you, Jughead Jones!” she hollers.

“Sorry, Ronnie! It was just the right moment!” Archie defends him and Jug in a fit full of laughter. Jug’s laughter comes to a slow halt as he glances around.

“How were you able to get the power on?” he turns to me. I realize that V and I didn't have much time to make up an excuse for our magical conveniences. My eyes dart over to V, raising my brow at her, and V gives me a panicked look. Her expression reads “Just Say Something!” and I immediately go back to Jug.

“Just messed with the switches for a while.” I lie. I can’t tell whether or not he bought it, but he gives me a smile. Good, it worked. Archie and V banter from behind us, but I can barely hear the conversation. My mind is elsewhere…. The voice in my head is at full volume. It’s chanting my name, almost screaming it. I reach a hand up to one of my ears in attempt to cover it. I just want the voice to stop. Is it the familiar I summoned? What have I done? What did I just----

“Hey, are you okay?” Jug snaps me back into the real world. I blink at him for a moment or two, not sure of how to respond. The unrecognizable sensation continues in my head. I go to open my mouth, then the lights go out all at once. Archie gasps, Veronica screams. A hollow scream rings through my ears. I can hear the electricity go out down the street. And that laughter…

“Let’s get the hell out of here.” Archie hisses in the darkness. I can see his shadowy figure reaching out for Jughead. The boys make their way out, but V is frozen still.

“Brina?” she whispers to me. “Do you…. Do you think…..” I make my way over to her in the
darkness and grab for her hand. She squeezes my hand tight as I lead us away from the living room, out to the entry way of this hellmouth, back out into the street….

A gust of wind comes at full force behind us. V and I stop in our place on the walkway. I can see my breath form in the cold night. The breath clouds swirl in the air. The voice from my head echoes behind me. Now more present than before. SABRINA….. I slowly turn my head back into the doorway of the house, and…. Something is standing in the doorway. V turns to see where I’m looking at, and she jumps back, pulling me back with her. This….thing, whatever it is, lurks in the doorway, waiting for its final shape to form. Its eyes are glowing in the dark in front of me.

“Sabrina…..” it speaks. The voice is lighter now, but it is also raspy. Like it was waiting for a chance to speak after many years. “You called for me…..and I came.” The thing begins to shift. V and I both step back in fear. What is this presence forming into? The thing swirls in a black cloud for a moment, then…..

A black cat emerges from the shadows of the Conway house. It lets out a long, adorable meow. So this is my familiar. I sigh in relief, my eyes tearing up in happiness, as this new guide shakes its body and looks up at me.

“Awww....” V lets out a cheerful expression.

“It worked.” I begin to chuckle. The cat-shaped familiar prances out of the doorway and heads in my direction. I kneel down and hold my hand out to it. The cat head-buts into my palm, letting out a pur of approval.

“Hello, Sabrina Spellman.” the voice speaks to me. I know now it’s coming from this familiar.

“Hey, little fella.” I take it into my arms and hold it close to me, examining my new friend. Its eyes are a unique blue-green that looks as if they have so many stories to tell. I could swear this thing was starting to smile at me.

“Hey!” Jughead calls out to V and me from a distance. “What’s taking you girls so long? There’s no power anywhere on this street!”

“Calm down, Jughead!” V yells back, motioning for me and this familiar to follow in suit. “Sabrina found a cat!” I can hear her giggle as she runs over to catch up with the boys. I take one more look back up at the house in the darkness, my new feline friend purring contently in my hands.

“I hate to ask, but would you mind if you let me down so I can stretch my legs?” the familiar asks in an angelic voice. “I’ve been cooped up in that house for maaaaaannnny years.” I hear his voice draw out. I smile down at it and carefully let it down to the walkway. It stretches out its front legs and lets out a yawn, which sounds like a faint scream. “Now then,” it starts up again, “shall we catch up to your friends?” It looks up at me with those mysterious eyes. I laugh and start to head away from the house towards the others. I look down at my new friend, who doesn’t hesitate to keep a good pace with me at my ankles.

“So…..” I start to ask it, “what do you want me to call you?”

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
ALICE
The silence in this diner is unbearable. I haven’t spoken a word to Hiram since he helped me up on my feet and back out into the main body. We’re sitting in a booth and he’s still digging at his pie, my pie. He grabbed a slice for me to help with the dizziness, give me some energy, but my slice is untouched. My fork unused. I’m staring down at the red lumps not wanting to look at him. I don’t want to acknowledge his existence. I know why he wants to talk and why Sabrina is somehow involved. I know what he wants to say, I don’t need to hear it. I don’t want to.

“So you’ve been in Greendale for a while, I suppose?” he attempts to break the silence and make small talk. I glare up at him and stay silent. He takes an uncomfortable bite at a cherry glob and twists the fork in his fingers. “When Zelda Spellman and I spoke on the phone, she mentioned a witch who used to live in Riverdale that would go with Sabrina. A witch who owns a bakery and psychic shop.” He pauses, his eyes going soft at the sight of my angry pair. “I never once made the connection that it was you until she said the Riverdale bit. I heard some things about the bakery you own…. I even tried to investigate more about it independently, just to grab some nearby sweets for Veronica and for myself. Well, that was…..but I think you have given Edgar quite a scare, if I must say.” My brow raises at the name. Edgar? Another witch? What kind of person named Edgar would go on Hiram’s behalf and….. Then I remember - the raven at my shop. I roll my eyes at let out a huff. Of course, how did I not realize? The raven, Edgar, is Hiram’s familiar.

“Edgar did inform me of your presence…” he continues like I didn’t insult him and his pet, “or at least a presence I wasn’t aware of at the time. But during that soccer game, when Veronica introduced me to Miss Spellman…..and I saw you…..the pieces began to connect. A witch from Riverdale. Closed-off. Quiet. In that moment, I realized, “So it must be Acid Queen Alice”---”

“DON’T CALL ME THAT.” I snap at him. Hiram clamps his mouth shut in shame. My blood boils and flows rapidly. The nausea comes through me the slightest bit, and I have to look away from him, down at the untouched slice of pie in front of me. My fingers curl, then they reach for the fork. I stab at the pie and take an angry bite.

“Funny how small of a world this is.” his voice rings the air again, quieter than before. I look back up at him as I swallow a bitter clump of cherry filling. His eyes begin to form some optimism as he talks, “There you were in Greendale after all these years, becoming so acquainted with members of the Church…..and here you are again. Looking after the daughter of the Former High Priest---”

“Save the theatrics, Hiram.” I interject, wounding his pride. I take a deep breath and set my fork down. I continue, “You want me to convince Sabrina to go back to Greendale and sign that book.” His mouth hangs slightly at my words. He looks shocked, but I’m not stupid. I know why we’re even having this conversation in the first place. He doesn’t respond, and I’m getting frustrated again. “Isn’t that why you had to waste my time tonight? To get Pop out of the way and frighten me?”

“It was never my intention to frighten you, Alice.” he manages to stay calm, “And trust me, I didn’t want to do anything to Pop Tate either. But I had to talk with you alone…..where we could truly talk as ourselves about the situation at hand…..”

“What situation at hand?” I snark. “Sabrina’s staying in Riverdale until notice of her trial, and I’m making sure she doesn’t get into trouble.” My mind races and I realize that I have no clue where Sabrina is and what she’s doing now. Is she back at the trailer with Gladys or FP watching over her? Is she with friends? Anyone or anything that is nowhere near that house? “And…..” I bring my mind back into my sentence, “and why should she have to choose to sign now? Why should anyone have to convince her?” I want to rattle on, but then I stop for a moment. Veronica. Sabrina was
with Veronica on her first day. It makes sense now. I let out a low-registered, angry laugh. “Take it
Veronica is on the sidelines acting as your little magical helper?” He blinks at me, then sighs.

“Yes.” he replies in almost a whisper. “Veronica is part-witch….like Sabrina. But she’s only there
to inform me if Sabrina brings up the matter and needs advice. Nothing more….nothing less.”
Bullshit, I think to myself. Hiram got away with marrying Hermione, a mortal, and now his
daughter is fulfilling more of her witch-like duties to make Daddy happy. It’s no different than
how he used the others back in high school. He’s going to be the reason Sabrina winds up back in
Greendale and signs herself away to Satan. And he’s going to get away with it.

My lip quivers. I make my eyes roll again to keep them from tearing up. “Glad to know you
haven’t changed, Hiram.” my voice croaks. I push my plate forward and rise up from the booth. A
feeling of dread falls through me. My vision blurs for a slight moment, making my balance slightly
off. I have to keep a steady hand on the table as I stand up. I’m not still sick from earlier…..am I?

“I am only doing what’s best for Sabrina.” Hiram looks up at me with a hurt expression, “I just
want to keep the peace with the Church. It’s what I’m in Riverdale to do.” I push myself away from
the table and head over to my broom leaning against the bar. He’s making up excuses for his
actions, and I’m not here for it. I grab the broom and start to walk away when Hiram rises up and
stands in front of me. He doesn’t reach out for me, but he keeps his hands in front, his same little
“I’m not going to hurt you” gesture. He swallows a lump in his throat and speaks in a low voice, “I
don’t want anything awful to happen to that young girl….or you for that matter.”

To be frank, I’m stunned. Now Hiram Lodge is concerned about me? I feel a hot tear roll down my
cheek. I look at him and tighten my grip on the broom. “Since when did you have the decency to
start caring about my well-being?” I mutter, my voice starting to crack. Above us, the lights start to
flicker. I know my emotions are a little all over the place, but this flickering isn’t my doing. And
I’m not sure if it’s him either. The thought of him using magic has my mind going back to high
school. “Were you ever going to tell me, Hiram? About you being a witch?”

“I considered it, heavily.” he admits. “But being in a town where witchcraft is not so open as it is in
Greendale, it’s a little hard to reach out to someone about that. And you can’t exactly open up to
others about things like attending the Academy of Unseen Arts or going to Church gatherings for
new Baptisms.” ENOUGH OF THE EXCUSES, my mind screams. He takes another breath and
goes on “I thought I had been the only one…..until I met you. Well, I wasn’t a hundred percent sure
at first when we met….but after that Halloween party….” he pauses, looking down at the ground.
He must be caught in his head trying to piece when he figured out I was a witch.

There wasn’t any other times I could think of…..but there is one. Only one time I did use magic in
front of Hiram. And it was the first time Hal and I worked together to get revenge on my
classmates. Hiram looks back up at me, “And after that night with….whoever, or whatever that
thing was you had with you.” I blink at him, the memories of that night coming back. My throat
goes dry. All my memories with Hal flood in. This conversation needs to end. Now.

“I need to get back to work, Hiram.” I whisper, but it’s audible enough for him. Without another
moment of waiting, I whip my head and start walking over to the other side of the diner. The lights
continue to flicker heavily, but I’m not causing this. There’s an itch in my brain but I can’t clarify
what is causing it. But it feels more than an itch, or even a headache; it’s like my brain is tearing in
half. The itchy headache makes my bones shake, my hands stiffen, it’s becoming painful. It can’t
just be from my magical outburst, or my recent wave of emotions. Something else is going on that I
can’t identify. I inhale sharply through this odd sensation and go back into sweeping with tears in
my eyes. Can’t I just have one damn night where I don’t have to be reminded of my past? Or of
Hal?
“Alice, wait.” I hear Hiram hurrying his steps behind me. He joins my side. I barely make eye contact with him, but from a brief glimpse, his eyes are panicked. His lips trembling. “Alice…if there’s something going on that I can help with---”

“I don’t want your help!” I cry, my emotions slipping from my control again. My grasp on the broom tightens, but not to the point where it will snap again. The pain in my head gets worse, there’s a ringing in my ears….No. It’s a laughter. Hal’s laughter. The pain is growing and Hiram won’t leave me alone. I wince at the overload of everything. “Just….just….” I can’t form a coherent sentence. Hiram stays there paralyzed, not sure of whether to help me or to run away. In truth, I prefer he do the latter. I look at him, my anger building up. I’m tempted to use magic to throw him out or do something, but I’m scared of risking another wave of nausea, and…..whatever black or red substance was coming out of me. So I go to open my mouth, to yell at him to get the hell out and never show his face at Pop’s while I’m here, to never go anywhere near me or Sabrina….

The back door flies open. Pop takes a few steps into the main body and notices our stance. He stays silent, which I’ll take that as a good thing, then looks out the window. “Awfully cold out there tonight.” he comments. He glances into the kitchen, almost like he isn’t aware that Hiram and I nearly destroyed his dinner just minutes ago. Or even that I am on the verge of having a breakdown. “Well….guess no one else is coming in tonight. Better to pack up and---”

The lights completely go out. The power audibly goes too. Even the giant neon sign in the parking lot sparks out. Pop glances around nervously, and so does Hiram. I stay frozen in my spot. The air becomes like ice, I can see my breath clouds. For a moment, everything is still. We are all silent. Just for a moment….

A sharp wave of excruciating pain ruptures through me. It flows from my head all the way down through my body. My eardrums start pounding, a sharp laughter echoes in my head. I let out a scream. Finally, Pop stops and sees my panicked expression. “Miss Beauchamp? Are you alright?” He tries to come over, but Hiram keeps him away. He looks back and forth between me and Pop, not sure what to do. But I can’t concentrate on either one of them. My hands fly to my ears briefly, then they fall to my sides. Something is coming to my head. A vision, a hex, what the hell is this? My mouth hangs as my vision goes out and in, between the diner and…..

The house. It’s the Conway House. There’s an uproar inside. A figure slams through the walls uncontrollably. And I can feel a powerful trace of magic that had just been used….. No. No. No. Stumbling through my blindness, I limp my way out of the diner and into the parking lot. I can’t see what’s in front of me, I’m still caught in my visions. The figure shifts at a rapid pace, muttering for something….someone, I don’t know who. The muttering grows louder, the figure turning to face me. Even in its unfinished form, I know its eyes. I know his smile.

He’s free. Hal is free. The figure in my vision goes through me, snapping me back into my current state out in the lot. I gasp for air, I want to cry, but my throat is dry. My body shakes. I’m beginning to lose my balance. Someone broke my binding spell. Hal is no longer bound. How is this possible? Oh no….did Sabrina find her way there? Did she use any magic? Was it someone else? Another rogue witch? Anybody?

The door opens behind me. I can hear footsteps running over. I turn my head, but even that motion starts to throw of my stance. Hiram slows his pace, just stopping a few feet in front of me. I blink at him, then look out into the pitch black sky. My thoughts race. Who could have done this? HAL IS OUT AND HOW COULD ANYONE KNOW----

I turn down to Hiram, my hands vibrating. My anger building up. There has to be another reason
why he came here to see me. Was it to distract me while he had Veronica free Hal? Or anyone else for that matter? He remembers me, and has some knowledge of what I did, so he must know something. Why else would he want Sabrina to go back?

But my anger is not fulfilled, nor is my want to use a powerful hex or something to kill Hiram, because my eyelids begin to grow heavy. My knees start to get weak. My body is collapsing.

“Alice?” Hiram takes another hesitant step towards me, fearful of me having another on-the-verge-of-death moment in one night. Something comes out of my throat but I don’t know if it’s a word or a noise. I can feel a single tear fall from my eye.

“Hal….”

It’s the last thing I say before everything goes black, before I can feel my body hit the pavement.

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My mind stays in a state of blurry, horrific images and bright, flashing colors for a while. It’s like I’m trapped in the tunnel from the boat ride scene in Willy Wonka. I lost track of how long I’ve been out, I don’t even know if I’m still at Pop’s lying unconscious in the parking lot.

I’m not on the pavement, I’m in a bed. It’s not quiet or dark out. It’s a new day. The sunlight over above me wakes me up. My eyes flutter open and a migraine hits. I groan and push myself up. I’m back in my trailer, in the bedroom. How did I get here? I glance around the room, nothing has changed which is good. I turn to stretch out my neck and back, and notice that there’s a symbol on the headboard. I blink at it for a few seconds, then really glare at it. Someone drew a sigil over my bed. I reach my fingertips out to trace the lines. It looks like an upside down heart with a half circle facing up, and two lines going through. I’ve seen this before. I don’t remember where exactly, or when, my head is so clogged right now.

I don’t see the cat on my bed until I hear a low, grumbly meow. My heart almost flies out as I turn to find….a black cat looking at me puzzlingly. My breath quickens with my heartbeat. How did this cat get in here? And why does it sound like it’s growling at me? And….and why are this cat’s eyes a vaguely familiar blue-green?

“Salem, don’t be mean!” Sabrina enters the bedroom and scoops this new addition to the household into her arms. She continues to talk to the cat, “It’s just Aunt Ali. She’s looking after me. I told you that.” The cat lets out a short, disgruntled mew. Sabrina looks down at me and smiles. “Hey, you’re up!”

I struggle to find words and wind up groaning, running my fingers through my knotted hair. “What time is it?” I ask. What day is it, I wanted to blurt out. How many hours, or days, have I been knocked out for?

“Little after 9.” she replies. “Seems like you got a good night’s sleep. You were practically out last night when I got back, still in your Pop’s uniform.” I raise a brow at her. How late was she out for, and…. And I look down. I’m still wearing the yellow waitress dress. My “Wendy” name tag is still attached. The air gets chilly all of a sudden. And my eyes are still on that cat.

“Sabrina….” I start. She lets the cat down onto the carpet, and it prances off into the kitchen. She turns back to me and approaches the bed.
“Were you already back here when the power went out throughout town?” Sabrina questions me. My head’s still in a weird spot, but the memories of the night before are creeping back in, slowly but almost clear as day. There was a blackout. And Hal….. “I guess it came back when I showed up.” Sabrina continues to ramble on, “Sorry, I should have told you last night. But I was hanging out at the school with Veronica and Jughead, and then I met their friend, Archie. We drove around town for a bit….”

I just stare at her blankly. She’s talking so fast that her words sound rehearsed. Like there’s some bit about last night that she has yet to tell me about. The cat….Salem, I think I heard correctly, remains at the doorway. Its eyes glare into mine. My head might be playing tricks, but I swear I think it’s smiling at me. And there’s a little faint whisper, but I can’t make out the words. How did Sabrina find this cat in the middle of a blackout? And out of all the names in the world, why Salem? Sabrina takes note in my quiet state and stops her rambling. “Ali?”

“Sabrina…” I say her name again, my eyes still glued on the feline stranger in our doorway, “where did you get that cat from?” Her mouth closes a little. She looks back at the cat, then turns to me. She goes to explain---

There’s a banging on the door. Salem growls and prances out to the living room. The sound of my heart beating fills my head, pulses in my ear drums. Sabrina whispers my name in slight panic. I slowly rise from the bed and step out in front of her. Is it Gladys outside? Or FP? Hiram, even? Or….oh no, what if it’s Hal? Does he even know where I am and why I’m back? I leave the bedroom, step by step, the banging on the door starting up again. Sabrina says my name again. “Wait here.” I tell her as I reach the front door. My head is still so foggy that I can’t make out any auras of whoever is on the other side of the door. I take a deep breath, the air still feeling sharp as it goes through my nostrils, and open the door. I stare at the person on the other side, my mouth hanging the moment I realize who this is.

“Wendy Beauchamp?” the man in a sheriff’s uniform speaks. I don’t respond right away because, well I’m shocked. It’s Tom Keller, the Riverdale ROTC golden child. When did Tom Keller become the sheriff? Does this mean trouble for me? For Sabrina? At least my memory spell hasn’t been broken by the events of last night, because he sees me as Wendy, not Alice. Praise Sa…..Go….. praise somebody. Not able to speak, I nod my head. Sabrina comes to my side, holding a fussy Salem.

“Morning, sir.” she greets him. “Is….is everything okay?” she stutters. Odd. Despite the tone in her voice, Keller doesn’t seem to pick up on it. He just smiles at us.

“You ladies are fine. Just doing a check-in with all the neighborhoods in Riverdale. Quite the nasty blackout we had last night.” He starts to take notice of the trailer. I look back at the living room, realizing that a lot of what Sabrina and I have unpacked is all over the floor. A mix of her clothes and mine. Some of her schoolbooks. My books on witchcraft. MY BOOKS ON WITCHCRAFT.

“Everything alright, Miss Beauchamp?” Keller regains my attention. Salem grumbles in Sabrina’s arms….it’s like he’s growling at Keller. The sound makes my senses act up. Salem makes the sound again, and Keller eyes the cat. “And who’s this little guy?”

“This?” Sabrina stands baffled, then continues, “Oh! Um….this is Salem. He’s uh….a……a stray. A stray cat I found.” Keller raises an eyebrow, and I don’t blame him. Her words come off disjointed. A shiver goes down my spine. Where did this cat come from?

“And how exactly did you find him in the middle of a blackout?” he asks the question that’s been in my head. I turn to Sabrina, hoping that I can read her thoughts if she is lying to Keller. That is, if I can clear my head up and get it together. A dull ache begins to form in my head. Sabrina is talking
to Keller, explaining her night…something about this Archie Andrews kid and FP’s son, and finding the cat while driving around town. Or Salem found her. I can’t concentrate on her words, the pain in my head is throbbing.

I wince and rest my hand against the door frame to keep myself steady. Sabrina stops her story and turns to me. She goes to open her mouth, then closes it. She can’t say my real name around Keller. It’s me who breaks the silence. “Sorry….my head….it’s….” I have to stop because the pain is getting worse. It’s the side of my head that’s aching, where I collapsed on the pavement last night. My vision blurs the slightest bit, almost sending me to the ground. Keller takes a hold of my bicep. I know it’s meant to be a helpful gesture…..but it doesn’t feel helpful. At least not the way….I can’t believe I’m saying this…..the way it felt with Hiram.

“Miss Beauchamp, you should sit down.” he states in concern. He takes a step closer, almost entirely in the trailer. His closeness, and Sabrina standing nearby with Salem, makes me claustrophobic. But I don’t have the energy or the willpower to fight back and tell him to leave. I let Keller guide me over to the kitchen table. I let him help me sit down. I stay at the table going numb. The window above me shoots out bright grey.

“Water glasses are in that cabinet over there!” I can hear Sabrina directing Keller in the kitchen. I can hear the clanking of a glass and the water running. Salem chirps again, another wave of pain numbs my head. My eyes turn from the window to the cat. Sabrina notices. “Al….Wendy. I’m going to take Salem outside. Would that be okay?” I meet her gaze, my mouth going dry. I blink, then turn back to the window.

“Think you probably should.” Keller’s voice responds. “And….if you are going to keep that cat around, make sure he gets everything he needs, food, water, vaccines. You get the gist….uh….sorry. I don’t think I ever got your name.”

“Sabrina!”

“Sabrina, okay. The name’s Sheriff Keller. I think you’re in the same class as my boy, Kevin! Well, you better go take care of that cat. And welcome to Riverdale.”

“Thank you, Mister Keller.” she tells him, then speaks to me. “I’m gonna be back, okay?” I don’t answer, I don’t even look at her. I don’t see her leave with Salem. The door slams shut. The ache in my head dies down, yet I still feel a sense of dread. Guilt. I haven’t even been here for more than two weeks, and I’m losing touch with Sabrina. I’m letting Zelda and Hilda down.

The glass of water drops onto the table. I inhale at the sound, seeing Keller sit down at the table across from me. “Hopefully this helps. You want me to get you any painkillers?” I let out unsteady breaths as I look down at the glass, my throat going dry again. I reach for the glass, taking a giant gulp of water. I almost choke on the liquid, coughing slightly. I set the glass down and look back up at Keller.

“This is fine.” I squeak out. I try to think of nonverbal spells to get rid of this ache, but I don’t want to make it obvious. Besides, I don’t need Tom Keller snooping through my personal items, even if he is the Sheriff. A bit of water stays on the corner of my mouth, and I wipe it away.

“I’ve been meaning to stop by the diner, by the way.” he brings up. “To try out a slice of one of your pies. Have they been treating you good over there?” I’m not sure how to reply at first. My hand stays wrapped around the water glass, my fingers tapping ever so slightly. Keller’s voice fills the space once more, “The customers, I mean.” I blink at him and bite my lip.

“They’re fine.” I force myself to say. To be honest, I don’t think I’ve had a bad experience at Pop’s
with rowdy customers. Except for that one kid who wanted the pie. Except for the chef who berated me before I even started my job. Except for… Hiram.

“Were they any customers with you and Pop last night when the blackouts happen?” I hear the question, but I stay silent. My mind goes back to last night. It’s coming back to me, clearer than before. Hiram is a witch, and Veronica is too. He wants Sabrina back in Greendale into the arms of the Church of Night. He remembers me. He knows what I am. And….and Hal is…..

“Hiram.” Saying his name feels like sand in my throat. I look Keller dead in the eye and my hands shake. “Hiram Lodge was there.” I can see images from last night cutting from one to another. Me losing control of my magic. Vomiting up whatever that stuff was. Snapping at Hiram. Feeling Hal embrace his new freedom. My eyes mist up. Hal is free. He’s out of that house, and I’m still here in this damn trailer like a damsel in distress. Like I’m waiting for someone, or something, to pick up my mess, wrap up my bandages, give me a kiss and tell me to get it together. I’ve spent the past 25 years of my life avoiding that fate, and now it’s a reality.

“So you met Oz, the great and powerful.” Keller snickers, I guess in an attempt to crack a joke and lighten the mood. It doesn’t. He continues, “Yeah….I don’t blame you for getting weary. I don’t want to speak ill of another person, since his daughter is pretty good friends with my son. But….” he leans forward, his forearms resting on the table. He sighs and gives me a sorrow expression, “if I’m going to speak honestly, Miss Beauchamp, I’d be careful around him. I went to high school with him, and….he was quite the little manipulator. Tends to get what he wants very easily.” Yeah, no shit, I think to myself. “Just don’t want you to be led astray. You seem like a nice woman…."

His voice trails off all of a sudden. He takes a moment to look at me….like, seriously look at me. His eyes stare deep into mine. Then they dart up to my hair, then down to my lips, then back up to my eyes. He tilts his head in wonder. What is his doing? He looks away in attempt to process my features. And I’m frozen in my seat shaking.

“I’m sorry, I just…..” he goes on to explain, having to pause every few words, “Your…..your eyes are just….well, your whole face really…. I think….. You look familiar. Part of me feels….like I’ve seen you before.” The words make me tense up. I start breathing heavily in through me nose, out through my mouth. My misty eyes get watery. The imaginary sand stuck in my throat becomes thicker. Is this a sign of my binding magic no longer working? Has Hal being set free breaking the spells I set on this town?

Keller blinks, then shakes his head. “Probably just mistaking you for someone else. Get a lot of faces in this town.” He gets up from the table and looks out the window. I shut my eyes and sigh in relief. Good, the memory spell still works….but for how much longer? Keller turns back to me, “I better go check in on everyone else in this neighborhood, and then the rest of Riverdale.” He lets out a long sigh. He turns on his heel and heads towards the front door. I don’t get up to direct him out. I don’t get up to offer a pastry, or a drink, or even a proper gesture of goodbye. I stay in my numb state. Keller gives me a sad smile, “Take it easy today, Miss Beauchamp. Hope to see you around.” And with that, he leaves.

The door shuts fully, and I can take off the mask. I exhale, my voice shaking, and my hands go up to my face, covering my mouth, my fingers resting between my brows. My chest vibrates as I start to sob. I wind up covering my whole face with my hands, my emotions bubbling from the surface. The weight of my past crippling me. And Sabrina still doesn’t know the truth. Sabrina has to know. Somebody…..ANYBODY, well, anybody but Hiram or that girl of his, or even Keller, somebody just has to know. The inner panic sets in. How long can I go on letting this trauma affect everything in my life? Is everything I worked so hard to build up falling apart?
The feeling of utter helplessness weighs me down. My forehead falls to the table. My tears stain my cheeks. My crying fills the silence.

SABRINA
Well, that was certainly a close call. The moment I take Salem outside, I set him to the ground and sigh in relief. I hate having to lie like that, especially to a Sheriff. I know I could have just used my magic to remove any memory of the words I said, or use some manipulation spell to have him turn around and walk away. But that’s something the Weird Sisters would do. It’s something Auntie Z or Hilda, or even Ambrose would do. I’m not them.

I hope Ali’s alright in there by herself with that Sheriff. She doesn’t look too well this morning. I still wonder how she got back to the trailer in this blackout. I wonder what caused her to pass out so early in the night. And why is Salem acting so weird around her?

“Penny dreadful for your thoughts, Sabrina?” Salem brushes up against my leg. I huff and walk down the steps of the trailer, stopping at the bottom and sitting down. My elbows land on my knees, my hands under my chin. Salem perches himself at my feet.

“Should I ask her about the Conway House?” I start thinking out loud. “Before you came to me last night, I saw symbols on the ground, in the dust. Somebody must have done a spell there years before. Maybe she might know about it.” Salem chirps in cat form and I can hear him laugh.

“Aunt Ali sure is something.” he throws out sarcastically. I roll my eyes.

“Come on, Salem.” I chastise my familiar. “I’ve known Ali for years. She’s one of the smartest and kindest witches I’ve met. I don’t get why you’re acting so…..” I stop for a second, looking for the right words to say, “fussy around her.” Salem sprawls out on the grass.

“I don’t disagree with you on her being a smart witch. Just think you have more potential.” His paws claw the air, like he’s trying to cut something in the air. I giggle and scratch his belly, feeling his silky fur between my fingers.

“I appreciate the compliment, but I don’t know enough about this town. About Ali’s past. And why…..” I trail off. My head finishes, And why Riverdale is not as supernatural as Greendale. V told me this town was a dead zone for magic. So how was Salem able to find me?

“So you survived Sheriff Keller’s raid?” a voice captures my attention. I look up to find Jughead walking over to me. I stand up to greet him, Salem getting up from his lazy position too. “Did he ask you about your whereabouts last night?” He tilts his head up to the front door.

“Not really.” I answer. “Did….did you say anything about the….house?”

“What? Hell no.” Jughead snorts. “I mean, I told him about the article I’m writing, but not about the nightly adventures. Let’s just hope Archie and Princess don’t tattle on us.” I know the last part was meant to make me laugh, but Jughead’s nickname for V leaves me a bit unsettled. If only he really knew the type of person she was. If anyone knew really….what she and I could do….

The door behind us opens. Sheriff Keller appears at the doorway to my trailer. “Take it easy today, Miss Beauchamp. Hope to see you around.” He shuts the door and heads down the stairs, seeing
us. “You two stay out of trouble until we figure out this whole matter.” he directs at us with a stern
look. “That means you, Mister Jones. And tell your sister the same message.” Jughead gives the
Sheriff a two finger salute and a smirk. Mr. Keller then looks at me, and in a kinder tone says,
“Remember what I told you about the cat, okay?” I nod at him. Salem growls. Sheriff Keller heads
over to his vehicle and drives off. The moment his car is officially off trailer park property, I
exhale. I guess I held my breath for a while.

“I meant to ask you, by the way,” Jughead speaks afterwards, “Did you find anything in there that
could help with the article?” I stay in my spot with my mouth hanging. Salem meows, and I look
down at him for a brief moment. Jughead still doesn’t fully know how I got Salem. I redirect my
gaze up to him.

“Not really.” I lie. “Just Salem, that’s all. But….nothing that will be good for your article.” I feel
horrible. While I got a new friend and a familiar, Jughead got nothing out of the trip. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t need to apologize. Maybe Veronica was right - the Riverdale Reaper is just another
conspiracy theory to hyperfixate on.” He goes quiet, his head lowering. Salem purrs in content by
my ankles. I look down at Salem again. He couldn’t have been the only thing to have come from
the Conway house….could he? My thoughts start going. An idea comes to me.

I reach for Jughead’s shoulders. “You said that there were more murders, right?” Jughead raises a
brow at me. I clarify, “That the Riverdale Reaper went after more than just the Conways? If…if he
did go after the Conways?” Salem squacks in confusion.

Jughead finally catches onto my idea. “What are you suggesting?” I let go of his shoulders and
continue, my thoughts taking reign.

“V told me that Riverdale was no place for anything supernatural….or, to hold ghosts like you had
suggested. But….what if….what if there is? And it’s just not in the Conway home? Maybe…..it’s
where these other murders happened? Who says the Conway Massacre has to be our only source of
information for your article on the Reaper?” He stays in his place not responding for a moment.
Then, a wide grin forms on his face. He lifts a finger up at me in delight.

“Something tells me you came into Riverdale for a reason.” he exclaims. He’s partially right, I
come to Riverdale for a very important reason, but not the one that’s on his mind. Nevertheless, I
don’t think me jumping in to help and to share the same interests as him is purely a coincidence. “I
knew you’d get it. I thought the same thing too at first, but the web wasn’t giving me much luck.”
He lowers his finger at the last sentence. I can see him losing hope, then a thought comes to him.
His face lights up.

“But that’s what small town libraries full of small town histories are for! Do you have a laptop on
you?” My mouth hangs, I’ve never actually had my own tablet of any kind. I’m lucky that Aunties
even let me have a phone. Jughead waves his hand, “That’s fine. We can use one of the desktops at
the library. Just….go ahead and grab anything to write notes on, and meet me back out here in five
minutes!”

He pats me on the shoulder and sprints back over to his trailer. I smile at his excitement. Below
me, Salem growls. “I’d be careful about that one.” he tells me in a concerning tone. “He’s going to
get into some serious trouble if he keeps falling down the wrong rabbit holes.” I take a deep breath
and glare down at Salem, my hands resting on my hips.

“Why? You afraid he’s going to dig something up about you?” I joke. He slaunches down onto the
grass and flails his paw into the air, hissing at Jughead’s trailer. “Besides….don’t you think it’s
strange that out of all the supernatural stuff we could have found, you were the only resident of that
house?”

Salem stretches out, then rolls onto the grass. “What can I say? I’m one of a kind.” He tilts his head and winks at me.

I shake my head. “Such a drama queen, Salem.” I head back up the stairs and open the door. The kitchen is empty. The living room is still in the same condition I left it this morning. And Ali is nowhere to be found. “Ali?” I call out. I leave the door ajar and glance around. I hear a faint sob coming from the bedroom. I take a couple of steps towards the bedroom door, which has been shut tight. I press my ear up against the door….why is Ali crying? Did Sheriff Keller say something to her that made her upset? I’m tempted to call out her name again, but I don’t want to startle her. The same way I was hesitant to tell her about the Conway House and finding Salem earlier. I want to share this information, but…. This whole trip to Riverdale, I guess, is making her so unhappy. I know she’s come back to help watch over me, but it’s hurting her. I’ve never witnessed her in this much upset before. It makes me feel so helpless.

I can’t keep Jughead waiting, though. Or Salem. Whatever history of Riverdale can help explain the unsolved murders, maybe it can explain what made Ali leave. Having to make up my mind, I hurry back over to the living room area, eyeing my school supplies and Dad’s charm on the floor. I slip the amulet around my neck, grab a notebook and my backpack, and head over to the kitchen table, tearing out a piece of paper. I reach for a pen and scribble out a note for Ali. I pin it on the fridge, hopefully she sees it…..if she does come back out. I shouldn’t be at the library to too long, I reason, because….what if she does something and needs me? I fumble with the charm as I take one last breath staring at the bedroom door. Then, sliding the backpack over my shoulders, I head out.

XXXXXXXX

ALICE

I eventually wind up in the bathroom. The weight of my pain, my tears, becomes an overload. I get up from my place and slaunter into the bedroom, slamming the door shut behind me. My feet drag me into the bathroom, my fingers flicker on the little light above me - I could have used magic, but is it worth the risk of another nausea attack? I sob out loud, the sound of my cries echoing in the silence. My hands grip the sink, my tears platter onto the ceramic, my mind replays memories like a broken movie reel. I look at my reflection in the mirror. My eyes are red. My cheeks bloated. My skin pale. The brunette roots of my hair starting to show through the nest that is my current blonde. I look ill.

My sobbing fit goes on. I think I hear the front door open. Someone calls for me, but I don’t make an effort to see who is waiting for me outside. The footsteps go away, the front door slams shut. The loneliness settles in once more. I think I’m getting hoarse from all this useless wailing, but I can’t stop. What was I thinking of coming back here? Why did I explode at Hiram like that? And Sabrina….why am I not doing better by Sabrina?

Because you’re a coward, Alice, another voice in my head replies. A voice that stands out, one that agonizes me. All you know how to do is run away. All you know is to bury secrets like dead bodies. The only person you’re hiding from is yourself. I stare at myself in the mirror, and he’s there. He smiles that smile at me. His eyes twinkle. His teeth like daggers.

I scream. I violently push myself away, and the mirror cracks. I turn my head. He’s not there. Just
my head playing tricks on me. I look back at the now cracked mirror. Guilt sets in. So does regret, doubt, rage, fear…. I can’t keep living like this. I stumble out of the bathroom, out of the bedroom, letting my body lead me into the kitchen. There’s a note on the table, next to my still full glass of water.

*Going to the town library with Jughead. Will be back later. Call me if you need me.*

I pick the note up and devour each letter. Take in every little detail. She drew a heart next to the last sentence. I can feel it now, she was the one who came in. My fears of letting the Spellmans down take control. The letter crumbles a bit in my hands. Maybe that voice was right. All I do is keep secrets. Stay to myself. I’m leading Sabrina into danger by not telling her the truth…..

I turn to the living room. Sabrina’s notebooks and school supplies are on the floor. I slam the note down and grab for a notebook, my knees dropping to the carpet. I tear out a sheet of paper….multiple. My hand shakes as I click the pen open. I ramble in my words. My handwriting wobbles all over the place. I can’t make a coherent sentence. I have to keep crossing out words, putting lines through unfinished sentences, writing until I cover every corner and blank space on that page, and the other side. My tears fall onto the sheet, smudging up the ink. My fingers make the paper crinkle, the edges starting to rip. I’m caught up in a toxic trance that I don’t hear someone pounding on the door. My breathing goes heavy. My eyes bulge. My mouth stays open in fear.

“Hey! You alive in there, Alice?” I close my mouth and let a tear stream down. It’s Gladys. GLADYS. Maybe…..could she…..can I trust her? “Don’t worry, Cowboy Sheriff’s gone. It’s just me.”

I rush to a standing position, my vision blackening a bit from my blood running, and I shake as I twist the door handle open. Gladys doesn’t have her Pop’s uniform on, or her Serpent jacket. She’s in one of FP’s flannels and an old band t shirt. She doesn’t see my pained expression at first when she speaks to me, “Diner isn’t opening until later, but I didn’t know if Pop already told you---” she stops when she finally looks at me. My breathing becomes like huffing with this crying. I almost forget I have my unfinished confession to Sabrina in my hand. Gladys grows scared for me. “Woah….what the hell? Are you okay?” she takes a step towards me, her hand resting on my upper arm. I wince, not out of fear of her coming into the trailer, but fear in what might come out of my mouth. What I might end up saying to her.

“Gladys…. I….” I can’t finish. I teeter back a bit, scaring her. Gladys fully enters the trailer and shuts the door before she takes a soft but steady hold of me.

“Hey, what did Keller say to you?” she asks. I try to tell her it was nothing, that this episode has nothing, well not entirely, to do with Keller. “Okay, FP and I just wanted to make sure. We didn’t hear anything from you after the blackout last night. And….Pop called and said he can’t get the diner up and running. He wanted to see if you were okay, too.” I almost forgot Pop saw me in my panic attack last night. He was there too. I go to ask why, but the words are stuck in the quicksand formed in my throat. Gladys goes on, “Apparently….you fainted?”

“Not just that.” I sound weak. It was more than just fainting. If only she knew what else my body underwent.

“And….he said something….something about Hiram Lodge being there.” The sound of his name makes me stiff. My spine straighten. My eyes grow at her. She looks confused for a second. “Well….Pop said that he….got you away from Pop’s. It didn’t make sense to me at first, but then I remembered. After FP and I returned from our date, a little bit after the blackout before Jug and your girl came back….he was here. In this trailer park. He was carrying you.”
I’m stunned. I stare off into the distance in shock. It was Hiram who brought me back here. He got me out of Pop’s and brought me back into the messy comfort of this trailer. And….that sigil. Did he draw that? What does it mean? Why did Hiram do this? My eyes water up. My spirit crumbling.

Gladys goes from being concerned to pissed off. “Jesus. If Hiram tried to do anything to you, let alone lay one goddamn finger on you, I swear I’ll march my ass over to Pembrooke, and---”

“NO!” I stop her, the loudness of my own voice startling the both of us. I place my hands on her shoulders, my note now wedged between my palm and her shoulder, and sniffle. “No…. This doesn’t have to do with Hiram. Not entirely.” I have to stop before I go any further.

Normally, a witch would never confess to their identities to any regular human. It’s seen as taboo, potentially putting that witch and their community in danger. Well, I never felt like I belonged with the Church of Night. And as far as I know, Sabrina, Hiram, and maybe Veronica are the only witches to put in danger. But not because of confessing, but because of my own secrets. If anyone had to learn the truth of what I am and what happened to me, you would say I’d choose FP….but not yet. I don’t have the slightest clue as to tell him what happened to me. So for now, Gladys is the lucky winner on the horrific game show that is my tragic life.

I swallow the lump building in my throat. Then, I lead Gladys into the bedroom, walk her over to the bed, and sit her down, my note falling into her lap. She makes an effort to ask what’s going on, but I’m not listening. I leave her and the note there as I go to shut the bedroom door. The wood feels smooth on my palms. I rest my forehead against the door, breathing becoming more and more difficult. There’s a stillness in the air.

“Alice…..who’s Hal?”

My forehead comes off the door. I slowly turn my head. Gladys looks up from my note up to me. I’m not sure if she’s mortified or on the verge of tears. Maybe even both. But it’s an expression that I figured would be long coming. I take a deep breath and push myself away from the door. I face her for a second, and my eyes go down to my feet. Where do I begin?

I speak. “There are some secrets…..that are so painful,” I walk towards her with careful steps, “you not only hide them from the world……but you hide them from yourself.” I stop, my mind searching for the rest of the words. Gladys rises from the bed and comes closer, stopping about an inch from me. She places her hands on my shoulders, I tear up again. I look into her eyes, “25 years ago…..I did something awful. And…..and it made me do these…..awful things…..it made me leave Riverdale, leaving FP behind…..and I’ve had to keep it a secret…..so NO ONE would know what happened. I wanted it to stay in the past…..but coming back here……for Sabrina…..” I start to hyperventilate. This is probably the first time in 25 years that I have owned up to my demons. The first time I’ve opened the wounds I patched up. I fought to keep my past with Hal and with Riverdale in the past. Well, the past is certainly catching up to bite me now.

“Hey….hey hey hey, Alice, look at me.” Gladys brings her hands to my face and brings her forehead against mine. The gesture is soothing….but not enough to calm this tension down.

“Breathe with me, okay? Smell the daisies. Blow out the candles.” I follow her instructions, taking a deep breath in, letting it out. She has me doing it for a couple more times. “You can do it. Daisies and candles.” she reminds me. Once I’m calmer, she lets go of my face, taking my hands into hers.

“Whatever…..” she starts up, “whatever you have to get off your chest….whatever sin you think you need to confess to…. I’ll hear you out….. And I won’t tell anybody else…..not even FP, unless you want me to---”

“No…” I interrupt, “Not yet.” I go quiet again.
“Okay, I won’t tell him.” she responds. “I think you’re a good person, Alice. Regardless of whatever it is you’re about to tell me. And I want to help you. But…..” she pauses. I grow the slightest bit panicked. She sighs and continues, “but you gotta tell me everything, okay? There’s a thing that FP and I say to the kids - “No more secrets. No more lies.” It’s cheesy, I know….but it works. So can you do that for me, Alice? Can you tell me the full truth? Everything you can remember from the beginning?”

I swallow another building lump. No more secrets, no more lies, it’s a motto I never thought about, even when processing my own thoughts. But Gladys is right - the only way I can ever move on from this…..maybe the only way I can help Sabrina is to break down the walls I built around myself. It may not be Sabrina or FP that I’m confessing to….but telling Gladys is a good place to start.

I take one more final breath, looking straight into her eyes. “No more secrets. No more lies.”

I tell her everything. I tell her about being a half-witch, and a half-Serpent. I tell her about going to the Conway House that Halloween night, and about Hal. I tell her of the classmates I hurt, of those Hal killed, and of those I tried so hard to save. I tell her of binding him, placing the memory spell on Riverdale, and leaving without giving FP the goodbye he deserved. I tell her of my life on the run as a nomadic witch, finding my way to Greendale, working in the bakery, and how I met Sabrina. I tell her of the Dark Baptism, the real reason for Sabrina coming here and me having to return. And….I tell her of what really happened last night. And how my worst fears are coming true.

“And….and now he’s out.” my voice is starting to go out, but I need to finish my confession strong. “Hal is out of the house again, and I don’t know who went there and broke my spell. I don’t know if it was Sabrina, or another witch Hiram hired, or someone from Greendale….but…..” But what? I think to myself. If it was Sabrina or someone else, how would I know? How would I go about finding this person, Hal’s new victim, and explain to them that he should not be trusted? But what if he already began to corrupt that poor witch? How could I help them if it's already too late?

“I’m lost.” I confess with a sob. “I feel so goddamn helpless. And I don’t know what I’d do if Hal ever found Sabrina and hurt her. Or anyone else. I don’t want anyone to repeat the same mistakes I did, because what I did….what I have to do…...it hurts. Everyday I think about what I went through…..and…..and I can’t make those thoughts go away. I can’t heal this pain. I just keep letting everyone down. The Spellmans. My classmates. Even FP…..” I think about the words that taunted my brain in those minutes before Gladys showed up. The horrible, intrusive thoughts…..they come out of my mouth. “I’m a coward. All I know how to do is run away. Bury my secrets like they’re dead bodies. The only person I’m running from….is myself.”

I end my speech. My cheeks are stained from dried tears, and newly formed tears. My throat scratches. And yet, a makeshift weight….at least a little bit, has been lifted from my shoulders. I wipe my tears away to distract the nasty thoughts running through. But it’s quiet. Too silent. I look at Gladys…..she’s motionless sitting on my bed. Her expression is blank. It’s making me concerned.

“Gladys?” I utter her name. She remains staring out into nothing. My anxiety flares. “Gladys….please just say something!” She looks at me, her face still expressionless. She lets out a long sigh, clamping her mouth shut rather quick.

“Well, Alice…..I can’t really say I’m surprised.” My heart races. What is that supposed to mean? I go to open my mouth, but she clarifies, “About you being a witch.” My lips form a tight line. The rapid beating of my heart slows. She knew what I was? How? I never tried to make it that obvious,
neither did Sabrina. I stand there in confusion. She gets up from the bed and makes some hand gesture at the clothes on the floor. “No offense, but….your whole hippie wardrobe kind of says it. And….I saw some of the books you and Sabrina had lying around….about spells and all those herbal remedies.” Her hands fall in front of her, the back of one hand resting on the other’s palm. She looks down, eyeballing her wrist. Her wrist….she has Ourosboros on it.

Gladys pulls back the cuff of the flannel and her hairbands, revealing the tattoo once more, and holds it up to me. She walks over to allow me a closer glance. “Also,” she sighs once she approaches me, “out of everyone on the Southside….no one that I’ve met knows what this means. Not even FP really knows…..But you did.” She lowers her wrists a bit, and I reach out for it. The tip of my fingernail traces the outline of the snake. She said it had something to do with her family. Her life in Toledo…. WAIT…. Does…..does it mean that….

“Did your daddy ever tell you the history of the Serpents?” Gladys mutters. “You ever learn how they wound up in Riverdale? How they formed?” I stare at her blankly. I never had a good relationship with my dad. My initiation process left me so weak that I don’t think I ever bothered to learn about Serpent history. I don’t think I ever really wanted to identify as a Serpent. Even after I left town. But now…. There had to be a reason Gladys left Toledo to spend her adult life here, start a family with FP. That tattoo can’t just be some family heirloom.

“Okay.” Gladys takes my hand and walks me back over to the bed. “You confessed your truth. Guess it’s my turn.” She plops down next to me, trying to think of the right words to say. My gaze is still on her tattoo. The more I stare at it, I think the more I realize I’ve seen it somewhere in my books. Somewhere that explains some history of witchcraft…..but where exactly? My eyes go from staring at the tattoo to her face. She exhales and starts her account of Serpent history.

“The thing about retelling history, and explaining the origins of certain groups….a lot gets left out simply due to the lack of information….or people who just don’t feel like owning up to their history. What tends to get left out in the history of witchcraft and the covens that were formed back then is those groups…..those witches that were marginalized. Non-white Native American witches, if we’re going to be honest. Not only were their tribes getting wiped out by European settlers…..but they were getting persecuted by their own people. They saw these witches as “nonpersons” or “dead”. When Native American tribes were dealing with European settlers before the colonies were formed, they feared that these witches in their communities would bring more strife….break the traditions and the lifestyle they worked on to preserve. You thought the Salem Witch Trials in Massachusetts caused an uproar? What went down in these tribes was just as ugly….if not, even worse.” I stay silent, my thoughts wandering. I’m stunned that I never read about these tidbits in my own history books on witchcraft. I don’t think I ever saw any of this in the books Sabrina and her aunts own.

Gladys goes on, “So with the colonies getting established, and the influx of slaughters happening, these Native Americans grew more paranoid….they became more determined to weed out those who had the craft for the sake of nativism. It dwindled down their population even more. The roots of ancient witchcraft and their mythologies getting erased. But not all of it. Those who did survive the persecutions….they banded together. Moved up north and found a new home. They realized that the only way they could survive what was coming for them, they had to create something powerful….use a symbol that could bring them the protection they needed.” She pauses, lifting her wrist up, the tattoo more prominent than ever.

“The Uktena is what the Cherokee call a Horned Serpent. It’s a dragon-like creature that resides in the water. Its features and size are what make people afraid to go near it. Those who were brave enough to go and slay one of these bad boys….there have only been myths and stories. But this creature is so deadly….it’s rare to survive going after it. These Native witches looked up to the
Uktena as a symbol of unity.....a deity to put it in witch-terms. So, they formed a coven around this creature, created laws, built families and values....they did this to protect themselves from the world. They didn’t start letting any other outsiders in.....white settler witches to clarify.....until around the 1800s. White families who displayed the same values, practiced the same craft, became allies of the Uktena. They were allowed to initiate in, perform the rituals.....just as long as they upheld the laws of the coven.

“Problem is with letting outsiders in….there will be those who want to branch out. Rework the core values that fit their own needs. And that happened to the coven. When Thomas Topaz, a descendant of the founders, and a group of white Uktena members came to Riverdale in its founding in the 1940s, they came for the purpose of expanding the Uktena’s territory.....finding other witches that could join. Well.....one of those members got power hungry and.....decided to shake things up. Thomas Topaz went back to where the Uktena were located....”


“Yeah.....the Uktena’s homebase is Toledo.” she gives a soft smile. “But when Thomas went back....the others didn’t go back. They realized they could form their own version. Find whoever they wanted. Change the values and traditions.....” she goes quiet, her smile fading. My heart breaks for her. She seems so rooted, so connected to family. How did she get stuck here? “It wasn’t just Riverdale that these warped factions of the Uktena were popping up in. It was happening all over. When the Uktena heard wind, they were half-tempted to destroy these factions from the inside out. Excommunicate these families that had nothing to do with these outbreaks. The only way these families could still prove their loyalty was if they sent out family members....those who upheld the values, to try and change the factions. To bring them back to the ways of the Uktena.” Her fingers curl into her palm. I’m still in a state of shock, but it all makes sense now.

“That’s why you came here?” I throw out the question. “Your family....they sent you to represent the coven?”

“Pretty much.” she answers, the tone of her voice growing sadder. Nostalgic. “My family’s built a strong alliance with the Uktena for decades. They’ve held the same values.....did the same rituals.....and the craft.....well, my family’s got the craft in their blood.....” And you? I want to ask. The answer is obvious before she says it out loud, “I didn’t get so lucky in that department.” She shuts her eyes, I can see a tear coming down one side. I’m speechless. A family full of magic and she’s the only one that doesn’t have an ounce of it in her? But she’s so loyal, so dedicated....

Gladys wipes the tear away and continues, “I heavily considered just going back to Toledo a few months after coming here. The way the Serpents acted when I showed up.....the tattoo I got on my back, I had to get it here so I could blend in.... I felt lost. I knew I didn’t belong. But I had to keep reminding myself that I was here for a purpose. That my lack of witchcraft shouldn’t diminish my loyalty to the Uktena. So I stayed....for my family back in Toledo....” her voice waivers, her eyes getting misty. “Besides.....if I had gone back....I never would have met FP. Jughead and Jellybean wouldn’t even been in our lives..... Still.....” She stops. I guess the thought of her family both here and in Toledo scares her. I don’t mean to, but I read her mind. She’s bound by family to be here. She wanted to find happiness, which she did with FP, because....he was just as at-war with himself as she was coming here. In a way.....she’s just like me. Stuck making choices for the sake of family. And having to look at a tattoo everyday to remind herself....

A realization hits me. My free hand goes to my upper thigh. I forgot I still have my Serpent tattoo, after all these years. It’s a snake in an S-form taking up the space of my lower hip and upper thigh. SOUTHSIDE is printed in between the curves. Even through the fabric, I can feel the outline on my finger tips. Where the snake starts, where the words end.....the patch of my skin that burned
when I tried to have it removed….when Hal tried to remove it.

I never really brought up my Serpent tattoo to Hal much. He knew of it. He saw it when we had sex. He never had a real good look at it until one night when we were in bed. I could feel the tinge of his power, his demonic nature, vibrate through me when he traced his fingers along the outline.

“How old were you when you got this?” his question pierced through the silence between us. It had been a long day, and even after our time together, I was drained. Exhausted. It was the last thing on my mind. I sighed and turned more into him.

“A couple of days after my initiation.” I responded. I got it about three or four days after my ill-fated 13th birthday that bound me to the Serpents. The memories of that night, the song I had to dance to, the coldness of the pole that chilled my half-naked body, still haunted me. It made me hate everyone in that gang, and it made me hate myself. “I wanted to get it where I knew no one else would have to see it. Where I don’t have to see it.” I could hear him snicker against me. His thumb pressed against the head of the snake, on my hip bone.

“Then why do you still have it?” he went into a deep tone that spooked me a little. I saw his eyes glowing in the darkness of my room. I had to turn away from him, even though his thumb was still pressed against my tattoo. He went on, “You know I can get rid of it for you, if it is making you that unhappy.”

“It’s not just that, Hal.” I huffed, staring up at my ceiling fan. He made a valid point - I was unhappy with this ink permanently on my body. I could get it removed….but I didn’t know how. I didn’t know enough spells at that time to remove something major like that, nor did I know of anyone that could aid me. He must of read my thoughts, because he brought his fingers to my jawline, gently tilting my head down to meet his gaze. His eyes were determined….mysterious. His mouth was in a straight line. His fingers went back down to my tattoo, pressing down harder.

“You know what I’m capable of, baby.” he spoke calmly, yet his fingers radiated with an aggressive heat. A burning sensation that made my flesh and bone feel raw. “I came to you because I wanted to take away your pain. And clearly…. ” his fingers pressed down harder, my skin felt like it was on fire. “This is bringing you pain.”

I moved his hand away from that area of my body, the burning sensation fading. I led it up to my waist and curled up more into him. I was too tired in that moment to go through that. “Not now, Hal.” I mumbled into his shoulder. “Let me sleep on it.”

It wouldn’t be the last time he offered to take the thing off me. Before it all went wrong, before the car crash that set up Hermione Gomez’s fate, Hal did make an attempt to remove it. His hand burned the area of flesh where the Serpent’s head was. Where the word SOUTHSIDE started. It made me scream, my skin was red and bubbling, the ink felt like hot wax. Poison. It hurt me to the point that I had to yell at him to stop. That I pushed him away. He said the tattoo was causing me pain…..but he was causing me pain too. Only I realized the latter too late.

I forget sometimes it’s there. I don’t like changing in front of mirrors much, so I only see the tattoo when I lay in the bath, or slide on undergarments. It feels more like a dirty little secret more than a memory of my past. I’m quick to cover it so I don’t get reminded of him, or of Riverdale. I don’t want to look at the scar Hal left. I can still feel the burn every once in a while, but only if I think about it. And now I’m thinking about it.

A little heat comes from that area. I can feel it now through the fabric of my uniform. It’s not painful, but it is irritating. I let go of Gladys and stand up, heading into the bathroom at half speed. I realize I haven’t properly examined the tattoo in days. Months. I never thought to look at it until
now. Is it acting up again because of his release? Is my mind just playing a cruel trick to make me more paranoid? My fingers curl at the hem of my uniform, and I slowly raise the skirt, up my thigh, up my hip, holding the fabric in a ball at my ribcage. Through the cracks of the mirror, I glance in horror.

The snake is still there. Where the head once was is an irritated patch of black and red. SIDE is the only full word, the SOUTH part having been violently burned too. Everything else is still intact, yet… The ink of this tattoo. Something’s off with the ink. I figure my tattoo would have started to fade right now, but the ink is standing out. What was black is almost now a mirage of black, blue, purple, and blood red. There are black veins sprouting from the sides. The same color as what came out of me last night. I swear the ink is pulsing along with my heartbeat. I have no words. I feel all emotions. It’s frightening and beautiful.

Gladys appears on the corner of my reflection, standing at the doorway. I release the fabric of my skirt and turn to her. She must have seen enough of the tattoo, because I can see the fear in her eyes. Her gaze goes from where my tattoo is back up to my face. “Did….did he do that to you?”

Another wave of tears stream down my face. Half in amazement that I told Gladys the whole truth, and half in agony that I really noticed my tattoo for the first time in a while, my emotions slip from my control. Daisies and candles, I tell myself. Daisies and candles. I can’t believe that Gladys hasn’t run away, or told me that I’m lunatic or a monster for what I did. And she’s willing to keep this secret…even from FP, at least until I’m ready to admit the truth to him. I stare at the other woman in front of me, seeing into her past, her present….

I’ve never allowed myself to make many friendships since leaving Riverdale. Despite how long I’ve known Sabrina and her family, I don’t consider Hilda or Zelda to be true, close friends, not even Ambrose. Sabrina is the only one of the bunch I’m close with because of her innocent nature, I see myself in her. Sabrina’s the closest I’ve had to a family….a friend…. It finally occurs to me how lonely I am. How helpless I am on my own trapped by my demons. Stuck in the past. It dawns on me. Maybe Gladys is my friend. My first real friend in a real long time.

I walk over to Gladys and throw my arms around her, letting myself melt in a tight embrace. I sob into her shoulder as she holds onto me. She’s crying too, I can feel the tears against my shoulder. Maybe I did make the right choice by telling Gladys. Maybe it was a good thing she told me about the true history of the Serpents…and that we have both gone through hell for the sake of family. We’ve been through a lot on our own, only having FP and our roots to the Serpents as a common denominator. But sharing our truths has brought us closer now. And I need somebody to hold me accountable. To keep me going. To help me move past this.

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SABRINA
The crisp morning air chills me as Jughead, Salem, and I walk through town to get to the library. Salem’s still a little weary of Jughead, so he stays along the outskirts, brushing up against the outer part of my leg, reminding me of his presence. Jughead spends our time walking rattling off ideas for the article. He’s thinking about looking up other notorious serial killers and using that information to track down the Riverdale Reaper’s pattern.

At least that’s the gist I got from only half-listening. My mind is still on Ali back in the trailer. Crying in the bedroom all by herself. I’ve never heard her sound that upset. I don’t think I ever
have witnessed Ali in so much distress. She always seemed to have a smile on her face. Even when customers at her bakery were rowdy and childish, she still greeted every one of them the same. She had such a glimmer in her eyes. But now that I look back on it….there’s a tint of sadness in her gaze. A tired, broken record projecting her voice. A mask she has to wear each day.

I think Ali is depressed, and has been since the day I met her. She fights to wear a brave face, but she’s hurting. She goes to the same parties as me, but she just wants to retreat into the walls she’s built and let no one in. And….I think being back in Riverdale and going through places that remind her of her past is weighing down on her. She’s so sad….and I don’t know what to do to make her happy. I don’t know how to help her.

“Hello? Hello? Earth to Sabrina?” Jughead waves at me, snapping me out of my thoughts. I shake my head straight, then turn to him. “You okay?”

“Sorry, Jug. I….I was thinking about Aunt Ali.” I admit to him, letting out a sigh. “I didn’t get much of a chance to check in with her this morning before Sheriff Keller showed up.”

“Yeah, law enforcement isn’t too friendly with us over on the Southside.” Jughead snickers. “Not that I’m identifying myself as a Serpent! But still…..they’re part of family. Even if they’re not blood.” he trails off, shoving his hands into his pockets. He gets back onto the subject of Ali, “Why? Did she get sick last night or something?” I face the road in front of me. Did Ali get sick? Was that why she wasn’t up when I came back?

“To be honest….I don’t really know.” I confess. The thoughts of her state of emotional being enter my brain again. I continue, “She’s just been……not like herself since we came here. She has this look of sorrow whenever we go somewhere she knew about. The job at Pop’s gets her interacting with people, but she still gets so quiet……” I pause for a moment, looking back at Jughead. And then there’s Ali and Jughead’s dad…..and whatever history they have. But I don’t say that out loud. “I think that whatever happened to her all of those years ago is hitting her extremely hard. But she doesn’t want to tell me because….because……” I stutter. Why hasn’t Ali still told me about her life here? Why hasn’t she told me what caused her to leave? What is making her so sad?

Salem’s tail curls around my calf, which takes my mind off the negativity of the conversation. Jughead’s voice echoes, “Maybe she just needs some time to get used to it all. Being back in Riverdale again.”

“Maybe.” I look down at Salem and allow myself to smile a bit. With one motion, I scoop Salem into my arms and he meows. “What do you think?” I speak directly to him, causing Jughead to laugh in the background. “You think I can help Aunt Ali out?”

“Well……” Salem sighs in frustration, “you know my opinions about the woman. Besides…..it’s gonna take her a while to get over this….thing that happened.” His word choice confuses me a little. I raise my brow at him. “So I suggest you just let her be and keep to yourself.”

“Whatever.” I roll my eyes and let Salem free. Jughead shoots me a perplexed look.

“So you’re a part-time cat whisperer? Any other weird facts I need to learn about you?” he teases. I cackle and trot down the road. We continue on our path for a bit longer until we get through downtown. Realizing that neither one of us grabbed breakfast at the trailer park before heading out, Jughead and I make a quick stop to a coffee shop close by the library. The shop is a little smaller than Ali’s bakery, and not as bright and colorful. There’s teens everywhere. I’m shocked that this little place is open after the blackouts, and not Pop’s. Luckily, Jughead and I are able to squeeze in and grab ourselves a drink and a small pastry. We’re about to leave this shop when someone stops us.
“Sabrina!” a voice halts us. I turn to find a boy hurrying over to me. I stare at him for a bit….have I seen him before? “Sabrina, that’s your name, right?” I nod, trying to figure out where I’ve seen this person. He’s got a Bulldog letterman jacket on. A teammate of Archie’s? But I haven’t seen him with Archie, or V. His dark hair doesn’t give me much to work with, but his face….his face looks familiar. And so does the sound of his voice. It hits me. The boy from Pop’s that was angry about the pies. The boy that led Ali to get her job.

“You probably don’t remember, but…..” the pie boy stutters, “look, I really just wanted to say….that I’m sorry for how I treated you….and your mom that day at Pop’s. Wait---no, not your mom, legal guardian….”

“Yeah!” I clarify for him, my anxious mood fading away at this boy’s kindness. “And you’re totally okay! She’s not mad….if that’s what you were wondering.”

“Good.” he exhales in relief. Another thought comes to him. He takes a moment to extend his hand out to me. “Sorry. I don’t think I had the chance to introduce myself. Moose Mason.” I take his hand in awe…..a boy named Moose? Must be a nickname like Jughead, or something.

“MOOSE!” a new voice breaks our moment. Coming into my peripheral vision, a short girl with pixie brown hair latches onto to Moose….wait. It’s Midge Klump, the head of the River Vixens. She let me onto the team….well, she was reluctant until V convinced her to allow me to join. Not paying attention to Jughead or me, she looks up to Moose, “Worried that you ran off, sweetie.” She smiles at him, and I realize that Moose is her boyfriend. Midge then acknowledges my presence, her smile fading into a smirk. “Oh. Hi, Sabrina.”

I wave to her uncomfortably. “Hi Midge. Don’t worry….Moose was just apologizing for what happened at Pop’s. Nothing major.”

“Fair enough.” she gives me a quick answer. Moose, a little on edge, turns down to his girlfriend.

“I’m gonna get the car started, okay, babe?” he mumbles. The two kiss and he leaves, bidding farewell to Jughead behind me. The door clanks shut, and Midge huffs.

“Sorry. Moose tends a little flaky.” she watches her boyfriend go before redirecting her gaze at me….and surprisingly at Jughead too. “I hope….that he wasn’t interrupting your date with Jughead.”

The comment causes my mouth to hang. Jughead gets defensive behind me, saying that we’re not together. I jump in to ease the tension, “Oh no! We’re not…. I’m just…. I’m helping Jughead out with an article. For the Blue and Gold.” I stop talking. Midge tilts her head slightly, one eye brow raised.

“So you’re also with the Blue and Gold?”

“In case you were curious, Midge,” Jughead comes over next to me as he addresses the other girl, “It’s the 50th Anniversary of the Riverdale Reaper murders, and it’s important information to get out to the town. I wouldn’t be able to tackle it all on my own---”

“Which is why I’m helping!” I finish his thought. “And I know some sources from Gree….from where I came from, that could maybe connect some missing pieces. Find any new information that could explain how the Reaper could get away with it.” Midge remains silent, glaring back and forth between us. Salem chirps, grabbing all of our attention. I almost forgot Salem was here too.

Midge smiles a tiny bit. “Such a pretty kitty.” she coyly comments before she speaks to me again,
“Sounds interesting….this article. Hopefully it doesn’t consume much of your time….with schoolwork and everything. And Vixens practice.” Her tone leaves me unsettled. I was little intimidated by Midge when I met her, but I….I had no idea she would be in this demeanor. But how would she be any different from Prudence Blackwood? Or the other Weird Sisters?

Jughead leans in. “I’m….gonna go wait outside.” He gives a little wave to Midge before he leaves. I’m still by the doorway, Midge looming over me, Salem keeping me anchored by my feet. Midge takes a step in and sighs.

“Look, Sabrina…..” she begins, making an effort to sound sympathetic. “I know you’re the new girl. I know you haven’t had much time to adjust to Riverdale High culture. It’s tempting to want to join every club you can. Expand your boundaries.” She stops for a second, working out the words in her head. She doesn’t need to say it, I know where this conversation is going. “I only want to make sure you don’t lose sight of your priorities. Everyone’s priorities are different, of course….mine just happens to be the Vixens. I’ve worked very hard to become the Head Vixen, and I want to see all my girls do well. Even you.” She takes another step in, placing a hand on my shoulder. Salem growls at this touch. My breathing slows a bit. Midge purses her lips together before continuing, “I’m willing to put forth effort to help you become a great addition to the team….you just have to put in the same effort. Okay?” I zone out for a second, holding my breath. She didn’t have to say it, but it’s obvious - she doesn’t want me being distracted by this article with Jughead. With hesitation, I nod. Midge smiles and releases her hand from my shoulder.

“I better go find Moose. See you around, girl!” she perks up before walking past me, letting the door fly open as she leaves. I let go of that breath and hang my head. Salem’s tail curls at my ankle.

“Wow….what a bitch.” Salem comments. “Glad to know the Vixens haven’t changed.” My head lifts a little. How would my familiar trapped in an old house know anything about cheerleaders? Let alone how they behaved? I look down at Salem, his bright eyes have a little mischievous tint to them.

“How do you know about the Vixens?” I inquire.

“Let’s just say that being around Riverdale for a while has…..educated me on the kind of people that reside here.” His tail releases my ankle as he heads for the door. Odd answer, I think to myself. It’s almost like….he’s dodging the question or making up something to…. I snap out of it. Oh well, guess I better get back to Jughead and get to the library.

Midge is right. I should get my priorities straightened out. And right now, my priorities are helping Jughead learn about the Reaper, finding a way to make Ali happy….and figuring out how in the world I’m going to handle Salem.

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End of Chapter Three

Chapter End Notes

Uh oh….does this mean Sabrina is bound to make the same mistakes as Alice???
We’ll just have to wait and see.. ; )
SABRINA

If there’s one thing I miss the most about Baxter High, it’s the library. At Baxter, Roz, Susie, and I could get lost for hours scouring through the classics collection, the history section, everything in between. Not that the Riverdale Public Library is subpar, but it looks a little run down, not as well loved. The only breathing bodies that could think of inhabiting the space are the nice old ladies that want to re-educate the youth, and kids like me and Jughead, who don’t follow most norms among teenagers. As a matter of fact, Jughead and I are the only younger people in this library today, with the purpose of doing research. Out of the wide variety of seating options, we choose a table closest to “Psychology and Sociology” - he thinks we can study into serial killers and see if we can find a pattern. He has me select some books out of this section while he ventures off to find books on Riverdale’s history from the 1960s.

My fingers trace over the titles, the indents for each word. I wonder if the library includes anything about witchcraft, or anything supernatural. I wonder if there are books that can teach me how to work with Salem; he’s nothing that I thought a familiar would turn out. Back in Greendale, I read that familiars aid witches in their magical rituals, and they offer protection against any harm. Well, Salem definitely could help with my magic. But protecting me from mean girls like Midge and outsiders like Jughead? The logic makes no sense.

For now, I grab some books on killers, like Charles Manson and the Zodiac Killer, and make my way back to our table. Jug has a pile of books stacked next to his laptop, where he’s typing at lightning speed. He pauses for a moment to hand me the first book on top of his stack. “Here, start looking through this one so you get an idea of the town’s history.” I take the book, examining the
front cover. It’s an overhead shot of the town in black and white. There’s no view of Pop’s or the trailer park, but I can easily make out the school and the library. I peel open the book, a wave of dust spiraling which causes me to cough. A moment later, I start to read.

Riverdale was founded in 1941 by a General Augustus Pickens (Jughead pointed out Pickens Park on the way over here). The town was divided into two sides - north and south. The northside holds more of the wealthier families, and the southside….well, everyone else. The book only explains a generic history of the town, but nothing related to our case. I would have thought Riverdale would have been founded sooner with this land. 1941 seems a bit too recent.

“Does this explain how it even got established?” I ask him out of the blue. He stops typing and sighs, turning to face me.

“Not in that book….not in any book written by the founders.” he admits. “See, Pickens and his pal, Barnabas Blossom, took over the land in the 1940s to build the ideal American Dream town, wiping out anything they thought didn’t fit their image. That’s why we got the divide between Northside and Southside.” I continue flipping through the book. It just goes on with discussions of financial developments, lands to use for suburban communities…..but nothing about the events of the Reaper. No death counts, no evidence, no aftermath….. It’s like this part of the town’s history has been erased.

“Then how does the Reaper enter the story?”

“That….” Jug drums his fingers onto the table with a grin on his face. “is what we are going to uncover.” He goes back to his typing, leaving me confused. Wanting a clearer answer. I close the book in frustration and lean back in my chair. Below me, Salem nuzzles into my calf, his fur bringing a sense of warmth. The thought of Salem’s presence…. If these books don’t have my knowledge, or Jughead’s, maybe the internet would. I sit up and look at Jughead’s computer.

He catches me examining his computer and smirks. “Don’t worry,” he reassures, “this research has a purpose.” I nod my head at him slowly.

“Take it you’re heavily into the supernatural.”

“It’s something I’ve taken interest in lately. Just don’t vocalize it, ‘cause….you know, friends judge. I know Veronica and I rank on Archie for his music, but this….’” He stops for a second, clicking on a tab to open it. I peer over his shoulder to read the page. The article mostly consists of sketches of demonic figures, some of which I’ve seen from my own books, and where they reside. Is it possible that Riverdale could harvest demonic elements that’s preventing any other type of magic from entering the town?

“This could change how people view Riverdale.” He taps on the screen. His finger falls to the keyboard, and his smirk fades. “It’s just a matter of getting people to believe it.” Jughead goes quiet. He obviously does show a passion for this subject, but he doesn’t have the resources to help him. Well….he didn’t, until I came in. Salem growls at my feet, making me glance down at him. I drum my fingers on the table, coming to a decision. Salem may be right – Jughead might be going down a rather intense rabbit hole, but he shouldn’t go through it alone. Not with me around. I look away from Salem and back up at Jughead.

“I believe it.” I say out loud, catching his attention. I shift in my seat with my confidence growing, “If there really is something in Riverdale, causing the town’s history to get wiped out, we can bring it back. We can find the truth. And we can make people listen.” The words coming out of me feel forced. A sense of darkness swells, a fog entering my brain. I can’t tell what it is, but it makes me stop talking. Yes, Sabrina, a voice echoes in my eardrums. I swear I’ve heard this voice before. A
familiar voice that’s dropped in its pitch…..it’s almost sinister. **You can make them listen. You can change history.**

I blink, waiting for the sensation to roll over. Salem meows. I look down only to find him licking his paw. I shake my head and pick up one of my serial killer books. “But we’ll start with the basics, obviously.” I add in, starting into the first chapter. Jughead chuckles next to me.

“Works with me, new girl.”

We continue researching for a couple more hours, me scouring through a quarter of the books from the psychology section, and Jughead filling up half a notebook’s worth of notes from his demonology article. Around noon, my morning coffee is drained, my brain still has some of the fog, and I’m getting bored. I tap my pen on the table while reading about….to be honest, I’m not sure what this book is about. I’ve lost so much interested. Salem’s asleep at my feet, and Jughead’s still going at it. I’m tempted to ask if we can go out for a break, or to at least pick back up our research tomorrow. I just need a break, or some reason to get up and stretch my legs.

My phone buzzes in my coat. Salem stirs awake at the noise. I reach for my phone and smile at the notification.

**From V: Are you busy right now? I need to get your opinion on something. Come over to my place!**

“Everything okay?” Jughead snarks. I look back up at him, a sense of guilt forming. I know how important this is for Jughead. And….I need to find something out about Riverdale that could tell me what happened to Ali. It doesn’t mean the answer has to come today. Or within the next few hours.

“V wants me to go over to her place.” I say, making up my mind. Salem lets out a little meow and stirs awake as I start to pack up my bag. “Don’t know what for, but hopefully it shouldn’t take too long.” Jughead looks a bit defeated, staring off into space. He shakes out of it and looks back up at me.

“No worries. We’ll pick up again tomorrow, depending on if Mayor McCoy and the rest of town hall decide to cancel school.” I nod and sling my bag onto my shoulders. He lets out a small chuckle.

“What?”

“Nothing. Just….didn’t think Hiram Lodge would already allow his daughter to invite people over to Pembrooke. But here we are.” I raise my brow at him in confusion. Salem growls beneath me, I think he can sense my current state of thought. Did Mister Lodge not allow V to bring over people before? Or is Jughead just jealous?

Whatever. I scoop Salem up into one arm and bid Jughead farewell before texting V back.

**To V: Sure! Leaving the library now. Where exactly is it you live?**

“Told you that boy would be trouble.” Salem comments as we leave the library. Sliding my phone back into my pocket, I head down the steps onto the street, releasing Salem to the ground. “I think you’re better off staying with Miss Lodge….considering that she and you share a common secret.”

“What? That we’re both half-witches?” I snort.
“More or less. Besides, you need to be around more people who are like you. How else can you build on your powers?” I turn away from Salem and slow down my pace. He does have a point - having more people in my life like V could help when it comes to controlling my witchcraft and balancing my human life. But where are there more half-witches that don’t feel shame in their identities? Especially in a place that doesn’t hold much magic?

“Good luck finding more witches in Riverdale, Salem.” I end our conversation there. I feel a buzz in my pocket, signaling me to pull out my phone. Plugging in V’s address into my phone, I begin my route to Pembrooke.

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ALICE

It’s cold in the trailer. Even with the long-sleeve dress I changed into after talking with Gladys, I’m still freezing. I light a candle to bring some heat into the space, and I sit at the table, wrapping myself in a blanket I snagged from the bedroom. The flesh under my eyes feels heavy. My throat is sore from the crying. My headache is returning. I’m tempted to take some herbal remedy and go back to sleep, but I’m scared of seeing what haunts my dreams. Gladys left about five minutes ago to get some food started for me, considering I haven’t eaten since yesterday. She tried to insist that I come over to her trailer just so I wouldn’t be alone - I guess the thought of me doing something scared her. Frankly, it scares me too. I won’t lie when I say I’ve been so terrified of my memories and my thoughts that I…I wanted it all to stop. There were those times, and there still are. What’s kept me from doing something is helping Sabrina along her journey. It’s keeping my bakery open. But even now….those things could easily slip from my reach, especially with Hal out and roaming.

A couple of minutes pass when I hear a knock on the door, pulling me out of my numb state. I groan as I get up to see who’s at the door. I’m thinking it’s Gladys telling me to come over for lunch. I open the door and my eyes widen. It’s not Gladys at the door, but FP. He stands outside the trailer with his hands in his pockets, his mouth gaping open and close like a fish gasping for air. He struggles to make eye contact with me, he’s nervous. What is he doing over here? At my trailer of all places?

He stays quiet for another moment, then talks, “Ummm….Gladys wanted me to let you know that food’s ready…..and she, uhh…..” He stutters in his speech. He keeps his eyes on the ground, digging at something with his shoe. He eventually looks up at me, continuing, “Just…..whenever you’re ready to come over and eat.” My gaze at him goes soft, a sense of calmness putting me at ease. I forgot how relaxed I felt whenever he was around. Snapping my mind back into the present, I give him a silent nod. As much as I want to stay here in the comfort of my trailer, I do need something in my stomach. And maybe I could use some company.

“Hang on.” I lift a finger at him. I hurry away from the door and slip on a pair of slippers by the bedroom. I blow out the candle then, wrapping the blanket around me tighter, head out of the trailer. I shut the door behind me and look up at FP…. I take more time than anticipated to fully examine him. I can make out the lines around his eyes, the small hints of gray forming in his brown hair, the quiver being contained in a tight-lip expression. Whatever happened to FP in these past 25 years must have worn him out. Witches tend to maintain their youth and beauty as they age, so I’ve been lucky enough to have some youthful glow. Yet, my human side has made me look somewhat older….well, younger than my classmates. I blink at him, forcing myself to not stare for too long. I sigh, and make my way down the steps, FP trailing behind me.
“Sabrina not around?” he looks back up at the trailer. Remembering her note with the heart, I give him a sad nod.

“She’s out with your son….I think.” He turns back to me, almost stunned at my words. He blinks heavily before letting out a cough.

“Can’t ever keep up with what that boy’s doing,” he admits. “Into the whole….dark academia thing. Surprised he hasn’t gotten in trouble yet for doing all that research for the school paper.” I look around the trailer park, too scared all of a sudden to make eye contact with FP. This neighborhood we both grew up in hasn’t changed. The young Serpents back in our day ran this area, playing a ball game of some sort or fighting one another. I never partook in any of it, and now Jughead doesn’t seem like the type either. Part of me starts to wonder how different Serpent teens are….whether the group has changed for the better since I left and Gladys showed up. If there’s less trouble with the authority, especially with Keller in charge….

“So….Tom Keller is the Sheriff now?” I throw out. FP’s eyes light up, and he chuckles. His sudden radiation of positivity makes me laugh too.

“That’s not all of it,” he smiles, looking back over at his trailer then to me again. “I’ll catch you up when we get to the trailer.”

So we head to the Jones’s trailer. The house smells of slow-cooker chili, and my stomach instantly growls. Gladys greets us and insists that I take a seat in the living room while she finishes preparing the meal. FP comes over to the living room and sits down across from me on the cot. So he starts to catch me up on the lives of our classmates - Apparently, Keller left the military and came back to Riverdale, married, had a kid, and is now the Sheriff. Sierra Samuels, the political animal of our class, married some singer and now goes by Mayor McCoy (yes, she is the mayor now). She has a daughter who is the town’s Whitney Houston, has her own band and everything. And Fred Andrews, one of FP’s teammates and close friends….he married our class’s valedictorian, Mary Maiden.

“Mary? He’s with her?”

“Yeah. Got together after school ended.” he answers. “She’s got some law practice going across the country. Not sure what exactly it’s for, but she’s not around as much. It ain’t an issue though between them, and he’s taken over Andrews Construction in town. And their boy, Archie, he’s been buds with Jug since elementary school.” My mood lifts more and more as the conversation goes on. So the town went on just fine after I left. The people I knew pursued what I’d figured they would go into - Sierra with law and politics, Fred with construction (which shocked me at first but it makes sense now), and…..Hiram with whatever it is he’s doing.

I lean back slightly in my seat and my gaze wanders as FP continues filling me in on our classmates. I turn to face the bedroom doorway by their kitchen. A small figure with bright eyes and pigtails hides behind the wall, staring at me in wonder. She doesn’t have FP’s eyes, or Gladys’s, but she has her father’s facial structure. She has her mother’s mouth. I slowly lift my hand and wave at the little girl. She stays in her spot with no response, part in wonder and part in fear.

FP notices my movement and turns to the girl. “You gonna come out and say hello, Jellybelly?” She doesn’t reply.

Gladys goes over to her and takes her daughter’s face into her hands. “Go wash up, JB.” So this is Jellybean…. I watch as the girl follows her mother into the bedroom, and to where I assume is the bathroom. FP and I turn to each other, and his eyes widen in a “yep, that’s my daughter” fashion.
Maybe the girl is just shy, I figure to myself. Yet, something about this girl is striking out to me, but I can’t tell what. Something I must have felt at that age.

“Sorry,” he says to me with a sigh, “JB gets all anxious whenever new people come into the house. I don’t blame her though - whenever we got other Serpents coming over, it gets so loud and hectic, so she and Jug tend to hide out in the bedroom. But you…” he pauses, making me a little bit nervous. He runs his fingers through his hair, and I notice something on his wrist….a silver cuff bracelet with words carved into the metal. I sit up so I can get a better glance at the words, but I can’t make them out. He catches me looking and gives me a sad smile. He looks down at his wrist as he speaks, “Got this as a “18 months sober” present. From my AA program.” His wrist falls into his lap, and he develops that sadness in his eyes again. It takes me the little strength I have now to not burst into tears. FP did have his struggles after I left. He never got out of this town. He joined the Serpents and fell victim to his inner demons. And Gladys….Gladys was there to pull him out. She had to…..because I did this to him. I destroyed him, and Hermione Gomez too.

Before I can ask about his AA program, a pair of fingers taps my forearm. I turn to find FP’s daughter towering over me. She has a bowl of chili in her hands, holding it out to me. “Mom says you get first serving.” she finally speaks to me. I lift my head up to her at the sound of her quiet, little voice. Still shaken by the thought of FP’s battle with alcoholism, I inhale deeply and force myself to give the girl a small smile.

I stand up. “You keep it for yourself.” I whisper to her. Smoothing down the fabric of my dress, I head into the kitchen to grab myself a fresh bowl. FP and Gladys begin to converse with one another behind me in hushed voices. I notice a couple of biscuits fresh from the oven on the counter. I take two and wander back over to where I was sitting. JB stays still in her place as I set the bowl down. I transfer one biscuit into my free hand and hold it out to her, a little peace offering. She eyes the item in my hand for a moment, then she looks up a me. The corners of her mouth lift slightly. Her eyes light up. She takes the biscuit and flops down onto the couch. I sit down next to, grabbing for my bowl, and dig in.

XXXXXXXX

SABRINA

I look up at this decadent building when I arrive. So this is where V lives? Pembrooke looks like those buildings, castles really, out of fairytales but more modern. V said someone would guide me up to her residence in a follow-up text, so I let her know I’m outside. At my feet, Salem growls. I sigh, lowering my phone, and glare down. “What now, Salem?”

“Look up, kid.” he tilts his head up at the building. Out of curiosity, I turn up to examine whatever Salem could be referring to in the upper levels of Pembrooke. Nothing stands out to me…..except for one window. The shades are up so the interior of this residence is pitch-black…..mostly pitch-black with a little bit of a glowing fire in the distant. A figure stands by the window staring down at Salem and me. I squint to get a better glance at this person. Even in more casual wear, his features still make him recognizable.

“Mister Lodge?” I giggle slightly, returning my gaze to Salem. “What’s there to be so worried about with him?” He stays quiet for a moment.

“Nothing of your concern….for now.” he coyly replies. That’s strange, I think to myself. Why
would Salem have a problem with Mister Lodge if he’s never even met the man? I look back up at the window only to find that the man is no longer there. Even if it was V’s father, does he know why I’m out here? Does he even know about Salem’s…nature?

“You know, Salem,” I address my feline familiar, “for a little creature locked up in an abandoned house for so many years, you know way more about the people in this town than most.” Salem perks up at me. His strange eyes have a little twinkle, like he wants me to believe he’s innocent at all costs.

“Looks like that Jones boy is already starting to corrupt you.” his voice comes off playful, yet the message comes off cautious. It doesn’t sound innocent whatsoever. Before I can ask the meaning of his words, I notice Salem looking a new direction. His head tilts towards the staircase, then coils back slightly. He teeters back, lets out a menacing cry, and hisses. My breath shortens - what’s got him all agitated?

“Miss Mullway!” the voice that caught Salem off guard catches mine. To my surprise, Mister Lodge comes down the steps and approaches me with a warm smile. My mood lightens and I return the friendly gesture.

“Hi!” I’m compelled to explain my reasoning for staring into his home. “I’m not just lurking…..if that’s why you’re out here, Mister Lodge. I----”

“Veronica told me you’d come by.” he reassures me, still smiling. “So, I thought it would be best if I showed you into the place.” He then turns slightly to gesture to the building behind him. “Welcome to Pembrooke.” The gesture makes me giggle, which in turn makes Salem grumble. Mister Lodge directs his attention to Salem, “See you already made a new acquaintance.”

“Oh….yeah.” I answer, looking down at my familiar. Salem nonchalantly licks his paws, but even then he pays our host no attention. Not wanting to stall, I go on. “This is Salem. Got him yesterday, but….I’m still trying to learn how to train him.”

Mister Lodge raises a brow. “Salem, you said?”

“Yeah! Like, the Salem Witch Trials.” I tell him. Of course, Salem gave me his name, so I can’t take full credit for it. Still, I have no clue how he came up with Salem on his own, but I guess it’s more history I’ll need to dig into while I’m here in Riverdale.

“How clever.” Mister Lodge comments. In disapproval, Salem positions himself, almost as if he wants to attack, and growls. Oh great, just what I need. My new best friend’s father wants to get to know me, and I completely embarrass myself thanks to a familiar. I frustratingly turn to Salem and bark at him to calm down. I stumble in my words to apologize for Salem’s behavior, speaking quickly and nervously. V’s father makes a “it’s alright” gesture with his hand, bringing me some relief. “Come on. I’ll take you to Veronica.” he begins to head up the steps. I assume he wants me to follow him, but I don’t move. He stops at some distance and turns his head back to me. Realizing that he does want me to follow, I begin my way up the steps.

Then I remember Salem. I turn quickly on my heel to face him, pointing a finger. “Stay here. And….don’t eat any mice?”

“Oh, with pleasure.” Salem coolly responds. I honestly can’t tell if he’s being snarky with me, but I’ll have to lecture him on his attitude later. I rush up the steps to catch up with Mister Lodge, and we head into Pembrooke together.

The lobby of the building itself is jaw dropping. The white walls loom over, and the gold trim
sparkles in the blique sunlight. I slow my pace just so I can pay more attention to each detail. It’s so bright compared to Spellman Mortuary. It’s certainly more prominent in its appearance compared to….well, anywhere in Greendale, really.

“This way.” Mister Lodge guides me over to the elevators. The large, gold doors slide open and we enter. We stand there in silence for a few moments as the doors shut, sending us up. My mind starts to race again. What did V want me over here for? What if Jughead thinks I’m too much of a flake to work for his newspaper? And Ali….

Beside me, I hear Mister Lodge struggle to speak. The sound captures my attention, and I turn to him. “Sabrina, how is…..how is your caretaker?” he speaks, unusually slow and deliberate. Then I remember - Ali. She was with him at the diner last night!

“Oh! Wendy…..” I pause before I can say anything. I start thinking about Ali wailing in the bathroom before I left the trailer park. Practically passed out by the time I returned with Salem last night. Her hidden misery leading up to now. I don’t know how to respond to the question immediately, fearing that the truth of her depression might come off unfavorable. Yet….if Mister Lodge shared V’s powers, did that mean he could see my thoughts? I look up at him, and he shoots me a sympathetic glance.

“I just….wanted to see if she was alright. After the blackout at Pop’s.” he’s quick to explain. “She fainted so unexpectedly. It had me worried.” He stops for a second, lost in thought, almost somber. This is only the second time I’ve interacted with this man, yet I’ve never seen him this….upset. No, upset isn’t the right word - remorseful. He looks remorseful when he brings up Ali. I start to wonder, since V knows that I’m Sabrina Spellman, would that mean Mister Lodge did remember her? Did he even know she would be coming to Riverdale with me?

My thoughts come together. “Did….” I start to ask, “Did you bring her back to Sunnyside Trailers last night?” He breaks his distant gaze and turns to me. Without muttering a word, he nods. My heart lightens, and I smile. I get why Auntie Z trusted Mister Lodge and V to look after me and Ali now. I just don’t understand why Salem has such a negative outlook on this family sans V. Or why he doesn’t care for anyone Ali must have known….

The elevator doors chime open, indicating that we’ve arrived on our floor. Mister Lodge leads me down to the end of the hallway and opens the door. I step in…..WOW. I knew V had money, but this place is immaculate. The pristine white walls stand out in the sunlight. The long wooden table and roaring fire add depth to the living and dining room. I can’t help but stand in the doorway and look around with my jaw on the floor. If only the Aunties, Ambrose, and I lived like this back in Greendale….

A door opens from another side of the massive space, which catches my attention. V emerges from her bedroom, running over to me in delight. “Hey girl! I was so worried you’d get lost on the way over here!” She pulls me in for a hug and wraps an arm around my shoulder. She turns to her father and addresses him, “I can take it over from here, Daddy.”

“Just keep the noise down, mija. I have some work I need to get done before the day is through.” He gives us a nod before turning away. He begins to head off to where I assume is his study - there must have been where I was looking up into.

“Mister Lodge!” I call out to him. He stops and looks back at me. “Thank you, again…..” I say, my voice falling short. But I don’t need to finish. The somber look in his eyes returns. He gives me a sad smile. He knows I’m talking about Ali.

“Of course.” Then he retreats to his study, shutting the large wooden doors behind him. I stand
there for a moment in the brief silence. Whatever happened at the diner last night between Aunt Ali and Mister Lodge must be tormenting him…..but why?

“He’s been like that all morning.” V’s voice echoes behind me. I turn to face her as she continues, “Been hiding out in his office or sulking around for no reason. Maybe it’s a lack of sleep? But, who knows with my father.” she shrugs.

“You think it’s because he was up until you got back last night? After….” I pause, glancing over at the study door. I lower my voice, “after visiting the Conway House?” V stays quiet at first, then sighs.

“Actually, he was the one who got back late.” she confesses. “I was here at least an hour before Daddy came back to Pembrooke. I have no clue where he was during the blackout, or what he was doing…..probably scouring all of Riverdale to track me down, for all I care.” Her voice drops suddenly before glancing down at the floor. She really doesn’t know what her father did for Ali last night? I’m tempted to voice this truth, yet my mouth remains shut. And how could I? Before I can talk, V looks back up at me and beams. Something about her distracts me…..since when did V own a pearl necklace? She never has one during cheer practice, or maybe I just haven’t paid any attention. Either way, it stands out on her. I wonder how long she’s had it for….

“Anyways, enough about Daddy. Come follow me.” With a smile, she takes my hand and leads me away from the living room, into her bedroom. Her room is like the rest of the Lodges’ place - clean, pristine, and….well, astounding. The white walls reflect the sunlight from outside, brightening the room. There’s not a speck of dust on her bedrooms or her vanity. My room back home isn’t as bright or as clean - usually I’d have my school books or whatever books on witchcraft scattered along the floor. But with V, it’s almost like an exhibit for a museum - touch one thing and it’s all ruined.

What stands out in this room of pearl white is two darker dresses on her bed. V goes over to her bed and picks the dresses up, one in each hand. She turns to me and stands there. “So….which one do you prefer? Black mesh with florals, or purple sequins?” She shimmies a little with each dress. I don’t know if she wants me to try these outfits on, or if they’re meant for her to wear. I raise a brow in confusion.

“Can I ask what this is for?” I throw out with a nervous giggle. “Another dinner with your dad?”

“Actually…..” she sets the dresses down and clasps her hands together. “I considered telling you in the text, but….I figured it’d be better to tell you in person.” She walks slowly over to me, pursing her lips. Then, she gives a sheepish smile. “I have a date tonight.”

My eyes widen in delight and shock. She looks back and forth between her door and me, holding up her index fingers to her mouth to keep me from exclaiming too loud to disturb her father, all while giggling. I smile and take her hands. “That’s….V! That’s great! How did you even……” I stumble on my words as she leads me to the bed and sits us down. “With who? Archie?”

“No! No, not Archie. He’s a dear friend, but not my gentleman suitor for tonight. I don’t think you’ve met him yet.” she tells me in a soft voice. She still holds onto my hands in excitement as she continues, “His name is Chuck Clayton. He’s on the football team, and just so happens to be the coach’s son. But that’s not all about him. He’s into drawing and musical theater.” V gets up from her place and moves over to her vanity, staring at her reflection. “Funny enough, a week before you arrived, we got paired up to perform a song from Carrie the Musical in our musical theater class. Of course, the professor had me singing as the mean girl, Chris…..but Chuck happened to be a very good Billy Nolan. So, we performed our number for the class and did very well. And through the whole process, he was absolutely nothing but a gentleman.” She starts
rifling through her jewelry on a stand, trying to find some earrings to match her outfit. I look down at the dresses on her bed - they seem way too elegant for any casual date.

“So….where is this happening?”

“No clue. He said he’d surprise me.” V shrugs as she begins to play with the pearls around her neck. “Knowing how tiny Riverdale is, wouldn’t be that shocking if he took me to Pop’s…..if the diner opened back up tonight. Apparently Pop’s had more of the worse after-effects of the blackout. Did you hear about that?” The comment makes my spine straighten. My thoughts trail back to Ali…..and Mister Lodge….

“First time I’m hearing about it.” I answer in a weary tone. V turns back to me and leans against her vanity. Her lips form a straight line. She glances down at her carpeted floor.

“You think those outfits are too fancy for a small-town date?” She sounds wounded. I struggle to find an answer - do I think these outfits may be a little more elegant for a dinner at Pop’s? Perhaps, but if this is what V feels comfortable with, power to her. V goes on, “I know it’s….way over the top. I just….” she pushes herself away from the vanity and nervously clasps her hands together. “I haven’t been out with anyone since I lived in New York. My father’s strict with my dates. Can’t stay out past a certain time of night, wanting me to make sure I perform my practices…..reminding me of my witchness.” She goes quiet after that.

I get it. The struggles V went through, and still does to a degree. Both Aunties were strict about my dates with Harvey, or any time that I spent in the human world. They wanted me to stay true to my allegiance with the Church of Night, like I wasn’t a half-witch, half-human. It was almost like I forgot I had a human side to me.

I stand up and walk over to V, taking both of her hands. “Well….you’re not in New York anymore. You’re in Riverdale for a good reason.” V looks up at me on those last words. I continue, “I’d say enjoy being a half-human while you can. Wear whatever you feel the most comfortable in. See who you want.” She smiles as I finish my speech.

“You’re right. I’m probably just getting myself all worked up over nothing.” she teases. Yet, I can still sense the nervousness in her voice.

“Hey….if anything does happen, you can always call me. Or….send out some telepathetic message to summon me.”

“I know.” V whispers, squeezing my hands. Outside her room, something caws in the distance. We break our eye contact and turn to the door in confusion. V lets go of my hands and moves over to the door. She presses her ear up against the door, listening for any sort of noise. Another squawk, louder this time, echoes through the walls.

“Is there a bird trapped in the house?” I whisper. V looks over to me and shakes her head.

“I….I think it’s my father’s familiar.” I blink at her. Mister Lodge has a bird for a familiar? How odd…. She moves over to her window and looks out. I rush over to join her and my mouth falls open. Outside, a black moving figure, what almost appears to be a raven, flies away from Pembrooke. Something’s wrapped around its neck. A message?

“You think your dad’s trying to contact somebody?” We both turn from the window and look at one another.

V shrugs. “To be honest, ‘Brina, I don’t know. My father hasn’t sent out his familiar to contact
anyone in a long time.”

ALICE

The diner is now back up and running, according to a phone call from Pop. Gladys and I figure it’d be easiest to work the same shift so we can commute together. Well, I tried to argue that I could do a shift on my own, or work solo on another night. But Gladys isn’t going to let me have another episode at Pop’s. Or at least have to suffer another supernatural panic attack on my own. So after some convincing on her end, and FP’s, I give in and agree to share the shift with her. I help to clean up from lunch at their place, and head back over to my trailer. Spending time with them actually wasn’t as scary as I feared. FP and I talked casually about life in Riverdale, and we found ways to make each other laugh. He shared stories of his newfound favorite activities during the holidays, like wrapping Christmas presents for children on the Southside, painting Easter Eggs with Jughead and JB, and becoming more involved with the Riverdale High Parent Organization for holiday galas. Gladys even mentioned that during this year’s Halloween party, she and FP stole the show when they made their appearance as Bonnie and Clyde. I’m just lucky Gladys helped to steer the conversation away from anything regarding witchcraft, or demons. The only person who didn’t contribute much was their daughter. JB kept quiet for most of the meal, only providing one or two word answers when I asked her about school. I don’t blame her - I never got along with my classmates either. I found a lot of my youthful days long and grueling. It didn’t help that I had to hide my magic from my peers, so it made me even more of a social pariah. At least JB is lucky she has good parents. She has both parents, unlike me.

After a little bit of cleaning off my uniform from the night before, thanks to a little quick magic, I throw on the uniform and smooth out the skirt. I quickly fill up two thermos containers with fresh brewed coffee for Gladys and me during our shift, and head out the door. Gladys is leaning against the outside of my trailer when I come down the stairway. I hand her one thermos and we begin to make our way over to her car. A loud squawk from behind us stops us in our path. We both whip our heads in fear.

“Who’s that?” she grits through her teeth. I glance around the trailer park for any sign of the noise. My eyes dart nervously…...then I see it. On top of my car waits an impatient raven wearing a little piece of paper tied around its neck.

“You've got to be kidding me.” I stride over to my car and glare down at Edgar. He hops around the hood, squawking away, then tilts his little head up at me. The letter tied around his neck crinkles in the wind. Even rolled up, I can make out Hiram’s handwriting. What does he want now? I grab for the letter around Edgar’s neck, untying the ribbon in a single motion. I unroll the letter with my fingernail and begin to read.

Alice, I hope you have been able to recover after the events of last night. I can now see why you have such a dear attachment to Miss Spellman - she is a considerate and thoughtful girl. I stand true to my statement if you are in need of any assistance during your stay in Riverdale. If not, I respect your wish to stay away. Please contact me otherwise. Take care, Hiram

“So this is how witches flirt with one another in Greendale?” Gladys glances at the note over my shoulder. “Through pigeon post? Who’s trying to reach out to you?” Letting out a long sigh, I hand
her the note, all while keeping my eyes on my little airborne visitor. A few seconds of silence go by, then Gladys scoffs. “Okay….Hiram being a witch makes sense now. You said he’s with that Church group, right?”

“Why do you think he came to Pop’s during my shift last night?” I turn to her and cross my arms. My eyes dart to the ground, somewhat in loss of words, but primarily out of my building anxiety. I shut my eyes for a brief moment and take a deep breath. I speak again, “I’d do anything to make sure that the Church doesn’t force Sabrina down a path she’s not ready to handle….at least not on her own.” I clamp my mouth shut after the last bit. I look back up at Gladys and take a deep breath, feeling a little wave of sadness ripple through me.

She gives me a reassuring smile. “That girl seems smart. She won’t let anyone force her to do anything she don’t want. That I can tell you.” The comment makes the corners of my mouth rise. She brings her hand to my bicep and gives it a gentle squeeze. “Just promise that if there are people bugging you and that girl, don’t go and kick their asses without me around. Okay?” With a chuckle, my smile grows. We start to walk away from my car when Edgar lets out another squawk. I turn to face the raven, part in frustration. He tilts his little head at me, like he wants some sort of payment for delivering me that message. I let out a sigh, then I leave Gladys’s side to go back over to Edgar. I crouch down so I’m at eye level with this thing.

“You can go back home now, okay?” I speak to him. He doesn’t do anything - he just stays in his spot unbothered. I try again, my voice a bit more stern. “That means you need to leave.” Nothing. My frustration begins to bubble up. I’m tempted to slam on the hood to scare him off - but Gladys is here, and I don’t want to cause a scene. And I’ve already done enough to frighten this thing, even if he does deserve it. An idea comes to me. I make a fist then release it, taking a deep breath. Then, I look Edgar in the eye.

“Diles a tu jefe que recibí su mensaje. Tu trabajo está hecho.” The Spanish rolls from my tongue, a little rusty but Edgar gets my message loud and clear. Without another moment of hesitation, he nods and flies away. I watch him go off, half in amusement. So he takes Spanish commands….

I hear Gladys snort. I look back at her and raise my brow. “What? I took Spanish in high school.” I reply. It’s true - back during my school days, I could pick up on the language easily. And with my magical capabilities, I’ve been able to maintain the tongue for it. She continues to laugh.

“Well, shit. Anything else you need to tell me about yourself, witch?” With a smirk forming, I hustle back over and throw my arm over her shoulders. We walk away from my car and head over to Pop’s.

The afternoon is surprisingly slow, considering Pop’s is the only restaurant in town open after the blackouts. I figure people don’t want to go out and would rather spend time with family. Also, Sierra McCoy and the team at the PD dropped by earlier to announce that the high school won’t be open for the whole next week, so the teenagers are most likely celebrating elsewhere. Pop sees it as an opportunity to get more people back into the diner, and so does Gladys. For me, it’s a good thing the school’s closed….and bad. Good in that I can finally have some alone time with Sabrina and talk with her. But, with Hal out and about, who knows what he could do and who he could target. And the fact that I still don’t know who had the ability to let him out….

I run through possible conversation scenarios in my head while I cater to those in the diner. I try to think of how to explain everything to Sabrina - why I really left Riverdale, why I’ve had so many panic attacks, my history with Hal. While my intentions to have her steer clear of the Conway Home and any dangerous magic practice with Hiram’s daughter, I fear that I might come off stern with her. I’m not here to play Zelda. I’m not her, or Hilda, or Ambrose. To her, I’m Aunt Ali, the
understanding one. The gentle one. One of the only few witches she trusts. I don’t want to scare her away, but I don’t want to watch her make the same mistakes as me.

I finish serving a table full of Vixen women their meals then head off to the bathroom to wash my hands. Sometimes, getting away to use the restroom acts as a reset for me - I can just shut my eyes and let the water run. Let the soap cleanse away whatever is on me. Like I’m Lady Macbeth scrubbing out the damned spot. I force myself to take a deep breath before I turn off the faucet. I can still feel my anxiousness building up even after running my hands under warm water. I don’t realize it until I violently rip three paper towels from the dispenser.

My breathing slows, my thoughts are still trapped over my fear for Sabrina. No - it’s my fear of Hal finding her and abusing her. The way he abused me. I have to shut my eyes and rest my forehead against the paper towel dispenser. It takes me a few rounds of breathing before I can put myself together again. **Breathe, Alice, just breathe. Daisies and Candles.**

I walk out of the bathroom, the clump of damp paper towels still in my hands, when my eyes dart up. I stop, staring at the sight in front of me. At the cash register, Sabrina leans against the counter talking with Gladys. They stop their conversation and look over at me. Sabrina grows a wide grin, slightly tearing up. Gladys nods at me and moves away to tend to customers at the other side of the diner. The corners of my mouth raise, my breathing eases, as Sabrina rushes over to me.

“Ali----” she starts then clamps her mouth shut, looking around the diner. While there aren’t many people here, it’s still too risky to have people refer to my real name. Even if they say my name in a whisper. Sabrina turns back to me. “Hey! Did….did you see my letter from earlier? I….I just didn’t know if…..” she stutters, her hands are trembling. I set the paper towels down on the counter and take her hands.

“I’m….I’m okay, sweetie.” I force the words to come out of my mouth. Her eyes remain so hopeful, easing the tension. While I am feeling slightly better since telling Gladys the truth and spending the morning with her and FP and their daughter, something about this morning still leaves me unsettled. It doesn’t come to me right away, but I remember. Sabrina had that black cat with bright eyes. I break our gaze, looking around the diner. “Sabrina, what happened to that cat from earlier? The one you were holding this morning?”

“Salem? Oh, I dropped him back off at the trailer park.” she responds in a weary tone. “Hopefully he stays there. He was all fussy with me before I went over to spend the rest of the morning with V.” My back stiffens a bit. V? Is…..oh wait. She’s talking about Hiram’s daughter. My thoughts go back to his letter. He mentioned something about his opinions on Sabrina. But his alignment to the Church….how do I know he’s not using that daughter of his to convince Sabrina to sway towards the Path of Night? She brings up her going over to help her “friend” after working in the library with FP’s son. Her conversation with Hiram. Seeing Hiram’s familiar fly off with something. The words come out of her mouth, but I can’t process them. My thoughts are still on him. Why did Hiram help me last night when he knows of my neutrality in the Sabrina matter? Why did he send that letter to me? What was that sigil doing over my bed? How does he remember about what I did to him…..with Hal….Hal….

My vision goes fuzzy for a second. I tilt slightly to the side. I have to let go of her hand so I can grip onto the counter to keep me upright. Sabrina’s smile fades, her eyes lose their hope and turn into fear. She reaches out for my arms as a way to help me. “Hey, you should sit down.”

“No….I’m fine.” my voice comes off much louder than anticipated. I stand back up straight, glancing down at Sabrina. She looks wounded, I guess from the tone of my voice.

“Are you sure?” she whispers. I don’t say anything. I could, but I’m worried that what will come
out of my mouth will wound her further. I don’t trust Hiram. I don’t trust that daughter of his either. I don’t want them corrupting Sabrina. My brain screams all of these fears, yet my lips remain tight shut.

“You don’t need to tell me why you’re upset, Ali.” Sabrina tells me with a frown. I blink at her, first with no emotion, then in confusion. Before I can ask her for an explanation, she rotates us so my back is to the front of the diner and her back’s to the kitchen. She sits down at one of the barstools, letting out a sigh.

“I know about Mister Lodge, and why he knows Auntie Z.” she starts in a low register, not to draw attention to our conversation. My brow raises. How does she know about Hiram being a witch? She goes on, “He’s like us, and so is V. They’re helping to keep me safe until our return to Greendale. I’ll admit, the truth of that matter did strike me odd at first, but I know it’s with good reason.” My eyes widen. I can’t tell whether it’s happening out of shock, or anger, or sadness. I don’t even know how to respond to all of this. I don’t know how Sabrina found out, or when. Her voice comes to a halt as she sees my current expression. I look down and noticing my fingers trembling. My wrist tenses up, my bones getting stiff. And I thought I was more shaken up by Sabrina falling down the wrong path with Hal.

Sabrina grabs for my shaking hand. She strokes her tiny thumb over my wrist. “Look, I know you don’t like Mister Lodge. You have a reason to be angry about what ever it was that happened between you two in high school. But…..maybe Mister Lodge has changed for the better. Maybe he’s not that same person you knew. And V…..V is good. She would never do anything to hurt anyone else…..” She pauses, taking a deep breath as she looks down at the ground. My intense gaze softens. My hand not as shaky anymore. She looks back up at me, smiling with a teary look in her eye. “I know Roz and Susie are my friends back at home. But V…..V is the first real friend I’ve had. The first one I can relate to.”

It hits me for the first time since seeing Hiram again, and meeting his daughter. Maybe Zelda did have good intentions of having them look after Sabrina. Even if he didn’t know he would be handling me as well. His tone with me during our conversation last night makes sense now. The real concern he showed in his wording. Perhaps Hiram did change after high school. He may have his fealty to the Church, but there is his daughter. Sabrina hasn’t once brought up anything regarding talk of joining the Church for sure. Or even consideration of signing the Book.

I take a soft, yet firm hold of Sabrina’s hands. A small grin forms on my face. “I’m proud of you, Sabrina.” my voice shakes. “I know this transition has been hard for you. And I know you miss your family. But you’ve been able to put a smile on your face and make the most of this situation. You jumped into classes at the high school with ease, you joined different clubs, you made new friends…. I pause. It occurs to me that what I’m saying is right. Sabrina has been able to move forward and acclimate to life in Riverdale. I’m trapped in the past and want to hide. She’s friends with kids of all jacks and trade, I can barely talk to FP without having Gladys around. And I almost killed Hiram. The whole situation with the Church is nothing concerning me, yet I have found ways to make it about me and my past. My selfishness and isolation have blocked me from seeing how far Sabrina has come in forming new alliances. And what she can do with them. Even if her friends are children of the foes of my past. “I won’t stop you from seeing Veronica. I don’t want my past with her father to affect your friendship with her now. Or any relationships you have with the children of my former classmates…..” My mind wanders to FP’s son. And Fred’s. Maybe even Tom and Sierra’s kids, though I have yet to meet them while in town. Maybe things have changed for the better. This new wave of kids could not be as cruel or sinister as the kids I went to school with in the 90s. Even then…..

“You just don’t want to watch me get hurt.” Sabrina states what’s in my head. My mouth gapes
open, then clamps shut. My face flushes in panic. I can feel the corners of my eyes getting wet. She squeezes my hands. “I get it. I don’t want these kids to hurt me anymore than you fear. But trust me, Ali - these kids aren’t so bad compared to any of the other bullies at Baxter. Or even Prudence Blackwood and her sisters. You don’t have to be afraid for me. The people I go to school with here won’t do anything bad. And if something were to happen…..well, you know.” She finishes with a slight smile. She frees one of her hands and makes a little gesture. I allow myself to grin as the tears in my eyes form.

“I know you can defend yourself, sweetie.” my voice cracks. I can feel the tears coming full force. I struggle in between gasps to speak, “I just want you to be safe. And happy. You deserve it, after everything you went through.”

Sabrina rises up from the barstool. “You deserve some happiness too, Ali. More than anything.” She reaches up on her tiptoes and wipes my tears away. I hold onto the outer part of her hand when she caresses my face. “I’m sorry this whole process of coming back to Riverdale has been hard for you. I want to help you, Ali. You shouldn’t have to suffer all alone.” Her gaze wanders off for a moment, glancing around the diner. Then she looks back up at me. “Do you…..do you still want to tell me what happened to you? Are you comfortable talking about it?” I let out an exhale. I glance around myself. I do want to tell her everything. I need her to know about Hal and the Conway House. But with all these people in the diner…..

“We don’t have to talk now, obviously.” Sabrina rushes her words. “We can have that conversation back at the trailer if you want. Can take the whole next week, really. Oh! Did they tell you guys in here? School’s cancelled all next week leading up to---”

“That’s fine.” I cut her off before swallowing the lump that built up in my throat. Sabrina gives me a sympathetic smile and nods. I’m relieved that we can finally have the time to talk later….if we can still make that time. “Hopefully nothing will get in the way.”

Her face contorts in confusion. “Why do you say that?” To be honest, the odds of me successfully having the time to tell her about myself are slim to none. Especially since she and I showed up in Riverdale.

My eyes meander over to the window, looking out into the world. Somewhere either on the streets or in the forest, Hal is waiting…..or something else much worse. Whatever it is, maybe the after effects of my memory spell….. it wants my past to stay buried in the past. I sigh, “It’s just…..why do I feel like every time I’m about to bring up my origins to you, something always interrupts the conversation?”

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SABRINA

I’m surprised that I was able to complete most of my homework at Pop’s. I feel bad for having to hover around the vicinity to wait for Ali, I feel bad for leaving Salem behind at the trailer park after returning from Pembrooke. But I want to make sure that Ali is okay, especially after this morning. I’m glad that we can take time later tonight to really talk. Maybe I can take the opportunity to ask her about the Conway House, maybe even tell her about how I really found Salem. She might have an idea of the symbols I saw on the floor.
The night comes, increasing the brightness of the lights in the diner. The crowd in here grows, but luckily I can work in peace without too much distraction. And luckily, Ali and Mrs. Jones were able to get me something to eat during the down times. I start to wonder about V and if her date with this Chuck Clayton is going well. I check my phone for any notification from her. So far, nothing. With a sigh, I set my phone down and grab for a fry on my plate. I open up my journal and glance through my notes from this morning. Maybe Pop Tate could know something about the Riverdale Reaper - he must have grown up during the Massacres. Besides, the diner has been around for a long time, even while Ali was here.

My thoughts drift all over while I finish my dinner. I start to fill the blank spaces in my journal with some small sigils. Above my school notes, I draw my symbol for “I bring happiness to those around me”, a little notion for V and Ali. Down at the bottom of the page resides “My spells work quickly and with much power” in the tiniest form. I flip to the next set of pages, my notes on the whole Reaper case. I think for a moment - what kind of sigil could help me and Jughead find the answers we need? What could guide me to learn more about Salem? I write down a sentence, take away the vowels and repeating consonants, then I sketch out a symbol that represents this intention for myself. I stare down at this new symbol. It looks like a P with an upside down V and a dot in the loop. The symbol is small, but the meaning is powerful.

I see the truth.

The doors chime open in the distance. I try not to pay attention to the person who just walked in, but the voice speaking catches my attention. “You think you could put an order for me and my dad to go, Mrs. Jones?” I look up to find Archie at the register, giving Mrs. Jones an order to go. He turns and sees me, his smile growing. “Sabrina!” he greets me with a wave. I close my journal and get up from my booth to walk over. He meets me halfway, “You hear about school?”

“Yeah, it’s crazy. And I just got here!” I tease. He starts to laugh, and I can’t tell if it’s out of pure amusement or nervousness. The way his eyes lit up when he saw me….it reminds me of the way Harvey would look at me. I wonder how Harvey and everyone else in Greendale is holding up without me.

“It’ll be out in 20 minutes, hon.” Mrs. Jones calls out. Archie gives her a thumbs up before turning back to me. His eyes start to lose their gleam the more nervous he gets around me.

“Do you want to wait with me?” I throw out the question, “I mean….I’m just getting ahead on some school work….but I don’t mind the company.”

“Sure! Sure….” he nods and trips on his words. I head back over to my booth, pushing my food to the side. Archie slides in across from me and rests his forearms on the table. “So….were you and Jug able to make it back to your place okay last night?” It takes me a little bit to register the question, but it clicks. He’s talking about our trip back from the Conway House. My eyes bulge open and I glance around the diner. I just hope no one is eavesdropping in on our conversation…..especially not Ali. I do want to ask her about this place, but if she found out of my real reason for being out last night, it would break her heart. Even more than it already is from what is going on with her mental state currently.

“Uh….yeah. Everything was fine.” I answer while still glancing around. No sign of any eavesdroppers, or Ali, so I let out a brief sigh before turning back to Archie. “Your dad didn’t get angry with you about taking his truck, did he?”

“No, didn’t tell him anything about our trip.” he admits. “Like I said last night, it was a good thing Jug reached out - I needed to take a break from the songwriting.” His eyes develop that shyness once more. He brings his hands together and looks down, frowning. I sit up straighter in my
cushioned seat. I’m tempted to read his thoughts, to see what could be troubling him. Before I can, he looks back up. “Do you think my music is bad? You can be honest with me if it is.”

My mouth hangs in shock and in sadness. I speak quickly, “What? No! I happen to think it’s good. Are you worried about what Jughead and V said about it last night?”

“Kind of, but I know they don’t mean it.” Archie attempts to shake off his gloominess. Yet, I can still sense something is throwing off his behavior. He continues, “I’m just glad that I can talk about this with someone else. My music…” His voice trails off briefly as he leans back, unraveling his hands from their clasp. He huffs, glancing out the window. Without making it obvious in my facial expressions, I make an attempt to read Archie’s mind. What flows into my head shows his true emotions. He’s torn between expectations and real desires. And he can’t express these desires to anyone who truly cares.

Eventually the thoughts in his head come out of his own mouth. “I’m not really good at most things. School has always been a struggle for me - I can’t concentrate on the subjects too well, and no matter how hard I try, I get too easily frustrated. And even though I can play football, it’s not what makes me the happiest. I guess I just do it because it’s what my dad did in school, and it made him happy…… But my dad also liked another hobby - music. He wanted to go into it, but with money being so tight in our family, and with his chances of getting a football scholarship being non-existent, he had to give it up. Go into the family business to make a living.” His fingers drum on the table, a nervous tick I guess? He bites his lip before going on, “You know, my dad had this band in high school - the Fredheads. Had a nice guitar and everything. But he had to sell that at the end of his senior year just so he could pay for college.” He pauses, the drumming of his fingers ceasing, and looks back at me. Hearing these thoughts, I can’t help but feel so sorry for him. He sounds so passionate about his family and his passions, but I don’t think he’s had a real chance to talk about this with anyone. Not even with the people who are supposed to be his friends.

“Is that why you take it so seriously?” I finally ask the question. He turns back to me, his face going from hopeless to subtly surprised. I follow up, “You want to pursue a love for something that your father couldn’t fulfill?”

For the first time since our conversation began, Archie projects a microscopic smile. “Well…partially.” his voice sounds optimistic again, “I always had a knack for it, and my dad, he taught me how to play when I was younger. But me wanting to go into it as a life career…..that’s all been me.” He sits up straighter and energetically places his forearms onto the table. “I know I’m only a sophomore right now, but I am trying to look at colleges that would allow me to play football and study music. That’s the goal…..if only I can work on my grades. That’s why Jug and Ronnie are around. But…..” his eyes dart down to his arms then come back up, “I’m just relieved that I can talk about this with someone else…..”

He stops speaking. Then his eyes widen, almost in a panicked sense. Not sure of what’s happening, I raise my eyebrow and go to open my mouth. Yet he clarifies, rushing his words, “I’m so sorry…..did that make you…..was that…..oh crap….” In frustration, he buries his face into his hands.

“What’s wrong? What do you have to be sorry for?” Eventually, he lowers his hands and looks at me remorsefully.

“I felt like that came off like I was trying to hit on you. But I wasn’t, I promise! But….I’m sorry if it came off that way! I just….I didn’t want to say anything weird in case……in case you had a boyfriend or something…..” My face falls, my mind going to Harvey. His ramble comes to a halt when he sees my expression.
“I….” I wind up looking down at the table. I know Archie’s excitement of explaining his love for music wasn’t meant to make me uncomfortable, but his mannerisms, his hopeful expressions, his ability to love life….. I see so much of Harvey in him.

It makes me miss Harvey so much more. And it makes me miss Roz and Susie, and everyone I go to school with. I even miss Aunties and Ambrose. I do try to stay positive and make the most out of life here, as I explained to Ali earlier. I do find it comforting that V is also a half-witch, caught between honoring family and living a normal life. But I get why Ali is so scared for me, why she chose to come with me. No matter what I do to adjust to life here, focus on school, chant my heart out during Vixens practice…..my thoughts always race back to Greendale. To the life I had. To what I could lose if this trial causes me and Aunties and Ambrose our place in the Church of Night. If the consequences from my Baptism cause me to never have that split life again.

I finish my sentence, looking down nervously, “I actually do have a boyfriend. Back where I’m from.” I let the silence take over just for a small moment. Then my eyes go back up to Archie before I continue, “But that doesn’t mean we can’t be friends! You’re a lot nicer than some of the jocks I’ve known…..both here and back home. And you actually know what you want to do after high school!” My words ease the tension. Archie, in relief, exhales and falls back into his seat. “Besides,” I wrap up, “now that I think about it…..I could use some more guy friends, other than Jughead.” The comment makes us both laugh, solidifying our new friendship.

From the other side of the diner, a girl who looks about our age starts messing around with the jukebox. Her dark hair and flashy bomber jacket shine in the fluorescent lights of the diner. A new song starts playing and she starts tapping her foot along to the beat. She starts to sing along…..she has one of the best voices I’ve heard, even better than Prudence Blackwood and her sisters. “Wow.” I mutter in awe. “She’s good.” Her voice has a natural soul to it, and it can capture anyone’s attention. Well, it catches mine….and Archie’s. I begin to notice the way his eyes melt at the sight of her. The way his smile softens. How he tries to be careful to not make it obvious that he’s admiring her from the distance.

“Yeah….insanely good.” he comments, still keeping his eyes on this girl. This talented stranger leaves the jukebox and walks back over to her booth. In a panic, Archie slips back into his seat and places his hands onto his lap. His lips purse together, and…..does he like this girl?

“Are you okay?” I ask with a giggle. “You know her?”

“Kind of…..” he admits sheepishly. That awestruck grin stays on his face when he starts to talk about her. “Her name’s Josie. She’s Mayor McCoy’s daughter, and she has her own band - Josie and the Pussycats. Everyone at school, and all of the town really, sees her as a musical staple. She even has a offer to go to Juilliard for music….or that’s what the kids at school say.” He turns his head to look at her again. After a moment or two, he slouches down, almost in defeat. “Too bad I don’t have the freaking guts to go and have a real conversation with her. Every time I see her walk by in the hallway, I get so nervous and have to turn away. Besides….I don’t she knows who I am anyway….so I guess it’s alright.”

He goes quiet, leaving me a little smirk. If he can talk so passionately about his music with me, maybe he can find a way to talk with her. There must be something I can do to help, just to facilitate things….. My head gets cloudy all of a sudden. Not from the thought of helping Archie build up the courage to talk to Josie McCoy, but…..something else. The hazy fog in my head is dark, I can’t tell if there’s a figure in the distance or something, but the figure appears to be running from something, or stumbling. This figure…..a girl…..she’s sobbing. The figure disappearing from my head, yet her cries pierce my eardrums. Where is this coming from? And….who is it?
“Sabrina? Are you okay?” Archie attempts to get my attention. I blink at him, unsure of how to answer. Before I can respond, someone busts through the doors of the diner. The sobs capture our attention. My eyes widen, I stand up in a hurry, out of fear.

V turns to me with red, wet eyes. She’s shivering in her black floral dress, there’s mud on her heels, her pearl necklace is not centered. She sees me and breaks down. “‘Brina….’ Out of sheer panic, I run over to her, Archie following behind me. V stumbles over to me and almost collapses into my arms. Everyone around us in the diner starts whispering, not sure of what to make of the scene.

“Ronnie! What happened? Are you okay?” Archie poses the question, but she doesn’t respond. She just keeps crying in my arms. He notices the gossiping crowd and leaves our side. “Hey, leave her alone! Can’t you people mind your own business?”

“V?” I take a soft hold of her head and wipe away her tears. Her eyeliner is all smudged up from the crying. I have so many questions racing through my mind - where is Chuck Clayton? Why are V’s feet all filthy? What happened?

“Chuck…..” she gasps, choking back tears. She tries to explain more, but eventually she gives up, resting her head on my shoulder. I stay in my place, attempting to put the pieces together. Why V ran in so suddenly in a state of upset. Why I had that image in my head, or why I heard her crying before she entered? How does this all relate to Chuck?

Then it hits me. A thought creeps in that disgusts me, it makes me mortified. But it’s the only logical answer. Without a word, I hold onto my friend tighter. I stroke her back, to give her some relief. I haven’t met this Chuck Clayton, but whatever he did…..whatever he attempted….. He won’t get away with this. I won’t allow him. No one messes with my friends.

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ALICE

It’s getting late at the trailer. I want to fall asleep after the long afternoon at Pop’s. I wanted to have that conversation with Sabrina, finally tell her everything. That was all before Hiram’s daughter came in seeking refuge after a date gone horribly wrong.

It doesn’t surprise me that the football boys still act awful. Well, not all of them, but FP and Fred seemed to be the only exceptions. When Sabrina pleaded me to bring Veronica back to our place, to let her stay for the night, I guess I got the gist of what happened. I know I have my opinions on Hiram, or whatever negative thoughts I initially had, yet his daughter…..I get why Sabrina has found herself attached to Veronica. So part of me agreeing to let Veronica stay is partially to appease Sabrina, but another part is also out of pure empathy on my end. Whatever happened, or what could have gone much farther south. If only this Chuck Clayton boy was around when I was with Hal….

I allow the girls to take the bedroom for the night. The moment we arrived at the trailer, Sabrina took the young Lodge straight into the bathroom, shutting the door. “I’ll let you know if we need any help, Ali. Thank you.” she mentioned quickly. It’s been almost 45 minutes since coming back, and the girls still haven’t come out. I can’t just stand here like an idiot twiddling my thumbs. And that cat…..he’s been staring at me since we came back. I’m creeped out by this creature Sabrina
found out of the blue. I still have no idea where Sabrina found it or why it’s here...I don’t know why it gives me an unusual feeling of déjà vu every time I look into its eyes.

To shake off this notion, I decide to make some tea for the girls - a combination of lemon balm and lavender that treats anxiety that has worked for me in years past. When the tea finishes brewing, I pour my mixture into two mugs, one for Veronica and one for Sabrina. I approach the door, stopping outside. I’m tempted to knock, but I stop the sounds of whispering. Instinct wants me to listen in closely. To figure out what the girls are saying. But I don’t want to violate their privacy. I promised Sabrina I wouldn’t sabotage her friendship with Veronica, and I’m afraid this could fuel that fire.

I tap my knuckles on the door, “You girls want some tea?” I don’t get a verbal response from the other side. I’m tempted to tap on the door again, but Sabrina opens the door.

“Thank you, Ali,” she whispers, taking the cups from me. “Seriously.....thank you for letting V stay here for the night.” I stand there stunned. I don’t think I agreed to let her stay for the night, but at this point I’m not in a proper mindset to question the decision. I just nod at her and attempt to smile. I peer into the room and the smile fades. Veronica is sitting on the bed, her hair wet from having taken a shower, wearing one of Sabrina’s nightgowns. She gives me a sorrow expression, then her eyes dart down to the floor.

“Just.....let me know if you girls need anything.” I manage to say. Sabrina thanks me once more, then she calls out for her cat. The thing leaves its place and comes into the bedroom. I feel as if a wave of electricity ran right through me when the cat brushes against me. Like I want to puke my guts out. My mouth flies open, and I have to cover it to keep myself from getting sick. I can’t tell why I have this gut feeling, but something is not right about that cat. But I just can’t put my finger on it.....

Sabrina quickly smiles at me before closing the bedroom door. Whatever that weird electric wave was, it’s gone now. I take a minute to shake myself out of it before turning off the stove. I still sense an odd vibe in this house. Whether it’s the overpowering presence of magic, or that cat, for some odd reason, it’s overstimulating my senses. I need to get some fresh air - maybe that will do the trick. Help me clear my head. The breeze hits me the moment I step out of the trailer. I inhale the cool air and allow it to cleanse me. I lean down, gripping my fingers onto the railings. I head down the steps and wrap my arm around the wooden pole when I get to the bottom. I glance around the darkened trailer park, the murmuring of voices inside the trailer, the faint light of a fire pit a few trailers away. This is the first time I think Sunnyside Trailers has ever been this quiet. The energy feels so much calmer compared to when FP and I resided here in our youth. Perhaps Gladys coming here to make things better has worked, or even me and Sabrina showing up. Regardless.....I can say that this place is peaceful at night.....

An angry voice raises in the distance. At first, I don’t know where it’s coming from or who is yelling. Then I look across the way and stand up straight. Gladys is marching towards my trailer, yet she’s not paying attention to her surroundings. She’s busy yelling at someone over the phone.

“Look, Lodge, I don’t know what happened to your daughter! All I know is that she showed up at Pop’s like she came straight outta Evil Dead!” The conversation brings a sense of dread. I roll my eyes and sigh. Of course, Hiram raises hell when something happens to daddy’s little girl. Gladys continues giving Hiram her two cents as I head over to her. I make an attempt to ask what the deal is when she notices me coming over. She raises a finger, indicating for me to stay out of it, mouthing “Lodge” with her brows raised. I can’t hear too well what he’s saying to her, even if I make an attempt to use magic. Gladys makes a firm line with her lips, almost to keep herself from exploding at him over the phone. After a little bit, the line breaks and she speaks again. “Yeah?
Well, good luck sending your boys down here this late at night, dumbass! You make any notion of your presence down here, and the Serpents will be out for blood. And I mean it when I say I’m not cleaning up any more of their shit….or yours for that matter.” Just from overhearing this conversation, I don’t want to clean up after anyone either. Well, Hiram may ignore Gladys and her threats, but he won’t be able to ignore Acid Queen Alice.

I nudge Gladys on the arm and motion for her to give me the phone. She doesn’t move or say anything back. On the other end of the phone, Hiram gets all testy, but his words mumble. I wait another second, then I motion again. Eventually, she hands over her phone and I finally catch the end of Hiram’s rant. He goes on about not knowing the location of his daughter, what it means to the Lodge name, eccetera eccetera, I’m not really paying attention.

He’s about to end his sentence when I cut him off. “I suggest you take back those statements, Manhattan. Your daughter’s with me and Sabrina at the trailer park.” That shuts him up real fast. The other end is quiet for a brief moment, then I hear a light chuckle.

“Oh….good evening, Acid Queen Alice.” He sounds so syrupy and fake, it makes my eyes roll. And he said that nickname again. If only I could just hex his ass over the phone. “It’s good to hear you’re up and moving.”

“I had work, Hiram.” my reply comes off snippy. “How else do you think I’m affording to stay in town? Also…..your little bird friend paid me a visit, so yeah…..I got your note, in case you wondered.”

“I must say, Alice, I should say I’m shocked that you figured out how to communicate with Edgar…..but you are a smart woman with a sharp tongue.” Hold on…..is he complimenting me? Is he trying to divert the conversation by talking about how to train a bird to be bilingual? I shoot a look of annoyance over at Gladys. She raises her brows, as if she’s saying “I know, right?”, in sarcastic sympathy. I let out a long sigh before even re-engaging in conversation with this man.

“Can we get back on the subject regarding your daughter?” My words come out quick and irritated. I would normally force myself to slow down, but 1) I am exhausted after a long 24 hours of work, emotional distress, and high school reunions, 2) I don’t want to leave Sabrina and Veronica alone for too long, especially with that cat’s presence making me a little hesitant, and 3) it’s Hiram. I continue, with Sabrina on my mind, “I already promised Sabrina I’d let Veronica stay over for the night. And besides…..you did mention that you had a positive opinion of Sabrina. Did you not?” I get no response. “Or do I have to read the words from your own letter myself?” That evokes a chuckle from him.

“You really did read it? Good, I almost didn’t believe Edgar when he informed me. Knowing your opinion of me…..I assumed you probably just burned it or tossed it into Sweetwater River.” The tone of his voice in that sentence goes more somber….a tone that I vaguely remember from the night before. I swear he had that tone when he….. My thoughts are interrupted when his voice chimes back in, “But I’m glad. And I trust that you and Sabrina can look after Veronica.”

“So is that a yes?” I beg the question. “Just wait until morning to come get your daughter? I don’t feel like watching your men go at it with the Serpents, and neither does Gladys for that matter.” I shoot Gladys a sympathetic glance on those words, and she smiles at me. He stays quiet for a couple of seconds, then sighs.

“I suppose.” he states as if he’s about to admit defeat, yet some part of me feels like he’s smiling over on the other end. Is it a smile….for me? “But I will be there early, so don’t act surprised when I show up.”
“Heard you loud and clear.” I scoff.

“Alright, then. Sleep well, Alice.” And with that, he hangs up the phone. I lower my hand and let my gaze stare off into the distance. I don’t get it - he was so ready to send people over to claim his child, yet he backed off the moment he talked to me. He was willing to offer help to me. What the hell is causing Hiram to act like this? Why now?

“Okay then….” Gladys steps in and takes back her phone, snapping me out of my haze. I turn to stare at her. She slides her phone back into her pocket while on the verge of cackling. “Memo to me - next time Hiram Lodge tries to cause trouble around here, I’ll come and get you.” I stay in my place, unable to respond. She picks up on my uneasy state. “You think he’s bluffing?”

“I honestly don’t know what to believe when it comes to him.” I admit in a mumble. “Nothing but smoke and mirrors. He says one thing then…..he could do something else. Been like that since high school.”

“Yeah, FP mentioned something ‘bout that. Surprised they haven’t come for each other’s throats yet, considering how long they’ve known each other.” she tells me. She places her hands on her hips and stares back at her trailer. I look over too, not just to mimic her motion, but because now I’m thinking of FP again. If Gladys is right….if Hiram really has a negative outlook on the Serpents, how is FP still standing? And considering my history…..

Gladys turns back to me and nudges my arm. “You wanna use the cot at our place? Jug’s staying over at Archie’s, and FP’s letting JB and I have the bed tonight. We can help get the cot over to your place if you want.” I look back over at my trailer…..the bedroom light is still on. I wonder what Sabrina and Veronica are talking about. And what…..what Salem is doing in there. I don’t mind letting Sabrina have the bed - we’ve worked a rotation system where one of us has the bed every other night while the other takes the couch. And frankly, the couch is more of a comfort compared to the places I slept on in my youth.

I turn back to Gladys and shake my head, “I’ll be alright. I’ve practically got the couch all set up anyway. Besides, I think I’ll be up for a little longer looking through some of my books, so it won’t make any much difference.” I finish my explanation, and she gives me a thoughtful smile.

“Alright. See ya in the morning.” she gently squeezes my arm and walks away. A breeze blows through where I’m standing, now all by myself. I wait for the porch lights of the Jones’s trailer to go out before I retreat back into my own trailer. It’s almost silent when I enter. I can hear faint whispering from the bedroom, but I can’t make out their words. And I don’t feel like using magic to eavesdrop on their conversation. I flop down onto the couch, huffing. It was merely hours ago that I sat here making a sad attempt to write out a lengthy confession to Sabrina. That I admitted my whole life story to Gladys. That I received that note from Hiram.

The note….

I rise up. The note Hiram sent to me. Where did I put it? I stumble over to my purse on the kitchen table and dump everything out? Did I throw it out? Did I shove it into my purse before heading into Pop’s? Is it buried in my car? My uniform? Where did that note go? After another search through the garbage pile from my purse, I grab my car keys and head outside again. Another wisp of cold air hits as I fly down the stairs and go through the convertible. Nothing in here. Then I remember - we took Gladys’s car to work, not mine.

Growing more frustrated, I head back into the trailer, running out of options, until I see my Pop’s uniform and a sweater hanging on the backs of the kitchen chairs. I run over and dig through the pockets. I’m not lucky at first. Then, feeling out the pockets of my sweater, something crinkles in
my hand. I grab for this paper-textured thing and pull it out. Got it!

I meander back over to the couch and sit down, reading Hiram’s words over and over again. Only one sentence sticks in my head. **I stand true to my statement if you are in need of any assistance during your stay in Riverdale.** The words are clear as day, yet I don’t understand why he put those words in this note. **if you are in need of any assistance during your stay….** Is he bluffing on his promise? Did he just say that he’ll wait until morning or will he come tonight when we won’t suspect it? Am I going crazy? **if you are in need of any assistance…..** And how do I know this isn’t all just one giant distraction to keep me from finding Hal and banishing him for good? How do I know that Hiram didn’t find someone to release him….or he doesn’t care about who did it but rather just to let the chaos ensue and watch the carnage from the sidelines, or….. Or does he really mean it? Has my tarnished memories of this town affected my judgement? Is Sabrina right by saying that maybe Hiram has changed for the better? If he knew who I was…..WHAT I am…..why didn’t he reach out sooner? Why did he let me go to that house and bond with Hal? Why did he stand by while Hal and I murdered our classmates, and I had to deal with the wreckage all on my own, and….. All that wreckage. On my own.

**If you are in need of any assistance……**

I sit up straight on the couch. Something deep in my subconscious hits me. This isn’t the first time he’s offered assistance to me.

*It was cold that Halloween night, but the lights and music were blaring all the way up in Thornhill. I don’t remember why I finally decided to go to this stupid party, but it was almost close to a last minute decision. I remember telling FP about the whole conversation I had with Hiram hours prior - he was just as sketched out about it as I was. He offered to drive us over there and meet up with Fred and Hermione, still his girlfriend at the time. I half debated on not wearing a costume to this party - I already put on a show with me being the school’s pariah. Besides, I would only make my appearance just to give Hiram his “candy” and leave, that’s what I predetermined. Yet, after some talk and with FP going through my thrifted closet, I caved and threw on one of my fancier thrifted dresses. Granted, I still wore my jeans and boots underneath, and I wore my Serpent jacket over just because it was that damn cold. Well, it was still a costume, so that night, I’d say I was Ozma of Oz. No one really picked up on it, but I was quite proud of my originality. Yet, I did feel quite out of place compared to FP dressed as Ash Williams from *Evil Dead*, and Fred and Hermione as Danny and Sandy from *Grease*. It just reminded me further of how lonely I really was back then, even if I had FP around.*

*The drive up to Thornhill weirded me out - not due to the silence, but due to my inability to make conversation with the other passengers. FP drove while I say quietly in the front seat, glaring out the window. Fred and Hermione occupied the whole back seat and tried not to make their making out obvious, which failed because FP saw the whole thing in his rear view mirror. After a while, he just gave up and turned to me. “You okay, Ali?”*

“I just anxious…..that’s all…..” I muttered, not looking him in the eye. I wasn’t really in the mood for this stupid party. I don’t even know why my youthful conscious agreed to go after a long, internal debate. While I enjoyed the solitude and silence to practice my incoming magic, I needed fresh air. I needed to move. I wanted……something new.

*FP touched my shoulder, making me turn to face him. He smiled, “Don’t worry, Ali. It’s gonna be fun. And if anyone tries to pull anything—-”*

“We’ll beat their ass!” Fred yelled from the backseat. We both shot him a look, and Hermione began to cackle. FP chuckled and turned his attention back to the road. I remained staring at Fred
and Hermione for a little bit. At the time, I wanted a relationship like theirs, though I would never admit it. Not even to FP.

We arrived at the entrance of Thornhill. I’d never seen the place before in person, I only saw the Blossom’s residence from pictures and news articles, so this peaked my interest. I rested my elbow on the windowsill and looked out in awe. It looked like those places I read out of my favorite gothic novels. This place had the Brontë Sisters and Edgar Allan Poe written all over it with its haunting appearance and architecture. It was all so beautiful, so perfect. That was until Hal burned it to the ground a day after Hermione’s accident.

FP parked the car in an almost filled up row by the pool. There were already some of my classmates, in full costume, lounging by the water, singing along to some Bon Jovi, and drinking from black and orange plastic cups. The four of us headed up to the front door, hiking up the steep elevated hill. I was still so mesmerized by the overall dark aesthetic of the place, I almost stumbled over a drunk Marty Mantle dressed like Marty McFly. “Watch it!” he slurred before passing out. FP took me by the arm and we continued our trek upward. We eventually reached the front door, and Fred, now up front with Hermione, knocked on the door. I could hear the music blasting from within Thornhill’s walls. Nobody responded for a good minute, then the door opened, revealing Penelope Blossom.

“Fred! Hermione! SO glad you could make it!” she spoke in a snotty, yet sultry tone. I couldn’t see her costume at first, but from what I could tell, she looked like Madonna from that “Lucky Star” video. She then faced FP, “And you brought the golden boy with you!” I almost gagged. FP had mentioned something about Penelope constantly attempting to flirt with him.

“Happy Halloween, Blossom.” he coughed. Our greeter allowed Fred and Hermione to walk in, leaving me and FP outside with her. Penelope drifted her gaze from FP straight down to me. Her smile disappeared instantly. Her eyes flared in disgust.

“What’s SHE doing here?”

FP kept silent as he turned to me. I just smirked and gave her a salute. I wasn’t in any mood to utter a word to this girl. Yet, she persisted. “You’re kidding me. You think you can just waltz in here with FP Jones and infect my house with your slimy Serpent hands? Well, I’ll tell you right now, you trashy bitch, I---”

Her rant got cut off when a new figure entered the door frame. It was Hiram. He was wearing an all white suit with a blue collared shirt and a yellow tie. He wielded a cane, and his hair was slicked back. I realized after a minute or two from examining his outfit that Hiram was Jay Gatsby, or at least how Robert Redford dressed in the movie. He wrapped his arm around Penelope and smiled, diffusing the situation.

“Relax, Madame Blossom.” he addressed her before sending his gaze to us. Primarily to me. “The acid queen’s here per my request. She has treats for us.” He winked at me, and I rolled my eyes.

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“Well, take your jingle jangle somewhere else!” Penelope continued to screech. “Besides, you’re not in any…” she stopped, examining my outfit. “What are you even supposed to be? Stevie Nicks? ‘Cause that’s so 1970s.” Penelope cackled at her attempted diss. The boys both directed their attention to me, I guess to see how I would respond.

I let out a sigh and spoke, “I’m Ozma. You know, Queen of the Land of Oz?” FP smirked and turned back to Penelope, still unimpressed. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Hiram smile.

“I didn’t know you still read at an elementary school level, Alice.” Penelope snorted. “How can
you be a queen? You look like you came out of Sweetwater River and walked through the sewers! And you don’t have a staff, or a crown!”

“Maybe you can be kind enough to let her borrow one of your pageant crowns, Blossom.” FP entered the conversation in my defense. “Unless you don’t want slimy Serpent hands stealing your spotlight, huh?” Her eyes widened and her mouth hung. I had to cover my hand to keep myself from bursting into laughter out loud. Hiram still kept his eyes on me.

“I think it’s a neat costume.” he spoke. “Very original to go as an underrated literary character.” My stomach began to knot up. He just complimented me. He thought my costume was neat. The thought made me nauseous. Hiram stepped to the side, distancing himself from Penelope to let FP and I through. The other girl, still irritated at my presence, huffed and walked away. FP entered the house, yet I stayed outside. He whipped his head back toward me in concern.

“It’s alright, Ali.” FP whispered, gesturing his head back towards where Penelope ran off to. “I’ll make sure she won’t bite at ya for the rest of the night.” I wish I did stay by his side all through that night. Or at least that I brought him with me to the Conway House. But he wasn’t there when I was sent away. He didn’t know about my safety until the next morning. If only I knew….

Taking a deep breath, I stepped through, giving Hiram one last glare. I pulled the drugs out of one pocket of my Serpent jacket and slammed the baggie into his chest. “There’s your candy, Manhattan.” I spoke quickly, then I joined FP as we officially entered the party together.

It was a loud and chaotic scene. Most of the kids were on the verge of blackout drunk, some high from the party favors I supplied, others practically having sex with their costumes on. FP and I did get separated at one point - he got dragged away by some of his football teammates, but I wasn’t a hundred percent left by myself. I engaged in some small talk with some of my classmates and just mostly people watched. By the fireplace, Darryl Doiley chugged beer through a funnel while spilling some on his Boy Scout uniform. In the corner, Mary Maiden, dressed as Princess Leia, started a philosophical debate with some of the Vixens. And on the couch, Keller stripped off his Batman mask to get intimate with Sierra, paying homage to Eartha Kitt as Catwoman. I kept having to explain my costume to multiple people, but after a while, I just gave up and found a quiet area in the kitchen to hide.

It felt like I was in a time warp - I lost track of the time and had no clue of how late it was. I murmured some calming spell to ease my anxiety, but it didn’t do much. After a while, I did leave my little sanctuary in the kitchen to rejoin the land of the living. The social gathering in the living room seemed dead, except for one voice right front and center.

“So what if I have my suspicions? I think that Reaper is still out there!” Penelope fought with one of the jocks on her couch.

“But didn’t they catch the guy?”

“They caught A guy. You know my mother led the raid against that Riverdale Reaper. She was the one who suggested they bury the man out by Pickens Park, since, of course, we Blossoms have close connections to General Pickens.” she spoke loudly of her ancestry. The whole room groaned. Guess I wasn’t the only one annoyed by Penelope Blossom’s constant boasting of her life. I stayed in my hiding spot, glancing around the crowd in ease, then I saw Hiram residing in one of the love seats.

He sat up straight and addressed her. “You think the real Reaper is waiting to attack again? After what I’ve been hearing, I’m not so sure he can top what he did to the Conway family.” That caused some people to laugh while others went quiet.
A mix of voices rose in the room. “Poor family.” “What a bastard.” “He’s probably just taking a nap in the sewers waiting for a new victim.”

“You say your family caught someone who resembled the Reaper.” Hiram inquired our host further, “What if the real Reaper is hiding out in town? Perhaps he’s waiting in that house.” My heart started racing at the last of his words. I passed by that house merely days before this party. Before Hiram and FP dragged me out of my shadows. Whatever voice called out to me that day, it didn’t sound like a murderer of a nuclear family. It didn’t sound human either.

I stepped into the group. “The house is abandoned.” I called out. Hiram fixated his gaze on me, smirking. Everyone else seemed to stare at me too. I continued, “Got all cleared out 25 years ago. No one’s stepped foot into that house in years. Even people who still live on the street don’t go near it with a ten foot pole.” Some muttered in agreement and whispered to each other. Penelope remained bored.

“Wow. Nice evaluation, Nancy Drew.” She stepped towards me, her hand glued to her hip. “Did any of those Serpents you sleep around with tell you that? Do you even know that it’s accurate? Where’s your research?”

“Oh, it’s up your ass, Penelope.” I threw back at her, provoking a reaction out of everyone present. She just rolled her eyes, then she glared down at the ground. At that point, I didn’t know that she was planning out my fate. Or that she planted the seeds to people Hal and I murdered…..including her own.

Once she formulated her course of action in her head, she looked back up at me and took another step in. “You think you know everything about the Conway House, Alice? Why don’t you go there and prove yourself.” The room went silent. My heartbeat picked up, my palms clammed up. It was an insane and dangerous dare to take on in 1992, and maybe it still is. But back then, I knew a trip out there for an extended period of time would not bring positive results. I stayed unresponsive while the room filled with chatter again. They all began to whisper of if I would go out and take on Penelope’s quest.

She spoke again, her voice now low and unsettling. “Do I need to repeat myself, snake girl? Go to the Conway House. I. Dare. You.” The crowd whooped in excitement. My confidence was starting to crumble. Penelope smiled maliciously. And Hiram…..he was the only one in that room who didn’t give in to the whooping or hollering, nor did he jump in to stop Penelope. He remained in his seat, his face neutral, his eyes still on me.

I knew what people said about the Conway House. I knew what went down, what to avoid, why to not go over there at night. Especially on a night like Halloween. My human side was aware of these reasons and wanted me to listen to logic. But my witch side….I wanted to show Penelope up. To make them all stop talking. And by that point of the night, I had enough of this party.

I swallowed the forming lump in my throat, then glared down at her. “You’re on, Blossom.” The kids cheered and began to clap. I began to back away, Penelope’s smiling growing as she waved goodbye, and I hurried out of the room. I half-considered wanting to find FP, or even Fred and Hermione, to drive me over to the house. To go in with me. But the house was dark and the music was loud and I swore I would have sensory overload if I didn’t get out of there. The entryway to the house was deserted by the time I marched out the front door. The cold air hit me instantly, I could see my breath form. I started my way down the incline, turning my back to the haunting and mesmerizing world I just entered hours before. Behind me, something….someone…..was hustling to catch up to me.

“Alice, wait!” the voice rang out. I stopped, my frustration building. I turned to find Hiram
catching his breath. “Are you sure you want to go down there all by yourself? Do you want me to send someone with you?” I wasn’t sure if the cold air was stinging my eyes, but they started to tear up. I glared off to the side, not wanting to make my emotions surface, and huffed.

He went on, “I mean it. I just want you to be safe. Just in case you do need any assistance tonight….or in the future…..” I brought my gaze back to him. Hiram wanted to provide services to me? A Southside freak? The Acid Queen? I could’ve laughed out loud.

“I can fend for myself, Manhattan.” I muttered, starting to turn away from him. I walked about a few steps, then looked back. He was still standing there, half in remorse. I looked back up at Thornhill once more. “Besides,” I called out, “I’d rather being dancing with the devil at that house then doing nothing here at this lame ass party. Happy Halloween, Hiram.” With that, I walked away from Thornhill, and I made my way to the place where my future in Riverdale ended.

The note crinkles in my hands. I have to glance up to keep myself from getting all misty eyed and ruining the ink. Looking back on that night, I had so much unnecessary resentment against most of the people I knew. Even bystanders and silent agents like Hiram. While I guess I was justified in my anger and my envy, I realize that it made me destroy my chances of positive change in this town. It made me more vulnerable for Hal to prey on me. If I wasn’t being so naive, if I stuck with FP, or Fred, or even Hermione during the party, if I had just taken Hiram’s offer that night……

If I had taken his offer then……if I take it now…….

An idea comes to me. It’s….I can’t….I don’t want to…..but it may be the only way. I can’t stop Hal on my own. I don’t know how to track him, or to find an effective spell to bring him down. I don’t have the proper training to do it.

But Hiram does.

XXXXXXXXX

SABRINA

The cups of tea feel warm in my hands, and I think I can smell some lavender. Maybe the scent can help ease V’s tension and trauma. I notice Ali glancing over at her before she turns back to me. “Just….let me know if you girls need anything.” she states hesitantly. I know it wasn’t her intention, or mine for that matter, to let V stay over for the night. But that was before Chuck Clayton.

“Thanks.” I respond. I spot Salem on the floor a few feet behind Ali. Perhaps he could bring V some comfort….maybe even some advice on how to handle this situation. “Come on, Salem!” I call out to him. He prances into the bedroom, brushing past Ali. Her mouth flies open before she covers it. Almost as if she’s having a bad reaction to Salem’s presence in the trailer. How odd….

I give her a smile before I shut the bedroom door, turning back to V. Salem curls up on the bed a few inches from her, licking his paw. I join them on the bed and hand one of the cups to V. “How are you feeling? Any better?” She takes a quiet sip of her tea before answering.

“Somewhat.” she exhales. She starts shivering, maybe from the cold air or her wet hair, I’m not sure. She sniffs then takes another slow sip. “I…..I don’t get it ‘Brina. Chuck never did anything awful when I first interacted with him. He was always such a gentleman…..always so nice to
me…..and the other girls in class…..” Other girls? These words stick out in my head. There were others? The thought also makes Salem perk his head up.

“You think there were others?”

“I’m not sure. Well, now that I think of it, some of the other football players in our class were always snickering in the back…..and other girls would give us weird glances whenever we practiced our number. Like…..they were worried about my well-being or something…..”

“Sounds like this boy’s caused trouble long before you ladies came into town.” Salem pipes in. “Men these days just don’t know how to behave themselves. Mortal ones, if we’re going into specifics.” I have to think over Salem’s comment for a moment. Harvey would never do anything to the extent of….whatever it is Chuck did. I don’t think Archie or Jughead would either. But Salem has a point - there have been plenty of jerks at Baxter who used their status as athletes to prey on other students. Especially over people like my friends…..even…….

It’s been a while since I have thought about what the Weird Sisters and I did to those jocks that beat up Suzie. The plan was meant to be a simple prank - make them believe one thing, then simply scare them with another. I never intended for the Sisters to almost kill them. I try to put it past me when those memories come into my head. I haven’t even told Ali about it, or V for that matter. But with Chuck Clayton having been able to get away with his awful actions, and him going after V like that……it’s a dangerous idea to toy with that kind of magic again. I don’t want to resort to it. But what good can be accomplished if I sit back and do nothing?

“He shouldn’t get away with this.” I break the silence. V shoots me a confused look, and Salem tilts his head with a meow. I rise up from the bed and start to pace. I try to think of ways to make Chuck learn his lesson…..ways that maybe don’t involve dark magic. There has to be a logical, mortal method to get justice. “If there’s other girls who went through your situation, someone has to speak up! No one should walk free from hurting others! Even if they are a football player!” Salem sits up and gives a little nod of approval. However, V remains unmoved.

“Maybe that’s how things work in Greendale, ‘Brina.” she sighs, “Not around here. Even if Archie tried to vouch for me, nothing would get accomplished. Chuck’s the coach’s son, and a star player. They’d be more worried about his reputation than my own safety.” She goes to say more, but a voice from outside breaks up the conversation. Salem chirps, and I turn to the window. I look out and see Aunt Ali with Mrs. Jones. Ali’s on the phone with someone…..she seems irritated. Who could be calling her this late at night?

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“Let me guess - Daddy wants to rip apart Sunnyside Trailers to find where I am?” V asks deadpan. I look back at her and she wipes away a tear. “Of course he found out. Somehow, one way or another, my father always gets involved with everything in my life.”

I blink, then I snap my fingers. An idea comes to me. Mister Lodge! He’d do anything for V! “We could use him! If he is that high up in the Church of Night, like you said, he could convince Chuck to own up to his actions and make him step down from the football team! That way, we protect the identities of anyone else that dealt with him, and we get you justice!” On the bed, Salem snickers. He jumps off and comes closer to me.

“Cute idea, Sabrina. But having Daddy stepping in won’t solve your problems.” he starts to sound more serious, as he did earlier this morning. I didn’t realize that Salem’s negative outlook on Mister Lodge paralleled Ali’s views…..yet his outlook appears more negative. Much more sinister. He looks up at me, his strange little eyes appearing darker in the bedroom. His voice goes flat as he continues, “You want real justice? Don’t rely on the willpower or on the kindness of strangers. You have powers, Sabrina. And so does your friend. Use them.”
I stand there, not saying a word. I do have powers, yes, but it could be risky to pull something magical out on Chuck, especially after that prank with the Weird Sisters. Imagine if they heard about this situation. Or about any of my time here in Riverdale. What would other witches my age be saying about me now? Would they call me a coward for running away? For not committing myself to the Church of Night? That I’m too caught up in the human world? They probably all think that I am a disappointment to the Spellman name. But I’m not. The more that I think about it……

“Salem has a point, ’Brina.” V speaks, unexpectedly. Did she just…..how can she….. I look up at her, and so does Salem. He tilts his head sideways and meows. V readjusts herself on the bed and huffs. “The only way we can make Chuck confess to what he did is if we take the initiative. We have to be the ones to do something.” I’m still too dumbfounded to speak. How did she know what Salem told me? Salem leaves my side and jumps back onto the bed.

“You can hear me?”

“I guess so? I wasn’t so sure at first who Sabrina was talking to when you came out of that house….but now it makes sense.” She glances over at me briefly with a small smile. I remain confused yet amazed at the shift of our conversation. She turns back to Salem, “Is….is that a bad thing? That I can communicate with you even though your Sabrina’s familiar?” V lifts her hand and holds it near him. I think she wants to pet him but doesn’t know if he would be okay with it. Salem takes a second or two to look V up and down. It gets quiet, and I’m not sure if he approves of this whole situation. Salem looks at her palm, then straightens his head, staring directly into her eyes. He stays like this for a while. It gets colder in the bedroom for no reason. I want to turn and see if the window is open by accident, but I don’t move. I can’t move. I don’t know what’s happening between Salem and V. It’s as if……as if he sees something about her.

Finally, Salem happily meows and nuzzles his head into V’s palm. “No. It’s not a bad thing at all, Miss Lodge!” She laughs in relief, and I’m stunned. It’s the first time she’s laughed since this afternoon. V then grabs Salem and places him in her lap, stroking his black fur. He starts to purr and addresses me, “You made the right call to join forces with Miss Lodge, Sabrina!”

I allow myself to grin ever so slightly. It’s a relief that V is feeling somewhat better, and that Salem has a high opinion of her……but their interaction, whatever connection they just fostered, leaves me a bit baffled. Maybe it makes sense why Ali acts so hesitant…..Regardless, Salem is here to act as my mentor and guide. And V is someone I can trust. Whatever we decide to do about Chuck Clayton, it will be better, smarter, than the stunt I pulled with the Weird Sisters against those boys.

I take a deep breath and move away from my place, sitting next to V and Salem on the bed.

“So……what’s our plan?”

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End of Chapter Four

Chapter End Notes

HOOOO BOI....
What will Sabrina and Veronica do to bring Chuck to justice? What's the deal with Salem? And....will Alice learn to break down her walls and ask Hiram for help?

Tune in next week, my dudes
HAPPY THANKSGIVING WEEKEND EVERYONE!

Sorry to delay the posting of this chapter (I was working all day yesterday), but you now have the newest chapter of this supernatural/film noir(y) epic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ALICE

The sky is a blended mosaic of blue, violet, and pink when I wake up. It’s the first time in a while that I haven’t been passed out from an attack or heavily slept in since arriving into town. I’m actually up before the girls in the bedroom. When I do come to my senses, I get up from the couch and check the time on the stove. Is it only 5:40? I move around the living room real quick and glance down at the little coffee table by the sofa. Last night, I began scribbling down how I would go about getting Hiram involved into my Hal problem. I pick up my notes, attempting to read my handwriting in the faint morning light.

Go to Pembrooke? Have him come to Pop’s? The trailer park? Do I get Gladys involved too?

I must have passed out while in the process of formulating a plan. I lower the paper down and let out a long groan. I think about going back to sleep, but the thought of Hiram dropping by at any moment between now and the later half of the morning keeps me jolted. And I want to stay awake in case Sabrina or Veronica come out from the bedroom.

I decide to throw on my boots and a sweater, and I head out of the trailer. Maybe a good, long walk can allow me to finalize the details in my head. The leaves on the ground crunch as I walk to the outer edges of the trailer park, heading more towards the woods. The sun begins to peek through the trees, making the sky more pink and orange. I see my breath every time I exhale. My brain goes through the options on repeat. What do I even say to Hiram? Would he take me seriously? Should I even trust him to begin with?

I begin to talk out loud, “So remember that guy you saw me with at school? The one who scared you that night? Yeah, well he’s a demon and he’s out and…..No that won’t work.” My muttering turns into rambling after a good amount of walking. Eventually I get frustrated and turn back around, returning to my trailer.

The whole situation is oddly symmetrical to me. Just years ago, I planned with Hal to get back at Hiram for….whatever it was he did. Now, I have to meet with Hiram to take down Hal. The roles are reversed now, yet the scenarios are similar. Somewhat similar, if I’m honest. In Hiram’s case, all he ever did was play in on the jokes classmates made about me, hit me up for drugs those few times, and called me the Acid Queen. Hal….he’s a whole other problem, and much worse. Now that I’ve had the 25 years to think about it, he always had been a problem. Ever since I let Hal come to school with me.

It was his idea to go after Hiram first. It was a week after the Halloween Party, and by that point people had dropped the talk about my trip to the Conway House. Only two people still brought it
up religiously. One was Penelope, just because she wanted to pester me. The other was Hiram... for reasons I didn’t want to know back then. At that point, Hal became a bit more familiar with the faces of Riverdale High, Hiram included, and he began to formulate some opinions of their behavior all on his own.

“So this boy showed up from New York?” he asked me when we were in my room after school one day. I think I was putting away some laundry when we had this conversation. I huffed at his question and folded up a flannel FP let me borrow.

“Wouldn’t surprise me if that’s where he gets his “holier than thou” attitude. That or the fact that his family is loaded.” I made air quotes with my fingers. Hal laid on my bed all confused at the gesture. I rolled my eyes before remembering that he’s a supernatural creature - he wouldn’t know my kind of language, or one of any kid in the 90s.

He sat up, resting his elbows on his knees and interlacing his fingers. “And he just thinks he can use you as a drug mule?”

“It’s not that big of a deal, Hal.” I tried to shrug it off. I turned my back to him so I could tuck some pants in my drawer. “It’s the general rep I’ve received. I’m everyone’s candy girl in Riverdale. Probably will be until I can get myself out of this place.” It was true - with college coming so soon, I wanted to get as far away from Riverdale as possible. I didn’t want to be stuck having to care for the Serpents, or for my father. I wanted to be someplace where I could truly better my witchcraft. Where I no longer had to be Acid Queen Alice. I could be... just Alice.

I shut the drawer and wiped my hands on my jeans. “Besides, Hiram Lodge is nothing compared to most of the kids at school.”

“Yet, he doesn’t do anything to help you.” I turned back around to find Hal rising up from the bed. His face held no emotion. His lips were in a flat line. But his eyes...his eyes gave away a subtle sense of anger. A sense I wouldn’t really pick up on until the chaos was already ensued. He walked over to me and stopped just inches away from where I stood. He looked down at my Converses, picking up each detail in my shoelaces, the colored bands.

He brought his eyes up to meet mine, “Why does he call you Acid Queen Alice? And not just Alice?”

I didn’t know how to answer. In my head, I knew Hiram did it because everyone at school did. It was my nickname long before he arrived from New York. Yet...he used that name for me more than the other kids. Most would just resort to “that Southside freak”, or “Smith”.....even “Serpent Slut” to others like Penelope. But to Hiram, I was and always would be the Acid Queen.

Was there a reason Hal poked into this? He only saw Hiram at school, and the two had barely interacted when we all had class. Hal only knew what information I gave about Hiram. But even from that small amount....

“What are you thinking?” I asked more as a whisper. I don’t think I ever knew what thoughts went on in Hal’s head. I wondered how demons and familiars saw the human world and how they responded to witches interacting with humans. Even witches who were pretending to be human.

Hal stepped closer in, curling his fingers under my chin and lifting my head up. I could feel a jolt of electricity rumble through me as he did this. He began to show more emotion in his face. “If he wants to call you a queen, he needs to start treating you as such.”

I still remember the look in his eyes from that conversation. I still don’t know what reasons
influenced Hal to have me go after Hiram first. I’m at least lucky that Hiram is still here, that out of everyone we attacked…..Hiram is still breathing. Because it will take much more than my own magic to stop Hal.

I walk back up the steps to enter my trailer and open the door. I feel calmer entering this morning. Whatever vibe came into the house seems to have died down - I’m not sure if it’s from Veronica staying the night, or any of Sabrina’s anxiety mixed with my own, or that cat….

I grab the paper of plans from the coffee table and bring it with me into the kitchen. I continue to look over the possible conversation starters as I start to make some cider - a blend of apple, cinnamon, nutmeg, and hints of pumpkin. It’s a drink I learned to make from an older witch I ran into years before I came to Greendale, and it’s become an unspoken fan-favorite at the bakery during the autumn. The aroma of the blended spice waft in the air, bringing some warmth on this cold morning. It calms me…. Maybe it can calm the girls too when they eventually wake up.

It’s about 7:35 when I finish brewing the cider. I make myself a cup and leave the mixture on a low-heat, just in case Sabrina and Veronica want a warm cup in a little while. I head back to the couch and start pouring through my books, taking a sip of the warm morning beverage. It takes each part of my brain to not count down the minutes until Hiram arrives to pick up his daughter. The patience kills me. I bounce my knee and tap my ankle onto the rug nervously. I speed read through a couple of spell books, not finding much that could help in the long run. My fingers grip on my mug, I can feel the burning sensation of the cider through the ceramic.

The bedroom door opens with a creak. I jolt out of my state for a moment at the noise. Then, my shoulders release from their hold near my ears, and I exhale. Veronica comes out of the bedroom and grabs her coat from the night before, giving me a little wave. There’s no sight of Sabrina or that cat behind her, so I assume Sabrina is still asleep. I stand up, setting my cup down.

“Has my father shown up yet?” Veronica whispers as I come over to her. My lips form a tight line as I shake my head. The young Lodge glances around the trailer, I’m not sure whether due to shyness or to avoid small talk. She eventually returns her gaze to me, “Thank you for letting me stay the night. I thought about going home, but…..” Her voice drops. It doesn’t require me having to read her mind to understand what could be going on in the girl’s head. She didn’t want to go back alone in the dark, especially with Hiram wanting to know every detail of her whereabouts. And now with Hal out of the house…..

“No, it’s alright.” I force myself to say something. “You were better off staying with me and Sabrina. It would have been too risky to go back all by yourself…..” I don’t finish the sentence. I stare at the young girl, taking in her facial features. She really does look like Hermione, she has her. She has Hiram’s eyes….. My face softens. Then my heart races. It hits me. Hiram’s daughter is just as much of a target for Hal as is Sabrina. And who knows what would happen if Hal ever got his hands on Veronica….

I come back to my senses and head into the kitchen area. “You want some cider? I made it fresh.”

“Are you sure?” I hear her ask, but I grab a travel mug for her anyway.

“Trust me, I’ve made enough for Sabrina and I split for the next couple of days.” I respond as I ladle the cider into the mug. I set the ladle down and screw the lid on before I hand the mug over to her. She takes it a smiles.

“Thank you, Miss…..” she pauses, her gaze drifting off. She looks back up, “I’m sorry. What would you like for me to call you? Miss Beauchamp? Miss….” So Hiram hasn’t shared with his daughter about my true identity.
“Alice is fine.” I croak.

“Just…..Alice?” I’m about to respond, but something catches my attention. From the distance, outside the trailer, I can hear a car pulling into the driveway. I take a deep breath.

“Yeah, just Alice.” I head over to the window and peer out. The same vehicle that Hiram pulled up in from the soccer game sits outside my trailer. I can see him step out slowly, examining the scene around him. Is he expecting trouble from the Serpents?

“Did you know my father growing up?” I lean back from the window. It takes a moment to process the question. With my back straightened, I rotate towards Veronica. She takes a nervous sip of her cider. “I thought your name was Wendy Beauchamp. You used it at that soccer game a couple of weeks ago, and you use it at Pop’s. Does he know you as Alice?”

“It’s…..” I start to provide an answer but stop myself. I forgot Veronica and Sabrina were there with us when he approached me. Could she tell, even from that interaction, that Hiram could see past my facade? “It’s complicated. But yeah, he knows me as Alice……and I knew him.” I finally answer. I notice Veronica’s face soften. Her eyes express her contemplation, and her low spirits. Something in my subconscious stops me from adding in, And your mother too.

“How do you view him?” she poses a new question. I stay in my place, out of words. How did I view Hiram? Did my hatred and sour opinion of him stem from Hal’s opinions of him, or were they all fostered on my own? Was I making my emotions up? What happened to me within these 25 years has changed how I think of others. I don’t open up much unless out of pure panic, like I did with Gladys, or if I do have a fair amount of trust in them. But with someone like Hiram, where I think I know one thing only for it to be another, my chances of trusting him are up in the air. Yet…..

There’s a knock on the door. I let out a breath and march over to the door. He’s studying the details of the staircase arch in wonder when I open the door. He fixes his sight on me and grins.

“Morning.” his greeting is short and simple. I rest my forearm on the doorway and peer out to the driveway. His ride remains the only vehicle apart from my own in that little space. “Don’t worry.” he follows up, “I came from Pembrooke alone.” I’m actually shocked. Maybe I really did talk him down from having his men invade Serpent territory.

I return my focus back to him. “I was just about to say, you forgot your entourage, Michael Corleone.” the sarcasm naturally slips from my tongue. I push away from the door frame and back up to let him through. Hiram enters the trailer. He glances around until he spots Veronica by the kitchen table.

“Mija.” He rushes over to his daughter and pulls her in for an embrace. I watch their interaction briefly…..it’s different from how he talked to her during the game. He seems more caring, more panicked for her wellbeing. She’s more open, more willing to seek comfort. I look away and find myself staring at my plans on the coffee table. Would it be a good time to ask him now? “Alice.” he calls out to me. I face the Lodges, almost clinging to one another. He gives me a faint smile. “Thank you.”

“Thank Sabrina. She did more to help your daughter.” I take a couple of hesitant steps towards them. The thought of Veronica being just as much in danger as Sabrina still lurks. I’m tempted to ask Hiram to stay so we can talk about this situation, but from his jittery stance…..it seems he might be in a hurry to get somewhere, I don’t know whether for Church business or another task. My sight darts down to the mug of cider in Veronica’s hand, then I look back up, heading into the kitchen. “You want any cider, Hiram? I made some for your daughter. I guess it’d be rude if I
didn’t offer you any either.”

“If you’re offering, I wouldn’t refuse.” his voice perks up, more genuine than I anticipated. I finish getting his drink together and hand him the thermos. His fingers graze mine as he reaches for it - they’re cold from the weather outside, but it doesn’t shock me. The touch, whether intentional or completely by accident, has a calming quality to it. The same as when he helped clean me up during our encounter at Pop’s. I redirect my attention upward, my eyes staring at his.

A little voice in my head wants me to ask him to stay so we can talk. It wants me to open up about those fears I have accumulated while being here. It wants me to ask about what he knows about Hal, if he ever suspected much more during high school. It wants me to trust him like my life depends on it. My brain screams, yet my mouth stays glued shut. Maybe now might not be the best time.

“Have a good rest of your day, Alice,” he breaks our little moment of silence, starting to walk away. Veronica follows him in suit. “And thank you, really.” he addresses me one last time with a wave. He heads out the door, and Veronica smiles at me before leaving herself. I keep my eye on the door as I let myself back into the counter in the kitchen. I almost regret not saying anything else to him.

The bedroom door opens, catching my attention. Sabrina, not wearing her pajamas, comes out with something small in her hands. A pearl necklace? She glances around then turns to me. “Hey, Ali. Did V already leave?” Behind her, Salem emerges and stands at her feet. I glare down at the animal. The weird energy I experienced last night around this cat slowly emerges, but not as boldly.

I look back up at her, pointing at the door. “She just walked out with her dad.”

“Okay, thanks!” she rushes her words and runs out of the kitchen, Salem keeping up with a meow. She hurries out the door, leaving it somewhat open. I can hear her calling out to the young Lodge, but I can’t make out the conversation too well. I turn back to stare into the bedroom. Sunlight starts to appear through the windows above the half-made bed. There’s a notebook on the bed, open to some pages covered in scribble notes. From what I can see in the distance, it looks vaguely similar to how I tried to plan out my conversation with Hiram. What are these girls planning to do?

XXXXXXXXXX

SABRINA

The sunlight starts to illuminate the bedroom as I look over our plan. It took V, Salem, and me a couple of hours to perfect, to every last detail, our method to bring Chuck Clayton to justice. I examine the notes scribbled on my notebook while I wait for V to finish up in the bathroom. Salem sprawls himself out next to me, his black fur shining in the sunlight. I giggle and scratch his belly.

V emerges, “So when I get back to Pembrooke, I’ll reach out to Chuck and make sure we can get this thing arranged at his house. If that doesn’t work, we might have to come up with a Plan B, because I don’t know what chances we have of executing this at Pembrooke, with my father around.”

“Hopefully it should.” I try to keep my voice down. I thought I heard the front door open when V
and I woke up this morning, yet I don’t want to risk bothering Ali so early in the morning.

Salem chirps. “It will. And the boy is a fool if he turns you away.” V smirks and ruffles his fur. She slides on her shoes, checking over her reflection in the mirror.

“It might be a while before I get to it…..I expect Daddy will probably lecture me about my behavior and what-not. But when I get the free time later…..I’ll let you know if we’re in.” She shoots me a nervous look. I know I’m just as nervous, but Salem is right - the plan has to work. It’s nothing like what I did to those Baxter boys with the Weird Sisters, but it will be just as effective. The boys from Baxter only harmed one girl, who I happened to be friends with, that they deemed unfavorable. But Chuck Clayton is a different case, one that has brought harm to more than just V. And with what we have planned, he’ll have no other choice but to confess to what he did.

“Okay.” I answer quickly. She smiles, then she heads out of the bedroom. I rise up from the bed and begin to change out of my pajamas. I can smell cinnamon and hints of apple all the way from the bathroom, it smells delicious. I finish getting ready when I look down at the dresser - V forgot her pearl necklace!

In a hurry, I grab for the necklace and head out of the bedroom. Salem grumbles and jumps off the bed to follow me. I step out into the kitchen and find Ali rested against the kitchen counter. I glance around the trailer for any sign of V, or her father. I turn back to face Ali, “Hey, Ali. Did V already leave?”

I look back up at her, pointing at the door. “She just walked out with her dad.” she points towards the door. Relieved, I begin to head in that direction, quickly thanking her. I run down the steps, Salem keeping up with my pace, and I am able to catch up to V and Mister Lodge.

“V, wait!” I am almost out of breath when I get to them. V stands there baffled, then she notices the necklace in my hands. “You forgot this.” I hand it over to her and attempt to regulate my heartbeat again. I turn to Mister Lodge and give him a wave.

“I didn’t realize I left this. Thanks.” V takes the pearls and fixates it around her neck.

“You sure that’s everything you have, Veronica?” he speaks up, to her dismay and embarrassment. She tells him, in an irritated tone, that nothing else is left in the trailer, which I confirm. “Well then,” Mister Lodge then addresses me, “I’ll see to it that you and your caretaker are compensated for your hospitality.”

Salem grumbles at my feet, not as bad as he was the first time around Mister Lodge, but he still comes across ill-favored. I pick him up, despite his squirminess, before providing a response. “We don’t mind having Veronica over, right Salem?”

“Oh, trust me. I’d rather you stay with this fair young woman than with that Serpent boy anyday.” Salem’s voice rings through my head. V must have heard him too because the comment makes her chuckle. She reaches out and itches his head. Mister Lodge directs his attention to the trailer, allowing V and I some time to talk.

“I’ll see if I can have you stay with me tomorrow.” she whispers. “That way we can go confront Chuck together. We’ll say it’s a sleepover.”

“Oh, trust me. I’d rather you stay with this fair young woman than with that Serpent boy anyday.” Salem’s voice rings through my head. V must have heard him too because the comment makes her chuckle. She reaches out and itches his head. Mister Lodge directs his attention to the trailer, allowing V and I some time to talk.

“I’ll see if I can have you stay with me tomorrow.” she whispers. “That way we can go confront Chuck together. We’ll say it’s a sleepover.”

“Okay.” I confirm with her. “Just let me know if we’re in with Chuck.”

“I won’t forget. See you later, girl.” V heads towards her ride, waving me goodbye. Salem wriggles free from my hold and jumps down to the ground. He prances off back over to the staircase as
Mister Lodge approaches me, still staring at the trailer.

“You’re lucky to have her, Sabrina.” I don’t respond, just out of confusion. Is he talking about V? Wouldn’t his tone come off more snobbish? More pressing into his status with the Church? My mouth hangs when I finally come to the realization that he isn’t talking about his daughter.

So he does remember Aunt Ali. I manage to form a smile. He knows about Ali. Then why would he go along with her “Wendy Beauchamp” identity, even around me? Did Auntie Z ever talk to him about her? Or….was he not expecting her to show up with me?

He finally looks at me. “I’m glad that she offered to come look after you in Riverdale. And, frankly, I’m glad that you’re looking after her too.”

“She’s a good witch.” I speak up, directing my own gaze at the trailer. Even with V’s situation at the forefront of my thoughts, I still am eager to keep an eye on Ali. To learn why being in Riverdale makes her so sad. To know what she’s been wanting to tell me long before we left Spellman Mortuary just weeks ago.

“Take care, Sabrina. And take care of her too.” Mister Lodge nods at me before turning away. I watch as he disappears into the same vehicle V just entered into moments ago. The all-black car pulls out of the driveway, circling around our section of the trailer park, vanishing into the fog. I start thinking about Ali’s connection to Mister Lodge. If he knows about her, that must mean he must have some indication of what happened to her. Maybe he might even know something about the Riverdale Reaper….

“I’m still not getting good vibes from that man, in case you were wondering.” Salem expresses from behind me. I roll my eyes and peer down at my familiar. “Veronica, I can at least trust. But her father….his words sound like lies.”

I cross my arms. Something’s not right about Salem’s attitude. “Then why did he help Aunt Ali get back to the trailer the same night I found you? Doesn’t sound a string of lies to me. You’re just being paranoid, Salem. As you are about Jughead.”

“Excuse me for looking after your wellbeing, Miss Spellman.” he grumbles as he heads up the staircase. I eventually make my way up and re-enter the trailer. The flavors of apple, cinnamon, and pumpkin whirl through the air. At the kitchen table, Ali is writing something on a sheet of paper. She stops and looks up at me as I shut the door.

“There’s fresh cider on the stove, sweetheart.” she gestures to the stovetop before going back to her writing. I start to wonder what Ali could be working on, but my thoughts are put on hold by the aroma of these autumn spices and flavors. I grab a mug and pour a large amount of cider into it. I look back into the open bedroom, realizing I forgot to shut the door behind me. Did Ali see the notebook of V and mine’s plans about Chuck? I shrug it off, heading to the table to join Ali.

“Did you sleep okay?” I ask as I sit down, taking my first sip of the warm beverage. The cinnamon tastes fiery and the pumpkin flavor coats my throat. Ali stops her scribbling and engages in our conversation.

“Yeah….surprisingly so.” she speaks to me slowly. “Best sleep I’ve had since coming here.”

“I mean, were you okay with me and V having the bed last night?” She pauses for a moment. Her fingers circle the outside of her own mug.

“It wasn’t that bad, Sabrina.” she shrugs off the notion. “I’ll take the couch anyday compared to
where I’ve slept on before.” She grips onto her mug and sips on her cider. Behind me, Salem leaps onto the couch and curls himself into a ball. I stare at Salem, my mind still preoccupied on Mister Lodge and his potential knowledge of Ali’s past.

I rotate back to face her, my interests taking over. “Did you grow up here? In Sunnyside Trailers? Did you and your parents live like Jughead and his family?” She goes quiet, her focus aimed down at the table. I’m worried that I’ve made her panic and that I brought on a sensitive subject. To be fair, I don’t remember if Ali did ever mention anything to me about her parents, how she came to use her powers, how she survived going to school….

Ali sets down her mug and swallows a lump in her throat. She begins, “Yeah. Was born and raised here. My father was…..quite the active member of the Serpents. Obsessed with riding around on his bike with his Serpent buddies. Ready to fight rivaling gangs…… making sure I would follow his legacy.” Her voice goes out for a second. I spot her right hand flying down to an area between her thigh and her hip. She shuts her eyes and inhales, her fingers itching at that area. A tattoo? Ali was a Serpent? Just like Jughead’s parents? Then…..then what about her own mother? I’m about to inquire about her mother when Ali continues, “And my mother…..well, I didn’t know her. She left when I was 5 years old. All I know about her is that she’s a witch, hence why I have the craft.”

I take a second to process the information. How could Ali’s mother leave her? And how did Ali even come to practice her witchcraft all on her own? I carefully word my question, “There weren’t other witches in the Serpents?”

She shakes her head with a frown. “The only way I knew what I was doing was through books I found at run-down shops on the Southside. I didn’t really interact with many other witches until long after I left this place. More towards when I came across you and your Aunts.” The last statement makes my mood lift. I still vividly remember the day I met Ali years ago. Even from the beginning of our relationship, she was always so pleasant with me. So kind. And she was hiding the pain of her past here in Riverdale all with a smile. It makes me wonder how long she had been on her own before Aunties and I entered her life. I wonder if Jughead’s dad knew where she disappeared off to……or if Mister Lodge knew……

“What about Mister Lodge? Did you know about his magic?” I throw out, instantly regretting it but it’s too late now. Ali stares at me with her mouth open and her eyes startled. She blinks, then her mouth closes. She glances away at the wall and takes another inhale.

“Found out for the first time two nights ago.” she replies all monotone, grabbing her mug for another sip. “I only know about his magic just as much as you know about Veronica’s.” She doesn’t look at me for a while, she just continues to stare off in the distance. I’m worried that somehow I’ve upset her by bringing V and Mister Lodge up so much. But I haven’t interacted much with Jughead’s parents to ask otherwise, and out of the people I’ve met in Riverdale, I have a stronger connection with V.

Ali slowly returns her eyes to meet mine and reaches for my hand. She gives me a sad smile, “But I’m happy that you and Veronica can help each other with your magic. You’re already twenty steps ahead of where I ended up at your age. I’m only a little envious.” She ends her comment with a playful wink to lighten the mood. I’m relieved that we can have the time for her to open up to me about this, and for her to reminisce with some positivity. I let go of my own cup and hold onto Ali with both hands.

“I’m sorry you had to go through that all by yourself.” I do mean it - I’ve been lucky that I have Aunties and Ambrose to guide me, and I have Ali too. But Ali growing up without any guidance, or a friend like V, or Salem….. “Was that the reason you left, Ali? Were you trying to find other
witches outside of Riverdale?"

She stays unresponsive for a minute. Her silent state is one that I haven’t seen with her before, and it scares me a little bit. There must have been someone she knew back then, someone who could help her transition from Riverdale to Greendale. Otherwise…. I beg another question, “Were you running away from something?”

Ali shuts her eyes, squeezing onto my hands tighter. I’m regretting having this conversation, not because I’m petrified of my own actions, but because I’m petrified that Ali has to relive painful periods of her life. My questioning could be causing her more harm than I anticipated.

I go to speak, to apologize for the constant pestering, when she answers. “Yes. I ran from a lot of things, Sabrina. I ran from……my life here. The people I interacted with all over town……” she pauses, opening her eyes and leaning back in her seat. Her grip on my hands eases. She purses her lips before continuing, “I ran from myself. I hated my life, Sabrina. I didn’t want to be a half-Serpent, half-witch. I didn’t even want to be a Serpent. I was on my own for a majority of the time….if I wasn’t with Jughead’s father or anyone else in the gang. Other than that, I didn’t have the support you have now. Everything I learned about magic came from my own research. Even then, I was miserable. And vulnerable. And……I made the biggest mistake of my life.”

My heart races at the end of her explanation. I have so many questions but my mouth won’t move. What mistake? What did Ali do? She readjusts the hold on my hands and leans in. She takes a deep breath, then looks me straight in the eye.

“You’re a smart girl, Sabrina. And you have more of an emotional backbone than I did at your age. Don’t let anyone else take that away from you, and don’t let them get to your head. You want to know why I ran? I didn’t have that advice.”

XXXXXXXXXX

ALICE

It’s been roughly 24 hours since Hiram left the trailer park with his daughter back in his care. 24 hours, and I still don’t know if I have the time, or the courage, to ring him up and ask for his help. If he knew what was at stake by confronting me at Pop’s that night and still doing it anyway, why shouldn’t I be able to do the same?

At least I had somewhat of a chance to open up to Sabrina about my past. I wasn’t able to disclose everything, specifically about Hal himself, or even that house; the topic became too much after a while. But I could get my point across about developing emotional strength and finding some support. She seemed to take it well, which brings me some relief. After that instance, she disappeared into the bedroom for a while along with that cat, so I spent most of yesterday drafting out what to do about Hiram.

Work is slow this morning at the diner. So far, only families with smaller children and older folks have come for a meal, not many teenagers. Normally, I would be gone by now after making the daily pies, but something keeps me here at work. I keep staring at the phone at Pop’s like I’m expecting some call….for no reason. Some part of me must think that I can try to use it when the rush dies down so I can get in contact with Hiram…..but I think I’m just stretching things out beyond proportion.
I get the chance to eat during a dull point of service. I could have kept going and gone the whole morning without breakfast, but Gladys makes me sit down so I can eat something. She covers my tables while I impatiently look at the phone, stabbing my eggs with a fork. I haven’t had coffee at all, but I’m so jittery. Am I expecting someone to call at all? Maybe not Hiram, or Keller even…..Hal? Did he know how to use a phone? Does he know where I am? That I work here?

My thoughts get put on hold when Gladys joins me at the bartop with her own plate of breakfast. “You hanging in there, witch?” she mutters, biting into a piece of bacon. She notices me staring at the phone, which happens to be next to the coffee pot, and smirks. “You want me to convince Pop to let us finish out the last of that pot?” I manage to look at her, and with a smile, I shake my head.

“I think my heart would fly out of my chest if I drink any caffeine today.” I tease. I finally decide to take a forkful of food and shove it into my mouth. The eggs taste watery and the corned beef hash is crusty and lukewarm, but it’s better than not eating anything.

“You handle Lodge alright on your own?” she inquires me in a low voice. “I meant to ask about that yesterday.” I finish swallowing the lump of food before I answer.

“We kept it brief. He got his daughter and left. No fuss.” Gladys rotates in her stool so her back leans against the counter, elbows on the bartop. She glances out the window, looking out at the foggy, grey world.

“Surprised he didn’t bring any of his capos along. Probably would have if he were dealing with anyone else on the Southside, including me or FP.” I mimic her motion and allow myself to relax against the countertop. I turn my head to the side to face her. She continues, “You got any weird, magical gut feelings? That him being so soft around you strikes you odd?”

I sigh and roll my eyes. “Trust me, I’ve been trying to figure that out since I arrived.” Her eyes light up, and we both start laughing. She drops her head onto my shoulder in attempt to suppress a snort. It’s nice to let my guard down for once. I spent too many years of my life not connecting with people, and not allowing myself to breathe and hang loose. Opening up to Sabrina tears down some of that wall I built. Hanging out with Gladys provides a sense of relief for me. Maybe this trip to Riverdale is what I needed to heal.

We’re both so caught up in our delirium that we don’t notice Pop coming out of the kitchen. He coughs, catching our attention, and he gives us a stern nod. He wants us to get back to work in the nicest way possible. I follow my gaze to the jukebox, still high on my good mood. “Come on, let’s get some good work music going.” I grab Gladys’s hand and we head over to the jukebox. I browse through the collection of music, searching for something upbeat. My eyes land on Yvonne Elliman. Gladys shoves a quarter into the jukebox and I press on the selection. The vibrant disco music fills the silence in the diner. I’m fully aware that the music out of this time period screams cheezy, but it radiates so much positive energy. It lifts my spirits every time I throw on his type of music in the bakery, or even when I’m by myself back in my little apartment above my shop. It reminds me of simpler, happier days.

I take Gladys by the hand and we make our way around the diner, grooving to Yvonne’s lyrics.

Don’t know why

I’m survivin’ ev’ry lonely day

When there’s got to be no chance for me

My life would end
We’re both laughing and jamming to the song without any real sense of coordination. My mind no longer focuses so heavily on my strategization to convince Hiram to help me, nor on Hal. For once during my return to Riverdale, the weight of my trauma glides off my shoulders. I still have a strong relationship with Sabrina. I have a real friend. I’m slowly making amends with former classmates. And I can reintegrate myself into society. I can finally say I’m in euphoria.

*Am I strong enough to see it through*

*Go crazy is what I will do*

I don’t hear the phone ring over the music or my state of happiness. I don’t even hear Pop on the other side of the diner go to answer the call. It’s only after Gladys and I take a second to catch our breaths from the bad dancing and ongoing laughter that Pop holds my attention.

“Miss Beauchamp, Mr. Lodge is on the other end. He wants to speak to you.”

The high I experienced starts to fade. My internal thoughts kick back in. What does Hiram want this early in the morning? From me of all people? I’m frozen until Gladys nudges me, gesturing her head to where Pop stands. I let go of Gladys and hustle over to where Pop waits for me. He hands me the phone and walks away. I scan the diner for any eavesdroppers - I can’t risk any mortal overhearing this conversation.

“Pop’s Chock’Lit Shop. This is Wendy.” I speak into the phone, maintaining my new identity. The other end is dead silent. Did Hiram leave the conversation without hanging up? Attempting to not let my anger rise, I inhale sharply. I start again, “Pop’s Choc---”

“I heard you the first time, Acid Queen Alice. You don’t have to use your cover around me.” Hiram replies, I can hear him smirking. I wish I could reach through to the other end and strangle him. Then I have to remind myself that, whether I care for him or not, he’s the only one who can help me with finding Hal….maybe even with Sabrina’s trial if he’ll budge.

I bless under my breath before re-engaging with him. “You better have a good reason for calling me in the middle of work. Unless you have any news regarding….our mutual acquaintance,” I have to carefully state out loud. Innocently mentioning Sabrina or her problems back in Greendale could open up a can of worms I don’t have time to clean up.

“I actually do have a meeting regarding that manner in a few minutes, in case you were curious.” he defends himself rather quickly. I roll my eyes, losing patience with him. He goes on, “So while I have the time, I wanted to know when you would like to have those mugs returned to you.” Whatever feelings I just generated cease at the request. He still has the mugs I put the cider in yesterday. I almost forgot I gifted the Lodges with a warm beverage to go.

“It’s not that big of a deal.” I become sheepish, turning my back to the front of the diner. I lean against the phone booth, holding the phone closer to my ear. My thoughts wonder - would now be a good time to ask? When will I have another opportunity? Is Gladys right about him? Why is Hiram acting so damn soft around me?

“I can have my daughter bring them to Sabrina if that’s easiest.” I remain silent. Sabrina asked me this morning if she could spend the night with Veronica. She claimed that she wanted to check in on her new friend, saying something about a girls’ night in at Pembrooke. She also mentioned something about taking Salem along with her, which I’m fine with. I still don’t know what to make about that cat. I’m tempted to ask if Hiram might be aware of this last-minute decision, but time is of the essence here and I do have to get back to waiting tables. Yet my head is still screaming to ask for his help.
“Okay.” I keep my answer short. An awkward silence fills the gap of our conversation. I’m not sure if he’s waiting for me to speak, or if he lost the will to speak himself. *What are you waiting for, Alice?* my inner voice begs. *Just ask him. He’s the only one in this town who can do what you do. He would have the resources, the tools; he’s your one chance to stop Hal. What’s taking you so long?*

“If you don’t have anything else, I’ll leave you be. Have a good day, Alice---”

“Hiram, wait!” I yell. The boom of my voice pierces the space of the diner, echoing throughout. Everyone in the diner, including Pop and Gladys, stare at me. I’m embarrassed out of my mind, but at this point, it’s now or never.

I lean further into the booth, exhaling. In a low register, I speak into the phone, “You said you’d offer me assistance if I ever came to need it. Right?”

I hear him lean back into something. Is he in his office right now? I can hear the shock when he returns, “Why, has something come up?” My heart could fly out. The knots in my stomach feel like butterflies. The phone cord curls in between my fingers. *Come on, Alice, spit it out.*

“More like someone has returned. Meaning bad news.” Referring to Hal alone makes me want to lurch, but I have to stay strong. I need to for Sabrina, for Veronica, and maybe for myself. Seconds go by, and Hiram says nothing. His silence puts me on edge. Does he no longer wish to offer his services? Does he even know that I’m talking about Hal?

“Look,” I start to ramble out of pure anxiety, “this actually is kinda urgent because it not only involves me. It involves Sabrina. And your daughter. You too, if you want to extend it…..” I start to stutter on words, blessing once more away from the phone. I manage to form a cohesive sentence to end my plea, “I don’t have time to explain all of this now, but this thing…..I can’t sit on this anymore and let everything go to hell. I need help.” The other end remains muted. I force myself to take a long, deep breath. Admitting that I can’t take on Hal alone wasn’t the hard part. Admitting that I can’t take him on alone and that I need Hiram to help me scares me more. My need to resort to someone, who I never got along with in high school, who invited me to that party in the first place, who became my first target….. But it doesn’t matter anymore. Hiram tried to reach out to me 25 years ago, and now I need to reach out to him.

I expect a sneer from him. I anticipate him to laugh in my ear and tell me to take the high road. Figure it out on my own. But I don’t get any notion of cruelty. Nor do I get even one noise. Instead I get, “Meet me tonight at Lenny’s - I’ll make a reservation for us at 8. Does that work?” My heartbeat slows. My brain is numb. I don’t think I ever stepped foot into Lenny’s - I never had enough money to go into our town’s most expensive restaurant. Yet again, I didn’t need Hiram’s help until recently.

“That’s fine.” I mutter into the phone, still trying to process this point of our conversation.

“We’ll talk more tonight. See you then.”

The call ends. I place the phone back in its spot and stay frozen. I’m unable to move. The arrangement that we agreed on takes some time for it to hit me. It’s actually happening. I’m meeting with Hiram. Tonight. At Lenny’s. The reality of the situation hits hard. My eyes bulge and my knees turn to jelly.

“Oh no.” I turn away from the phone booth, latching onto the bartop for support. I continue to mutter to myself, “Oh no….no no no no no.” Gladys sees me, her brow raising. When I manage to stand up without support, and without the crowd in the diner watching my nervous breakdown, I
frantically point to the bathroom. My heartbeat picks up, the knots in my stomach churning. She gets the hint, and we both hurry into the bathroom. I pace between the sinks and run my fingers through my hair, still muttering while Gladys locks the door. She’s about to ask what happened when I face her in panic.

“WHAT THE FUCK DID I JUST GET MYSELF INTO?” I whisper, which comes off more as a hiss. My hands start to shake, I feel like I’m swallowing hot wax. I might have just made a big mistake. Who am I trust Hiram Lodge at this hour? But what other choice do I have? I start to ramble, “I made a mistake. I can’t go to dinner with him. I don’t why I’m asking for his help in the first place.”

“You’re meeting with him for….I’m confused. For what now?” I glance over her shoulder towards the door. I know she locked it, but still the paranoia shakes me. I return to meet her eyes and place my hands on her shoulders, huffing. Both of my brows lift, hoping she gets the hint. Part of me wishes I had a spell so I can transmit into her head what I’m poking at. But no magic is required - her eyes widen. “Oh……. Oh shit, that thing?” I nod my head at a turtle’s pace, releasing my hands from her shoulders. I walk into one of the stalls and allow myself to melt to the floor, fingers in my hair, elbows on my knees.

“When does he want to meet? And where?”

“8. At Lenny’s downtown.” I mutter, providing her the details. My fingernails tap up and down on my skull. My gaze is to the tiles on the bathroom floor. The colorization of the tiles makes me dizzy, so I have to squeeze my eyes shut. I’m acting like a four year old - what is wrong with me? Daisies and candles, I tell myself, daisies and candles.

“At this point, just go.” She states, point blank. “See if it’s worth the time.” My fingers release from my hair. My eyes snap open as I tilt my head up to her. I stare at her, still silent, and I rise up from the floor. My hand rests against the stall, my mouth hanging.

“Are you high on fumes? I can’t!” I practically screech. The door jingles from the end of the bathroom. We both turn our heads at the noise. Whoever is outside attempts to fumble with the door again. Gladys calls out that the bathroom’s occupied until further notice. I wait until the stranger leaves before I proceed in a harsh whisper, “I never got along with this man. I was nothing but a drug dealer to him in high school. And now he wants to give a crap and make me think I need to rely on him?” I back away a little, my uniform sticking to my skin, even though it’s not hot. I speak in between breaths, fanning out my uniform, “I have to back out, I gotta call him back and cancel this. Maybe I should just ghost him….or whatever the kids call it. Hey, is it getting hot in here or is just me---”

“Alice,” Gladys takes a hold of me by the shoulders, looking me in the eye. She speaks calmly, “look at me. Deep breaths, okay?” I do as I’m told. Daisies and candles. The dizziness starts to go away. My skin cools down. The rapid beating of my heart stagnates. Once I calm down, she says, “If you haven’t decided to back out yet, maybe I can help craft your argument for tonight. Highlight the points that can convince him to aid you.” The inner voice, the teenage version of me, formulates excuses in my brain so I can skip this meeting. I’m caught listening to Teen Alice (my head makes some good points) that I faze out. Gladys picks up on this and squeezes my shoulder. “At least let me help you pick out your outfit.”

I sigh. There really is no backing out now. At one last attempt, I say the first excuse that pops into my head, “I don’t have anything good in my closet. Well….nothing that suit the dress code for a place like Lenny’s.” Gladys doesn’t fall for this. She tilts her head one way glaring down, then straightens, looking back up at me with confidence. I think I can tell what she’s trying to get at, but
I let her say it out loud anyway.

“I never said we were only gonna browse through your hippie garb, witch. I’ll admit, a lot of what I label “fancy outfits” is mostly snakeskin and kinda sheer, but it should work. Now, what size dress are you?”

SABRINA

The walk to Pembrooke from the town library is quicker this time, partially because I’m getting better at my Riverdale geography. I observe the environment around me, my backpack slung over my shoulders, my overnight bag in my hands, and Salem prancing alongside me. It’s a little after 6:30, but the sun is already starting to set, pinks and oranges blending into the fading blue sky. Leaves crumble on the sidewalk, blowing past some of the shops closing for the night. The town starts to transition to prepare the nightlife. And I’m about to engage in it.

I head up the steps of Pembrooke and enter the lobby. I text Ali to let her know that I made it safely, then I let V know I’m here. We agreed to meet at least an hour or two early so we can set up our alibi - V and I would have a sleepover, and we’re watching movies and catching up on homework in her room. Our plan is to leave here around 8:30 to head over to Chuck Clayton’s house. V will get talking with him while I go through his house…..from there we make him confess his wrongdoings. There are some details we have to work through, hence why we’re meeting earlier…..but it also allows me some time to look more into this Riverdale Reaper.

I pull out a book I borrowed from the library. It’s another book about Riverdale history, but it can provide a better insight of what Jughead and I need to write the article. I flip through the lengthier chapters, narrowing down my search. I stop on a chapter talking about the late 1960s, which is when the murders happened, and…… Something strikes out to me about this book. There actually is information regarding the Reaper massacres. Nothing’s stated about the Conway family or their unfortunate fate so far, yet the book discusses how the town reacted during this frightening time. Apparently people fled the town long before the Reaper went after the Conways, as a result of a series of “witch hunts”. A group of high elite family names banded together to seek out anyone that could be responsible for the murders. A photo of this group takes up half a page in black and white. Something else stands out to me - this group is mostly all-male, except for one woman, with one stripe of some color in her white hair.

Footsteps coming in my direction breaks my attention on the book. I lift up to find V walking towards me, decked out in an all-black bodysuit and jeans. She’s not wearing her pearls. “I didn’t keep you waiting too long, did I?”

I shut my book and shove it back into my bag. “I just got here.” I rise up from where I’m sitting, sling my backpack over my shoulders again, while Salem perks up at the sight of his new friend. He trots over to V and nuzzles his head into her leg.

“Anything that needs to be done about your father?” he purrs. V rolls her eyes and scoops him into her arms.

“Not yet, pequeño duende. Though, it wouldn’t hurt just to have you on stand-by.” she teases as she plants a kiss on top of his head. No one’s at the front desk currently, but V still has me follow
her up the back steps to her residence. Her living room is still immaculate and clean as it was the
day I first saw Pembrooke. If I can take a day or two to study every detail, I would. But we waste
no time and head straight into V’s bedroom. She releases Salem to the ground and shuts her door as
I walk in. Her laptop sits open and lit up on her bed. “While we have time,” V moves around me
and flops onto her bed, grabbing for her computer, “I found something that could fuel more fire in
our plan. Well…..Archie and Reggie found this while at practice and sent it to me.”

“Something about Chuck?”

She sighs, turning her laptop screen to face me. “Not entirely.” I come closer to the screen,
lowering my knees to the floor so I can have a better look. There’s screenshots of a journal
log….with girls’ names listed. And a comment and score. Some of the names I recognize from
cheerleading, like Ginger Lopez and Tina Patel. Other girls I don’t recognize - Ethel Muggs,
Melody Valentine, the list goes on.

“We were right, ‘Brina. I’m not the only girl at Riverdale High that dealt with Chuck. From what
Archie and Reggie could get without being caught, Chuck keeps a scorebook to….I don’t know,
make a name for himself. Assert power. Either way, this list proves that he shows no respect for
anyone he…..did anything to.” I’m speechless. So there were other girls involved…..

Salem snickers in disapproval, “That gives more of a reason now to execute this revenge. He’ll just
keep pawing his hands on anything that moves…..unless you two put an end to this. And anyone
else you want to play a part.” I start to think about the others. I’ve only held brief conversations
with Ginger and Tina, and they never brought this matter up. I wish I knew what the others looked
like so I can determine if they were waving warning flags. If I knew what the others looked
like……

“Can I see photos of the rest of the girls on the list?” I ask out of the blue. V torts her head in
confusion. I rise from my knees and sit down on the bed next to her, handing back the laptop. “I
might have an idea on how we make Chuck confess - but I might need to get some visuals to help
me out. Do…..do you kind of understand what I’m saying?” V ponders for a second or two, then
she catches on. She smiles and sits up straight, pulling the laptop onto her thighs.

“I think you just read my mind, Sabrina Spellman. I just happened to do a little Facebook stalking
before you showed up. Get an idea of who we need to help protect and stand up for.” I peer over
her shoulder as she goes through the list, finding their profiles all over social media. It’s a variety of
the popular and well-known, timid and would rather spend their weekends in the library. But it’s
enough information for V and I…..and Salem……to finalize our game plan.

We finish our investigation and strategizing in 20 minutes. Since we are technically having a
sleepover-slash-“girls night in”, we decide to watch a quick movie before we head over to
Chuck’s. V scrolls through the options on both the family Hulu and Netflix accounts, narrowing
down our viewing options. V’s shocked when I tell her I don’t recognize half of the titles. I explain
that Aunties don’t care for me to watch mainstream cinema…..or mainstream anything. The only
movies I get the chance to watch come out around Halloween at the Greendale movie theater, and
they’re all from the 70s and 80s. V jokingly vows that before I head back to Greendale, we’re
going to get through all the cult classics and pop culture superhero movies, “Even if we have to
skip school or take up all of Thanksgiving Break.” she says. I laugh, and so does she. It’s nice to
finally experience a normal teenage life for the first time without any restrictions or hold backs. It’s
nice to experience with someone who gets it.

We eventually select to watch *Heathers*, some late 1980s black comedy with Winona Ryder. On
the surface, it’s a teen comedy dealing with high school cliques, but it’s actually pretty dark.
Winona’s boyfriend wants to kill everyone and frame it as suicide. It is a good movie, though. V’s seen it a few times now, but she doesn’t mind rewatching over again.

“Were you named after the main character?” I ask her during one of the slower parts.

“Not sure. Apparently, my mom picked out my name, but I don’t know if she got influenced by this movie.”

“It’s a nice name.” Salem comments from his place on her vanity. “Also seems kinda fitting to prepare for your retribution with Heathers. Considering the topic….” I roll my eyes and glare at my familiar.

“Thanks for that input, Salem.” I compliment him in full sarcasm. V and I both break out into laughter. We almost don’t hear a knock on V’s door. The noise causes Salem to growl and hop down from the vanity. V jolts up for a second, then relaxes. She pauses the movie to call out to whoever is on the other side as Salem joins us on the bed.

“Door’s open!” We both stay on the bed as the bedroom door creaks open wide. Mister Lodge stands at the door frame, adjusting the links on his cuffs. He’s all dressed up with an ascot around his neck, but for what reason? “Let me guess - movie too loud?” V sass her father. He fixes the cuff before turning his attention to her.

“You’re fine, mija. I actually came to….” he stops, seeing me next to his daughter. “Sabrina, hello! I didn’t hear you come in! I better include you in this as well.” Mister Lodge steps into the bedroom to address both of us equally. “I’m going to be out for a couple of hours, so if you ladies need anything, Andre will be available. As will the staff downstairs.”

“That’s why you look like you’re going to a gala?” V comments, gesturing to his suit.

“As a matter of a fact, I’m having dinner with…..someone to discuss…..an arrangement.” His words come out methodical. Is this anything related to the Church of Night? Or even my trial? Did Auntie Z ever mention leaving the house for the night to conduct a business meeting in years past?

“I thought you didn’t have business meetings on Monday nights. Especially this late.”

He takes a deep breath, briefly glancing over at me. Something tells me that maybe Mister Lodge is meeting with someone to talk about me. But who? Auntie Z? Another Church of Night member? ALI? “Well, I do make exceptions every once in a while.” he explains to us. V and I exchange a look of scepticism. I still wonder who Mister Lodge would desire to share a meal with this late at night. He looks down at his watch and lowers his wrist. He starts to leave the bedroom, “I better be on my way. Will you two be alright here by yourselves?”

“We’re fine, Daddy.” V groans, impatiently waiting for her father to make his exit. He smirks and salutes us.

“Enjoy your night.” He’s about to shut the door when Salem lets out an angry meow. Mister Lodge directs his attention to my familiar, still holding his smirk. “Y buenas noches a ti, Salem.” He gives us one last wave, then shuts the door behind him. We wait until we hear the front door outside shuts, leaving us in Pembrooke alone, before V speaks.

“Guess that means we don’t have to sneak around my father tonight.” she exclaims with a grin. I can’t respond or pay attention to her turning back on the movie. My mind is stuck on the thought of Mister Lodge potentially meeting someone from Greendale, or even Ali. What if Auntie Z or Hilda is in Riverdale? Wouldn’t have they contacted me otherwise? Now that I have my mind set on this
matter, why haven’t I heard from Aunties, or Ambrose? Or Harvey, or Roz, or Suzie, or anyone else from my life back at home? Don’t they care about what’s going on here in Riverdale? Don’t they care about me?

“‘Brina?” V stops the movie and places a hand on my back. I don’t realize that I’m physically showing my fear until I feel a tear stream down my cheek. Salem curls into me, resting his front legs across my forearm. I quickly wipe away the tear, letting out an unsteady exhale.

“Just thinking about my family, that’s all.” I mutter. I take a pillow from behind me and hug it into my stomach. Butterflies, or something knotty, swirl within me. With everything going on in Riverdale, I distract myself so much from the thought of home. I haven’t thought about it since my talk with Archie just days ago. The thought of everyone in Greendale weighs down heavier now. I miss Aunties and Ambrose. I miss Harvey. I miss Roz and Suzie.

“Has anyone from your family reached out to see how you’re holding up?” V whispers. I struggle to stop crying, but eventually, I give up, shaking my head. Salem nudges his head against me. V makes circles on my back to soothe me. It’s embarrassing - I’m supposed to be here to help V with her problems, yet we’ve shifted gears to focus more on mine. I don’t hate Riverdale, I love the environment and my new friends. I hate that I had to leave everything I knew behind, even if it’s just temporary. I hate that I feel like I’m making Ali relive her trauma and making her depressed. I hate that I put my family at stake with the Church of Night. I’m letting Aunties down. I’m letting my father down….. My father…..

Then I remember - Dad’s amulet. I straighten my back, setting the pillow next to me. I rise up and leave the bed so I can reach for my backpack. I shoved the amulet into my bag when I was cleaning up the bedroom for Ali to use tonight. I dig around my bad, shoving aside the library books, zipping through my pockets, until my fingers rest upon the chain. I grab on and pull the amulet out of my bag, smiling. I stand back up, letting the amulet dangle in my hands, to show V and Salem.

“A family heirloom?” Salem rises in interest. “How did you manage to snag that little charm?”

“I didn’t snag it - Ambrose, my cousin, gave it to me before I left.” I explain, putting the amulet on before resting back down on the bed. V reaches for the charm, running her fingers on the edges. I continue, “If it’s a necessity to call back home, I can just use a summoning spell.” My thoughts float back to when Ambrose first showed me this thing the night Ali and I left for Riverdale. How come I never knew about it before then? Why did Dad leave it behind?

“It’s beautiful.” V comments. My mood lifts slightly, but I’m still in a funk. I give V a sad smile.

“It’s what I have left of my dad, for the most part. And maybe my mom too.” I tell them, then pause. I’m not sure if Mister Lodge told V about the fate of my parents, or why I live with my aunts. I don’t think I’ve told Salem yet either. We’ve focused so much on current events that I haven’t made any real attempt thus far to educate my new friend, and my familiar, on my family history. But it will have to wait for another time. I take the charm into my hands and finish my statement, “I never even met them, and yet I miss them. Funny how the world works.”

“It is a cruel world, indeed, Sabrina.” Salem states, coming off more as a hiss. “A sad, cruel world. But you’re lucky that I’m here. And so is Miss Lodge. We can act as your family if your aunts and cousin forget all about you.” I can feel my smile slowly fade, not out of cruelty but out of confusion. I guess it would be nice…..if the trial doesn’t go as plan or I get excommunicated or banned from Greendale, I could start over here and stay with V and her father. And I can keep Salem around. It does sound wonderful….. But what about Aunt Ali? Isn’t she my family too? I still don’t understand what it is about Ali that makes Salem hold such a negative opinion of her….
I quickly reform a smile for Salem before returning to V. I change the subject of the conversation, “What time did Chuck want to meet with us again?”

“Somewhere 8:30 or 9. You wanna finish up the movie?” Relieved, I nod. I retake my place next to V so we can start up *Heathers* again.

Around 8:10, we pack up our supplies and head out of the residence, using the steps as we did before. We slip into the lobby without a sound, heading for the back set of doors, leading out into the streets of downtown Riverdale. We head towards the parking garage at the end of the corner of the street. I’m tempted to pull out the light on my phone, or use some magic to light the way, but V makes sure to guide me through the dark. Salem keeps a good pace next to us, carefully noting each step we take. Eventually, we stop at a bright, red car. V reveals a set of keys to unlock the vehicle, and she gestures for me to get in. I’m impressed - when did she learn how to drive, especially since her family has chauffeurs and she grew up in New York? Instead of asking questions, I just climb into the vehicle, taking Salem with me. V brings the car to life, backing out of the parking space, and roaring out of the garage.

It takes a minute or two for the three of us to make our way through town before V chimes in, “You nervous, ‘Brina?” I hold onto Salem as she takes a sharp turn.

“A little bit. You?”

“I’ve got jitters.” she laughs. “But we’ll be ready. Chuck will have his comeuppance.” Salem chirps in excitement.

“That’s the spirit!” His voice is devilish, as if he was waiting for a moment like this to happen since being left alone in that house. But nothing to worry about for now. V giggles, and I do as well to some extent. A few more miles down the road, and more sharp turns later, we stop at the end of a street. V turns off the engine and the lights, turning to me.

“Chuck’s house is up down there.” she tilts her head back to the other side of the street. It doesn’t make sense - why would we need to park on the opposite side of the….. Oh. I get it now.

“So no one will see us coming from down here?” I throw out. She nods in approval, getting out of the car. I hop out myself, releasing Salem onto the sidewalk. I join V by her trunk, and…..she’s shaking. I can see her breath materialize in the cold air, all broken up and unsteady. She looks just as nervous as she appeared when we explored the Conway House. Is she getting cold feet?

I take her hand, her fingers are like ice. “You sure you still want to go through with this, V?” She releases another breath as she glances around this dark street. It takes her a while before she turns back to me, her lip quivering. “I’m right with you, okay?”

Her lips curl up the slightest when she squeezes my hand. “Showtime.” she whispers. I call for Salem to join us, and we make our way down the street. V still clutches onto my hand like we’re going through a “haunted” corn maze anticipating someone in a mask to pop out at us. She’s scared but she won’t own up to it. I’m amazed that she still wants to follow through. And I admit, I’m shocked that I haven’t back out. When I went to get back at those football boys with the Weird Sisters, I felt much more confident and sure. I had a steady plan. The stakes here are no different, but for some reason, I have a feeling something might go wrong…..

We come to a house towards the other end of the street. Its white and grey outer skin illuminates in the darkness. This must be Chuck Clayton’s home. I wonder what will wait for us on the inside, what could work with the plan…. V lets go of my hand before she heads up the entryway. Salem prances over and stops at my ankles. I pick him up and cradle him.
“Well, here goes nothing.” I mutter and follow V to the front door. I wait behind her, still holding onto Salem, as she rings the bell. No one comes to the door at first. I glance around more of the outside of the house. I spot a car sitting outside the family’s garage? Does that car belong to him, or his parents? Will his parents be here too?

My thoughts come to a halt when the front door opens. A boy around our age towers over us from the other side. I’ve seen this boy at school, but it never occurred to me that THIS was Chuck. I’ve seen him walking down the hallways, smiling at me and others as he passes. Now that I can put a name to his face, the sight of him makes me sick.

“Ronnie,” Chuck smirks down at V. “I’m glad you made it.”

“Hello, Chuck.” she swoons, I forget she’s putting on a facade. Salem squawks in my arms, catching Chuck’s attention. The smirk drops when he sets his eye on me. V waves at me to come forward, “Don’t worry, she’s with me. Showing her around.” I adjust my hold on Salem to wave hello. He becomes less concerned the more he looks at me.

“Oh right. The new girl.” he reforms his smirk. I’m relieved that I don’t have to create an impromptu back-up plan to sneak into the house if he didn’t approve of me being here. But so far, he shows no disapproval. Maybe this will work after all.

Chuck opens the door wider. “You gonna come in or what, ladies?”

XXXXXXXX

ALICE

It takes a while for the heat to kick on in my convertible. It’s not super cold out, but the sheer fabric of this dress….romper thing on me doesn’t do much to keep me warm. Out of all the outfits Gladys had me try on, I felt more comfortable in this red snakeskin one. It shows more skin than I thought - the V neck of this thing goes down to my belly button. But Gladys found some gold jewelry and a belt to pair it with, so I do feel more comfortable with that. It feels weird, though, that I’m borrowing clothes from FP’s wife. I’m even wearing Roman-style heels that go up to my calf, and they’re hers. Perhaps I’m still getting used to having a real female friend and being able to share stories with others, as well as swap wardrobes.

It’s a few minutes to 8, so I need to get a move on, with my AC blasting heat or not. I don’t want to leave Hiram waiting for me or thinking that I abandoned our arrangement. I pull out of Sunnyside Trailers and head for Lenny’s downtown. Normally, I would drive in silence, or at least let my mind wander a little. But I keep thinking about how empty the trailer felt this afternoon without Sabrina or her cat while I finished getting ready. I keep thinking about everything in this town. I need to distract myself before I drop this bomb on Hiram tonight. I flip through the channels on the radio, switching between the newest pop songs, some country, rap. Eventually I stop on a classic rock channel and hear the end of a Rolling Stones song. The channel host makes a bit of commentary as a new song starts up. The familiar opening cords under the dialogue sound familiar. My eyes dart to the radio slightly, the music progressing. I recognize the song almost instantly from the singing.

*The full moon is calling, the fever is high*
And the wicked wind whispers and moans

You got your demons, you got your desires

Well, I got a few of my own

I lean my head back and force myself to breathe. Of course, I landed on a song that brings me back more memories of Hal. And how fitting that this song played right as…..right as Hal and I were on our way to confront Hiram.

We made a deal to meet up at one of Marty Mantle’s parties a week or two after the Halloween Party. Hal crafted what I should say to Hiram and how to get ourselves into this party. Luckily, there was no struggle - Hiram made it a promise to get me in, and that was that. With our plan set in stone, I could have Hal enter the house without anyone suspecting to aid in my conquest.

When the night arrived, I drove Hal and I to the other side of Riverdale. He hadn’t seen much of town, only the places I hung out after school and mostly on the Southside. It was his first time in the Northside, and he already seemed displeased. I didn’t blame him for looking so sour - as much as I envied a Northsider life, I hated how those kids treated me. But Hal had a good point when we talked earlier - I could do something to change it.

I pulled up to a spot a few houses away. Hal strategized that if we needed an escape, we could park on the other side where no one would see us. The idea struck me odd at first, but I quickly realized he had a point. A lot of people were gathered outside Marty’s house. The chances of them making comments about my presence could spark some trouble. We snuck around the back side of the houses, heading towards the party. But I wasn’t planning to stay here for a long time, nor was I planning on making my presence known. We reached the house and peered at the scene through the trees.

“So this is what a high school party looks like.” Hal snickered from behind me. From the sliding glass doors, I could see into the house - jocks playing a game of beer pong, girls dancing to music by the radio, the booksmart kids having a debate on the sofas. And yet, looming by the kitchen, leaning up against the doorframe by himself, was the only person I had my eyes set on that night.

“Wait here. I’ll let you know when to get in.” I whispered as I headed for the scene of the party. Before emerging out of the woods, Hal grabbed my arm and came into my view.

“They don’t deserve you.” he sounded so smooth, coming in closer to me. When I first interacted with him on Halloween night, I didn’t feel any immediate connection, or real attraction. Yet, the more we hung out and the more I opened up about myself, the more he showed his devotion….was I growing attracted to my familiar? A goblin disguised as a human boy? I had to drop my gaze to my feet, his eyes glared into mine with such desire. He placed his fingers under my chin and lifted my gaze up to meet his once more. His lips were dangerously close to mine. “Remember what you are, Alice.”

The words loomed in my head long after I left Hal in the woods, entering the land of the living. The music became louder the closer I came to the sliding glass doors. I paused for a second, examining my scene. I could hear the Eagles blaring on the stereo as a bunch of drunk Vixens swayed their bodies. Luckily, everyone in that living room was so intoxicated that it was easier than I thought to slip in without many people catching on. A couple of drunk classmates bumped into me but seemed to shrug it off, not staring at my face. Hiram still remained sulking in his spot. It was only a matter of time before Hiram did another room scan and set his eyes on me. I slowly made my way through the room to get over to him, the music getting louder in my ears.
I've been searching for the daughter of the devil himself

I've been searching for an angel in white

I've been waiting for a woman who's a little of both

And I can feel her but she's nowhere in sight

“Well I’ll be damned.” Hiram muttered when I stopped in front of him. “You did make it after all. Did Marty let you in without a fuss?” I didn’t respond, I just shook my head. He stepped away from the wall and took a sip of his drink. “You really are a rebel, serpentina.” My light expression dimmed. I still was no fan of him calling me Acid Queen Alice, but serpentina bugged me just as much.

“I’m afraid I don’t have any drugs for you or your pals to overdose on.” I rose my voice over the music and the laughter.

“You are retired now, aren’t you?” Hiram wiped away some alcohol from his lips. I shrugged my shoulders at him, starting to look around. Marty's house certainly stood inferior to the architecture of Thornhill. It was too cramped in there, too bright, too many hot bodies. “Unless you got some hiding in a car somewhere.” I knew he would pester on until I gave in. It was all part of the plan, yet I still rolled my eyes at him anyway. Had to keep up appearances somehow.

“You’re funny, Lodge.” I snarked, taking a step closer into him. I crossed my eyes and held my stance. I pieced together how this would play out in my head. He would take one last sip of his drink and leave his place to throw his cup away. He’d continue to look at me as he leaned down on the kitchen counter, elbows on top of the marble. He’d give me that same soft look he had when he asked me to come to the Halloween Party. Realizing I wouldn’t budge, he’d wander back over to me. He’d glance down at the monochrome tile scheme before looking back up at me. This is when I would “start to give in”, if only he knew.

“Maybe just one last request?” he looked so sincere, but I didn’t know for sure what to make of him back then. “After that, I promise I’ll ask for no more. Scout’s honor.” He saluted to me, and I swore I thought he’d smile. But he still had that soft, somber glow on him. He was right where I needed him. Time to make my next move.

I huffed. “We’ll need to go back to my place on the Southside.” I hurried my sentence and scanned the party. No one was sober enough to be paying attention to us. I tilted more into him, “You think anyone will notice if you’re gone?”

"I got in because of my name.” Hiram admitted in a neutral tone, “No one here to really hang out with unless I have money or party favors.” He gave me a wink at the last sentence, a smile formed. It made me want to hurl. I saw an opening for us in the back by the sliding glass doors to make our grand escape. With a grunt, I took Hiram’s hand and dragged him away.

“We go back for my drugs, then you leave me alone. Got it?” I called out as I led the way.

“Whatever you say, Acid Queen Alice!” he replied in excitement. We made it through the doors and back out towards the wooded area. We ran around to the front of the house next door, now clear of the party. I kept my hold of him firm as we made our way to my car. I looked up at the night sky, the stars shining bright, the moon in its third quarter at waning crescent. I directed my attention to the woods, the trees looming over the streets and houses. There, something was waited for its signal.
I lifted my head high towards the woods. I spoke to the woods all in my head. **You better catch up, my inner voice called out, or you’ll miss out.**

“Oh, I wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Hal replied back. Somewhere in the woods, he caught up to our trail as I drove Hiram to the trailer park.

I almost miss the turn going into Lenny’s. The memory of that night distracts me entirely. When I regain focus on the road, I notice that the radio station is now playing Dolly Parton. I sigh and turn it off as I enter the parking lot. It’s practically deserted tonight. The only cars here might belong to waitstaff or some straggler guests. Once I find a spot, I turn off the ignition and get out of the car. My bones shake as my feet hit the pavement. I have to readjust the outfit and tug down the fabric under the belt a bit. Clutching onto my purse, I take a deep breath. I have to get Hiram to listen to me tonight. It’s now or never.

I make my way in to the restaurant. I can feel the warm air surrounding me when I enter. The place is mostly candle-lit, it’s like I walked onto the set of *The Godfather*. I can smell the bread from the kitchen, the candle wax on the tables. My senses tingle here.

I walk over to the host. He greets me warmly, which is nice for a change. I’m about to explain why I’m here when he interrupts me. “Miss Smith…..ah, yes. Mr. Lodge is towards the back.” I raise a brow at him. Hiram told this man…..this place about me? Another host waves for me to follow him before I can start asking any questions. I have to remind myself that I’m playing a game on no-man’s land here. This is Hiram’s playground, and I have to play nice and by the rules. Doesn’t mean I can’t bend the rules a little bit.

I’m led all the way to the back of the restaurant, passing table with only a handful of guests. The host leads me past the brick oven, the wine cabinets, everything is so decadent here. I continue my browsing when my gaze goes downward. In one table at the center of this section of the restaurant, Hiram twirls a liquor glass in his hand. He looks…..rather handsome, I will admit. He breaks his gaze at the sound of our footsteps. He smiles at the host before turning his attention fully at me. His mouth hangs slightly, his eyes become all doe like. He looks genuinely stunned at the sight of me.

“You waiter should be with you shortly.” the host tells me. I thank him, not breaking my sight on Hiram. The other man leaves, we’re alone now. We both maintain our silent gaze, refusing to back down. I have to take charge here. I lift my head and release my shoulders from my ears, my confidence gradually building. My heels click on the floor with each step. The tail of this outfit flows behind me. My poker face keeps it hold - I can’t show any emotion just yet. His mouth still hangs by the time I reach the table. I sink into my seat, resting my purse on the floor, crossing one leg over the other. I grab for one of the water glasses while still maintaining eye contact.

It’s me who breaks our prolonged silence. “You gonna keep that jaw on the floor all night, Lodge?” He closes his mouth instantly. One point for me. “Not the first time you’ve seen me in a dress.” I comment before taking a well-deserved sip of this water.

He smirks. “Thought you would have purged all your Serpent attire. Unless you kept some items for any reason you planned to come back.” I set down my glass, tapping my fingers on the outer shell. I don’t think I brought any clothes with me when I left Riverdale. I left everything I had behind - clothes, books, good and loyal friends….

“I didn’t.” I reply stone-cold. Our waiter comes and breaks our tension. He asks if I want more than just water. Normally, I’d resort to wine, spiced cider, or stick with water. But this isn’t the comfort of my place over my bakery, nor is it the Spellman’s house. I stare down at the drink in
Hiram’s hand - whiskey? Scotch? Another witchy liquor I have yet to introduce into my drink assortments?

“I’ll take what he’s got.” The waiter leaves with my drink order. Hiram falls back into his seat, still in a daze over me. Two for me, zero for him. I’m not here to simply have drinks and flirt, and he picks up on it now.

He sits up straight and rests his forearms on the table. His smirk has yet to break. “You want to talk business, Acid Queen Alice? Alright. We’ll talk business. But it won’t be like arranging for jingle jangle or obtaining access into house parties. We’re not children anymore.”

“First thing in a while that I agree with you on.” I fire back. I don’t show it in my face, but a wave of nervousness hits me. It hits me that this confrontation is happening. It’s him and me, face-to-face, no magic or any familiars in plain sight to use as weapons. It’s all words. It could fall either way, with me getting his assistance, or me walking away empty-handed and Sabrina in danger. The uncertain probabilities chisel away at my pride.

I speak again, “Hopefully we agree on more things. If you actually have the decency to listen, or if you’re not busy planning blackmail material.”

I go to reach for my glass. He scoffs. “You’d think I’d blackmail you?” I lower the glass back down with a clank. My upper lip curls to reveal my teeth. I could laugh.

“Why else did you bring up Sabrina in Pop’s that night?” My face stays neutral but my voice displays a rising anger. My head drifts back to Pop’s just days ago. The moments of Hiram revealing his memory of me, my nose bleed, our talk about Sabrina’s fate. It still irks me to no end. “Yeah, I am looking after her on behalf of Hilda and Zelda Spellman, but I am in no way making an effort to sway her towards or against the Path of Night. And I don’t plan on it either…..” I trail off for a second. My thoughts circle back to the blackout. The pseudo pain ripping my brain and lungs apart, the fear of someone freeing Hal becoming a reality. “Not with the reason why we’re here now.” I croak. Hiram loses the smirk. His eyes show his concern. His stance eases.

“What’s going on, Alice?”

The waiter comes back with my drink. I take a long sip - it’s smooth going down, and it leaves a sickly sweet aftertaste. We place our meal orders with low, hurried voices. We wait for the waiter to disappear once more before we jump back into the discussion head-on.

“You remember that boy I hung out with?” I jog his memory. “Bright blonde hair, blue eyes….looked more innocent than he let on.” He sits there contemplating my words. Then it comes to him.

“Hal Cooper.” he mutters. He looks pissed. Hurt. Hiram looks me in the eye. “I take it he’s the reason you skipped town? Did he know about….your craft?” I don’t respond right away. I take a long slug of my drink. He loses the angry approach. “He was like us?”

“Goblin, to be exact…..or a demon.” I explain to him. “Yeah, that night I went to the Conway House, I summoned him, thinking he was going to be my familiar.” I cross my arms, anxiously beginning to dart my eyes around the room. “Turns out that was a mistake.” I mutter, hoping Hiram doesn’t hear me.

But he does. “That’s why you came back.” I can’t help but stare at him now. “You’re not just back in town to look after the young Spellman out of the kindness of your heart. You don’t want her to find the Conway House and to release…..that thing.” He’s putting the pieces together faster than I
hoped. One point for him. I exhale, drumming my fingers on the table. My fingers curl into my palm. Time to drop the bomb.

“Yeah……that’s the problem. Hal’s out.” His eyes widen. His inhale comes in sharp. His lips form an unsteady line. Hiram retreats further into his seat. I proceed, “The night you came to Pop’s to confront me, someone went to the Conway House and undid my binding spell. I don’t know if it was Sabrina, or your daughter……or any other witch that’s gone rogue, but……he’s no longer in there. He’s back and out in the streets. It wouldn’t surprise me if any strange occurrences……or deaths, start happening.” Hiram keeps his composure, but I can read the panic on his face. This whole ordeal scares me too. I’m amazed that I haven’t broken down yet at the mentionings of Hal. I only hope that Hiram can come through. That we can set whatever distances we have, and have had, aside to hunt Hal down. That we can just….do something to keep these girls safe. Maybe even keep the town safe too.

“Doesn’t mean I won’t feel guilty if something does happen. I brought him out once and he made me cause the death of people we knew. I don’t want it to happen again. Not to a witch like Sabrina, or your daughter.” My voice starts to waver. My lips crunch together for a moment, I feel my emotions slipping from little cracks. Daisies and candles, my brain tells me. I want to say more, but I can’t get the words out. My lips stay glued shut. My gaze grows distant, unfocused, hazy. Did Hal already find someone to prey on? Was I even making this whole thing up, and my mind played tricks on me that night? Am I losing my mind?

Something’s off about Hiram now. His gaze moves downward at his glass. He appears more melancholy. Was mentioning his daughter too much for him? I lean forward, intertwining my fingers. I have to be smart about these next few words. It could make or break this whole deal. “I know how protective you are about Veronica.” I say to him, speaking with sympathy. “I saw the way you acted around her the other morning. You have so much devotion and love for her, even if you don’t want to make it public. In a way, you’re honoring Hermione…..” I pause. Even thinking about Hermione still makes my insides churn, not out of disgust but out of guilt. I look to see if he’s reacting to my name dropping of Hermione, but he seems unfazed by the notion. I exhale, partially in relief, and keep my words going, “You’re taking care of your own flesh and blood.”

His distant appearance breaks. Hiram blinks a couple of times, then he makes eye contact, struggling to find words. He huffs, then speaks, “Too bad she isn’t.”

I’m paralyzed. Baffled. Too bad she isn’t? What the hell does that mean? My mouth creaks open, I’m mentally preventing myself from letting it open all the way. How is Veronica not of his own blood? Did Hermione marry someone else before Hiram? Is he only her stepfather? An uncle? Grandparent? I’m running out of options that could explain this. There’s no other way Veronica can’t be a Lodge, unless she was….. I sit there motionless. Numb. I look Hiram in the eye. He bits his lip out of fear before he gives an answer.

“Alice, Veronica’s adopted.”

XXXXXXXXX

SABRINA

It’s nice in Chuck Clayton’s house. The inside is primarily wood with some modern deco. It almost reminds me of the inside of Aunties’ house back in Greendale…. With permission, I release Salem
to the floor so he can “wander around” while V and I follow Chuck to the living room. “You ladies want anything to drink?” he goes over to the bar cabinet full of liquor bottles. The sight makes me cringe. I’m not opposed to alcohol, it’s common for young witches to indulge in the liquid spirits to prepare for adulthood. But having this much in one house seems rather unsettling. V and I both decline the offer, which causes him to shrug. “Let me know if your mind changes.” His tone bothers me. Is this how he talks to everyone else at school? Around other girls?

V wanders over to the couch and melts. The living room overlooks the kitchen and the staircase leading to the second floor. Across the way, a wooden door leads out to the pool - I can see the moon reflecting on the water’s surface through the little window.

“So, how are you liking Riverdale, new girl?” Chuck questions me from the bar.

“It’s…..good so far!” I respond rather fast in attempt to avoid eye contact or awkward small talk. I start to worry about Salem’s whereabouts - he hasn’t come down since we arrived. Chuck adds the last touch to his drink then goes to join V on the couch. He’s about to sit down next to her, then notices me, then he decides to occupy the other end of the couch.

“Figure it must bother you that school got cancelled then it’ll be Thanksgiving Break, and you just got here.” Chuck keeps up with me. “You involved in anything so far?”

“She’s on the Vixens with me.” V enters the small talk. She rests her head into her palm and pulls her knees up to her shoulders. “She’s a quick learner, too. Picked up our Homecoming Game routine just days after joining.” Chuck seems impressed. I could run away. It wasn’t hard for me and the Weird Sisters to lure those football players into the mine and “kiss them”. Why can I barely stand in the same room with the man who hurt my new best friend? I grab for Dad’s amulet and run my fingers along the grooves. This motion eases some of my bubbling fear, but not all the way.

“Is that Midge Klump treating you well? Heard she grew to become a bit of a tyrant when she took over this past spring. Even more now that she’s dating Moose - you can’t rip away her title or her boy if you tried.” V releases her head from her palm, bringing it back straight.

“What’s got you so interested in Midge, Chuck?” He takes a second to formulate a response. He stares off towards the pool door. Would Midge become another target…..if something ever were to happen to her and Moose? Chuck sneers, turning back to V.

“How can anyone not?” he makes up an excuse. “She runs the Vixens, she dates a Bulldog. The Sheriff’s kid, Kevin, always talks about wanting to cast her as the lead in the upcoming musical. Everyone at school knows about her. You just can’t.” He stops, taking a long sip of his beverage. Part of me wishes it were poison instead. He sets his drink down on the coffee table and finishes his statement, “But to me, she’s just like every other girl at school.” My shoulders tense. V lowers her feet down to the floor, then she faces me. She raises a brow, signaling, We need to get this done. Now.

“Sorry, do you mind if I go upstairs?” I start to back away from the living room area. “I just want to make sure that my cat isn’t messing with anything.”

“You want me to help?” V rises from the couch, moving as far away from Chuck as possible. I nod at her then turn to Chuck. I can see on his face that he knows something isn’t right.

In defeat, he waves his hand at us. “Fine with me. Haven’t heard any weird noises yet, so you’re cat’s…..fine.” I take V by the hand and we move to the stairs. We start to call out for Salem, hurrying up each step. I begin to take in the details of the upstairs section of Chuck’s house. Some
of the bedroom doors stay shut, I don’t think we’ll use them in our final plan. But the hallway, I can work with. From the end of the hall, Salem prances over to us. I sigh in relief, and I bend down to pick Salem up.

“You hear what he said about Midge?” I whisper, hoping Chuck isn’t eavesdropping from downstairs.

“Oh, trust me. I got every word.” Salem growls in my arms. “You need to act before you two lose your chance.” V starts to glance back and forth between the hallway and us. Her inhales and exhales gradualize in fear. Her eyes widen. I meet her gaze.

“The alcohol.” I mutter.

“Damnit,” V comes to the realization too, “He’s gonna get too drunk for this to work!”

“Don’t say that.” Salem snaps us both out of it. He leaps out of my arms and lifts his head up. “The illusions will scare him more while we have him under the influence. Ramp it up more, make the performance top notch.” He concludes his pep talk. V and I exchange a timid glance. I admit that I could just walk out now and never turn back. I could convince V to have Chuck write a written confession of his wrong-doings if he does have the rest of his drink. Or call the police and say something…. But we’ve already come so far now. What would be the point of backing out? What would the Weird Sisters say if I obtained cold feet? What would Suzie say? They’d all call me a coward. Not a real Spellman. I don’t deserve to be the Former High Priest’s daughter.

I strategize out loud, “We have the house to our advantage. If we can get into these other rooms, maybe the pool too….”

“There’s no other way he can avoid what he did.” V finishes my thoughts.

“What the hell is going on?” a new voice booms. V and I whip around to find Chuck at the end of the hallway, cautiously keeping his distance from us. He spies Salem between us on the ground, then he follows his eyes upward. He starts to laugh, shaking his head. Did the alcohol already start to affect him? He breathes, then says, “Shit. If you didn’t want me to talk about Midge Klump, you could’ve just said something! You don’t have to retreat up here to get emotional support from your cat!” He laughs more, pointing at Salem. V looks at me, waiting for me to do something. Or say something. I take a moment to glance down at Salem before I address Chuck.

“Did you say that to the others, Chuck?”

He shows no emotion at my words. He scoffs, “What others?” like it’s all a joke. Well, it won’t be a joke in the next few minutes. The lights above us start to flicker. It’s subtle, but it catches Chuck’s attention. V and I share a glance. I raise a brow. She smiles. Salem chuckles.

“Showtime, ladies.” he purs. We both turn our heads to Chuck. I start to use magic to intensify the flickering. V begins to create the first illusion, all out of sight. Chuck’s face falls. He starts to back away ever so slightly.

“What others?” he calls out to us. V takes a step forward.

“Why don’t you ask them yourself?”

Chuck takes another step backwards, about to bolt in the opposite direction, but his path is blocked. A girl about our age with brown hair and dark eyes stands before him. She shares the same look of anger and determination. He’s stunned to see her. And confused. And, now he’s beginning to panic.
“Ginger? How the hell did you get into my house?” The figment girl, Ginger, stays in her spot.

The figment speaks, “Do you remember, Chuck? Back in the seventh grade?” I get chills down my spine. I’m impressed that V could conjure her looks in a timely manner, and that she could get Ginger’s voice on the spot. I start to draft the next surprise in my head while Chuck has his occupation on our first “visitor”. Chuck doesn’t respond to this Fake Ginger. He steps an inch back. She continues, “We were paired up for Seven Minutes in Heaven at Donna’s birthday party. We waited in that closet for 6 and a half minutes before we even kissed. And it was short too. All we did was kiss. But that’s not what you told everyone else…”

“Ginger…I don’t understand—”

“You claimed I had a lot of game. Talked it up with all of your football buddies. You got called popular, but all I got called was slut.” Now it finally hits him. Chuck quickens his pace to get away from Fake Ginger. By this point, I’ve prepared our new visitor. Chuck goes to turn away, but is stopped again. His eyes widen.

“Tina?”

“Freshmen year,” the Fake Tina interjects, “You had me as a model for your art class. Your first one bailed out so I jumped in. One moment, it’s a homework assignment. Next, there’s drawings of me all over school, on the lockers, on doors, EVERYWHERE.” Chuck tries to get out but Fake Ginger blocks him. He’s trapped between the two, there’s no escape.

He makes an attempt to plead freedom, “I never posted those up. I don’t know who got them—”

“But you drew them!” Fake Tina screams. “You drew me without clothes on, and teachers saw it. Students saw it. All of my cheermates!”

“No…” Chuck looks back and forth at the figments. His state of panic worsens. His breathing hardens, getting louder. “No, you’re full of shit! Both of you!” V gives me another look. Next part. I nod and cause the flickering to get deeper, the lights starting to fully go out and back in again. Ginger and Tina start to circle him, he’s twisting his head to catch up with their movements. He stutters, shaking his head. “No no no no no, this can’t be happening. This isn’t real. This isn’t real, man!” Chuck attempts to run out of the circle, but Tina forces him back in the middle. If he thinks this level of torture is scary, he won’t know how to respond to what comes next.

Chuck finds a breakthrough and bolts down to the living room. I follow him down, crafting my next trick. He goes into the kitchen and violently comes to a halt. By the kitchen island, more girls appear, all stern and out for blood.

“What…..what the…” his paranoia grows as my illusion increases.

“Own up to it, Chuck.” the chorus of women chant. Not one smile cracks on each face. Their eyes all stay on him like Blythe dolls. V comes to my side, her illusions of Ginger and Tina advancing on Chuck. His breathing gets louder, more unstable. He can’t escape this now.

“YOU’RE ALL MANIACS!” he screams. “YOU’RE MAKING THIS UP!” He bolts away, shoving Ginger and Tina aside. He makes a break for the door, but Salem stops him in his path. Salem growls, striding towards Chuck one paw at a time.

“You think this is just gonna go away?” the kitchen chorus speaks in unison, the voices boom in his ears. He covers them, shaking his head again.

“It won’t, Chuck.” one voice says.
“There’s no use of running.” another adds.

“Own up to what you did to me.”

Ginger faces him. “And me.” she says. Tina says it too. “And me.” The voices layer, surrounding the hallway behind me and V. We all stand together, the lights overhead violently flashing. Our illusions go in and out in timing with the lights. Tears stream down his cheeks, but he stays silent. Stunned. Each girl disappears one by one, “AND ME.” becoming louder. They all fade until V and I are remaining. V steps forward after the last illusion disappears. Her fingers curl to make fists.

“And me,” her voice is low but her message is clear. Chuck stumbles back, contemplating whether he should go for the door again. Salem stands his ground, hissing. Chuck can’t run now, he can’t ignore what he saw. He’ll confess to those awful things any second now. His head rapidly turns from V to Salem, V to Salem, over and over - I swear his head might snap. He screams.

“LEAVE ME ALONE!”

Chuck bolts past V, runs past me, and runs out through the pool door. V and I follow after him, Salem catching up to watch what happens. Chuck stumbles into the darkness, panting and out of breath. He sees us from behind and tries to back away. Big mistake. He doesn’t realize that he’s at the edge of his pool. He loses balance, fighting to stay on ground, but it’s too late. He falls into the pool.

Everything goes quiet. Is he drowning? Oh no…..this wasn’t part of the plan. V and I hurry over to get a better look. I use some magic to turn on some overhead light sources and pool lights. The hot tub sparks to life with yellow and blue, and so does the pool. The water starts to ripple in agony. Chuck pops up, gasping for air.

“And he lives.” Salem comments. I glance over at V and she nods. Time to get our confession. V pulls out her phone and starts to record a video. Chuck looks at us in despair.

“You…..you….” he pants in between breaths. “YOU BITCHES!”

“Just own up to what you did, and we’ll leave you alone.” I tell him point blank. He doesn’t bother to listen. He makes an attempt to swim to the edge and climb out. V uses magic to make a wave with the pool water, forcing him back. Salem hisses, his paws on the edge, claws digging in.

“You’re overreacting!” he screams. “I didn’t do anything to those girls!” Chuck, out of a last resort, turns to V. He looks worn out. Exhausted. He’s begging for a life sentence. “Veronica, please. I….I didn’t…..”

“But you did.” she cuts him off, her phone shakes in her hands. Her anger builds with each breath. I notice her eyes getting teary. She takes a deep breath, then speaks, “You took me to the movies downtown. You made me believe that you were a gentleman. I even let you kiss me.” She stops, she hangs her head. She lets out a quiet sob. My heart breaks for her. I take V’s hand and glare at Chuck in full anger. V lifts her head back up, not bothering to wipe away any tears before she goes on, “You wanted more than that.”

Chuck stutters, “Ver….Veronica…..”

“I could have just gone to the police.” V interjects, her voice booming now. “I could have gone to my father. I could have killed you with my own bare hands!” Her tears flow down faster….there’s black tears running down. Yet, her makeup is still intact.

I shift my focus back to our objective. I make the next statement, “We’re giving these girls back
their voices. We aren’t afraid to speak up. What you did hurt V, and it hurt the others too.” Chuck breaks down, he starts shaking his head in a low hang. I make the final proposition, “Admit what you did, say you’re sorry, and we’ll go.” He stays unresponsive. He just shakes his head.

“I didn’t….,” he sobs. “I didn’t do anything…..”

“Look into the camera and say you’re sorry.” I point at V’s phone. Chuck blinks at me with weepy eyes. He knows now that V and I aren’t backing off. He has to do this. Accepting defeat, Chuck swims to the edge once more. Salem snarls the closer Chuck comes. “Salem, it’s okay.” I address my familiar in a calm tone. I turn back to Chuck, signaling for him to speak. His head leans back into the water, he lets out a cry.

“Fine! Okay, I did it!” Chuck yells, directing his attention to V’s phone. His sobs graduate in between phrases, “I went after those girls. And I went after Veronica Lodge. I’m a monster, and I’m sorry. I promise to never go near another girl again. Okay? Is that what you want to hear? I’M OWNING UP TO IT!”

I stand there frozen. I didn’t realize I held my breath during his rant until my heartbeat picks up. I release the built up air. It’s over. We did it. I turn to V……something’s not right. The phone slips from her hands. She’s still crying, the black tears streaming more. Where is it coming from? She doesn’t make a single noise. She just stares at him.

“You’re lying.” she mutters. She lowers her hand down to around her stomach, her hand shakes in rage. It’s getting hot in this area of the house….which makes no sense. We’re out by the pool in the middle of November. It’s supposed to be cold out….

“Salem, was this part of the plan?” I turn to my familiar and whisper. Salem keeps his gaze on Chuck, not answering me. I look back at V, then back down at Chuck. The pool ripples, each wave rising and falling. Chuck struggles to stay afloat. What is V doing?

“Say it like you mean it.” V grits through her teeth. Chuck tries to speak but water flies into his mouth. It sends him back and down. V’s fingers bend in all speeds and shapes, it gets hotter in the pool area. I can’t move, I’m at a loss of words, but I still hold onto V. I have to talk her out of this before it gets worse.

“V?” I bend down to grab her phone on the tile floor. Maybe this will snap her out of…..whatever this is. But it doesn’t. She stays locked on him, her brown eyes starting to turn black. No…her eyes are getting fully black. There’s something red, or of a dark color, trickling out of her eardrum.

“Say it, Chuck. SAY YOU’RE SORRY.” V gets louder over the water. He starts to choke. I can hear Salem release a low cackle. The water crashes in a deadly manner. The heat is becoming unbearable. I realize that Chuck is going to die. And V will be responsible.

“SAY IT!”

“V!” I step in front of her, placing both of my hands on her shoulders. Her gaze goes soft. The blackness that consumed her eyes fades. The normal color of her eyes reappears. Her nose begins to bleed. She looks at me, she blinks….. Her lip trembles. Panic seeps in. She looks over my shoulder at Chuck in the water. The magic she used to control the movement of the water and the heat ceases. It gets cool again. The water ripples back to a normal pace. Chuck gasps for air behind us, coughing. V glances around and her mouth hangs. She’s on the verge of tears as she realizes what could have happened. “Brina?” her voice breaks, she sobs. I glance over my shoulder at Chuck. A thought hits me - Chuck could have us locked up for attempted murder. Chuck will remember our faces. What we did….what V was about to do. I have to leave. I have to get V out of here.
I start to lead her away from the pool. I give Chuck one last look, taking a solid breath to keep myself from falling apart too. “Come near any of those girls again, including V, and you’ll face much worse.” He stares at me, numb and petrified. V clings to me as I open back up the doorway. We walk back into the house, heading out the door. I stop - what if someone sees us coming out of the house? I lead V out back to the pool area, passing Chuck on the way out through the patio door. I don’t see Salem still perched by the pool’s edge…..

We start to go through the backyard as our alternative route out of here. Luckily, some of the neighbors seem to be asleep or not here, so it gives us more leeway to make our escape. V sobs, and I do my best to calm her. Behind us, Salem gallops over. “Where are you going? Aren’t we going to finish him off?” I stop, my hold on V loosens slightly. Finish him off?

I look down at Salem. “You thought we were going to kill him?” I don’t know what else to say. How could Salem think this? Our plan was to scare him into a confession, not to murder him! Unless Salem somehow misinterpreted everything….. “No.” I speak, starting to walk away with V. “We’ve already gone too far, Salem. We gotta get V out of here before anyone sees us!” My pace slows so I can have Salem follow us. V’s wails pierce the silent night. I look over my shoulder, Salem is still in his spot.

“Salem, come on!” I hiss, hoping to not wake up any of the Clayton’s neighbors. I huff, “We can use a spell to wipe his memory out or something later! It’s no use doing any more harm now!” Salem glances back at the house, then he returns his gaze to us. His head circles as he lets out a deafening meow. His eyes go from the blue-green to…..grey. No…..it’s a dark color. Like the stuff coming out of V’s ears.

“Fine.” Salem spits out. “If you won’t take care of Chuck Clayton, I’ll do it myself.” He runs off, sprinting back to the Clayton house. What is he doing? I call out for Salem, but no avail. It’s too dark and I can’t see where he ran off to. The only light comes from the pool area in the house. I’m tempted to go back in and get Salem…..or to see what Salem will do to Chuck. But something happened to V, something not at our level of witchcraft. She’s still scared. And I’m scared too. I’m scared for her…..

I force the lump in my throat down, then V and I continue on my path. I just hope Salem doesn’t do anything severe or deadly, even if Chuck Clayton deserves it.

XXXXXXXX

ALICE

I can’t process a sentence. My jaw hangs to a degree. My hands tremble. Veronica is adopted? How? She looks too much like Hiram and Hermione….

I still try to process the information when our waiter returns with house salads for both of us. Hiram sends the other man away before grabbing his fork. He notices my state of being and pauses.

“I know it sounds ridiculous, Alice, but it is true. It’s only a mere coincidence that Veronica just happens to share my features. And Hermione Gomez’s as well.” He starts to dig in. I figure I should start eating as well, just so I don’t come off rude. I reach for my own fork and twist it around in the salad. My mind is still trapped.
I swallow a lump in my throat. “Does she know, Hiram?” He taps his fork down on the plate. His faces fall. It takes him a good moment before he answers me. “Have you told her?”

“I’ve contemplated it over the years.” He keeps his phrasing short and sweet. He’s about to dig in again then stops. His eyes shut as he inhales. “Of course it doesn’t help that the remainder of the Lodge family knows about it. I’m surprised that none of mis parientes have brought the subject up to her at any get-togethers. Because…..taking her in became a bit of an uproar. Not just with the Lodges…….” He stops. Who else could know about Veronica’s adoption? It takes me a second, then the voice in my head finishes his sentence. It became an uproar with the Church of Night.

I want to ask more. I’m eager to know now if that’s why she has to take the Path of Night, and he wants Sabrina to join her….or act as a guide, I’m still not sure on this debacle. I finally take a forkful of salad and shove it into my mouth. It’s the first real food item I’ve had in my body since breakfast. I mean, it’s not a Thanksgiving meal, but it’s edible. I try to distract myself a bit on the matter by digging more into this salad. But there’s one thing that I can’t quite grasp…..if adopting Veronica upset the Church…..how was he able to get away with marrying Hermione? A mortal?

“I did my best to let it all slide at first.” Hiram breaks our prolonged silence, “Hermione was just over the moon about the whole thing….finally bringing home a baby. Raising children never grew as a major topic for us when we got married. At that time, she…..was still recovering from that accident,” My heart grows heavy, my eyes dart around the room in regret. I’m not sure if he knows the truth about what happened that night. I continue to listen, “and I was doing everything in my power to maintain peace with the Church. We were both so busy to consider raising a child……then one day, she just…..” He tries to find the appropriate words. He makes a gesture with his free hand, “appeared at our door, all bundled up and crying. There was no birth certificate on hand, no note to explain her identity, no rhyme or reason. I thought about taking her to an orphanage, or even another family within the Church…..but seeing how Hermione cared for her…..” he forms a faint smile. I can’t tell if his eyes are getting misty or if it’s the lighting in this place. “If it was worth keeping Veronica to Hermione…..then I figured it’d be worth it for me too.”

I twist my fork around in my salad. I’m trying to remember if Hermione ever talked about having kids, a rich husband, and all the other things of life. If she ever had the pre-partum crazies like most of the girls in our class. I still can’t wrap my head around the whole adoption thing. Were they just taking a break from the whole baby thing when Veronica came into their lives? There’s no other way they could have, unless he wanted to wait to get approval from the Church, unless like he said they really weren’t keen on the whole baby thing, unless she was…..Unless she was……

The fork slips out of my hand with a clank. My hand flies to my mouth. I squeeze my eyes shut, in hope to fight back any forming tears. My heart races, almost flying out of my chest. It finally clicks in my head.

Hermione wasn’t able to have any children.

“Your accident didn’t cause her infertility, Alice. That I can reassure you.” he responds to my state of being. I force my eyes open and notice the somber yet neutral emotion on his face. He sighs, “She never had the ability to bear a child long before high school. It was part of the reason how I was able to convince the Church to let me marry her. If we only engage in courtship with no means of producing a child for the Church of Night….trust me, it was a long and hard battle, but luck came on my side. And hers.” His gaze wanders down to the table, the emotions reading less neutral, more in mourning. “I don’t even know if I have any luck anymore, especially when it comes to Church-business. Raising Veronica on my own has been a challenge, I won’t lie. Everything I do is to keep her safe. To keep her from making the same mistakes as I once did in my
youth.” My hand releases from my mouth. If Veronica’s safety matters that much, no matter how little he shows it in public, it could be the emotional leverage I need to get him to help me.

I finally speak up, “That’s why I need you in on this, Hiram. If Hal is out, any guarantee of Sabrina…or Veronica, being safe is out the window.” He starts to lose some emotion in his face. I lean in, my forearms grazing along the tablecloth. I look at him, “I get if promising two more witches to go down the Path of Night means you keep your family safe from a damaged reputation, but…..” I take a shaky breath. How do I phrase this? How do I keep him in this possible negotiation? I glance down at my plate for a brief moment, then my eyes meet his again, “that might not be a possibility if they fall victim to Hal. The same way I…..” I stop. My inner voice finishes for my mouth, The same way I almost did.

I allow the silence to take over. I pick up my fork and scoop for another bit of salad. “I’m not asking you to make up your mind now.” I mutter, “Just think about it.” I look down, the salad no longer appealing to me. I decide instead to grab my drink, sipping on it slowly. Well, great. This is awkward. We’re not even at our main course, and I’ve already dampered our meeting with this talk of Hal and Hermione. I’m worried that we’ll have to resort to small talk and painful silence as a way to move on from this point. I should have waited until the end of the night. What was I thinking? The alcohol creeps into my system. I feel light and airy, considering this is the first form of calories I’ve consumed following work. I might be drunk…..at least I think I am…..there’s a tick in my head. One that I can’t exactly describe. It’s like the dull ache I experienced the night at Pop’s. It’s not super painful, but it’s there. I shake the feeling off and take another sip.

The waiter takes away our salad plates, it’s even more quiet now. I kind of want to cry. I want to ask more about Hermione and their marriage. I want to talk about anything, just so I don’t have this dread floating around, even more now that I’m starting to get drunk. Hiram picks up on this, grabbing for some water. “Have you talked with anyone else about this matter?” he sounds raspy. The little ache in my head increases. What’s even in this drink? Is it the drink at all? I set the glass down and clear my throat. I, too, reach for water.

I state my response carefully, “Not really.” It’s partially true - no other witch knows about Hal. I would include Gladys, but it might be risky if he learned I shared it with…..a non-magical member of a family full of witches. And as for Sabrina…..she still doesn’t know all of the details yet. If only I stopped getting cold feet, and she and I could make our schedules meet to talk. “I’ve been….wanting to open up to Sabrina. I’ve tried.” I admit to Hiram. I review the times that I made those attempts….first in the car on the way into Riverdale, then at Pop’s after the soccer game, the trailer park when we had alone time….. “Life just keeps getting in the way, though.” I tell him, rewarding my throat with some ice water.

“What about Hilda and Zelda?” he begs the question. I grip onto the water glass, the condensation freezing my fingers. I don’t think I spent any time discussing my past with the Spellman Sisters. Or Ambrose. When I showed up in Greendale, I made a valiant effort to build up my walls, throw my past as Alice Suzanna Smith away, begin anew. I don’t even remember how I introduced my history to them, or maybe I never did. It would have helped now though, since they were the ones who suggested Sabrina go to Riverdale while awaiting her trial….

“They have no clue. Nobody in Greendale does. I made sure to keep it that way.” I let go of the glass. I start to chew on my tongue anxiously. Before, I never saw my isolation as a problem. It kept me from staying trapped in the past. It kept my mind busy. Now…..I’m not so sure if was all worth it. I don’t know if I’m angry at Hilda and Zelda for thinking sending Sabrina to Riverdale was the best idea, or if I’m angry…..at myself. For not speaking up. For not suggestion someplace else. Even if I had, I wouldn’t have seen FP again, I wouldn’t have befriended Gladys, I wouldn’t
I have learned the truth about Hiram. And Hal would have found a way out eventually.....

“I guess it doesn’t matter anymore.” I sigh, retreating for another sip of water. I glance up at the little lights above, I can feel my walls breaking. My neutral facade revealing more of my own emotions. I chuckle, despite this dread. “My past was bound to come back and bite me in the ass someday. I didn’t figure it’d be this soon….all that running away for….for it to start happening all over again.” My thoughts drift to Pop’s. The sickness I went through. The connection to Hal being released. If I felt it then…..would that mean.....

His face falls. He blinks at me in confusion. “Start happening…..you think something will come up?” I don’t know how to go on with this. I realize that this is the first time I’ve opened up about the sickness from my over excessive magic use. Or why I felt that connection with Hal, even after 25 years.

The ache in my head doubles in severity. It stops me from speaking, from trying to form a coherent sentence. It’s much worse than the ache I felt at Pop’s, it makes me dizzy. My mouth slips open, my heart pounds in my ears. I can hear someone screaming. A boy, I don’t know how old, but he doesn’t sound like a child. He’s screaming for help. I can hear water splashing. I glance around the venue. Is there a teenage boy in this restaurant? Is there a source of water?

“Alice?” Hiram sees my state and starts to show concern. My vision goes out, and it comes back. Only I’m not sure if I’m at Lenny’s….I’m at a pool. Someone is in the water. The boy maybe? I hear a snarl….is it coming from me? My viewpoint raises, I’m over the boy in the water. He cries for help. He yells for God. Whatever I’m seeing through, it attacks.

Something digs into my chest. A ripping. My hand flies to my heart area, the dizziness worsens. Hiram calls out my name again, I look at him in panic. “I’ll....” I make an attempt to stand up, gripping onto the table. “I’ll be right back.” I turn away, my hand glued to my chest. My feet lead me to the bathroom. No, I want fresh air, but the bathroom will do. I feel sick. I just witnessed a murder. An attack on who? I don’t know. This isn’t the alcohol. I’m not crazy, am I?

I stumble against the wall, I fight the urge to vomit. The pain is growing to be unbearable. I force myself to stand above one of the sinks. My fingers grasp onto the ceramic. I pant, hoping to bring some air back into my lungs. I look at my reflection, my vision keeps going back and forth between the bathroom and that pool.....the water is starting to turn red. The screams fade under the growling. What is this thing? Where is this happening? I start to feel a trickle down my nose.

I snap out of my visions. I’m tempted to use magic to open the window, but I’m worried of sparking a reason to vomit. I turn back to the reflection, taking in the dark blood running out of my nostril. I bless under my breath, wiping away the blood trail. I turn on the sink to clean off my hands and get myself together. I stop after a while, letting the hot water run over my hands. Even under this layer of makeup, even in this bathroom lighting, I look skeletal. The pain in my head dies down, I wish I had brought some herbal remedy with me. Or any form of mortal painkillers. This couldn’t have been Hal.....could it? I try to think back.....did Hal go after my classmates in any other form? The only times I saw him were when he appeared in human form, before and after each.....kill. And the one time he didn’t kill....

We arrived to a dark and bare Sunnyside trailer park. I wasn’t sure if there was a Serpent meeting that night, but my father wouldn’t be in the trailer. So that allowed me and Hal to go about our business....to enact what we would do to Hiram.

I stepped out of my vehicle, taking a deep breath of the cold, night air. I shivered and waited for Hiram to get out.....and waited for Hal to show up. Hiram slammed the door shut and glanced around. I was waiting for him to make some comment about the dirtiness of this place, but he
stayed quiet. It was a relief, but it left me a bit unsettled.

“Come on.” I nudged him as I walked past the hood of my car, heading up the steps to my front door. I looked out into the night sky. I hoped Hal would show up soon, I didn’t know if I could enact this on my own. I fumbled with the keys for a bit, then I finally pried the door open. I forgot I turned out the lights before leaving, but the atmospheric element fit. I waved for Hiram to come in. I stood to the side so he could enter first….I did this deliberately so I could leave the front door ajar for Hal. Everything needed to go according to plan. It just had to.

“Small shack you have.” Hiram paced through my living room. His hands stayed in his pockets, I could see his breath forming in the cold air. Even though it was dark, I feared that he would see how nervous I was, how on edge I’d been leading up to this very moment. I went through the details in my head - was I supposed to keep him in the living room? Did I need to have him come with me to the bedroom? When was Hal going to show up and take over? Would this work?

“My dad keeps a majority of his stash in the closet.” I started to head into the bedroom. I knew my dad hid some of the drugs he stole from other Serpents in the oddest parts of our trailer - under the bed, in the freezer, behind the toilet, buried under clothes in the closet. He had so much of it, I didn’t think he’d mind if I took some for….a client of sorts. I shoved some of my dad’s clothes aside and searched for the drugs…..or at least I made it out that way when Hiram followed me into the bedroom. I rifled through the assortment - oxycodone, ecstasy, some jingle jangle. I grabbed a handful of each kind and turned back to Hiram. I stood there facing him with the drugs in my hands, I couldn’t move I was too scared. Was I going too fast with this? Before I could walk over or speak, a cold draft blew through the trailer. I could hear a light flicker outside. The vibe of the trailer felt different, but it was comforting. It was a signal that Hal was there. I smiled a bit, making sure it wasn’t too obvious to Hiram.

I stepped forward, holding the drugs out for him to take. He started to dig through his pockets, a sense of dread coming apparent on his face. He didn’t have any money on him? I sighed, “Dude, it’s fine. You can pay me back later. My dad won’t even realized this is gone.”

“You deserve compensation, though.” he groaned, finally giving up on turning his pockets inside out. He huffed before addressing me again, “I feel awful for even having asked in the first place, believe me. I guess I just….wanted out of that party.” Something crashed in the living room. Hiram jumped back and peered out through the doorway. Yep, Hal was ready to go.

“You think flying high like a kite’s gonna spare you from social interaction?” I snarked at him, pretending that the noise didn’t faze me. Hiram started to breathe heavily. Whatever Hal did, it spooked him. He turned back to me, took a deep inhale, then held his hand out.

“I’ll bring the money to school. I promise.” he spoke quickly. It almost made me chuckle. I hesitated a moment, then I stepped in. I hovered the drugs over his hand and stopped. I gripped onto them tighter. Hiram noticed my movements and looked up at me.

I smirked. “Just one thing….Don’t call me Acid Queen Alice again. Ever.”

His face fell. As he opened his mouth to speak, I released the drugs from my grip. The drug baggies dissolved into fire, building a border between me and Hiram. He leaped back and yelped. The wall of fire grew, under my control of course, and continued to follow Hiram’s path. He glanced down at the fire then back up at me. I only stood there with that smirk on my face. Out of sheer panic, Hiram bolted out of the bedroom, heading straight into the living room. He didn’t bother to see a tall figure, dawed in a black ski mask and a leather jacket, about to approach him with an axe. Hiram stopped, seeing the figure in full form.
“What the f---” The figure swung the axe, Hiram ducked. The axe attempted to make a blow, one left, one right. Hiram avoided both with speed. He made an attempt to back away, but he was too far down to the ground that he fell back. The figure raised the axe and threw down the blade. Hiram rolled away and got back up onto his feet. He bolted for the front door. I reappeared and used magic to keep him still. The figure went to go for Hiram again, but I motioned for him to stop. Hiram looked petrified at the both of us. He turned to me in panic.

“You’re….you’re a….you’re a witch?”

“Damn straight, Manhattan.” I boasted in pride. “So cross me again, and you’ll get much worse. You might have another run in with my friend over here too. But if it were me, I wouldn’t test my luck. Got it?” Hiram didn’t say a word. He was paralyzed in my hold. The figure took another step forward, preparing the axe.

“Okay! Okay....” Hiram held his hands up in defense. Out of mercy, I released my hold on him. He looked at me with wet eyes. Maybe I didn’t realize it then, but it would change how he treated me, even coming back to Riverdale years later. He didn’t move. After a second or two, I took another step toward him.

“This is the part where you run, dumbass.” I gritted. With that, Hiram threw the door open and ran out, not looking back.

It was over. I ran my fingers through my hair and whirled around in utter glee. I laughed for the first time in days. I was free, Acid Queen Alice would be no more.....at least I thought at the time. I faced the figure in the living room. Hal removed the ski mask and dropped the axe on the floor. His top row of teeth showed when he smiled at me. His eyes were full of.....something I never really had anyone else show when they looked at me. Admirition. Pure enjoyment. Desire....

“Should we chase after him?” Hal began to walk towards me. I cackled at the question. 

"Nah, let him run.” I started to meet Hal halfway. “All that matters is that I am a candy girl, no more.” I curtsied at the last sentence, Hal chuckled. We came face to face, merely inches apart. The color of his eyes shone in the dark. I didn’t know if I could feel heat from the fire I manifested or....could familiars radiate heat? Whatever it was, it loomed between us. It warmed me. I brought my hands up to cup his face, and I beamed. “I’m free of all of that, thanks to you.”

“I’m always here for you.” he muttered in return. I came in for a hug. I clung to him and he wrapped his arms around me. We stayed here for a moment or two, then we pulled back.....only to lock our eyes on each other. His breath mixed with mine. The beating of my heart slowed. A hand moved from my back to my face, fingers going through my hair ever so gently. It sent tingles through me. He stared at me in wonder. Butterflies floated in my stomach.....maybe they were really warning signs that I didn’t take for granted. But then, it felt right being with him. Being this closed. Feeling wanted for the first time. And I was that vulnerable enough to let it happen.

I hadn’t kissed anyone, despite the reputation of my “sex life” at school; I always imagined it being after a romantic date, or at a movie theater, or somewhere out of the stereotypical rom-com setting. But when Hal kissed me, it washed away any expectations I conceived. It wasn’t light or quick. It was slow and all-consuming, but I liked it. I kissed back, pulling him more into me, I was so despearate and so stupid, looking back at it, but in the moment I wanted it. I craved it. I felt like I was drunk, each time our lips collided growing more passionate. His hands stroked my back, grazed my hips, it sent a volt of electricity through me.

I eventually broke off, looking up at him. A smile came across my face. I wanted more, but not out in the open like this. I was new to this, but I still had some standards. I turned to the door and used
some magic to send it shut. I faced Hal, raising a brow. He stepped in, I swore he growled. With a
giggle, I took him by the hand and led him into the bedroom.

I snap out of my thoughts when a drop of blood hits the ceramic. The warm water stops doing much
for me. I glance back up and notice my nose bleeding again. Great. I sigh and flick some water up
to get the bleeding to stop. It doesn’t do much, so I have to grab a clean paper towel to wipe my
nose again. I wash my hands again and turn off the water in frustration. I need to head back, I can’t
leave Hiram waiting for me or thinking that I ditched. I make my way out of the bathroom and
head down the hallway.

“Alice.” Hiram approaches me out of nowhere. I yelp and stumble back into the wall, my hand
flying to my chest rising up and down. I grow cross.

I point a finger at him, “You are asking me to send you into Spellman Mortuary, I swear, Hiram!”
He occupies the other side of the hallway, looking at me in regret.

“I wanted to make sure you were okay.” he testifies. “I told them to hold off on bringing our meals
out until you came back….” He stops talking. He takes note of something about me. Something on
my face. He steps towards me, he’s tempted to reach his fingers up but hesitates. He’s looking at
my nose. “You had a nose bleed?”

I bring a finger to the area under my nostril. Did I not wash all of it off? Some dried blood smudges
on my finger. “It’s…..it’s nothing. I’m fine.” He doesn’t believe me. He just stays there with his
hand hovering in the air looking at me like his dog got run over. I roll my eyes at him, “I’m fine,
Hiram…..” I say like I hope it would be fine. I hope it isn’t anything serious. I look at him again,
his gaze becoming softer. I step in closer to him, I start to fidget with my hands nervously. I guess
I’m still getting used to Hiram Lodge actually caring about someone other than himself or his
daughter. I sigh. “You didn’t have to hold off on eating just to wait for me.”

“Actually there’s another reason why I did. I wanted to…..” he starts. What? What other reason?
His eyes dart down both ends of the hallway to check for any eavesdroppers. I’m still confused.

“Wanted to what?” I attempt to pry out of him. He looks down at the ground, rests his hands on his
waist, and huffs.

“I’ll do it.”

My back straightens. Air enters my nostrils. Did I just hear him correctly? He lifts his head up and
continues to explain, “You asked me to think about it, and I did. You’re right - Veronica’s life is
just as much in danger as Sabrina’s. And I certainly don’t have the strength to confront the
Spellman Sisters if I ever have to explain why their niece’s blood is on my hands.” I’m speechless.
I could scream for joy. He’s agreed to help. He actually agreed to do it. I could praise Satan, or
even God, right now.

I’m still so much in shock, I’m tempted to ask him to confirm that it’s real. He smirks at me,
saying, “So, it’s a yes. I’ll help you find your former familiar and banish him.” My hands fly to my
hips, I let out an exhale of relief. This is the best news I’ve heard all day. This is up there with the
high I had dancing around at Pop’s. I have Hiram on my side, and there’s no Church of Night or
any…..

My face falls. It hits me. There has to be something in return. I look him in the eye. “But….”

He blinks at me in confusion. “But….what?”
I roll my eyes, my hands still solid on my hips. “There’s always _but_ with you, Hiram. You want something out of this in return. So, you might as well just spit it out.”

I can see it in his face. He hates to admit it, but he knows I’m right. He huffs, “I already promised the Spellmans and the Witches Council that I would do my best to have Sabrina consider the Path of Night upon her return. I can’t break that, Alice.” I release the hold on my hips and cross my arms. I have to remind myself of why Sabrina’s even in Riverdale to begin with, no matter how I view the situation. And that no matter what happens with Hal, Sabrina can’t avoid what happened between her and the Church of Night forever. It doesn’t mean I can’t let her stay true to her opinions….

I start to contemplate out loud, “If there’s no other way out of it, maybe….._MAYBE_, I can bring it up in conversation. Check in and see how she feels.” A wave of relief washes over him. I still stand my ground, “But that will only happen…..once we deal with Hal. That’s more of the priority right now.”

A microscopic smile forms on his face. “Then that settles it.” He pauses, staring down at his hand. Then, he lifts his hand up and holds it there. Does he want us to shake on it? There aren’t other contracts or deals we have to make, are there? Maybe I just find it strange that Hiram Lodge is actually agreeing to do this…..for me. He resumes, “We find your ex-familiar and banish him, and then we’ll get Sabrina back to Greendale, safe and sound.”

My fingers rise. I’m slow to bring my hand up to his level, but only because I’m hesitating. I got Hiram on my side, but I don’t fully know if I can trust him. Teen Alice screams in my head for me to run. To hex the daylighters out of him, take Sabrina, and leave Riverdale. She doesn’t want me to find Hal. She wants me to hide. Well, I’m done hiding, and I’m done with running away.

I reach for his forearm and he reaches for mine. We latch on to one another. Something pulses through me. It stings my wrist. I wince at the pulse, and he does too. But we don’t let go. We wait for the pulse to disappear. It takes a solid minute, but once it fades we look at each other. Our hold on each other softens. He moves first, sliding his fingers across my wrist, my palm, the tips of my fingers. He studies his wrist, blinking at it. It prompts me to look at my own. I almost bless at what I see. There, like a tattoo, is something penned into my skin. I take a closer look. It has my initials, then his, and the date. This is our contract.

Hiram speaks up, “Don’t worry, it’s not permanent. It will go away when we complete our ends of the deal.” I run my fingers over it, still in awe. So this is how witches make agreements with one another? I try to remember if Zelda or Hilda ever had anything like this thing on my wrist, but yet again….I wanted to stay out of whatever business they conducted with the Church.

I shrug it off and allow my wrist to fall to my side. By this point, I’m starving and the salad hasn’t done much to satiate me. I step away from my place by the wall and make my way towards civilization. “We better get back.” I tell him, “Don’t want our food to get cold.” I start to leave, then stop. I hear Hiram let out a suppressed laugh from behind me. I whip my head to him. “What?”

“Oh, Acid Queen Alice…..I think this the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”
End of Chapter Five

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm so much to discuss here - what will Sabrina do to control Salem? Is the Riverdale Reaper really back? And..... WHAT IS GOING ON WITH VERONICA?

So heads up - I have my finals coming up soon, so I will not have a chance to update this fic for a couple of weeks, or if I get a chance, it might not be on a Thursday. But I should be (hopefully) back on a regular posting schedule within the next couple of weeks.

Thank you for your patience, yal!
SURPRISE B*TCH, I BET YOU’D THOUGHT YOU’D SEEN THE LAST OF ME....

Hello! I'm back! And I have a new chapter ready for your reading pleasure! You know the drill my dudes ;)

SABRINA

The drive back to Pembrooke is long and quiet. I decide to drive since V is still shaken from what happened, and I’ll admit I’m a bit shaken myself. I didn’t know she had that much power. That she could not control it. That it almost killed someone we knew. I carefully help V into the passenger’s side before I take the keys and sit behind the wheel. I move with ease, the geography of town still foreign, especially at night. V gasps and sniffles next to me, she glances out the window the entire time. I feel helpless. I want to help her, I want to keep her safe. I don’t know how she lost control, and I don’t know what I can do to help prevent that again. I just hope Salem isn’t the reason for that. And I hope he isn’t out there causing any more trouble with Chuck...

We return to the parking garage by Pembrooke, back in her parking spot. I lift V out of the car and allow her to cling to me as we make our way to the complex, through the back, up the stairs, down the hallway, inside her home. It’s dead silent when we walk through the door. Is Mister Lodge not back yet from his meeting? I use some magic to turn on the lights as I guide V near her room. The closer we get, the less she clings to me. We stop outside her room and she lets go of me.

“I’m gonna try to take a shower.” she mumbles, running her fingers through her hair. “If you want, we can ring Andre and have the staff make something for us to eat.” The last sentence makes my stomach growl. I remember I haven’t consumed anything since I stopped by the library. But I don’t know if I want any food in my stomach after what happened. And I’m too scared to leave V alone.

“Ohay.” I wind up saying. I follow her into the bedroom and she hands me the number to call for dining services. I never had a personal waitstaff to bring a meal before, it just seems a bit unconventional that I’m experiencing this after a revenge-plan gone wrong. V waits to place her order with mine before she wanders off towards her bathroom, leaving me alone on the bed. She’s acting strong, but deep down it’s bugging her. She’s disturbed by what happened. I can see it on her face under the faked confidence. I can hear the shower running from the bathroom, V’s cries echo into the bedroom. And I can’t do anything at the moment to take away her grief. It upsets me. I reread the plan that we sketched out, nowhere does it indicate Salem attacking Chuck or V using more dark power. Something must have derailed along the way, or maybe….maybe Salem stayed behind for another reason.

V is still in the bathroom by the time our very late dinner arrives. I get the chance to meet Andre, he seems loyal and trustworthy to the Lodges, and I attempt to reassure that nothing’s wrong with V. I thank him after our small talk and send him on his way. I remove the lids from the plates of food, the aroma hitting me instantly. By this time, V emerges from the bathroom, covered in a silk robe and with her hair in a towel. I tell her that the food was just delivered and ready, cuing her to come over and grab her plate. I start to dig into my Monte Cristo sandwich, and it melts in my
mouth. I’m caught up in my ravenous hunger that I almost don’t realize V is barely making a dent. She shuffles her potatoes around with her fork in silence. I set what I have left of this first half of my sandwich. I go to open my mouth.

“I don’t know why I lost control, ‘Brina.” V jumps in, setting her fork down. With her plate in her hands, she inches closer to me on the bed. She sighed, “I’ve had formal training to handle my witchcraft, but….it’s like every time I let my emotions get to the worst of me……I…..I can’t explain it. I just know that I’ve always struggled to keep my emotions under check.” I set my plate to the side and allow my hands to fall into my lap. I have so many questions to ask, but I don’t want to bombard V with anything sensitive, even right in this moment.

So I take it slow, “Has something…..like tonight…..has that happened before, V?” She breaks her eye contact with me, her gazing going off into the distance. She’s quiet for a while, then she removes the towel from her head. She clings onto it as her wet hair rests on her shoulders. Her lips tighten together.

“There’s a reason Daddy and I came to Riverdale in the first place.” she begins her story, “I was a different person back in New York. Most of whom I interacted with came from high witch families or members of the Witches Council. I lived in a world of the elite….I never fully realized what it meant to love the human part of myself until I got older. Don’t get me wrong, I loved my witch life….but I wanted to see how the other half lived. So, with some convincing on my end, my father allowed me to start going to prep school and forming social circles with other mortal children. Only….I didn’t really how to interact with the other kids. I didn’t know how to properly handle my witchcraft around them. But somehow I managed to get myself with the rich and popular at school…..maybe that’s why everyone in Riverdale considers me an ice-cold bitch.

“Anyway, with that crowd….I met this boy, Nick St. Clair. In a way, he had Chuck’s personality, but he was more of an academic. He was charming, and he became intrigued with me…..or so I thought.” she pauses for a moment, moving the damp towel to the side and allowing herself to take a bite of her food. She finishes the bite before continuing, “I didn’t understand why he would want to spend more time around a new girl like me, but I was…..desperate for any kind of social interaction that could help me integrate to mortal life better. So we had a fling, nothing too serious. We’d go on dates in the city, we’d pair up for school projects. But I never really saw much romantic or sexual attraction for him…..he probably did for me…..but I guess I never confirmed that for real. Not even after….”

“Not after what?” I ask for clarification. V takes a shaky breath. Her knee starts to bounce. She swallows a lump in her throat.

“Around the end of the school year, back in May, he invited me over to have dinner with his parents. I met his parents before, they were lovely people….but something seemed off about them that night…..Nick too. I couldn’t put my finger on it at the time, so I just tried to let the feeling go. The whole dinner with them made me feel funny….. But that wasn’t the bad part. It was after dinner when…..when everything went wrong.”

When….everything went wrong? I try to think of the possibilities - what did this Nick St. Clair boy do? What did his family do? Did….did they find out V was a witch? I turn to her and wait for an explanation. But she’s frozen - her mouth doesn’t open. She just stares blankly at the other side of the bedroom with no focus. What did they do to her? I want to ask, but then V raises her hand to my head. Her fingertips gently touch the side of my head. She whispers, “It might be better if you see for yourself.” She takes a deep breath, then a pulse goes into my head. My sight goes black for a second, then….then…..
My heart drops to my stomach. What I see is only a memory, yet it leaves me disturbed. Nick is….was like Chuck. He tried to get with V against her will. He cornered her, tried to make her feel vulnerable. Tried to grab at her, but there was no kissing. No unwanted touches. Still….he made her afraid, and she snapped. She lost control the same way she did tonight with Chuck. She ran, I can hear her cries echo in my head. Or maybe it’s me that’s crying. When the memory ends, when V releases her fingers from my forehead, my vision returns, my eyes are wet. I don’t make a sound when I wipe at my tear-stained cheeks. I look at her, dumbfounded at the reveal but mesmerized at what I just experienced. I never had another witch bond with me in such a way before.

V curls her fingers in and out of a fist. She picks up, “I felt so helpless. I didn’t know what to do or who to turn to for help. So….yes, I did tell my father about what happened. He was angry, not over what I did but why Nick got his hands on me. From that point, he told me he’d step in and take care of the matter. See to it that the St. Clair’s would have their comeuppance.” She goes quiet again, taking a few breaths. Her hands are shaking now. After the last inhale, she proceeds, “There’s a reason I didn’t want Daddy to get involved with the Chuck issue, Brina. I didn’t hear from Nick or his family after that night, I didn’t even know what they had been up to going into the summer. Maybe I should have checked in with them…..maybe I should have checked in on what Daddy was planning for them. The week before Labor Day, we were out for lunch at the Dakota - it’s where my father and I would go on special occasions - and during that meal, a member of the waitstaff came over bearing news of the St. Clairs…..

“They got into a car accident. Nick wound up in a coma, and his parents died. I was shocked, Brina. I didn’t know what to say…. That night, Daddy told me to pack my things. We were in Riverdale the next day. And we’ve been here since.” She finishes her story. She curls her knees into her chest and buries her forehead against her kneecaps. I can’t help but feel dreadful. V thinks it’s her fault that she and her father ended up in Riverdale. She blames herself, but it’s not true. It just can’t be. I shuffle closer to her and wrap my arms around her. I rest my head on her shoulder and stroke her forearm. I thought I was dealing with an immense amount of guilt over the Dark Baptism leading me here, but V has just as many demons too. I get why Mister Lodge wanted us to stay close together…..

“You’re not at fault, V.” I reassure her. She lifts her head up to look at me, lowering her feet to the ground. I take a firm hold of her hands. “You’re not a monster. Whatever this power is….we’ll get it under control. I’ll find a way to help you. Maybe Salem can too….“ I trail off. At this point, I have no clue if Salem will turn up at Pembrooke later. I wonder what exactly it is he’s doing to Chuck…..

“You think a familiar like Salem can cure me of this thing?” her voice croaks. I have to think on this for a moment. Maybe Salem might have some idea of whatever it is V has. Otherwise, how come he wants me to only be friends with her and no one else…..

My mind goes back to a couple of nights ago, how it struck both me and Salem that V could hear him, how he made that connection with her so suddenly….. If he’s taken such a fond liking of her, why didn’t he try to stop her? Why did he let her keep going? What did he see about her that I’m missing?

XXXXXXXXX

ALICE
It takes me a while to fully wake up. The sky is still so dark blue, the sun has hours before it has to make its appearance. But I have to get up for work. I need to get the pies made for the day before I meet up with Hiram. I stay in bed for a bit, running my fingers over the new tattoo on my wrist. This little ink bound us together, and there’s no backing out. I know I won’t until I see Hal get dragged into the lowest possible pit of hell.

The plan Hiram and I made is simple. We’re both up early in the mornings, him going on runs and me at Pop’s making the daily pies, so we agreed to meet in the early hours before the rest of the world comes to life. We’ll do our research together, strengthen our magic, and gather whatever we need to track down Hal so we can lure him back to the Conway House, bind him, and banish him for good. It sounds straightforward on paper, but who knows how long this whole thing could take. I just hope we get it done before Sabrina is summoned back to Greendale for her trial….

The diner is practically empty this early in the morning, only a person or two come in for service. The quiet allows me to get going on the pies without distraction. Well, distraction from the outside world. I’m very much distracted by the thoughts circling my head, the details I’m trying to piece together for this ordeal. Did Hiram say he would meet me at Pop’s, or would I go to Pembrooke? Would we meet halfway at Pop’s? My memory’s become to damn muddy lately to remember smaller details. The flour sticks to my fingers and the hairs on my arms. My little apron has gunks of the filling for the apple and cherry pies. I contemplate whether or not it would be too early to bring pumpkin as an option for the diner…wait, is it really almost Thanksgiving? I check the calendar pinned up on the corkboard. It’s two days away. Sabrina and I came to Riverdale the night of November 8th. We’ve been here for three weeks. Three whole weeks, and not one word from Zelda or Hilda, or even Ambrose. No word from the Witches Council. And Hal is still out and in the open.

I get started on a pumpkin pie just to be safe. I would make this from scratch, but all I have in this kitchen is a giant can of pumpkin puree and the basics, so for now it will have to do. Besides, I need to speed this process up in case Hiram does show up ready to head out with me.

It’s almost 7 now, the pies are all cooked and ready to be served. I tend to a small handful of guests that come through, it keeps me busy. Giving the general Pop’s spiel and putting a smile on my face keeps me from not having a nervous breakdown. When will Hiram get here? Why can I not retain the details of our conversation? I clear out the table after an older gentleman pays his check and leaves, just as the clock strikes seven. There’s only a couple of people, but the other morning waitress has them covered. I need to get a move on with my day. I give Pop the heads up before I grab my change of clothes and head for the bathroom. It only takes me less than five minutes to get out of my uniform and sneakers and to throw on a long dress and wedges. They’re not exactly winter-savvy, but they’re clean and it’s part of what I have. I bid Pop farewell as I head out of the diner, retreating at last to my vehicle. I turn on the ignition just so I can get some heat while I wait in here.

Maybe it could be easier if I drove to Pembrooke and picked him up to…..wherever we would go. Or maybe we could stay there and do research, or even go back to the trailer. I do my best to recall the details from our conversation last night. All that sticks out is the news of Veronica not actually being a Lodge…..I’m still stunned by it. So there’s no record of where she came from or why she appeared at Hiram and Hermione’s doorstep? Would the Witches Council…..No, Alice, focus. What did you talk about last night? What was your course of action? Did….did we say anything regarding the Conway——

There’s a tap on my window. I don’t flinch at the sound, but it makes me grip the steering wheel for dear life. I turn to the sight of the noise, and my face relaxes. Outside, Hiram teeters on his heels, shoving his hands into his pockets to stay warm. I breathe in and out a couple of times, then I
unlock the car. I stay staring out the windshield as he makes his way around to the passenger’s side. I don’t notice the bag slung around him until he enters the car, plopping the bag onto his lap. I let go of the steering wheel and exhale.

“I didn’t keep you waiting too long, did I?” his teeth chatter. My fingers clamp together on my lap while I formulate an answer.

“You’re fine. I...I just forgot we were meeting here. Didn’t get much sleep last night. But...someone has to come in and make the pies, and...and it’s not fair for Pop to be in there all by himself, and for Gladys to work all those hours—”

“You don’t have to apologize, Alice. It’s okay.” He shoots me a sympathetic grin. My nose twitches slightly. He looks tired too, but I won’t say it out loud. Did he not get enough sleep either? And what about... I release my fingers and tap on the steering wheel.

“Is Sabrina okay?”

“I believe...” he trails off. “She and Veronica had already fallen asleep when I returned to Pembrooke. And I went on my morning run before I could check in with her. With both of them. But nothing came out of the ordinary from word of my staff, so...” He doesn’t finish his sentence. His face is neutral, but his eyes give away a notion of guilt. The lines that inhabit the space between his eyes and his brows become more prominent. They show his age, even with our capability as witches to age slower. And it’s withered at me too, my human side takes that credit. Maybe it’s doing the same to him. The years on my face make me realize what I have to own up to. What I have to stop running from.

It comes to me. We have to go where it all began. I clear my throat, I wish I had some water on me. My hands retake a firm grasp on the wheel. The whiteness of my bones peaks through the flesh on my knuckles. I sound scratchy when I do speak, “We should go there first. The Conway House.”

“Alice...” Hiram comes off concerned. I ramble on before he can jump in.

“We could get some insight on what came through the house the night he got released. If someone performed a spell that summoned him, the evidence would still be there. It just has to, wouldn’t it? That way we have an idea of what...who, we have to face. And then...then we can...find him.” I clamp my mouth shut.

Next to me, Hiram lowers his shoulders. “I was going to offer to start there, but....I didn’t know if it was a good idea....if you weren’t comfortable with it.” I soften my gaze at him. I do appreciate his concern. It is risky to consider the Conway House to be our first destination, but I have to grow up. I can’t keep avoiding this and expect others to jump in and fix it for me. I don’t need Hiram to worry about me anymore than....than he might already does.

“To the Conway House, we go then.” I put the car in reverse and pull out of Pop’s. I haven’t gone down the roads to Fox Lane in a while, and most of the time, I never went there by car. It was always by foot. Still, I don’t need directions from Hiram, and I don’t need to pull up a map on Google. I remember the route like the back of my hand. I turn on the right streets. I stick to the speed limits. The closer we get to Fox Lane, the more my heartbeat accelerates. The saliva in my throat turns to glue. My hands get clammy. He’s not in this area of Riverdale, I can feel the absence, but it still leaves me agitated. I make the left onto the street. I lift my foot off from the gas pedal and hover it over the brake. I go down the street at a turtle’s pace. The houses that stood when I walked down this street years ago still stand. They look empty, I guess people moved out. Leaves swirl in the air like tumbleweeds. This emptiness lends to the eerie, nostalgic atmosphere. It gives me the creeps. I look out ahead of me, and my heart stops.
The abandoned Conway House stands out in the middle of the street. Nothing’s changed about it. The house hasn’t lost its two-story structure, but the white paint on the exterior is fading. The wood is starting to chip away. Whatever Hal has been doing in that house for the past 25 years, it makes the house from *The Amityville Horror* look pleasant and innocent. The car comes to a stop outside the house. From inside my vehicle, I can pick up the energy from this house….well, the lack of energy. I realize that I can’t feel anything radiate from this house.

Grasping the keys in my hands, I step out of the car. The wind hits me, leaves dance across my feet. A dread builds up in me. The memories of this house seep into my brain. I can vividly see myself walking up these steps for the first time in 1992. I can recall the feeble architecture of the house’s interior. I remember the dark energy I felt when I lured Hal back in and trapped him here. The house no longer holds that energy, but there’s something else I sense. Another vibe that trickles into my blood. Someone has been here alright. And this person wasn’t alone.

Hiram joins my side and clutches his bag. He picks up on my blank state. “Are you going to be okay?” I stay staring at the house, not acknowledging his question right off the bat. I hear the spells I chanted to bind Hal to this house. It booms in my ear drums. His yelling and my screaming echo. I have to shut my eyes to calm myself down. My heartbeat slows. Time to put on my big girl pants.

“Let’s get this over with.” I march up the steps. I concentrate on the sound of my heels clicking on the concrete to ease the thoughts racing through my head. The breeze increases the higher up I go. The light from the outside world fades when I step onto the porch. The floorboard creaks underneath me. I stop, glancing up at the rotting wood overhead. I move my eyes downward to the door. I was in this position so many years ago, but under a different circumstance. My mouth opens slightly as I exhale through gritted teeth. I reach my hand out to the door. With the tips of my fingers, I force the door to creak open.

I expect something to pop out, to attack me and Hiram. But nothing waits for us on the other side. I hesitate for a moment, waiting on the porch, unsure of whether or not to enter this pit of darkness. A lump forms in my throat, and I have to force it down. *It’s alright, Alice*, a calming voice tells my head. I can’t tell if it’s Hiram communicating with me telepathically, or if it’s my own voice. My hands make little fists, I force them to unclench. *It’s okay, It’s okay, It’s okay*….

I step in to the other side. The house is still just as empty and cold as it was on Halloween Night in 1992. It’s not as dark with some of the outside light peaking through the boarded up windows. The feeling of darkness is absent. It’s a different atmosphere this time, one I will have to get used to. I glance around, everything about this house is still the same. I run my fingertips along the walls, taking in the sensation. Something creaks by the front door. Out of instinct and fear, I turn, only to find Hiram entering the house. He leaves the door open as he starts to look around himself. I leave him to examine the house on his own, and I eventually find my way to the living room. The sound of my footsteps echoes along the walls. The air is musty and mold is forming in the smallest corners of the room. Light enters through what is visible of the window. It reflects down onto the floor. I follow my sight to where it glows. My face falls.

The symbols I drew on the floorboards are still here. Somebody’s drawn over them, the dust starting to settle on the new marks. I kneel down. My hand hovers over the dust. Part of me wants to wipe it away. To scrub this house from head to toe to rid it of its evil, of Hal. To burn it to the ground so no one would ever step foot through here ever again.

“So this is where the summoning took place?” Hiram enters the living room. He kneels down beside me and squints at the symbols created out of the dust. I can’t tell if he’s having trouble seeing the symbols, so I go to stand up and use some magic to remove the boards from the
windows. “Don’t.” Hiram reaches for my arm. I freeze then lower back down. He takes off the bag that he’s been carrying and reaches in. He pulls out a hand-crank lantern and sets it down on the ground. He turns the hand at lightning speed, a strong warm light appears. It illuminates only part of the room, but it will do. He starts to empty out the contents in his bag.

I tilt my head at these items. “What the hell is all of this?”

“Divination tools, amongst what I brought with me - here, hold this.” he hands me a giant book. I examine the cover….Is this Hiram’s Grimoire? He begins to organize what he brought - an athame, a pendulum, a bell, some sage, dowsing rods. Did he seriously pack his whole witchcraft tool kit? “If we can discover any traces of what kind of witch came through this house, we might have an easier time tracking down where your familiar could have ended up.”

I peel back the cover of this book. There’s a picture on the front page with the book’s title in Latin. A couple of sigils are drawn on, for reasons I don’t know. Yet, something else on this page captures my attention. Someone signed their name in this book, but it’s not Hiram’s. Is this a book he’s taken or is borrowing? I run my fingers along the ink, reading the name. The book belongs...or it did belong….to someone named Jaime Luna.

“There should be a section in there about how to recall the traces of any person, witch or mortal, if you flip through. Should be around the middle.” Hiram instructs me, snapping out of my faze. I open the book and scour through the pages until I find the section he brought up. I lay the book down between us, making sure to not place it on top of the dust drawing. He takes off his jacket and sets it down next to me so he can maneuver his arms easier with the dowsing rods. He holds both rods in one hand while skimming the text with the other. I still have no idea what this would even result in for us. What kind of divination practice is this?

Out of boredom, I glance around the living room while I wait for him to finish. “Hal was the only spirit in this house. Don’t know if you’ll have much luck conjuring any new buddies on the other side.”

“That’s why I brought these tools along. Standard procedure.”

“Standard....” I turn back to him, raising my brow in the process. “Is this what they were teaching you at the Academy of Unseen Arts?” He doesn’t answer the question. To be fair, I’m not exactly sure what those young witches learn at the Academy - I have very little insight from what Sabrina has relayed to me via her Aunts. I’m guessing it’s like the American version of Hogwarts but without the friendly atmosphere and house rivalry. And without a creepy snake dude trying to terrorize the children every year. But again, I have no interest in whatever kind of kool aid the Church of Night is feeding those children, so I don’t trust Hilda and Zelda’s praise. Even Hiram’s knack for this type of divination comes off sketchy. Still, I have to wonder.....

“Must have really been bored by the mortal classes at Riverdale High, then.”

He stops what he’s doing and looks at me. He smirks, “Careful casting stones there, Acid Queen Alice. I came to Riverdale High out of my own choosing, not because I was forced to.” I want to clamp my mouth shut but it hangs slightly. Mostly because….well, I’m shocked. Hiram must have had a whirlwind of opportunities at his feet at the Academy….why would he waste the last of his witch youth at a mortal school? He sets down the rods and and glances at the book. I can’t tell if he’s tongue tied or caught in another thought. He looks back up at me. There’s a nostalgic glimmer in his eyes.

Hiram explains, “My mother grew up in Riverdale. She was one of the best brujas I’ve seen. She always told me stories about her time there, and she’d always try to convince me that if I had a
chance before my Dark Baptism, I should go….she didn’t make it to see me baptize into the Church. And by that point, I was so far ahead in my studies at the Academy that….that I wanted to fulfill her wish and go. Just to see what she had raved about for all those years.”

He goes quiet. The silence adds to the eerie atmosphere of this house. I didn’t know he ever had roots here. I didn’t know he had a close relationship with his mother. In high school, he always seemed to praise his family as a whole or just his father. Now that I think about it, I don’t think he ever brought up his family from what I overheard from his conversations with other classmates. It makes me realize that he was only putting on a show to cover up his true emotions. He was hiding something that could be used against him if people found out. In a way….Hiram was just like me.

I can see a sliver of a grin form on his face. “Also…..I just wanted the chance to take AP Literature.” The little comment tempts me to cackle. No wonder he named his familiar after a poet and dressed up as Gatsby for Halloween. It actually does make sense now - AP Literature was the only class I had shared with Hiram back in the day. The pieces click together in my head. He notices my failure to compose myself. “What? I happen to have quite a penchant for mortal literature and poetry! I wouldn’t want to miss it for the world.”

“Alright then, Manhattan.” I slide the book closer to him. I start to point at the figures, “Why don’t you use your bookworm powers to explain what this page wants us to do.” He takes the book into his hands. He examines the contents for a moment before rotating it to me.

“It wants us to clear our the energy of the room so we can narrow down what, or who, exactly came through here. In other words, we need to cleanse the heavens out of this house.” I lean in and squint at the page. Okay now it starts to make sense. But what part of this house needs cleansing? Hal was the only spirit residing in the house…. Unless….there’s others…..

I gesture for one of the bundles of sage. “I’ll go clear out the upstairs.” He hands one to me, and I use some pyrokinesis to get this bundle lit and going. I manage to get up, the smell of sage more potent the closer it is to me, then I make my way up the staircase, to the upstairs.

Mold has formed on the upper corners of the hallway. It’s so empty and quiet up here. I almost forgot the upper half of this house existed - I don’t want to think about what Hal could have preoccupied himself with in this floor during the 25 year period. I begin my smudging, waving the sage bundle in a figure-8, moving slowly down the long hallway. I make sure to go through each of the bedrooms, just in case. There’s no bad auras I sense, but it’s better to be safe than sorry. I end up in the children’s bedroom. The toy box sits untouched, rooted to the floorboards and covered in dust. No spirit resides here, but the laughter of the Conway children vibrates through my eardrums. The screaming for help when the Reaper shot them dead turns my stomach into knots.

After a while, the smoke clears out and I head back down stairs. I rejoin Hiram by the symbols on the ground and place my sage bundle down to the side. He holds the rods in his hands, flipping through the book until he finds the next section for our practice. It’s how we need to use the rods to make contact with whatever spirits we summon.

“You need me to give you a Dowsing Rods 101 crash course?” he picks up on my confusion. I huff.

“I know how they work.” I defend myself, letting out a deep sigh. “I just….don’t use them. The only divination I can do is tarot cards and palm readings. Even then, I make up half of the readings.” He’s stunned by my answer, he has to force himself from scoffing. I roll my eyes, “Look, the real reading is either too morbid or too bland for my customers to fully grasp. And….I don’t want them to turn out like assholes to others. That’s why I do it.” I’m a little embarrassed now that I’m owning up to my fraudulent business. But Hiram doesn’t judge me. He simply grins.
“At least you get them to come to your bakery afterwards, along with the common folk who only want your sweets.” Another compliment? From Hiram? Did someone put a love cognition spell on him? With one smooth movement, he hands the rods over to me. “You want to do the honors?”

The rods are cold in my hands. I twist on them nervously, waiting for instruction. He traces the words on the page with one finger. The air goes in and out of his nose. He speaks.

“Spirits below and above, spirits in between, caught in the fabric betwixt worlds, we ask that the veil be lifted and that you send forth any spirit residing in Fox Lane. Spirits of this residence, you're welcome to this house, to this circle. If you're here, we ask that you make your presence known.”

We wait. Nothing unusual occurs. No signs of any lost spirits. Wind gushes through the cracks of the boards. Something should have presented an aura to me by now. I gulp. I give a crack at the summoning.

“Spirits….hi. Um…” Hiram raises a brow at my informal summoning. I ignore him and continue, “if there is anything here, can you make yourself known? Please?” Stillness. Creaking. This better not take all day. I clear my throat, “Can you at least indicate what a “yes” answer means, using these rods in my hands?” I shut up and wait for any signs. Nothing. Hiram and I look at each other. I’m growing impatient, and he can tell.

Then, a chill goes down my spine. The rods rotate in my hold. Something’s here. It moves the rods to point towards my right. I smile. Hiram follows up, “Can you indicate what a “no” means?” I readjust the rods as he speaks. We wait, then the rods shift left, towards him. His mood lightens as well. I shift the rods back to center, prepping myself for the next series of questions. This could go either really well, or we’re back to square one. Regardless, we have contact.

“Was there a presence in this house?” A moment goes by. Then another. The rods go right. Back to center. “Was this….a good presence?” They go left. I face Hiram and mouth, Hal.

He goes forth with the next question, “Does this malevolent spirit live in this house now?” Left. “Did it leave on its own?” Left again. Just what we figured - Hal got released by an outside source.

I hesitate before asking, “Was it a mortal that released this spirit?” Also what I feared. The rods slide left. My heart falls into my lap. My eyes remain open, but I stop focusing on the rods, I’m fazing out. I struggle to breathe properly. My hands become clammy. My grip tightens on the rods. Hiram calls out, “Was there more than witch in this house when this spirit was released?” I feel nothing in my hands. Then, the rods twist right.

Fear settles in. The activity of the rods dies out, but the wheels in my head are spinning out of my control. Images play in my head. Voices scream in my ears. I hear him. He’s saying someone’s name….I don’t know if he’s calling for Sabrina, or if….if he’s calling for me. Teen Alice screams……a chant. A spell. It’s my voice yelling over his, it’s my voice repeating the same words over and over, until I’m screaming, until my voice gives out. It’s my voice chanting the binding spell.

TURPIS ET INFERNIS IN TERRIS PARIUNT. ADIURO VOS TAMEN HOC GRAECAS MUNUS.

The rods slip from my hands. They land on the ground with a clank. The book closes on its own. The light from the lantern goes out. One of the boards covering the windows cracks. I’m shaking. There’s a ring in my ears from my internal high-pitched scream. I can’t breathe.
“Alice?” Hiram places a hand on my shoulder. My chest rises and falls. My throat shrinks. My fingers twitch. I’m numb, but I feel everything. I want to cry. I want to move, but I can’t.

“Alice…” Hiram grabs for the rods, the sage, and the book. He shoves all of his material back into the bag he brought. He slings the bag over him, then, with gracious care, he rests one hand under my elbow, the other on my back. He helps me stand, I wobble on the way up. I lean up against the wall to stay upright. Hiram takes a baby step towards me, his face gives away his concern. I inhale and exhale sharply, my nostrils sting. Oh no, am I going to get another nose bleed?

He glances down at his elbow. Then, he lifts his forearm up to me. “Would fresh air help?” I stand there, frozen. I try to convince myself that I’m fine. I don’t need his help now. I can stay here and finish out the divination. But I’m still shaking and having a hard time breathing, and the more I sit here and have this debate with myself, the more that I realize I don’t want to be in this place anymore. I step away from the wall and reach for him. Then we make our way out of the house.

We decide to pace the street for a while until I can breathe normally again. Most of the leaves on these trees have fallen or are starting to fall off. It’s a mirage of red, orange, and grey everywhere I look. My breath forms a cloud from the cold temperature. My teeth chatter. Whether I want to admit it or not, it’s that cold that I’m still clinging onto Hiram for warmth. My heartbeat pulses in my eardrums, but it’s starting to slow down. I huff out another breath cloud. I wonder when it will start to snow.

“Has this happened to you before, Alice?” It takes me a second to register the words coming out of his mouth. I stop examining the fall foliage and turn to him. He clarifies, “Have these…..attacks happened in the past? Where you….” He stops, fumbling around for words, but it’s obvious - have I experienced these anxiety attacks before. My gaze drifts…. When was the last time I went through one of those attacks? I mentally go through the recent years…. Halloween. Sabrina’s birthday. That Smiths song Ambrose played. My shoulders tense up. It’s the only instance I can think of that occurred recently, but besides that, I never panicked as drastically as I did before….

“It’s only while I’ve been in Riverdale.” A projector reel plays in my head - the deer and the seizure. The soccer game. Pop’s. Last night at Lenny’s. These attacks and moments of sickness have only happened in Riverdale. Long before Hal came out of that house. “Something gets brought up, or…..someone I know….knew….my nerves just flare up.” I start to chew on my bottom lip. I hate admitting to other people about this stuff. I hate this perpetual anxiety that’s surrounded my whole time here in Riverdale. It was already hard enough telling Gladys the truth, and it will be again for Sabrina. Even FP. I guess I just wasn’t expecting my next willing ear to be a man who bought drugs from me in high school. But Hiram doesn’t act judging, nor does he write me off as a madwoman. He’s more concerned, more….aware. What other reason would explain him picking up on….

“And the nosebleeds? Were those recent too?” The mention of it makes my nose twitch. I reach for the rings on my fingers and fidget with them. He blinks, then phrases his next sentence steadily, “Alice, you’re the first witch I’ve known that has suffered from that…..intense level of sickness.”

I huff. Is it even worth owning up to what I think causes my sickness? Normally, I’d say no, just play things by ear. But I’m in this contract now….. Would he know of a way to diagnose this? Would he know how to help me? I tell him, “In case you were wondering, NO. I didn’t contract anything from anyone. I only get that sick if I go overboard with my craft.” He doesn’t get it, and it shows on his face. I simplify, “If I exceed the amount of magic I can conjure. I prefer to use simple magic for that reason. When I go too hard, my body reacts…..quite violently. So I try to avoid extreme dark magic whenever possible. The only few times I did were when I left Riverdale, post-memory removal spell, and when…. I trail off, meeting his gaze. I have to look away, stare down at my feet as we walk. A voice in my subconscious finishes, And when you confronted me at
I handled that night so poorly, and I realize that now. Yes, he cornered me, he revealed his memory of me and it made me panic.....but what I did, how I reacted, it was uncalled for. I could have killed him. I could have destroyed Pop’s. I would have ruined everything for Sabrina, and even for myself. It was a moment of unchecked rage, and I need to own up to it. Especially since Hiram is helping me, on his own accord. He’s shown nothing but kindness to Sabrina.

I quicken my pace so I can step in front of him. I grab a hold of his biceps and take a shaky breath. My lips press together as I move my eyesight up to him. How do I even begin to apologize? I take it slow, “I…..I’m sorry for what I did to you that night. It was violent, and so, so stupid. Yeah, I was angry, but it didn’t give me a right to lash out like that. I was a bitch.” It’s simple but it gets my point across. He stares at me sombersome, I don’t know if it’s a good thing or something bad. I go on rambling, “I’m not asking for you to forgive me. I don’t want you to feel obligated to do anything for me. I.....I just needed you to know….know that....”

“You’re not forcing me to do any of this, Alice. The choice was purely on my own accord, by my own reasoning.” he cuts in. My mouth hangs. I let go of one of his arms, recoiling my arm back down to my side. He sighs, “I admit I didn’t handle that situation well, either.....I don’t think I handled any of our prior interactions---”

“It shouldn’t have excused me from almost killing you!” My voice comes off more booming than I expected. I pull my other hand back in and cross my arms. It’s not comfortable, so I run my fingers through my hair. My cheeks become heated. Water forms in the corners of my eyes. No, I can’t break down yet. Daisies and candles, Alice. Come on, breathe. My hands lower to my sides. I look up at Hiram, “I made a mistake, and it almost cost your life. It cost our classmates their lives, and.....and now, this situation is costing Sabrina and Veronica their lives.” I ramble, not sure whether I’m talking about 25 years ago or now. His face is still neutral. His eyes....they grow to be more sympathetic. I want to stop talking, to just recollect myself, but my mouth keeps running. Why can’t I just get my point across? Wasn’t I in a similar situation.....

You don’t understand what I’ve done.....you don’t understand what I’m responsible for....

I eventually run out of words, out of excuses to explain my actions, and clamp my mouth shut. My throat aches. My eyes are stinging, ready to release tears. Then, Hiram reaches out and holds onto my face with one hand. His neutral expression is now replaced with one of remorse. Sincerity. He pulls me into him and hugs me.

I’m shaken. Hiram Lodge is hugging me? He’s caring for me when I don’t even think I deserve it? I don’t know how to respond, I just start sobbing. I wind up burying my face into the crook of his shoulder and wrap my arms around him. It’s a touch I’m so not used to, but it’s one that I need. The anxious flare doesn’t disappear entirely, but this hug at least eases it to a degree.

We stay like this for a bit. It’s warmth to combat this cold weather. It's a comfort to calm my fragile state. I lift my face from his shoulder, struggling to breathe from my nostrils, and he places his hand under my chin. His gaze wanders down to the ground before moving back up to meet mine. “You don’t need to apologize to me for what happened. If you think you need to, then I forgive you. And I won’t break our contract. That’s my promise to you, okay?” A hot tear streams down one of my cheeks. I wipe it away, then nod before returning my forehead to his shoulder. I might need to get used to this gesture.

I hear him huff as he glances around Fox Lane. “Not to ask another detrimenting question, but....I’m curious. How would that demon of yours manage to survive out here? I don’t think any of these house have been inhabited since the days of the Reaper.” I don’t register his words right
away, but…. Wait. Not since the Reaper.

My eyes snap open. My lips part. I lean away from him, a realization hitting me. Hiram notices my state, tilting his head at me. “Alice? What, what is it?” I back away and turn to the houses on the street. Not since the Reaper, not since the Reaper….. But when?

I snap my fingers and turn my head to him. “When did those Reaper murders happen?”

“1967, I think?” he sounds confused. 1967….it’s 2017 so it’s been a good 50 years. And no one’s been here until now? Well, except for Hal. And except for me, but that was back in….. 1992.

Unholy shit. 1992. That’s 25 years ago, and it’s 25 years after 1967. I don’t think Hal ever told me what led him to end up near the Conway House, or why he hadn’t left before I showed up….. Something must have held him there. Maybe it has to…..

My energy levels bounce. I fully face Hiram and grab onto his arms. “Hal was in that house when I released him. That can’t be a coincidence, Hiram. Hal has to have some connection to those murders. Have you read *It*?” He just stares at me, unresponsive. I roll my eyes and clarify, “Stephen King novel? Gross sewer alien-clown that eats children? They came out with a remake in theaters this year?”

“What does that…..” he tries to testify, then he pauses. It hits him too. His eyes go wide. “*It* waits every 27 years to attack.” Bingo. I let go of him and slam my hands together in excitement.

“Well, Riverdale might just have its own Pennywise that pops up every 25. Think about it - the Reaper kills in ‘67. I take Hal away from that house and go after our classmates in ‘92. And now…..it’s 2017…..”

“He’s prone to attack again,” he mutters. I smile. We might have just found our pattern. We need to get on top of this. Find any research we can. We have our jump start.

“Not if we stop him.” In a rush of adrenaline, I grab Hiram’s hand and march back down where we came, back to my car. “We gotta dig up whatever we can on the Reaper. If there’s anything odd from that time, it could explain why Hal was there. It can get us to him!”

“You think the library could have something?”

“Not sure about the witch side of it, but the town would have to have recorded something!”

“Okay, then. When we get back to town, we’ll need to pull whatever we can, then we’ll go back to Pembrooke. I’ll see if I have any resources at home that could render themselves useful.” We both jump back into the car, not determined with our plan, and I drive away.

I speed through Fox Lane. I make the right out of the street, heading back the way we came. I pull back onto the small highway that leads back into town, back towards Pop’s. I’m flying down this road. I now have a clear idea of where Hiram and I need to begin. Maybe going to the Conway House did bring some good. I feel much more lighthearted. More confident. More…..

Something’s blocking the road. No, someone is. A group of people in police uniforms are. I’m forced to slow down. What’s the hold up? I glance over at Hiram, and he returned a similar look of skepticism. I slow the car to a stop. I turn off the ignition. Outside, Keller emerges from the forest, sighting my vehicle. I step out, the cold air hitting me once more. Keller sees me and heads in my direction.

“Miss Beauchamp, you might want to head back the other way.” Keller greets me. Hiram gets out
too, still unsure of what is causing this blockage.

“You want to explain this, Tom?” The sheriff turns to the source of the question. His face falls. He’s not thrilled to see Hiram here. This isn’t good.

“You have a reason for being out here at this hour, Hiram? Aren’t you usually hiding out in Pembrooke?”

I step in to diffuse the situation. “It’s alright, he was with me.” Tom cools his stances, but he isn’t pleased with my answer. Behind him, officers are holding back reporters trying to shove cameras into their faces. There’s caution tape wrapped around the trees. There’s an EMS truck. Did someone get hurt out here in the woods? Did…..oh no, did someone die?

I move away from Hiram and Tom, heading closer to the scene. The two continue to bicker behind me, paying no mind to where I’m heading. Some of the crowd give me a startled look. They know I shouldn’t be here, but they don’t have the guts to call me out on it. A sharp sense of…..something, I don’t know what, roots in me. It turns my stomach to knots. It makes my senses go haywire. This…..whatever this is I’m feeling…..it’s almost like what I felt last night, minus the weird visions. But the feeling intensifies the closer I come to whatever these officers are crowded over. I stop just only a few feet away to give everyone their space. I peer around the area……my eyes eventually go to the ground. My back straightens. My breathing tenses. Something builds up in my throat. I cover my mouth. Panic sets in.

On the ground, in a body bag, is the boy that I saw in the pool last night…..well, what remains intact and unripped of that boy.

XXXXXXXXXX

SABRINA

The town is awfully quiet this morning. I decided to depart from Pembrooke so I can head back to the trailer park and check in on Ali. V attempted to convince me to stay over for breakfast, and believe me, I was tempted to hold off on my leave. I told her that I would keep tabs on her throughout the day, maybe even come over for a little bit tomorrow. Maybe I can talk with Ali and see if we can spend Thanksgiving with V and Mister Lodge, or go Black Friday shopping together.

I grab a hot chocolate from the coffee shop downtown and slowly make my way down the streets. I would have opted to have one of the chauffeurs at Pembrooke drive me, especially since it’s so cold out, but I still have so much of Riverdale to see. I want to take it all in before I have to go back to face my fate in Greendale.

I stick to the path that Jughead and I went down when we headed to town to research about the Riverdale Reaper just days prior. I come down near the town’s graveyard, taking a sip of my hot chocolate. I have a little time, I don’t have any pressure to head back to the trailer park right away, so I decide to walk through. Leaves crunch under my feet. The ground is a mix of green grass and marble stone. There’s a few tombstones that have flowers resting against them. The rows go on and on…..the silence contributes to this bleak atmosphere.

Something rustles in the trees above me. I stop, checking my surroundings. The noise stops. Finding nothing, I continue on my path. I leave through the gate at the back, the rustling picks up
again. I whip around in a frenzy. “Who’s there?” I call out. There’s no footsteps behind me, no visible shape follows my path…..but something is watching me. Something is waiting. The noise builds in the trees near by. I clutch onto my hot chocolate, mentally preparing a spell to defend myself….. A figure appears from the trees, meowing. I release the tension and smile in relief. Salem lands on the ground and looks up at me. He’s covered in leaves and dirt, but he doesn’t look injured.

“There you are! I’ve been looking all over town for you!” he chirps up at me. I crouch down, placing my drink on the pavement, and pull my familiar into my arms.

“Salem! Oh, thank Lucifer you’re okay! I thought something happened to you!”

“Well, I’m here now, so you have no need to worry, Miss Spellman.” I giggle and release Salem down to the pavement. I brush some of the leaves off his fur before reclaiming my hot chocolate and standing back up. Salem looks so happy to see me now, and I him…..but last night. Where did he go? Why didn’t he come back to Pembrooke? And….and what did he do to Chuck?

“What happened to Chuck?”

“Oh, him?” Salem starts to lick one of his paws. “You and Veronica won’t have to worry about him anymore. I took care of everything.” I stand there with no response. Everything meaning what exactly? Torturing him more? Playing more tricks? Even….. Oh no. Is it possible that Salem killed Chuck? Maybe, but I don’t want to consider it as an option. Not with what V experienced last night.

Salem perches up on his hindlegs and starts to trot down the street, heading where I’m about to go. “Aren’t we going back home? Unless we’re spending the afternoon with Veronica.” I go to open my mouth, then I clamp it shut. I should be getting back - I don’t want Ali to start worrying for my safety, or Mister Lodge for V’s.

“Right!” I hustle to join my familiar, and we make our way back to the trailer park. The walk back does not produce much between us - I figure Salem would ask more about my life in Greendale, if I have any plans for Thanksgiving. But he remains quiet, prancing along the sidewalk in his content state. I contemplate whether to get into the specifics about last night with him, about what exactly he did do to complete our revenge plan. But I’m still so drained, this hot chocolate while warming and delicious is not doing much to keep me awake. And…..and I might need a shower. I want to wash the night off of me, since I never got a chance upon returning with V to Pembrooke. Hopefully I can make the time before engaging in any type of conversation with Ali.

We arrive at the trailer park, after 25 minutes of freezing, unsettling tranquility. I finish the last of my beverage and toss the empty cup into the trashcan outside our trailer. Salem trots up the steps, and I’m about to join him when I look out at the driveway. The car isn’t sitting there. Did Ali leave? Maybe she’s at work….but I thought she worked afternoons? I decide to ignore the confusing notion and begin to make my way up the steps, pulling my keys out of my coatpocket. I go to unlock the door.

“Sabrina!” a voice yells from behind. I stop what I’m doing, a bit startled. I move down a couple of steps to look out at the park around me. Then, I see Jughead jogging over to me and stopping at the bottom of the stairs. He grabs onto the handrail as he catches his breath. I stay in my place not sure of what to make of his sudden appearance. He finally forms words, “Is your Aunt…..person here?”

“No….I just got back. Why?”

“You…..” he speaks in between pants, “You need to…..something came up on the news.”
“Sabrina…..” Salem growls at my feet. I’m intrigued…..and a bit frightened. What could be on the news that sparked Jughead to run over to see if I was here? I unlock the door and tell Salem to go inside, that I will be back in a few minutes. He tries to fuss and fight back, but I shoo him inside. I close the door and lock it before I make my way down the steps to meet Jughead.

“What thing?” Jughead lets go of the handrail. He readjusts the grey beanie on his head. His hands are shaking.

“It’s Chuck Clayton. They…..the police…..they found his…..a…..” he stumbles on his words. I’m frozen and internally freaking out. What did the police find? What does this have to do with Chuck? I do wish he could just get to the point.

“He’s dead.”

Sirens blare in my head. My arms shake in my still state. My eyes bulge. Chuck…..Chuck is dead? But he was alive when V and I left…..but, oh no but Salem. He couldn’t have possibly done anything to Chuck, could he? Did he? I took care of everything.

“Come on!” Jughead grabs my hand and leads us back to his trailer. He’s running so fast, I almost fall over and trip over branches and twigs. He guides me up the steps, pushes open his front door, pulls me into his trailer. In the living room, Jughead’s father and his little sister sit on the couch, mesmerized in horror by what’s playing on the television. Jughead takes me to the couch and sits me down next to his sister. “Dad, turn the volume up!”

I have so many questions. Where did they find Chuck? How long has he been dead for? Does anyone know that V and I went to see him last night? Does V know about this? Does Ali know? Salem, what did you do?

The volume goes up on the TV. Jughead moves to stand next to his father. His little sister shifts uncomfortably on the couch, clutching onto a pillow. Sound blares out, but I can barely string the sentences together. I can only hang on to certain details. He was found by the edge Fox Forest by a pair of runners. Some body parts are missing. His face has been shredded. The police don’t know what could have caused it, but they suspect that his death wasn’t done by anything human. I could scream. I could cry. Chuck is dead, and….and I don’t know whether I should act proud or if I’m guilty. I think Chuck should have been kicked off the football team, suspended or even expelled from school, forced to partake in community service….but was him dying worth it? Did V and I do the right…..

I feel dizzy all of a sudden. A lump forms in my throat, migrating upward. My eyes water. Something trickles down the area between my nose and my mouth. I bring a finger to that area under my nose and am shocked to make contact with…..blood. There’s blood on my finger. There’s blood coming out of my nose. I make an attempt to stand up. The dizziness gets worse. I collapse back onto the couch, more blood trickles down. It causes Jughead’s sister to stare at me. Her mouth flies open. “Dad?”

Mister Jones turns to me to see what his daughter could be so worried about. He tenses up, then he hurries over to me and kneels down. “Boy, get a damp cloth!” he commands Jughead as he takes a gentle hold of my head. His daughter jumps up from the couch and stares at me in panic. He turns to the girl, “JB, go grab some water. Go!” The young Jones girl scurries off, not taking her eyes off me. Mister Jones addresses me softly, “You’re alright, Sabrina. Just hold still for me.” I attempt to open my mouth, a wave of nausea hits me. I could vomit right here, it takes all of my strength, and every bit of nonverbal magic, to keep it together. Out of the corner of my eye, Jughead rushes over to his father and hands him some cloth. Mister Jones mutters something to him, I’m not sure what, I can’t process anything with this sudden feeling of sickness. Jughead disappears again, Mister
Jones brings the cloth to my nose. It’s wet, but it does enough to clean me up. He wipes up that area in smooth strokes, and when there’s no more blood….

He looks at me. He blinks in between periods of just looking at me. Just like the night Ali and I came to Riverdale. “Mister Jones?” I hear my own voice croak. His gaze goes distant, his hand holding the bloodied cloth shakes. His chin tilts up. His face falls. “Mister Jones?”

He doesn’t look at me anymore. Something’s caught his attention……not anything near me, but…..a thought. Something in his subconscious. He mutters, “Alice used to have nose bleeds.”

I don’t understand the comment. I don’t know how he would……maybe when they were teenagers. But it seems like Mister Jones didn’t remember that fact…..until now. With me. Does Mister Jones know about Ali’s magic? What caused her to leave Riverdale? Maybe…..then him coming to this realization makes no sense. I know 25 years is a stretch, but Ali’s friendship with Jughead’s father was that crucial, that important in her youth, it would have been important to him too. Then what sparked this….

Jughead’s sister returns with a small glass of water and hands it over to me. I thank her with a weak voice before gulping the whole thing down. Mister Jones lets go of my head, leaving me the cloth to stay near my nose. He stands up, he still appears so much in a daze by my sudden accident. He backs away and glances around the living room. The news still plays in the background, but the reporters are no longer as focused on Chuck’s mysterious death.

Jughead rests up against the arm of the couch. “You feeling better, new girl?” I watch his father going about his slowed down pacing. I rise up from the couch, lowering the cloth from my nose.

“Is your dad okay?”

“No clue…..” Jughead moves to my side and calls out to his dad. Mister Jones snaps out of his daze. He blinks a couple of times, trying to bring himself back to reality. Something about his eyes causes me to squint at him. His eyes are all misty.

“Sorry, boy….Sabrina…..I don’t know how I remember that. Or why.” He glances away from us and towards the television. He shakes his head, still somewhat in his funk, and moves to turn it off. He rests his hands on top of the television set, his fingers patter on the rim. “You know, it’s funny, or strange, really…..” Mister Jones straightens up and backs away from the stand. He speaks to me, “Your, uh…..Alice, the more I start to think about it…..I think she had those,” he can’t come up with the words, so he scratches at his nose. It’s simple, but I get the message. He continues, “yeah, those when….people died.”

Jughead and I exchange a look. His mouth and eyes widen, and so do mine. He turns back to his dead.

“Wait…..what people? Who died?”

“Just, classmates. That’s all!” Mister Jones brings his fingers up to his eyebrows. He massages them to get himself to calm down, or to think better. I take a step closer. I’m curious now.

“That’s awful. What happened to them? Do you…..” I don’t finish my sentence. Mister Jones releases his hand and goes to open his mouth. He sees my expression, his face mellows. He moves back over to the couch and sits down.

“It’s complicated, Sabrina. The details are just so…..fuzzy in my head. But yeah…..some people I went to high school with all died due to…….odd circumstances. Like that Chuck kid on TV.”
“Why, were they all attacked by bears or of that species?” Jughead throws out sarcastically. His father scoffs at him.

“No, it was….” he struggles to recollect the details. Eventually, he gives up and waves his hand at Jughead in frustration. My head goes through a series of possibilities - anything and everything including alcohol overdoses, car crashes, natural disasters, even a serial killer----

I freeze on that thought. A serial killer. Is it….no, they couldn’t have died from someone that was like the Riverdale Reaper. Unless….. I would approach Mister Jones. I would ask him about it. But what if he told Ali afterwards? And what if they both start asking questions? I want more information, but it might be too risky. So instead, I set my cloth down on the coffee table and ask, “Mister Jones, when did these murders take place?”

He blinks. He looks away for a moment, looking as if he’s trying to formulate an answer for me, then he returns his gaze back upward. He sighs, “High school? Oh….you want specifics? I, um…..probably towards the end. Before I finished up, and…..wound up in this dump. Sorry, Sabrina. I don’t mean to sound so…unhelpful for you. And…..” He stops talking again. He starts to stare, not in a creepy way, but in a way that’s more nostalgic. More melacholic. He gave me that same look when he saw Ali for the first time that night…..in a long time.

“I swear you look so much like her.” he laughs nervously, “Look, I know you’re not blood-related to Alice, but….that night you showed up, you….it kinda spooked me. The….” he snaps his fingers in a hope of finding the right words, “the freak chance that you happen to share her features. And seeing her……I thought I was going crazy. I thought she was just a figment of my imagination….like I was the only one who knew her…..and no one else did. For the longest time, it felt like my mind was playing tricks, or just….I blacked out or something.”

“Why do you say that, Dad?” Jughead comes to my side, crossing his arms. It takes a second for Mister Jones to answer, his eyes still glued on me.

“I don’t remember anything about the first half of senior year. It’s like my brain got wiped out or something…."

Got wiped out. That sentence sits with me funny. Not in a good way. And I…. My knees could turn to jelly. My nose has that itch. I swear it could start bleeding again. My vision blurs. I almost tumble over, but Jughead catches me before I go down. He leads me back over to the couch, sits me down again. I tell him I’m fine, over and over. But I don’t feel fine, at least not a hundred percent. What did Mister Jones mean by wiped out? What went down his senior year when those kids died? And what would any of it have to do with Ali?

Mister Jones rises. “Maybe some food might help. You want anything in particular, or are you okay with toast and eggs?”

“That’s fine with me.” I give him a small smile. He says he’ll have it ready in a few minutes, then he wanders off into the kitchen. The moment he clears out, Jughead sits down next to me.

He leans in close and mutters, “Don’t rule me out, but I’ve got a hunch.” I’m curious. I shift on the couch so I’m facing him full on. Jughead continues, “Doesn’t it seem a bit….odd to you that Chuck Clayton happens to die around the same time of the Reaper murders 50 years ago?” My mouth opens slightly, then it goes shut. I will admit, it does seem odd, but I still can’t process the whole situation. I still can’t come to terms that Chuck died, and it may or may not be because of what V and I did to him. Or even what Salem did.

Jughead takes note of my expression. He loses a fracture of his keen excitement and relaxes.
“Look, I didn’t have the highest opinion of Chuck either, and….I know that whatever he did to Veronica was horrible. Expulsion would have been nice. But death is….quite extreme. Even if he did deserve it.” It’s almost like he’s speaking my mind. And I think I might have an idea of where he’s going with this conversation. I tuck some hair behind my ears before I whisper.

“You think this is a resurgence of the Reaper?”

“Maybe. Chuck probably did get mauled by an animal in the woods, but…..what led him there leaves open a ton of red flags. No one around here goes into Fox Forest at night.” I think of the possible scenarios in my head. Maybe Salem wasn’t what ripped Chuck to shreds. Maybe he just chased Chuck out and lost track of him. It gives me a little bit of hope, a little bit of trust in Salem.

But another thought lingers in the back of my head. Mister Jones said that some of his classmates died when he was younger. It makes me wonder….would those deaths somehow be connected to Chuck’s, if the Reaper really has returned, or is Chuck dying just years afterward all a coincidence?

“What about your dad’s friends?” I whisper to Jughead. “Does that bring up any red flags too?” He takes a second to ponder over my words. He taps his fingers on the top of the couch and shrugs.

“First time I’ve heard about it. My dad doesn’t really like to bring up high school all that often.” I tilt my head in confusion. Jughead shifts on the couch, one leg crossing over the other, intertwining his fingers. He explains in a low voice, “My grandfather, Forsythe Senior, he…..he wasn’t exactly what you would label as Father of the Year. He had a bad penchant for a drink…..he beat my dad a lot too. Come to think about it…..my grandfather was the primary reason my dad never went off to college, never left Riverdale. He’s why my dad wound up joining the Serpents.

My dad’s not like him. Sure, he had issues with alcohol for as long as I could remember….but he’s all cleaned up now. And he’s never laid a finger on me, or JB, or my mom. He wants us to go after life the way he never could. To go and care about getting a good education, finding what makes us happy……” His voice dies out, a small smile forms on his face. My confusion dies out as well.

“Is that why you’re so into writing? And all this….demonology research?”

“It’s the only passion I’ve developed in life. People always are saying that I’m the smartest kid in class, always have straight A’s…..I don’t actually. I only really do well in English and Literature class…..just bullshitting my way through the rest. But demonology, conspiracy theories…..I can see myself pursuing a career in that. Hence why I revived the Blue and Gold at school - not that the school paper wasn’t dead, but it certainly was in worse for wear before I took over.”

I sit up straight and let my elbows rest onto my knee caps. “And now you have me to back up your research.” I state with a confident expression on my face. I glance back over at the television. Chuck’s death is far gone from the news hour, but it’s fresh in my brain. As is Salem’s unknown whereabouts from after V’s…..whatever it was that she went through. And now these kids Mister Jones mentioned has me thinking…..

I turn back to Jughead. “Would you think your dad would have anything that could help with our article? If he can’t recall details from his own head, maybe something…..like, a book, or an object…..anything that can maybe recall details? Because, if those kids died of circumstances that matched Chuck’s…..”

“Then we might be seeing a pattern that can lead us to our killer.” Jughead catches onto my train of thought.

“SABRINA, YOUR FOOD’S READY!” Mister Jones calls out from the kitchen, breaking up our
conversation. I yell back that I’ll be over in a minute, which is fine with him. Jughead taps on my arm.

“My family has a storage unit further out on the Southside. I have to go with my mom tomorrow anyways to grab some stuff for Thanksgiving, and to start pulling out Christmas decorations. I can see if my dad has anything shoved in there that can help us.”

“Neat.” I rise up from the couch, no longer having that wooziness from the nose bleed. Jughead and I head over to the kitchen and take a seat at the family’s small table. Mister Jones brings over my breakfast before he goes to make himself a cup of coffee. I start to dig in - it’s a simple breakfast, but it’s easy on my stomach so I’ll take it. I finish up my bite before muttering to Jughead, “I’ll keep looking through the books we found at the library. Some sort of clue has to scream out of those pages. And if you need me to go out with you and your mom tomorrow---”

“Don’t worry about it.” he waves it off. “I’m just relieved that you’ve been so willing to help out on this whole thing. It’s kind of comforting to see someone else just as psyched about what will fill the pages of the Blue and Gold.” I set my fork down, feeling just as relieved myself. Hanging out with Jughead reminds me of days back when I would help Roz or Susie with whatever campaign they held to have books brought into our reading curriculum at Baxter. It’s not polluted with worries of magic, or having to hide magic from people we love. Nothing about relationships either. Don’t get me wrong - I do appreciate helping V prepare for dates, or listening to Archie confess his crush on Josie McCoy, but so far I have yet to worry about those conversation with Jughead. Our friendship is purely a meeting of the minds, and frankly I need it.

“Exactly! It’s real stuff…..and not just, locker gossip. Or anything related to love.”

Jughead chuckles. “Yeah, well I’m aro-ace so consider yourself lucky.”

“The only thing this boy’s ever gonna love in this world…..” Mister Jones comes over to the table and claps his son on the back. “Is food. And whatever thriller novels he’s got himself stuffed into.”

“He’s got a point.” The comment makes us all laugh.

ALICE

It’s intimidating sitting here in this interrogation room. I didn’t do anything wrong, Hiram and I were nowhere near Chuck Clayton’s body before the police unveiled the corpse. But Keller still dragged us to the police station anyway. I overheard him talking to the other officers, muttering about how he thinks Hiram somehow orchestrated it. There’s no evidence to prove so, and also it’s a waste of time to hold both of us here. Hiram was with me last night. I saw that boy’s death with…..some vision of whoever or whatever it was that killed him. I tap my fingers rapidly on the steel table. My reflection on the wall due to the double-sided mirror spooks me. It’s getting cold in here, and I’m tempting to use a spell to warm myself up.

The door opens. I whip my head to find Tom Keller walking in. Another officer follows behind him and shuts the door. This other man is younger, more leaner than Keller. The two come to join at the table, sitting across from me. Keller has a cup in his hands - is it meant for me? He sets the cup down and slides it over to me. “Don’t worry, it’s only hot chocolate. You look like you needed
“Just to clear the air, Miss Beauchamp,” the younger officer starts off. He’s got a deep voice for someone so much younger. I listen to him, “we’re not holding you in for the death of Mr. Clayton. We only want to see how you’re feeling. I will admit, you looked a little shaken up when you saw the body earlier…..or what remained of the body.” A clump of cocoa mix sticks to my throat. My knuckles tense up. This young officer isn’t wrong - seeing the leftovers of that boy’s corpse threw me for a whirlwind. I thought I was crazy for seeing visions of him getting attacked, but now knowing that he’s dead and was rotting in Fox Forests doesn’t sit well with me at all. Part of me hopes that it really was some wild animal that finished him off, and not Hal.

I cough, “I appreciate that, Officer…” I glare down at the younger one’s nametag, reading it out loud, “Minetta.”

“We’ll just run through a couple of questions with you, then you’ll be free to go, Miss Beauchamp.” the young officer, Minetta, replies. He opens up a manila folder and slides it so the folder sits in the middle of the table, between all three of us. It’s a profile of Chuck, school photo and everything.

Keller starts off the interrogation, “You ever seen him before today?” I lean down to get a better look. Did Chuck ever come into Pop’s before his death? Maybe? But my memory has not brought me any benefits lately, so I can’t exactly rely on it now.

“I’ve only heard about him through Sabrina.” Minetta raises his brow at me. I clear my throat, “My, uh…..I’m looking after her for a family friend.

Minetta takes the next question. “You just moved into town, right? Making pies at Pop’s?” I smirk, and without a word, I shoot my index finger upward, indicating, Yep that’s me. He goes on, “Did your….did Sabrina ever say anything negative regarding Mr. Clayton? Any behaviors she witnessed at school?” I do my best to think back - Hiram’s daughter running into Pop’s all muddy and crying. The girls in the bedroom. Sabrina’s notebook sitting on the bed…..That notebook. Did I ever bother to check why she had that thing there? Or was I so caught up in my own plans to….

“Nothing significant.” I respond. “Just a name drop here or there, but nothing that could indicate he was in any sort of danger.” I want to leave it at that, but Keller and Minetta must have picked up on my expression. They want more details. I sigh, “All I know is that he did something to Hiram’s daughter, and it….it didn’t bode well. With any of us.”

“Was Sabrina involved with….?” Minetta starts off but he quickly drops. My face falls. Is he trying to imply that Sabrina and Chuck were fooling around? When I clearly know she would never do anything to damage her relationship with that young Kinkle boy in Greendale. I clench onto my cup of hot chocolate. I roll my eyes.

“What does that have to do with him getting mauled out in the woods?” I spit out. Minetta leans back in his seat, now a little bit afraid of me. Keller turns to him and starts whispering. At this point, I’m irritated and impatient. I don’t know why they’re asking me about Sabrina, or how I’m adjusting to Riverdale. And…..and where are they holding Hiram? Can’t they just realize that they don’t have any evidence against us? Can’t they just let us go?

I see Minetta nod at Keller, then rise up from his seat. He bids me a small farewell and exits the room. I watch as the door slams shut, leaving Keller and I alone. My anger cools off, but my suspicion still lingers.
Keller huffs. “I’m sorry, there wasn’t any intention to upset you like that, Miss Beauchamp. We’re only trying to…make sense of everything.”

“How regarding?” I inquire, my irritation bubbling once again.

“Regarding how Chuck ended up in that forest. Granted, we still need to have a formal autopsy completed to see the specific cause of death, but we all highly doubt that a human went out of their way to kill this boy.” He goes silent, a sad smile forms on his face. I can’t buy into this. It takes a lot of strength for me to not blurt out, Then why are you holding onto Hiram? Keller must have read my mind, or come to his senses about our holding, because he says, “Doesn’t mean someone didn’t intentionally lure Chuck out last night to be killed by a wild animal.”

My fingernails pierce my cup. My eyes dagger at him. I’m too baffled to even come up with a response. He thinks Hiram had a hand in killing Chuck, or leading that boy to his demise? I could laugh, I could do many things right now because I know it’s a wild accusation. Instead, I scoff. “Is that why you’ve got Hiram in the other room? You think he’s behind all this?” Keller smirks, and deep down he probably knows he’s wrong.

But Keller isn’t letting go of his pride. He follows up, “Miss Beauchamp, you know my opinions on the man. He’s one of the more ruthless people in this town, so honestly, it wouldn’t surprise me if we found any evidence that could trace back to him. And besides, it was his daughter that got hurt by Chuck afterall.” Keller may have a point - Hiram would do anything to protect his own daughter, even if it meant taking out the people who came to harm her. But….how could have Hiram orchestrated Chuck’s demise if he was with me? He WAS with me, and he’s been with me all morning. The instruments in his bag might be held up by the police for questioning, yet you can’t use divination rods or a spell book to slash open a teenage boy. At this point, it’s Keller trying to prove a point about his ill-opinion on Hiram. I know I’m still learning to trust him. I don’t even know if this contract that’s tattooed onto me is anything permanent…. But Hiram really is innocent this time. And I’m the only alibi he’s got.

I speak up, “I’m well aware of how much that girl means to him. He’ll protect her with all of his heart and soul…..but he’s not a killer. If you’d ask me, I think he’d rather would have paid Chuck’s parents to have him leave school or skip town to get rid of him, rather than leading him, or anyone really, to their unfortunate fates.” Keller’s confidence fades, and I smirk at him this time around. He has to contemplate my response for a moment before he engages with me again.

“How exactly would you know this?” A breath builds up in my lungs. Would it be too risky to admit of our meeting, why we had to do it? I force the air out of my lungs, through my teeth. I guess a little white-lie wouldn’t hurt.

“Because he admitted it to me last night.” I formulate an answer. Keller’s shocked. His face flushes and his lips part. I roll my eyes and go on, “He invited me to dinner last night and I took his offer. It wasn’t anything manipulative or drastic. He just wanted me to get to know the town better. Nothing more….nothing less.” I end it there. Wow, I’m starting to sound like Hiram, and that’s a sentence I’d never thought I would ever say in my existence. But it’s enough to get Keller thinking. He glares off to the distance over my shoulder, and I can’t tell if it’s a good or a bad thing.

I could use a spell to convince Keller to let Hiram go. I could work my way through these walls to allow Hiram some escape via magic. I have to do something…but maybe this time magic won’t cut it. It’ll open up another can of worms that are already spilling onto my plate, and I can’t take another load. And I can’t risk blowing my cover for the sake of proving Hiram’s innocence. I have to think with my mortal side. So, I stand up, letting go of my barely-touched hot chocolate, and walk around the table to reach Keller’s side. I hover over him now. He picks up on this and turns to
face me.

I sigh. “You’re allowed to have your opinions. I won’t force you to get rid of them. But you have to believe on this, Keller…..Hiram may not be who, or what, you think he is.” I pause, the realization of my own words hitting me. Hiram is definitely not what I thought he was when I came back to Riverdale, and his actions continue to surprise me. Maybe it does help that he never admitted his witchcraft to me back in high school….

Keller huffs and rises from his seat. He hands me my cup with sorrow. He glares down at the ground. Then, he looks at me. “I’ll talk to the others and see what we can arrange. Just wait outside, okay, Miss Beauchamp?” I’m stunned. It worked. My persuasion worked, and it didn’t involve any magic or blackmail. I almost smile, I almost laugh in relief, but I have to keep it together, just for now. Calm and collected, I nod, mumbling a thank you. Keller leads me out of the steel room, back out into the warm, bright hallway. He sits me down on the wooden bench, telling me that he’ll be back in a few minutes. I watch as he goes off into another interrogation room…..Hiram’s in there probably. The door shuts. I’m alone again.

A couple of officers pass by without taking note of my presence, not that I’m asking for anyone to pay attention to me. My knee bounces, my heel taps the wooden floor at rapid speed. My cup of hot chocolate is now lukewarm, the cocoa powder clumping together in an unsettling fashion. My fingernails run up and down my palm. How many minutes have passed? I shut my eyes. Daisies and Candles. Be patient, Alice. The grazing of my nails against my palms turns into scratching. The jerking of my knee increases. Where is Keller? Why hasn’t Hiram come out yet? Is Sabrina okay? DID HAL KILL CHUCK CLAYTON? My nails find their place in my palms, they dig in.

The door on my left opens. I snap out of whatever I just experienced. My fist unclenches. My knees stop bouncing. I open my eyes. I stay still on the bench as I watch Keller emerge from the interrogation room. He motions for whoever may be in there to come out. It takes a couple of seconds, but Hiram steps out into the hallway. My composure softens. I rise up from my place. He sees me and takes a baby step forward, tugging on his bag nervously. It still looks full, so maybe the police didn’t confiscate any of his equipment. Yet, he looks so shaken. What were they asking him in that room?

Keller comes in between us. He keeps his back to Hiram as he addresses me, “This only happens one time, okay?” I give him a nod of confirmation. Keller glances over his shoulder to look at Hiram. He huffs, then he turns back to me. He leans in, “I want only what’s best for you, Miss Beauchamp. I don’t want to watch you get hurt….” He continues to go on, but now I’m no longer looking at Keller. I direct my gaze to Hiram. He’s keeping it together all things considered, but it’s a little obvious now that he’s upset. His eyes meet mine. I see the tiredness, the petrification, the….the guilt.

Keller places his hand on my shoulder. “Promise me you’ll be smart, alright?” I don’t look at him. I don’t say a word, at least not right away. I just nod again and start to move away, his hand slipping from my shoulder.

I mutter, “Thanks, Sheriff Keller.”

“Please….call me Tom.” I break my gaze from Hiram and turn to Keller. He smiles briefly, then walks away. Call me Tom. It sends shivers through me. I wait until Keller is out of range before I fixate my sights back on Hiram. We stay staring at each other for a few moments, unsure of who will make the first move forward. Eventually, it’s me. I stride over to him, then stop a few feet away, afraid to come any closer. He takes some steps towards me, enough so we can have somewhat of a private conversation. He goes to open his mouth, but I jump in.
“I didn’t use any manipulation spells, or seduce him, to convince him to let you go….if that’s what you were wondering.” I clamp my mouth shut. My eyes dart down to the ground, my hand keeps its firm grip on the cup. “There wasn’t any reason for them to hold you there for so long.”

“I appreciate that, Alice.” I lift my head up at his voice. His expression lightens up a bit. “Thank you.”

My lips part, I smile. “I owe you the favor, anyway. Did….did they take anything out of that bag? Do we need to get any of it—-”

“No, it’s all still in here.” he gestures down to his bag. I release the air I guess I was holding onto in relief. It’s starting to get claustrophobic in this hallway, and I don’t think he wants to stand here anymore. I release my shoulders from my ears and turn on my heels. I start to walk towards the exit, out near the lobby. No footsteps follow behind me. I whip my head around to find Hiram still in his place.

“Aren’t I driving you back?” He doesn’t get it at first. He just stares at me all funny. I clarify, “Back to Pembrooke?”

He finally gets the idea. He starts to get all nervous on me, “Alice, you don’t have to.” The attempt to play it off as nothing doesn’t work on me. I cross my arms and glare. He sighs. “It’s just a couple of blocks down the road. I’ll be fine walking back.”

“You really would prefer to walk back and freeze your ass off when I literally have my car sitting in that parking lot?” He makes an attempt to say something, defend his choice, but I’m not backing down. I raise a brow at him and smirk. He gives up. He’s wound up, chuckling, and…..is he blushing?

Hiram grips onto his bag and gives me a defeated grin. “If you insist, Acid Queen Alice. Lead the way.” I tilt my chin up at him and turn away. In a matter of seconds, he catches up to walk by my side.

We leave the station and head back out to the parking lot. We climb back into my car in silence. I allow the heat to blast before I pull out and head back onto the road. I haven’t spent any time in downtown Riverdale since returning, so this area of town is a little foreign to me. But Hiram’s at least generous enough to guide me through the streets to get to Pembrooke. I look out through the windshield to examine the different places I probably passed by in my youth. Nothing really strikes out as familiar, except for the town library. The library….. I’ve been so distracted by the ordeal at the police station that I almost completely forgot - the library, needing to do research, the Reaper…..

“This is me on the left.” Hiram points towards the end of the street. I peer out my window and my jaw drops. This is where he lives? I pull over to the curb and somehow manage to not hit anyone. I put the car in park, glancing around the street. It’s….prestigious. I don’t think I ever have been to the richer side of downtown Riverdale, the library was the furthest I’d gone back in the 90s. There’s a handful of shops, a finance office, a law practice….I keep lingering off to where the library just was. There has to be something on those murders…..

“Do you want me to see if Sabrina is still up there?” Hiram pulls me out of my thoughts. “I can send her down if you want. Unless you have to go back to work?”

I shake my head. “It’s alright. I’m going to see if I can do some research in the library. Regarding…..” I stop and chew on my tongue. Maybe this is all too radical - Hal can’t be connected to the Reaper, can he? I puff out an exhale. My fingers tap on the steering wheel. My eyesight goes
distant, staring off into nowhere. “Am I crazy, Hiram? For wanting to find a correlation between Hal, and the Reaper? And now....”

“Chuck Clayton?” he finishes my thought. I don’t answer him, I’m too scared to confirm what is running through my head. We both stay silent for a minute. I hear him shift in his seat, “You felt his death, didn’t you? Is that what caused you to have that nosebleed during dinner?”

I open my mouth, struggling to form words. My palm lifts from the steering wheel then slams back down. “I didn’t just feel it. I.....” Something stops me. Those visions I had......was it purely a hallucination to mess with me? But the pool, the red water, the boy in there.....I swear, it looked like the body I.... “I saw it. I can’t explain how, or why, but I saw Chuck’s death through.....” I stop again. How did I see it? If Hal really was the animalistic culprit behind this, whatever form he has taken this time, how could I witness it from his view? It happened to me back at Pop’s when I saw his releasing. It’s like.....

A chill runs through me. My fingers latch onto the wheel for dear life. My teeth clench. There’s a reason that I’ve had those visions. Why I feel so sick when I go too hard. I wish I could see it sooner, but maybe coming to Riverdale has made me aware. The visions, the sickness.....

“I think it has to do with Hal.” I force myself to admit. I take a deep breath, then turn to Hiram. “When I bound him to the Conway House and skipped town, I don’t think I unbound myself from him. I must have forgotten to free myself from his latch, or maybe I just didn’t want to think about what I went through, but.....I think some part of him is still attached to me. I think he has been, and now with him being free from that house.....if he attacks, or if he kills, I’m gonna feel it. And so will whoever brought him out.” I dart my eyes away from him and glare out the windshield. I let go of the steering wheel, allowing myself to recline into my seat, my hands falling onto my thighs. A thought comes to me - if Hiram and I do find Hal, if we go and perform any spells that will harm Hal.....will it harm me too? Will it kill me?

I tap my knuckles up and down on my thighs. I make an effort to brush it all off, “I’m probably just being delusional.....” I sit up in my seat, pressing my palms down into my thighs. I face Hiram, “Can familiars make their witches sick? Has that ever happened with you and Edgar?”

He has to think about it for a hot minute. Then, he replies, “No, I don’t think I have. It’s a highly unusual side effect of bonding with a familiar.....but it’s something I can look into. If that’s what you would like.” The lump in my throat fades. So he doesn’t think I’m going insane. Without a word, I nod at him. The corners of his mouth rise an inch. Then, he goes to open the passengers’ side door. “If Sabrina’s still upstairs, I’ll send her over to the library to meet up with you. Thank you for the ride, Alice.”

“Anytime. And that would be great.” I quickly respond. He’s about to shut the door but stops. Something’s making him hesitate. Maybe I’m just making something out of nothing, so I decide to keep my eyes in front of the road. My hands go back up to the steering wheel, my lips press together. From my side, Hiram peels the door back, sticking his head in. He exhales.

“You’re not delusional, Alice. What you partook in with your familiar all those years ago was....horrible, yes. But you are not the villain. Your trauma should not control your life. Your past should not define who you are now.”

My lips part. My cheeks feel heavy. My eyes water. I manage to turn to Hiram. His whole expression is neutral, but his eyes.....they give away the remorse he has for.....for me. He extends his fingers upward, I guess to bid me farewell for now, and shuts the door. I watch him glide up the steps to Pembrooke, disappearing back into the comfort of his home.
I’m numb. No, I….I feel everything. I haven’t let others analyze my trauma like that. I’m fortunate that Gladys and Hiram both haven’t declared me insane, but to anyone else…..it’s material that could send me away to a bedlam. I don’t want to think that I’ve lost it, that what Hal put me through won’t make me completely unhinged. But what if I’m already on my way there?

*Your past should not define who you are.*

Hiram’s right - I shouldn’t let everything that happened to me control the rest of my existence. I know this, and believe me, I’ve tried to move on. But hearing it from someone else makes me realize that what I’ve done to cope on my own isn’t working. These years of having to reduce my magic for the fear of sickness, on top of avoiding any talk of Riverdale, hasn’t worked. I’m not healed, the wounds have only been cut deeper.

A tear streams down my cheek. Great, just when I’ve already cried enough this morning. Out of frustration, I wipe the tear away. “That’s enough.” I mutter to myself and huff. I wait another minute to make myself calm down. Then, I drive away.

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*End of Chapter Six*
Madness Starts Here

Chapter Notes

Hello, I'm back! Sorry it's taken so long for me to update! But here is a brand new chapter to end your 2019!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ALICE

My trip to the library is uneventful. There’s barely any books about the town between 1955 and 1970. And I have no luck finding anything about witchcraft. I make an attempt to inquire the front desks about these books, if they do have any hiding in the back, but to no avail. Apparently, somebody has already checked out books about the town from 1960 to 1970.

I wind up resorting to the internet for a bulk of my research. What pops up when you type “Riverdale Reaper” onto Google is either a link to a conspiracy group chat, or some memes generated by BuzzFeed. I’m getting frustrated, and I just want some answers. How did Hal get in that house anyway? Would he really have been around during the massacres? Or even before…..when the town was founded?

It hits me. Hal might have been here since the beginning of Riverdale. Maybe he was there before the Reaper. I bolt up from my seat at the computers, and I sprint back over to the Riverdale History books section. I pour through the titles, reading them out, until I find what I want. Riverdale’s story from the beginning in the 1940s. And I only glanced over this trying to find information only about the Reaper. Guess I’m going to look for a pattern!

I take a book or two and run back to the front desk to check them out. The older woman at the front gives me a bizarre look. Then I realize - I need to get a damn library card before I can leave with these books entoe. I impatiently wait as this librarian creates my card, glancing around the ancient environment at Riverdale High. It gave me a place to read up more on magic. It allowed me to avoid Hal when it all got worse in the end. Shouldn’t Sabrina be on her way over here now? Unless she already headed back to the trailer long before I dropped Hiram off at Pembrooke…

My library card finishes processing, and I finally get the books in my short-term possession. Normally, I would opt to spend the afternoon pouring through the contents of these texts, but I have work this afternoon, and I need to see if Sabrina is back at the trailer. I thank the woman, head out of the library, and speed back to the trailer park.

It’s quiet when I pull in. All of the roads were quiet when I drove through town. Maybe everyone’s heard already about what happened to Chuck Clayton. I step out of my car, allowing the cold to embrace me. The wind causes the bottom of my dress to stick to my legs. I can feel my toes starting to go numb from the low temperature. A meow pierces the silence. It’s coming from the trailer. I turn to face my trailer, taking careful steps towards the stairway. A mix of warming energy and…..something not so warm and fuzzy, pollutes my brain the closer I come. Sabrina is back, I sense it…..but that cat is too. How long has it been alone in the trailer for? Is Sabrina inside, or somewhere else in the trailer park? And…..why is this cat giving off so much bad energy?
A sharp bark comes from behind me. Panicked, I whip my head, only to find a fluffy sheep dog with dark grey ears waddling over to me. It barks up at the trailer, I’m guessing over Sabrina’s cat, and pauses its trail the closer it comes to me. I don’t consider myself much of a dog person, or a cat person for that matter, but this dog really is kind of adorable. It stops barking when it looks up at me, then it sits down on its hind legs. It’s acting so calm around me, so hopeful. Does it know I’m a witch? I crack a smile, then in the spur of the moment, I hold my palm out to the dog. It stays in it place, panting rapidly, then it brings its nose up to my palm. The cold and wet sensation tickles my palm, I giggle. It lets out a little yelp before it starts to make circles around me.

“Hot Dog! Come here, boy!” FP hurries over to us, whistling to the dog. Is this….this is the family dog? My new fluffy acquaintance, Hot Dog, stops his circles around me and runs back over to his owner. FP kneels down and ruffles through the dog’s fur. He glances up at me, “He’s not used to so many new faces, so he was just itching to go run around. He wouldn’t stop slobbering all over your girl just earlier.” My smile fades a bit. Sabrina’s been with FP?

“Is she alright?” I put the question out there.

FP sighs and stands up. He nods, “Yeah, she’s good. Been doing….school stuff for most of the morning with Jug, so….” My tension eases. Okay, she was somewhere safe this morning. I wonder how she managed to get back to the trailer park on her own, unless Hiram’s daughter arranged for a ride back. Or maybe FP or Jughead picked her up. Do any of them know about Chuck Clayton?

Behind FP, Sabrina appears and glows when she sees me. “Ali, you’re back!” My smile returns, I know now she’s safe. I move over to her and we embrace. She’s clinging onto me a lot more than usual. She’s shaking, yet I’m not sure if it’s from the cold or something else. Sabrina breaks our hug and looks up at me. “Did….did you hear about….it was on the news this morning…..”

My heart drops. She does know about Chuck. I swallow the lump in my throat. “I didn’t hear about it - I saw it myself. Got stuck at the police station because of it.” The girl’s eyes widen. Her mouth falls open. I want to explain to her my whereabouts, my reasons, but FP is standing right there. And he still doesn’t know….

“Why did Keller hold you up?” FP asks out of the blue. “You didn’t do anything.”

“Exactly.” I mutter. From inside the trailer, that cat howls again. Hot Dog yelps in response to the howling, and FP has to quiet him down. Sabrina rolls her eyes.

“I better go check on Salem.” she starts to head back to the trailer, but she seems more….hesitant. She’s still shivering, no, she’s antsy. Something’s off with her. I gently grab for her forearm and she stops. “Ali?”

“Are you feeling okay, sweetie? It’s about this…..Chuck thing, isn’t it?” She glances down at her feet, her lips pressing together all nervously.

She waits until she looks back up to answer, very quietly, “I don’t know.” This isn’t like Sabrina. Granted, the whole Dark Baptism episode did a number on her, but…..I’m not sure what’s up with her now. She only knew the kid based on what happened to Hiram’s daughter, unless they had class together. Maybe she’s just as conflicted about how to feel about Hiram’s death, unless they had class together. Maybe she’s just as conflicted about how to feel about his death, just like I am. Or Hiram for that matter. But she’s acting so…..skiddish. I take a closer look at her face. There’s a small rim of red around one of her nostrils. Almost like blood.

Sabrina starts to back away. “I’m gonna head in to take a shower. Is that okay?” To be honest, I want her to stay out here. I want to know if she’s doing okay. I want to know what that red ring inside her nose is from. No, that’s what Zelda or Hilda would want, and I’m not them. So instead, I
I really do fear for her. I fear for Veronica too, and even FP and Gladys’s kids. It makes me worry that Hal could latch to any one of them and harm them. But they all seem to be in good hands. Sabrina…she was in good hands with FP. I turn back around and find FP still messing around with his dog. He looked after her. For me. Oh no, I hope I don’t get emotional again. I’ve already poured my tweaked heart and soul out for one person. I don’t need FP, or Gladys, taking on more of my baggage.

I make my way over to FP. “Has she been with you all morning?” He directs his attention upward to me. He lets his dog go and stands up.

“Probably for an hour or two. Since….Jug brought her over to see the news about that boy.” He pauses for a second to run his fingers through his hair. He glances up at my trailer, “Poor kid, she looked so upset about the whole matter. Good thing Jug brought her over, and that she stayed with us…..she was…..she was about start getting---” I take a couple of steps in, stopping him before he can finish his thought.

“Thank you, FP. Thank you for watching over Sabrina. I’m sorry I couldn’t come over sooner. I tried, but Keller had me held up for so long, and…..” I have to slow down. I have to remember FP doesn’t know about my powers, about Hiram, about why I really went out this morning. I let my mouth stay open and shake my head. I’m at a loss of words right now. How can I even explain everything to him now? If I did, would he ever understand? Would he forgive me for leaving?

My building anxieties fade when FP reaches for my hand. His touch leaves me shaken, yet it soothes me. My mouth clamps shut, I look up at him. “Don’t worry about it, Ali. We take care of our own.” He gives me an empathetic smile and winks. The younger version of myself would swoon, I won’t lie. But his expression makes me have no butterflies. Maybe him being with Gladys has helped me move on. I grin in return. Something behind FP causes him to teeter closer to me. He lets my hand go to reach for the figure behind him, laughing. Jellybean pokes her head out from behind his hip and wraps her arms around her father’s waist, staring up at me. I can’t help but wave at her, she really does remind me of Sabrina when I first met her.

I start to back away towards the direction of my trailer. “Let me know if you guys need anything! I’m just going to relax a bit before I head back to work!” I turn on my heel and start to walk away. In the background, I can hear the little girl whispering to her father. It’s so quiet, but my witchness amplifies her words. Ask her, dad. Aren’t you going to ask her?

I face them again, “Ask me what?”

Jellybean pushes her father forward. He grabs for his daughter’s hand before he can provide any sort of explanation. “Yeah, um…..What are you and Sabrina doing for Thanksgiving?” I stand there, taken aback. I don’t think Sabrina and I have talked about what we would do for the holiday. I wasn’t anticipating for both of us to stay here so long term, long past Thanksgiving, before we would have to return to Greendale for her trial. Worse case, we could just order Chinese and have it at the trailer. Or we could do a turkey dinner at Pop’s. Or…..heaven, we could do something with Hiram and Veronica, if that’s what they want. My plans are so up in the air, I have no sort of clue of what’s going on. I decide to tell FP that I have no plans, and that Sarbina and I might just hit up Pop’s or order in. I’m curious now as to why he…..well, why his little girl, wants to know of our plans.

“Why don’t you and Sabrina come spend Thanksgiving with us?” My heart flutters. I can feel water forming in the corners of my eyes. FP continues, “Gladys and I got talking last night, and she….both of us, really, just want you and your girl to not feel left out on the holiday, you know?”
“FP….” I don’t know what to say. FP and Gladys want us to come over? I’m worried that I’ve already stepped over my boundaries or overstayed my welcome in Serpent territory, but this little act of inclusion…...it’s like they both want me to be part of their family. They want me and Sabrina to not be alone. “FP, are you sure?”

“We don’t mind a little extra company. Besides, the kids would get a kick out of it. I mean, Jug and Sabrina can….study together or whatever, and JB….” he looks down at his girl. He can’t find the words to say more, but the expression this girl gives me. She looks like that sad-looking Muppet girl from that Cookie Monster skit on Sesame Street. It’s so innocent, so mischievious……so much in longing for someone to be her friend. The same face that came into my life and is now living with me in the trailer. It’s that damn face that wins me over.

“Oh, why not? Sure!” I finally accept their invitation. The little girl glows, and so does FP. I follow up, “But let me at least help out, okay? You and Gladys shouldn’t have to do the work all by yourselves. I can make the side dishes, or even any beverages you all want!” I dart my eyes back down to Jellybean, talking to her directly. “Do you want me to make you something special?” With a coy little grin, she nods. I wink in response.

“Alright, we’ll let you get going.” FP waves me goodbye, and so does she. Together, the father-daughter duo walk hand-in-hand back to their trailer, Hot Dog trailing behind them. He’s so in peace now, not fearing for his life or worrying about his future. He really does care about his children, and he’s so devoted to Gladys. And she’s just as devoted to him. I stay outside for a bit, taking in this environment. This place hasn’t changed, but FP has, and definitely for the better. He and Gladys both want to make it better for their children, so they will never have to face the same fate that we did when we were their age. They’re lucky, and I envy them.

I wonder what I should make JB as a little Thanksgiving treat.

XXXXXXXXX

**SABRINA**

Ali keeps staring at my nose. Can she tell that I had a nose bleed? I really do want to tell her about my reaction to Chuck Clayton’s death, maybe even ask her about what Mister Jones confessed to me. But, if I’m honest, I’m exhausted, I need a shower, and….I’m worried that I’ve left Salem on his own for too long. I still don’t know if I trust what he’s saying about his involvement with Chuck.

I head back towards the trailer, still talking to Ali. “I’m gonna head in to take a shower. Is that okay?” She nods without a sound. “Okay, thanks!” I make a break for the steps and enter the trailer. I let my back hit the door, and I release a long exhale. I squeeze my eyes shut, embracing the silence of the trailer. Well, it’s not entirely silent. In the living room, Salem chirps as he jumps off the couch and prances over to me.

“Did you see the size of that dog?” he comments about the Jones’s family pet, Hot Dog. “He could practically pin me down without a blink of an eye.” He’s trying to keep the conversation light-hearted, but he’s obviously hiding something. I open my eyes and glare down at him.

“We need to talk, Salem.” I huff as I begin to walk into the bedroom. I run my fingers through my hair and slip off my headband. I set my backpack down onto the bed right as Salem jumps up.
“What’s the trouble now? I already told you we don’t need to worry about Chuck Clayton anymore.” I finish slipping off my shoes when he makes that last statement. I get dizzy again. I have to rest my palms onto the mattress to avoid passing out. Why is the mentioning of Chuck doing this to me? This never happened before with anyone I ever got justice from - not from those boys who picked on Suzie, or the Weird Sisters. Why has my time with Salem changed that?

“Why did you do it, Salem?” He’s quiet at first, then he chuckles. Of course, he’s going to act like he doesn’t know what I’m talking about about. “WHY---” I raise my voice but then quickly drop it. What if Ali comes in and overhears our conversation. I rush over to shut the door before I start up, in a hushed voice, “Why did you kill Chuck? I told you V and I had it covered!”

“I was keeping your best interest in mind.” he starts to lick his paw. “And that boy was bound to go on and do the same to other girls. It was better to take him out right then and there while I….we had the chance.” I raise a brow at him. That last sentence isn’t sitting right with me. I go to reach for….the empty space between my lungs. I forgot I took off Dad’s necklace before I went to bed last night. Ignoring Salem, I rummage through my bag until I feel the little amulet. It takes only a few seconds to slip on my comfort charm run my fingers over the grooves.

Salem reaches his paw up to touch my hand. Like syrup, he says, “I was only trying to protect you, Sabrina. That’s what familiars were made to do. How can you get mad at me for simply doing my job?” He may have a point - familiars stand by their witches and protect them from any sort of harm. I’m probably just not used to someone…..something performing a dangerous act out of devotion to me. Or V. But I don’t want Salem to keep killing people….I don’t want to have this new behavior established as a pattern.

I sigh. “Come here.” I scoop Salem into my arms. He purrs in content while I scratch his head. “We need to set a ground rule. For now on, no more killing anyone V and I don’t get along with. Don’t even attack them, unless I say it’s okay to do so. I already have enough blood on my hands from my birthday…..I don’t need more spilt on me, okay?”

“I guess….I can work with that.” he draws out. He sounds annoyed, but at least he’s willing to compromise. I grin and set him down onto the bed.

“Like I said,” I start as I make my way to the bathroom to turn on the shower, “not everyone in Riverdale is evil. They don’t know I’m a witch, so why should we be starting fights?”

Salem follows me into the bathroom and jumps up onto the toilet lid. “You’re right - we don’t start fights. But we certainly do end them.” Well, that’s one way to put it. But he still isn’t getting the point - no further blood shed. I glare down at him. He grumbles, “Peacefully, of course.”

“Sure, Salem.” I remark. I decide to just drop the conversation and jump into the shower. It takes a bit for the water to heat up (the water system here in the trailer park is not strong, but it at least functions) but I’m in and out of there within a few minutes. I throw on some pajamas and towel dry my wet hair so it’s not super damp. I glance over at my phone on the bed. I know it’s only been a handful of hours, but I’m worried about V. I feel awful about leaving her so early. Out of instinct, I flop down onto the bed and pull up my messages. Nothing from V. I’m relieved, but at the same time, I’m quite anxious. I wonder how she’s reacting to Chuck’s death. I wonder if she even knows at all….

There’s a knock at the door, causing Salem to chirp. “It’s open!” I yell out, still glued to my phone. Ali enters, and I set the phone down. I sit up, “Just checking in on V, that’s all. I haven’t seen, or heard, from her since this morning, so---”

“That’s fine, sweetheart.” Alice jumps in before I can go on rambling. She gives me a gracious
smile. Something good must have happened because she’s glowing. “I wanted to let you know - we’re going to spend Thanksgiving with the Joneses.” I stay there with my mouth gaped open. Jughead and his family want us to join them? That’s.....it is amazing, really. I really just wasn’t expecting it. I guess I was waiting to hear if I could come home to be with Aunties and Ambrose. Maybe even wait to see if V wanted me and Ali to join them.... Ali picks up on my mood, “Is....is that alright with you, Sabrina? I’m not jumping in on any plans you have with Veronica, am I?”

“No!” I jump up and come closer to Ali. I take her hand, “This is good with me.:” And I mean it. Maybe it will be fun spending the holiday with our new neighbors. Besides, it can buy me and Jughead some time to do more research on the Riverdale Reaper. The more I think of the positives, the more I become excited for the upcoming day. “Do they want us to bring anything? Make any side dishes?”

“That’s what I’ll need your help with, if you’re okay with that.” She makes her way out of the bedroom, out into the kitchen. I follow her to see what she’s been planning. There’s an array of cookbooks scattered across the stovetop. Some I recognize from when Ali first started her bakery back in Greendale. I smile - Ali’s never usually this excited about playing a part in giant holiday get-togethers. Whenever Aunties would throw a major feast, Ali would just make a simple dessert, or she would just brew some mulled wine. It was never anything over the top, and she never placed much passion into the occasion. What has caused her to start caring now? I’m thrilled, really, but it’s so unlike her. It’s....it’s like she’s finally willing to embrace our time here in Riverdale.

“Do you remember what I made the first Thanksgiving I had with you and your Aunts?” She frantically flips through the cookbooks. “What was that dessert? Did it have pumpkin in it?” She goes on rambling and flipping through pages. I vaguely have an idea of what she’s referring to - the first Thanksgiving Ali joined us, she made me a blended dessert, one that included pumpkin and apple. I can practically taste it in my mouth. I eye one of the cookbooks and search for the recipe. When I find it, I show it to her.

“It’s those apple-pumpkin cookies with the maple glaze. You noticed that I was constantly asking Auntie Z to buy them for me when you started up, so....”

“I brought you a whole batch when I came over.” Ali turns to me and smiles. I can sense the nostalgia in her eyes. She’s happy looking back at it, but she.....she also looks fearful. Cautious of something. “Am I going overboard with this, Sabrina?”

“What? No!” I jump up onto the counter and grab her hand. “Why do you say that?” She glares down at the books and pushes the air out through somewhat closed lips.

“You know me - I don’t really do giant holiday events. Especially with people I don’t care for. Or strangers.”

“The Joneses aren’t strangers.”

“I get that....” Her voice trails off. She twists around so she can lean against the oven. She glances over her shoulder to look up at me. “Your friend’s parents.....they’ve done so much for us within these past couple of weeks. I knew his dad growing up. I work with his mom now. I’ve spent so much time on my own, long before I got mixed up with you and your Aunts, so.....it’s a type of acquaintance I’m not really used to. Well, I need to learn to get used to it.” Ali reaches for her elbows, lowering her head. Is this topic becoming too sensitive for her? I place my hand on her shoulder, giving it a loving squeeze. She moves her hand closest upwards to stroke my fingers.

She looks up at me again, “I never wanted to bond with anyone after I left this town. I hurt a lot of people because of what I did, Sabrina. In my head, isolating myself from society seemed like the
only logical solution. I became nomadic. I wanted to see what I could of this world without anyone seeing me. I wanted to be a ghost.” She stops for a moment, turning around to face me. She takes a firm hold of my hand, releasing an exhale through her nose. “But I wouldn’t be here then, otherwise. I wouldn’t have met you.” Her lips curl up. She’s smiling, yes, but it’s out of melancholy. The talk we had a few days before races back into my head. She said she made some mistake….Mister Jones just told me people from his high school died.

No, she couldn’t have….but did she? Was Ali the reason those kids died? What that the mistake she keeps talking about?

Ali tilts her head at me, is she noticing something off about my expression? She cups my face with her free hand. “And….I’m sorry I haven’t done more to help you here. I’ve been so caught up focusing on my past, my problems…..I’m not enjoying enough of the present. I’m not paying attention to what’s going on with you.” My eyes bulge. I gulp down a wad of saliva. I don’t want her to ask about the Conway House, or about how I came to have Salem in my possession, but all those things will have to come to her knowledge eventually. I just don’t have the proper explanations for those yet.

Luckily for me, she just says, “I want to make sure you’re okay, honey. There’s been a lot going on - first with your birthday and the move here. Now, with that classmate of yours…..” She pauses in the middle of her sentence. She doesn’t have to say any names - I know she’s referring to Chuck. I could churn. She has no idea that V and I went to confront him last night. She has no idea that the “wild animal” that tore Chuck into shreds is sitting right in our bedroom. I’m guilty, I caused him to die. I caused Salem to kill him. I caused V to lose control of her powers and awaken…..whatever that thing is with her. Ali said she made a mistake. Well, I made a mistake too. All I’ve done is make mistakes, which is why we’re here in the first place. If I hadn’t agreed to go to that house, Salem wouldn’t be here, and V wouldn’t have gotten hurt, and we wouldn’t have confronted Chuck, and I wouldn’t have caused Salem to---

Ali holds onto my face with both hands. I must have fazed out or gotten dizzy, because my head hurts. My eyes get wet. I look down at her, and she’s concerned. “Do you want me to stop talking about it? We can move onto something else.” I go to answer, but my mouth is dry. My brain can’t form words. Instead, I sniffle and nod before jumping down from the counter. She pulls me into her arms, stroking my head as she hugs me. I release little sobs against her collarbone. I hold onto her tighter. I never meant for Ali to become so roped into my mess. I don’t want to make her depression worse. I just want someone, or something, to help me fix what I started.

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I’ve come to appreciate the quiet in this trailer. I’m so used to all the noise back at the mortuary that it’s an odd comfort to be sitting here in silence. Ali’s been at work all day, and she’s spent most of her time prepping for tomorrow’s feast with the Joneses. I’m happy that she wants to integrate more into Riverdale. She seems content at work with Jughead’s mom, and she and Mister Lodge appear to be on somewhat good terms. And I’m quite relieved that she avoided the subject of Chuck after our talk yesterday. I do want to tell her about my involvement, I want to ask for advice on how to move forward. Yet, I’m worried that if I reopen this can of worms, it will manifest into something much worse. Also, I don’t have any idea of how to explain what happened to V. I thought about inviting V over to join us for Thanksgiving, it could give her a chance to get out of Pembrooke and just enjoy the holiday. Eventually, I came around to it that V should spend
time with her father and avoid discussing Chuck all together. Well, try to avoid the discussion unless a conversation does need to occur. I figure she and I can spend Friday together shopping for Christmas gifts.

I’ve spent most of today flying through these Riverdale books, still keen on who this red-headed woman is in the pictures. There’s not much information on this woman, or her companions in this “witch hunters” group. All that the book provides is the basic summary of the group banding together to go after anyone they believed to be the Reaper. There’s no list of who fled town either, perhaps there’s an index in the back that can help. I go back to where I found this woman’s photo to search for a caption, and I hope that it may lead me in the right direction. I’m in luck - under the photo lives a small-print list of the names involved. It’s a bunch of older names, like Matthias, and Julian, some bear the last names of kids I go to school with, which shocks me. Then, I find the one female name out of the bunch, Rose Blossom.

A thunderous knocking shakes the trailer. Salem, who fell asleep on the living room floor, stirs awake. I rise up from my seat and hurry to the door. Who could be waiting for me at this time of night? Did Ali forget her keys? I open the door to find Jughead losing his grip on a moving box. He grunts, “You mind giving me a hand?” I look down at this box, labeled “Dad’s stuff”. Jughead must have found something for us at the storage unit!

“Hang on!” I help Jughead carry the box into the trailer. We carry it over to the living room, and Salem scurries out of the way before getting crushed. Jughead chuckles in content. I’m floored - what could be in this box?

“I just scored a jackpot at the storage unit. Big time.” he explains to me as he starts to open the box. The lid comes off, and a bunch of dust comes flying up. I have to wave it away and cough. I don’t pick up on it at first, but…..it sounds like the dust has a voice. Something whispering harshly in Latin. Once the dust clears, we begin to empty out the box’s contents. It’s a giant stack of books, a spare Serpent jacket, and…..oh goodness, there’s a pistol in with the other items. Jughead daintily rests the pistol far away from us, but some part of him is intrigued. He decides to direct his attention to the books. “Look at the dates of these.” He flips open one book’s covered to reveal its publication date for me to examine. I take a closer look….. Then I go for another book. Then another. These books were all around from the time of the Reaper!

“Only thing is, I’m not sure if these books came from Forsythe Senior, or if they belonged to Grandpa Cohen - that’s my mom’s dad. The Serpent jacket and the gun scream Senior, but the books…” I turn the books to see their covers - they’re all about demons. I reach for one at random, opening it up. I now see why Jughead is confused about the ownership. Some of the front pages have been violently ripped out.

“You it’d be safe to ask your dad?” Jughead’s eyes bulge and he reaches for my arm. He shakes his head.

“I wasn’t kidding when I brought up how bad Senior was. Especially to Dad. He couldn’t hold down any sort of job because of his drinking problems, as well as his temper. Dad always said the best day of his life, before he met my mom, was when Senior passed away.” I run my fingers along the curves. Maybe the books did come from Jughead’s grandfather - that could explain the rips. If I only knew a spell that could resurrect book pages, or a way to determine who owned…. An idea comes to me. I turn page after page in this one book until I stop at a random section. There’s handwritten notes in the margins!

“You recognize the writing?” I hand the book over to him. He readjusts the beanie on his head before before bringing the book closer to his face. He squints at it, then has to extend his arm out.
He tilts his head to the side.

“This might be Forsythe.” he mutters, turning to me. I don’t know what to say, I can’t organize my thoughts. Was it possible that his grandfather was…..a demon hunter? Or at least knew of demon hunting? I might be jumping to conclusions, but there has to be a reason for his abusive behavior. I didn’t see a Jones name in any of the Riverdale history books thus far, but perhaps I’m looking through the wrong sources. Maybe he got caught up in the town-wide hysteria from the Reaper scare?

Jughead opens up another book to a random page, his lips curling upward. “It’s in here too.” He sets the book down, going through another. Then another, and another. These books are all filled with notes.

“This is all way too much to process.” I say out loud. Jughead splits the book pile in half and shoves one side to me.

“Then we’ll divide and conquer. Takes notes on the notes, meet up when we’re done. Then, we can unravel more of the truth and craft our article.” I pick up a random book and stand up. I trace my finger down the filled-up margins. In the kitchen, Salem grumbles. I lower the book to stare at him, nonchalantly licking himself. I come to a realization. What if this book…..what if it can help me work with Salem?

I whip back around just as Jughead rises. I smile. “It sounds like a good plan to me.”

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ALICE

Thanksgiving is roaming all over the air in the Jones’s trailer. We’ve got turkey in their little oven with some side dishes going on their stove top, while every other food item is cooking at my place, of which I’ve left Sabrina and Jughead in charge. I’m still not used to the overwhelming hospitality provided by the Joneses. Usually when I go to see the Spellmans, it’s awkward small-talk unless you bring up subjects regarding Church of Night conduct. There’s no civil conversation checking in on one another, nor is there a vibrant energy running through the residence (unless you count Ambrose drunkenly dancing his heart and soul out to David Bowie). But the moment I walked through the door this morning, I was, surprisingly, welcomed with open arms and helping hands. Even Hot Dog ran over to me and let me pet him for a while. To return the favor for FP and Gladys inviting us over, I decided to bring over some breakfast from the supermarket on the way back from work last night, that way the four of them can have a break and spend time together while I get going on the feast.

It only takes a short amount of time to get my items set up and going on the stove. Gladys and FP have me rotating in and out with them so I don’t wind up working the whole day. I get that I’m a guest in their homes, but they shouldn’t have to constantly put on a show just for me and Sabrina. But it’s a good system we have going so far, and it helps that we have more of the meal being prepared back in my kitchen.

I’m now getting to work on the green bean casserole, and I can’t help but watch in amusement at Gladys and how she interacts with JB. She’s braiding her daughter’s hair on the couch and transforming them into these things called “space buns” while the little one watches the Macy’s
parade, all with the dog sitting at the girl’s feet. I don’t know why this intrigues me, but…. I’ve seen how Hilda and Zelda interacted with Sabrina in her youth. They did care for her dearly, and there were fun moments. But for the most part, they both seemed distant and cold. It was painfully obvious that they weren’t Diana Spellman. Their love wasn’t a mother’s love. It certainly isn’t what Gladys gives to JB.

I kind of envy how lucky that girl is to have two loving and supportive parents guiding her through every step of the way. I’m glad that she doesn’t have to endure many of the struggles FP and I did growing up in the trailer parks. Times are still rough, I can see that, but the family makes it work. They come out together as a strong family dynamic. It’s stronger than what I’ve seen with Hilda, Zelda, and Ambrose all having to pitch in to raise Sabrina, myself included. FP and Gladys made it strong for their children. And I…..

I never considered the possibility of having children. I haven’t considered settling down with anyone, let alone bring another person into my life, or my bed. I spent the 25 year period pretty much alone, not allowing a single person near me. My time with Hal left me feeling so tainted, so shattered, that the thought of engaging in romantic, or sexual, intimacy with someone else was off the books for me. Seeing families and couples so in love, before migrating to Greendale, made me want to gag, or it further reinforced how lonely I truly was. But since opening up the bakery, I’ve come across many children and their families, young couples too. I’ve seen how lucky these people are, and I see it now with FP and Gladys, and their kids. It makes me want to reconsider my whole outlook on the subject….

FP joins my side in the kitchen and leans on the counter top. He looks at his wife and daughter in pure adoration, his love for them glows in his eyes. After a few moments, he turns to me. “Gladys doesn’t get to gussy up JB’s hair often. Course, the kid wants to go with all the crazy in-trend options. I’m still trying to figure out what she means by space buns.” I wind up giggling at the comment, and he does too. “Did Sabrina ever demand you do this with her?”

“Not really….only if she needs a touch-up here or there.” I tell him, thinking back to the night before all of this. Back on her birthday…..sometimes I still wonder what would have happened if she did sign her name that night. I decide to lean my back against the stove, grabbing for my cup of coffee. I tap my fingers on the ceramic mug, “She’s pretty independent all things considered.”

“You got a smart girl, Ali. You’re doing well by her.” He’s still staring at Gladys and JB out in the living room. It causes me to glance back over for a small time.

I nudge him with my elbow. “You have smart kids too, you know.”

He chuckles nervously, “Yeah, they get that from Gladys, definitely not me.” He stops for a second so he can shift around to face me. He grabs for his own coffee and takes a sip. “She was always reading to the kids when they were little. She’s got such a love for reading…..encouraged the kids to develop a love for it. Especially Jughead. That boy can crank out stories like no tomorrow. I can barely string a sentence together.” He stops talking. He glares down at the stove top, gripping on tight to his mug. I knew FP struggled in school. I remember having him study with me for the SATs in the library because he just wanted a good enough score. He wanted something that could get him a ticket out of this town, and I did too. School was never his strong suit. It makes sense why he would want to push Jughead and JB to do better. He’s stepping up as the mentor, the guide, and the father he wanted for himself.

I set my mug down. “You’re a good father, FP.” He smirks at me, almost as if he doesn’t believe me. “I’m serious. You care about your kids, and it shows. You’re there to celebrate with them at their best, pick them back up at their worst, and everything in between.”
“I’m not all that great, Ali.” He reaches for his sobriety bracelet, twisting it around. He lifts his wrist up so I can see the bracelet. “This thing on my arm reminds me that I almost lost everything, that I need to deserve my second chance. And this was only a year or two ago. The kids grew up seeing me battle my drinking problems. I placed that burden on my family, and I’m gonna have to live with the consequences as long as I’m still breathing.” The bracelet glows in the morning sunlight, and so does….. I look down at FP’s hands. I can’t believe I didn’t notice these until now. When did he get burn marks on his hands? And where from?

Laughter echoes from the living room, pulling me out of my gaze at his hands. FP and I both turn to see JB clinging onto Gladys as she jumps onto the couch. Gladys plants a kiss on the girl’s forehead and allows her daughter to curl in. The little moment makes me smile. JB really is lucky. To my side, FP sets his mug down and turns back to me.

“I don’t know where I’d be if it weren’t for those kids. If it weren’t for Gladys. They were my rocks during my dark days….I’m working to become theirs. I want to support Jughead in his writing, see if he can get a good scholarship to transfer to boarding school or get into a good writing college. I want to help JB get through her teen years…..I have no clue if she’ll get into sports or the arts, but whatever she decides, I want to back her. And Gladys…..” He pauses, his sheepishness radiating through his eyes. He continues, “She’s worked so damn hard to support all of us. I’ve got more than one job too, but I’ve never seen anyone hustle as much as she does. She shouldn’t have to be the only breadwinner of the family. She deserves a break, more than anything.”

From the living room, Gladys pipes up, “What are you saying ‘bout my work ethic, Jones?” FP develops a smug on his face, I can’t tell if it’s out of embarrassment, before turning to his wife. I watch as she rises from the couch and crosses her arms. He moves over to the wall so that he can rest his elbow on the space above him. He smirks.

“Oh nothing…. Just tellin’ Alice over here that you’re a hard worker. And you deserve like….a million vacations. And….you look hot in that Pop’s uniform.” An evil grin appears on her face. I feel like I’m in the middle of something, but I don’t know how to escape. So I make an effort to slip around FP without them seeing me. Gladys picks up on my movement, her expression softening.

“Alice, go ahead and take a break. I can cover the kitchen from here.” She methodically makes her way over to him, moving straight past me. “Besides, I need to have a word with this man.”

“Is that so?” he mutters, fighting back a giggle. While it is a little amusing watching their playful banter, I fear this could get awkward really quick. Luckily for me, a small hand slips into my own, tugging me away from the scene.

JB whispers, “Come on, I’m sparing you from the thing.”

I turn to the little girl and raise my brow. I lean down, “What thing?”

She gestures to her parents, unaware of our interaction. “THAT thing.” My eyes widen - I’m well aware of the situation, but I’m overexaggerating my expression just for the sake of playing along with JB. I allow her to take me over to the couch so we can watch the parade together. Yet, I still wind up keeping my sights on Gladys and FP. There’s little to no personal space between them now. His arms coil around her waist. She rests one hand on his shoulder, the other one tracing over his beard. Those fingers move to his head and curl into his hair. He leans in to kiss her, but she’s quick on her feet. She gently shoves him away with a snort. She starts to back away towards their bedroom, her tongue rolled in her mouth. He’s shocked, she has him hooked.
“Oh that’s how you’re gonna play this game, Cohen?” Gladys doesn’t give him a verbal response. She just presses her lips together in a tight smirk, motioning for him to come to her with one finger. He makes no time to hesitate. He strides over to her, muttering something I can’t hear quite well, and lifts her up. She lets out a cackle and wraps her legs around his waist. The two kiss, caught up in their own little world.

I don’t realize how long I witness their moment until I hear JB fake gagging. “Ugh, gross.” she snickers. I finally direct my gaze down at the littlest Jones. She pulls her knees up to her shoulder blades. “They’re like the most PDA couple ever. Whenever Jughead and I yell at them to get a room, they always do that to tease us. Well….they don’t really do it around Jughead anymore since he told them he was “aro-ace”, or something like that.” She huffs, shrugging her shoulders. “Love’s weird.”

Her comment almost makes me laugh out loud, yet it also hits me hard. “You’re right about that.” I mutter. I glance back over at Gladys and FP, still in the kitchen enjoying their time together. Laughing in between kisses. Ruffling through each other’s hair. FP was right - Gladys and his kids really are his rocks. He looks so happy with her. Even with all those scars, on his hands and in his head, he’s at peace.

I decide to actually pay attention to the parade on TV, I don’t want to stare at these two and get myself all worked up over nothing. The floats that stroll through the streets of Manhattan numb my brain. The balloons flying over the city calm me down. When was the last time I’d watched the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade? Had I ever seen it before?

JB must be picking up on my state, because she comments, “Is this your first time watching the parade?”

I force myself to snap out of my daze. I turn to the girl, curling my lips upward. “First time in a while. Not since I was about your age.” She seems to buy into it, so she turns back to the TV, and so do I. Another float with some pop music singer stops in front of the Macy’s store on Herald Square. The music is upbeat but the lyrics don’t make much sense. People’s taste in music really has changed from when I was younger. I start to wonder, “Do….do they still have Snoopy?”

JB rotates her head up to me, all baffled. She scoffs, “Duh. It’s the Peanuts. They can’t not have Snoopy in the parade.” She goes back to witness the end of this little performance. The singer rides away, waving at adoring fans on the streets. Everyone’s in utter joy. They’re thankful to be alive, to be in the present with people they love.

I sigh. “Yeah….I guess you can’t.” The program cuts to Al Roker interviewing some TV star on some network. They’re talking about their show, how excited they are to bring their family or spouse, whatever, I’m not really listening. Hot Dog waddles over to us and rests himself between us. JB releases her hold on her knees, sending a small smile in my direction as she goes to pet the dog. The smile doesn’t last long. She lets out a little wince, her face scrunches up. She stops petting Hot Dog so she can grab a pillow on the other side of her, pulling it in towards her lap.

Concerned, I place my hand on her shoulder. I whisper, “Are…..are you okay, sweetie?”

She shrugs. “I’m fine. Just a little stomach cramp, that’s all.” That’s odd. What would cause her to have cramps? Do Gladys and FP know about this?

I let go of her shoulder. “If it gets worse, tell your parents. Okay?” JB winces again, quieter this time. She nods, then inches closer to me so she can rest her head on my shoulder. I freeze up - JB hasn’t done this with me before. When I came over for lunch just days ago, she was so shy around me, not wanting to invade my space. Now she…..she’s talking to me more. She’s curled up into
me. A few years ago when I met Sabrina, even in our brief interactions, I found her quickly latching onto me. She was so willing to trust me, a stranger, and she let me become part of the family. Maybe JB is starting to trust me now, just at her own pace. I wrap my arm around the girl’s shoulders and allow her to nuzzle into me more. We stay like this until the parade is over.

Everything’s ready to go in the early afternoon. We all gather around in the living room to pile up our plates and enjoy the holiday together. It’s much more relaxed compared to any of the “family gatherings” or parties that I attended with the Spellmans. And Sabrina looks so at ease conversing with Jughead through a majority of the meal. Even JB engages in conversation with the teenagers, her stomach no longer as in pain as it was earlier. Hot Dog lays on the ground between the three of them, wagging his tail in full delight. Gladys and I gossip about work, FP continues catching me up on the lives of our classmates. At one point in the midst of his loosely detailed summary of what happened to Marty Mantle, Gladys pauses him to pick crumbs out of his beard. It causes him to chuckle, then he leans in to capture her lips. It’s little sweet moments that they have no qualms being so open about with others present, yet I feel like I’m intruding on their privacy just by observing it. Fortunately, JB waves for me to come join in on whatever Sabrina and Jughead are telling her. Jughead’s going on about some book he read for class. From what I get caught up on, it sounds like he’s explaining the plot of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, one of the Sherlock Holmes novels. Sabrina provides her assessment of the book (she read it herself at Baxter), claiming that it really is not as scary as people make it out to be. “The dog’s not the real villain, Stapleton just used it to eliminate his competition.”

“But wasn’t the other guy part of the Baskerville family too?” JB tries to make sense of the story. “Why couldn’t he just split the fortune?”

“Because people are greedy, Jeebs.” Jughead readjusts his position on the carpet. He grabs a forkful of mashed potatoes and turkey and points the fork at his sister. “People promise things to one another, out of love or justice, then they wind up betraying them or use them for their own gain.” He finishes his statement before he shoves that food into his mouth.

JB scoffs, “That’s so rude.” It takes a lot of my strength to keep myself from bursting out into laughter, simply due to JB’s outlook on the matter. Her worldview is so simplistic, the minds these children have really do surprise me. And the fact that she’s so unapologetic about her opinion makes her stance much more believable. I wish I had that kind of backbone when I was her age.

The end of the day winds down gradually. For some reason, I wound up making three pies for the meal, too worried that one pie wouldn’t do justice for all six of us. Yet, we end up going through a pie and a half, and Gladys tells me to take home the other pie and a half. I’m a little shocked when she admits, “Pop made me take one home. So, you keep those pies for you and your girl.” Sabrina and I can finish up the one half, but one whole one? For now, I just nod and take her word for it. I stay a little longer to help FP and Gladys with the dishes before I turn in for the night. The moment Sabrina and I return to the trailer, she rushes into the bedroom to check in on Salem. I place the half-finished pie in the fridge, still holding onto the whole one. I still don’t know what to do with this - should Sabrina and I just finish it? Should I bring it to Pop Tate? A homeless shelter? I try to come up with alternatives in my head of people I could bring this to, my head is reeling, processing the events of the week. Chuck Clayton’s mysterious death, Keller letting me go at the station, Hiram calming me down. Hiram….

What are he and Veronica doing for their Thanksgiving? Are they with friends? Even family? I realize that I haven’t touched base with him since Tuesday at the station. And I’m not sure if Sabrina and Veronica have made much contact since their sleepover. Hiram and Veronica have done so much for us. The girls really have fostered a strong friendship, and, while Hiram and I did have quite the rocky start, he’s important to me now. He’s done so much for me alone. There has
to be a way for me to thank him, beyond helping him avoid a false charge for alleged murder.

Salem meows from the bedroom. I turn to find Sabrina cradling her cat. “Everything okay, Ali?”

I look down at the pie in my hands, then I turn back up to her. I respond, “Yeah. When was the last time you talked with Veronica?”

SABRINA

We arrive at Pembrooke around 7:30. I’m tempted to text V and let her know that Ali and I are making a surprise visit for breakfast, but Ali and I both think it’s best to truly keep our arrival under wraps. I hold onto the leftover pumpkin pie from yesterday as Ali leads us into the main lobby. We take a seat, and….boy is it freezing in here. It doesn’t help much that the chilled pie rests on my legs. A good few minutes pass, and there’s no sight of Veronica or Mister Lodge. Should one of us go tell the lobbyman? Should we just head upstairs and knock on the door? I glance over next to me - Ali’s knee is bouncy. She has a tight grip on her knuckles. She keeps her sights on the walls looming over us while maintaining a steady breath. I’m starting to get worried about her.

“What’s wrong, Ali?” She comes back to reality and looks at me. Her mouth parts then closes. She shakes her head.

“Nothing, sweetie. It’s….it’s just cold in here.” She releases a shaky exhale. She lets go of her knuckles and coils them around her elbows. She drags her nails back and forth over her bicep. I know she’s not giving me a full answer, so I raise my brow at her. She sees this, and her face falls.

“Sabrina….”

“I can text V right now and have her come let us in!” My voice comes off much more perkier than what I hoped. Ali huffs then stares down at her jeans. I tilt my head, “Are you really that concerned that Mister Lodge won’t be here?” She lifts her head up slowly, then she lets go of her elbows. Her hands rest on her kneecaps. She’s not answering me, at least not right away.

“I don’t want to freak him out. That’s all. Or Veronica while we’re at it.” she finally admits. She directs her gaze to me, “Both he and his daughter have made an effort to make us welcome here. And he….I’d be in a really bad place right now if it weren’t for…..” she keeps pausing in the middle of her phrase. I wonder what she’s referring to, what he did to help her. She bites her lip, then goes on, “I just don’t know if bringing over a thing of pie is enough to say “thank you”. I’m still trying to learn how exactly I should be interacting with…..people I had a hard time getting along with high school. Especially people who’ve changed. Much more than I would have thought.” She stops talking. She bites the inside of her cheek and digs her nails into her jeans. I get it now - she wants to make things right with Mister Lodge, but she doesn’t know how. She doesn’t think that what we’re doing now isn’t good enough. But I know that’s not true. She allowed V to stay over at our place. She came up with this idea to visit them for Black Friday. In my eyes, Ali is making an effort to…..not be so lonely anymore.

I take a hold of her hand closest to me, using my other hand to secure the pie in my lap. I give her hand a gentle squeeze. “You’re doing everything you can, Ali. You’re really…..you’re trying. And that’s what matters. I’m happy that you want to do more. All of this…..with my birthday, and
coming here…..” I feel her fingers curl around mine. I notice her staring down at the pie. What she
told me just a couple of days ago, about how she felt so trapped in the past, how she’s panicking
over not doing enough to care for me…..

I give her this reassurance: “You say you haven’t enjoyed enough of the present. But you are, Ali.
You’re just doing it at your own pace. You’re coming to terms with the present your own way.
And I’m proud of you for that.” Her expression goes soft, not out of fear but out of…..appreciation.
I mean every word, at the same level when we had our brief talk at Pop’s the night of V’s incident.
I know she’s terrified of the world coming after me, but I’m just as terrified of her falling apart. Not
finding the strength to go on. But I’m here for her. And so is Mister Lodge, as is Mister and Missus
Jones. She just needs to hear it.

She reaches for my face and pulls it in so she can plant a kiss on my forehead. I hear her tell me,
“Sabrina Spellman, don’t ever let the world change you and your kind heart.” I wind up grinning
ear to ear. I’m relieved that she sees how much I care for her….but a new sense makes me lose the
grin fast. A sense of dread, guilt….. Am I really kind? Was what I did with the Weird Sisters to
those football players kind? Was what I did with V to Chuck Clayton kind? Was going against
family obligation to sign my name away….. I like to think of myself as optimistic. I like to give
others encouragement and to remind them of how they are enough in this world. I give others my
love…..and yet, I haven’t given any to myself. I still think about my birthday. Why I’m here and
why Ali is here. Why Chuck is dead. I made those things happen, I recognize my mistakes. Why
can’t I let them go and forgive myself?

Ali lifts my head up. She looks so puzzled, does she sense that something’s wrong with me? She
strokes my cheek with her thumb, “Hey, what is it?”

I struggle to find the right words. How do I explain this guilt? I’m fully aware that Ali will listen
and empathize with me, that’s not what I’m worried about. I’m worried that if I begin to open up
about Salem and the Conway House, about what Jughead and I are investigating…. No. Ali’s past
can’t be connected to that house. I haven’t heard her mention not a single thing about that place.
But what if it was? If I tell her, would it make her even more upset? Would she ever forgive me?

I go to open my mouth, to make up some excuse for my pained expression, but something behind
us prevents me from speaking. Something…..no, it’s someone….approaches us. “Alice?” Ali lets
go of my face to turn and find….. Mister Lodge! He is here, but definitely not how I pictured. He’s
in athletic wear and not in a suit. His face is all flushed and glossy. He unzips his jacket to cool
himself off, exposing his arms. He has a tattoo? Mister Lodge turns to me next, “Sabrina! What
brings you both here?”

Ali and I stand up, I hold the pie in my arms. We start speaking, about to cut each other off. We
stop and turn to one another. Should she tell him, or should I? I go ahead and address him, rushing
through my words, “We had leftover pie from yesterday and wanted to see if you and V wanted
some!” He still looks so much in shock. I hold the pie out in his direction, a weary smile forming
on my face. Mister Lodge smiles too.

“My….I don’t know what to say.” He fixates his jacket around his waist, fumbling with the
sleeves. He looks back up at Ali, “Are you sure?”

“We have enough back at the trailer for a whole other feast. No need to fear over that.” Ali explains
to him. She glances over at me briefly, then she takes a step towards him. “Besides, I….uh, we….we wanted to check in on you. And Veronica. See how you were holding up since…..” Her
voice goes out. Holding up since what? What could Ali be referring to? Mister Lodge starts
massaging the area on his wrist where his watch sits. I can’t help but take note on….. Something’s
on his wrist. Another tattoo? It’s not as big or as grand as the design on his shoulder, but this one is….different. It takes a little time squinting at it, enhancing my view with some magic, but what I read is this: A.S. H.L. 11.20.17

Mister Lodge grins wide. He lifts a finger, indicating for us to wait, as he goes over to one of the people at the front desk. I hear him say, “Have this pie heated up. And bring dining ware for four. Ring when it’s ready.” He motions for me to come over. I don’t move right away, but Ali nudges me forward. The front deskman meets me halfway to relieve me of this pie in my arms. The deskman leaves the lobby, and Mister Lodge pulls something out of his pocket. He holds a set of keys in his hands, holding it out to me. “Sabrina, why don’t you go ahead and see Veronica?” I look down at the keys. There’s so many, how will I know which one will let me into his home? The lights reflect off the metal of the keys, it’s almost blinding. Maybe it’s just my nerves acting up.

Ali places her hand on my shoulder. I turn to her as she whispers, “It’s okay, Sabrina. We should be following you up shortly.” With that little reassurance, I just nod at her. I take the keys from Mister Lodge, thanking him, and start to make my way to the stairs by the back. Yet, I wind up stopping behind one of the columns. Why would Mister Lodge and Ali need to stay down here longer. Without wanting to make noise, I lean against the column, using a little enhanced attention to listen in on their conversation.

I’m only able to catch blips. They didn’t come back to try and question you further, did they? No. Haven’t seen Keller since he dragged us in. That’s good. And you? Did Keller pay a visit to you or Sabrina? No, actually. Have you talked about it with her? I tried, but…..I don’t know, Hiram. Something was off about Sabrina. I had to drop the whole matter about Chuck….

I push myself away from the column. I peer over, they’re still caught up in their talk that neither one of them sees me. Ali said she was at the station with Sheriff Keller after they found Chuck’s body. Why was Mister Lodge there too? Was…..was Ali doing something with him? Was that why she spent so much time away from the trailer? This is all too confusing. I want to learn more, but it wouldn’t be right of me to keep eavesdropping like this. Also, I do want to go see V.

I check one more time to make sure neither one of the adults see me, then I slip away. I practically know my way up to the Lodge residence at this point, so the hike up the stairs is a piece of cake. It takes only a matter of minutes before I reach the front door, my hand holding the keys shakes. I look down….did Mister Lodge indicate which key would let me in? So many sit on the ring, it could take all day before I find the right one. I could use magic to narrow down my options. I could just knock on the door, or just wait until Mister Lodge and Ali make their way up the stairs. I wind up deciding to just give one key a shot. It doesn’t go through. I go for the next one. It goes in, but the door won’t budge. I fumble with another one, then another one. “Stupid keys.” I mumble to myself, going key after key.

I’m about to give the next one a shot when the door flies open. I gasp and jump back, only to have V standing on the other side, just as much in shock. When she sees that it’s me, she softens. “‘Brina.”

“Hey, V.” I smile. We both wind up laughing, then I step in through the threshold. We throw our arms around each other for a tight embrace.

She holds onto my face. “What are you doing here?”

“Ali and I wanted to surprise you guys. We have pie, too!”

“Oh, ‘Brina, that’s very sweet.” She lets go of my face so she can shut the door. “You gave me
quite the scare though. I thought Daddy had forgotten his keys, or if it was a burglar trying to break in.”

“I didn’t wake you up, did I?” V shakes her head. She readjusts her silk robe.

“Oh, no! I’ve been up for a little while now. Catching up on from free reading.” V walks over to the dinner table and sits down. That’s when I notice a copy of *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt on the table. I take a seat near by, and she pulls the book closer to her. “Just helps to reset my mindset after…..” She goes quiet. She starts to fidget with her pearls, curling her fingers around the necklace. So she does know what happened to Chuck, or maybe she’s having second thoughts about all of it.

I finally break my own silence, “How are you holding up, V?” She lets go of her pearls, still keeping her gaze outward, nowhere really. Her hands fall onto her lap, she coils in on herself and shrugs.

“I’m doing better. I haven’t thought about our incident as often. You know, ‘Brina, I was half expecting him to call the cops on us. Or even bring Principal Weatherbee into the whole manner.” She winds up looking down at her hands, massaging out her knuckles. She lets go of the breath she held onto. “It was actually Kevin who texted me about Chuck’s death. I didn’t want to believe a word he was saying…..granted he’s the Sheriff’s son, so why would he lie about this kind of news? Still, at the time, I thought it was only an exaggeration…..then I turned on RIVW, and…..” She lifts her head up and faces me. I would have expected her eyes to be all watery and turning pink. But they’re not. Her face is neutral. I hear her foot tapping on the floor. She doesn’t appear shaken up at all.

V turns back to me. “I know Salem did it, ’Brina.” My mouth flies open. She knows? How? I want to ask, but she goes on, “Some part of me just guessed. He stayed behind to clean up our…..my mess. He protected us that night.” She attempts to put on a smile to not petrify me. “I thought I’d be so upset about what happened. I haven’t shed a tear, even when my father finally returned home. I felt so…..numb.” Well, numb wouldn’t be the way I feel about everything. But V looks so expressionless, so…..dead. I start to wonder, if she knew about Salem’s part, if she had that gut feeling…..does that mean…..

“Was there anything else?” my voice comes out dry, my throat scratches. V looks all confused when I pause to cough. I speak once more, “I mean, did you….did you experience….any….” I can’t process the words to make them come out. So instead, I rub a finger under my nostril. She doesn’t get it at first, no matter how many times I make the gesture. Finally, I lower my finger down to my lips, indicating a straight line down from my nostrils. Her eyes light up.

“Did you get sick?”

“No! It…..it was a nosebleed.” I confess to her, clenching my fist. V doesn’t really respond - she just takes my hand and makes that *oh, how unfortunate* face. Yet, it is so sympathetic.

“Is Salem with you? Is he downstairs?”

I shake my head at her. “Left him back at the trailer. I hope he doesn’t cause trouble while I’m gone.” I drift off, thinking back to my talk with Salem a few days ago. He said he did it to protect me. To make sure Chuck wouldn’t pull the same stunt again. I thought taking Salem on would help me move past the homesickness. To help get my mind off Greendale. To relieve me of that stress. Turns out Salem has only caused me more stress since taking him into my life.

I wind up expressing my frustration to her, “He’s been so antsy lately. He acts on his own accord,
without taking consequences into consideration. And he still sees nothing positive about Ali. Or
Jughead.” I pause, shaking my head. My fingers go through my hair as I lower my head. I mutter,
“None of his views make any sense. I don’t know how to control him, V. If only there were a How
to Train Your Familiar book in good reach.”

“My father actually has a whole collection of witch books in his study.” I release my hair and lift
my head. I half expect V to start laughing, as if it were a joke. But she’s not. She gestures over to
another part of the room. I follow her hand in that direction, only to find the door leading to Mister
Lodge’s study. I’ve seen him go in there already, and nothing about it struck out to me. If V is
right, could there be any books regarding how to work with familiars? Would Mister Lodge even
let me go in there and browse through his collection?

V takes my hand, “I’m serious, ‘Brina. You shouldn’t have to hassle with Salem all by yourself.
Let me help you out; he at least trusts me to be around you.” She has a point - Salem, oddly
enough, has a soft spot for her. After all, he did go after Chuck for us…..maybe it really was for
her. Maybe she could reason with him about his aggressive behavior. I place my other hand on top
of hers and allow myself to smile.

“Whatever you got, V, I’ll take it.” She giggles in response. Something must have popped into her
head, because she lights up. V grabs onto both of my hands.

“Not to change the subject on you, ‘Brina, but….have you been to any of these outlet shops in
town? I was thinking, since it’s Black Friday, we can hit them up! Maybe get our minds off the
whole Chuck situation, even. Who knows, we could find a bookshop, or a shop run by rogue
witches that could help us find some books about familiars.”

My mood lifts. I’ve been to the shops downtown in Greendale, but it makes me wonder what
Riverdale has to offer. It could give me a chance to not focus on the bad for a while. And it could
give Ali some time with Mister Lodge for….whatever it is they’re doing together. Before I can
provide her with an answer, the front door opens. Mister Lodge enters, standing aside so Ali can
center. I almost forgot that Ali hasn’t been up in Pembrooke yet - she’s in utter shock examining the
Lodge’s residence, the same way I was when I first entered. She takes a moment to study the
architecture, the cleanliness. She doesn’t say a word to him, or to us over here on the other side of
the room. She wanders over to the back of the couch and leans against it, all silent. It takes her a
while before Ali even notices me and V at the table. She stands up straight and clears her throat.

“Breakfast should be up soon, if you girls are okay with that.” she mumbles, still so much in awe of
the place. It makes me grin. V releases one hand and stands up, and I follow in suit.

“Suppose I better get changed.” She leads me towards her bedroom. Then she addresses her father,
“I’ll be out in a minute or two, Daddy.”

“Hang on - Sabrina….” I stop in my path and face Mister Lodge. He holds his index fingers up
then heads towards his study. He opens the door and disappears inside, leaving the door slightly
ajar. Ali starts to take some interest, moving her head to get a better glimpse of what’s behind those
doors. I can’t blame her - I’m interested in what could reside in that study as well. I wonder what
type of books Mister Lodge has collected, what areas of witchcraft he would hope to study, or even
teach to V.

I’m so caught up in Ali’s state of being that I don’t even notice Mister Lodge coming towards me.
His voice recaptures my attention, “This came in the mail for you!” I look down at his hands and
see that there’s a letter in his hands from…..from Greendale! Home! I snatch the letter and examine
it. The stamp is from the Mortuary. I recognize Ambrose’s handwriting without having to
contemplate over it. I could cry, I’m so happy!
I hold the letter against my chest and squeal in delight. “Thanks, Mister Lodge!” He returns a gracious smile. V reaches from behind to take my hand, and we go into her bedroom. She heads over to her closet to rifle through her clothes and find an outfit for today. I flop onto her bed and run my fingers over the writing on the envelope. The letter itself feels so….light. Well, what would I expect? Whenever Aunties wrote a letter to anyone, really, they never made their letters super long. They usually try to condense their letters to a page or two. But I haven’t been home in weeks. Surely, there has to be some updates about life in Greendale, or about my trial.

“Don’t wait on me, girl!” V calls out from the other side of the room. “Go ahead! You can read it out if you want!” I take V’s word for it and start to rip open the letter. A small folded stack of papers comes out of the envelope. I start to unfold and read its contents, sunlight glimmering onto Ambrose’s handwriting. I start to read out loud:

Dearest cousin,

Hope those mortals in Riverdale are treating you well. Life is so boring out here in Greendale without your perky spirit. Aunties have been going at me nonstop about work and Church business. ‘Course, I would prefer to have my own peace and quiet, but knowing my stupid restriction…. Oh well.

V interrupts, “What restriction?”

“He got bound to our house for attempting to blow up the Vatican.”


“I have a feeling he’d like you.” I tell her. I wonder what Ambrose would think if he and V met. I continue on with the letter.

I don’t have much detail on your trial though - Aunties won’t say a word about it. And no one from the Council has dropped by to discuss anything with them. So, sorry for the poor update. But otherwise, business has been booming for the Mortuary. Oh! This is actually something exciting that I must fill you in on, ‘coz. Get this - man’s body shows up at our morgue, his parents want to hold a funeral for him. So, I help arrange that, and this pet lizard thing shows up. I think it’s the man’s familiar, just a guess. But after the funeral, this man (around the dead guy’s age) approaches me. Turns out, he and dead guy used to date, and that he’s a witch, no joke. Well, things lead to another, and now….I kinda got myself a partner now. He’s coming over at some point to meet Aunties for dinner later, but we’re playing that by ear.

My voice dies out, I continue to skim through. Ambrose barely mentions anything about Harvey, or Roz and Susie. When he does bring up Aunties, it’s only about work. He does say that they talk about me, but briefly. I check the envelope for any hope of an extra letter from my aunts. Nothing. I flip through the pages Ambrose wrote. No handwriting belonging to either one of them. Ambrose ends the letter wishing me the best, and if I still have Dad’s necklace, to still always hold onto it in case I need it. His warmest regards don’t lift my mood. The fear of not knowing if my aunts worry about me being out here, or would bother to care at all, leaves me unsettled. It makes me feel so lonely, even though I have V, and Ali. And even Salem.

They shouldn’t make you feel this way, the deep voice creeps into my head, the same way it did at the library just last weekend. If they don’t care about your wellbeing, what gives them the right to consider themselves your family?
“You okay, ‘Brina?” V reaches for my forearm. The haze in my head fades, it takes another moment for my head to clear up. I look down and realize that Ambrose’s letter has crumbled in my hands. Panicking, I do my best to smooth out the letter before placing it down next to me. I would just tell her I’m fine, but….

“I don’t know, V.” I sound like a toad. “I don’t know….” I clench my fist and force myself to breathe. The forced breathing helps to calm me down a bit, but my head still has that clogged up sensation. Like whatever voice entered my head is still latched onto me. Practically bound to me.

“Hey, come here.” V lowers my head onto her shoulder as she wraps her arm around my shoulder. She rubs my arm in some effort to soothe me. I feel like I could weep, but my eyes haven’t produced any water. My eyebags are heavy though, and my face is like plastic wrap.

After a minute or two, I lift my head. “You know what? We shouldn’t let this, or Chuck Clayton ruin our day. I want to have my first Black Friday…..well, holiday season in general, in Riverdale be a good one!”

V takes my hands again and smiles. “Couldn’t agree more, girl.”

“Now, which shops did you say were good around here?”

XXXXXXXXX

ALICE

I’m so caught up in Hiram’s study that I don’t notice Sabrina and Veronica slip out of the living and dining room. The whole place, really, has some hold over me. I knew Hiram was the type of person to live a luxurious lifestyle, but this….this is so minimalistic. Simple but elegant. Not too in your face. His study, though….

Hiram strides over to me. “The letters came in Wednesday afternoon.” I break my gaze and turn to him. He still has a note in his hands….one written out to me by Zelda Spellman herself. “I would have brought them over, but I wanted to keep an eye on Veronica. She looked so shaken up when I came back after our trip to the police.”

I take the note from him, running my fingers over the envelope. I can smell Zelda’s perfume wafting through the air. “Were you just here for Thanksgiving, then?”

He shakes his head. “Gave my staff the day off. Veronica and I just went to have a turkey dinner at Pop’s. I needed to get out of this place, and it was good for my daughter to not be so pent up here.” He wanders over to the dinner table and rests his forearm on the back of the chair. I can’t help but stare at the tattoo on arm. Did he have that in high school? I don’t recognize the symbol, it’s probably related to the Lodge family in some fashion, like how Gladys has Ouroboros on her wrist.

I have to stop staring after a bit when he starts speaking again, “Some of Veronica’s classmates stopped by to give her their condolences, mostly the football players. It was led by Fred’s son, Archie….” He pauses for a second to smirk. I take it he doesn’t have a high opinion of this boy, granted, he and Fred Andrews never got along. I’ve only met Archie a couple of times at Pop’s, but he seems like a genuine, good-hearted kid, just like his dad. Hiram loses the smirk, “But he was gracious enough to arrange the gathering, so I will give him credit for that. Even Marty Mantle’s
boy showed up…..he and Veronica were talking for a while after the boys had disappeared.” I remember FP telling me something about Marty having a boy, Reggie. Was this the same boy that played in the soccer game from a couple of weeks ago?

Hiram pushes himself up away from the chair, placing his hands on his hips. “But, now that I know my daughter’s feeling better, we can get back to Hal?” Well, that’s good to hear. I nod my head in agreement. As much as I needed time off to not focus on my demons (quite literally) for one holiday, and to bond more with FP and his family, I’m ready to jump back into this hunt, for good. Hiram smiles, then he starts to back away towards his bedroom. “I should be back in a couple of minutes. Go ahead and make yourself comfortable. And if our breakfast is ready, feel free to let them in.” I agree to do so, and he gives me a thumbs up before disappearing.

It’s just me now in the living room, it’s so quiet up here. Maybe that’s why Hiram prefers to spend his time here - the serenity of this place is soothing. I direct my attention back down to the letter, wondering what Zelda could possibly want to fill me in on. Unless there’s anything regarding Sabrina’s trial or my bakery, I can’t imagine why she would want to write to me. I try to run my fingernail through the sticky part, but it’s glued on tight. I try again, but to no avail. I bless out of frustration. I need something to open this up, like a pair of scissors or a letter opener. I pause, turning my head back to the study. Would Hiram have a letter opener in there? Should I…..

My feet tip toe over to giant white doors. He still left the door open ajar. I whip my head back to the other side of the room. It’s idiotic, I know, because Veronica and Sabrina are in her room, and Hiram’s in his. No one is out here to witness me slip in, but still…. I push the door open, it squeaks a little, making my heart pace. I turn my head again, just to make sure no one would hear it. It’s still radio silent, so I’m in the clear. I squeeze my way through the door, pausing as I glance around this new area of Pembrooke.

His study is not what I pictured. It’s not bright and airy like the living room. It’s shielded by curtains, only a small fracture of light seeps in through the Venetian blinds. He has two bookcases filled up with….well, everything you could imagine. The fireplace isn’t up and going, but it takes up a good portion of one wall. And, above his desk across the way is a portrait of Veronica.

I become so distracted that I almost forget why I came here. “Letter opener, letter opener…..” I mumble to myself as I make my way over to his desk. I’m careful not to touch anything, only just eyeballing the items scattered around. I don’t find what I’m looking for on his desk, so I make my way over to one of his bookcases. He has a variety of stuff we read in high school and some classic children’s literature. Maybe he held onto it for Veronica? I can’t help but become mesmerized by his book selections, so many titles that don’t sound like works Hiram would read. Yet again, nothing about Hiram now is what I would have thought when I first met him. I scan through the shelves, stopping at one book. When did he own a copy of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland? The book itself is huge, it must be combined with the other story, Through the Looking Glass.

Out of instinct, I reach for it, gracefully gripping onto the binding of the book. It lays one of my forearms as I peel open the cover. I read the book growing up, and I always wondered whether my mother gave me my name based on this girl. I flip through the pages, memories of my experience reading this book coming back to me. I let out a tiny laugh looking at some of these pictures. I fly through the first story, following Alice on her journey through this Looking Glass world and shaking her poor kitten. I stop at one part towards the end - I forgot Lewis Carroll added his own poetry into his works. This one stands out, not because the poem itself is weird, but….. Hiram has this one marked in particular. He has one portion of it circled, one that leaves me puzzled.

She still haunts me, phantomwise,
“Alice moving under skies

Never seen by waking eyes.

“Veronica loved that book growing up.” Hiram enters the study, catching me off guard. He doesn’t appear angry, or disappointed that I came in without any permission. Instead, he looks so composed. More laid back. I’m so used to seeing him all formal in his attire, that I’m shocked to find him in a red sweater and jeans. He strides over to me, his eyes going down to the book in my hands. “She’d practically beg me to read both Alice stories to her whenever I had the opportunity. Had to do the character voices and everything. And I’d try to read it to her in both English and Spanish.” I almost let out a snort - it’d be interesting to imagine Hiram voicing one of the lively residents of Wonderland, especially in Spanish. I decide to close the book and keep it close to my side. I might ask him later about why he had that one random passage of the last poem marked.

I leave my mouth hanging at him, trying to formulate my explanation. I did nothing wrong, I didn’t steal anything. Yet, I feel like I just invaded his safe space. “I didn’t mean to come snooping in here.” I manage to get the words out. I feel Zelda’s letter crunched in between my arm and the Alice book. “I was trying to find a….”

“A letter opener?” he finishes for me. I nod, guilty as charged. But he doesn’t show off any anger. He just shoots me a sympathetic grin. “No worries, it’s buried in my desk somewhere. I’ll get it for you.” He wanders over to his desk and starts to go through his drawers. He glances up to me, still keeping his eyes on the book. “Oh, and if you were trying to find anything on witchcraft and demonology, you might have better luck over on that shelf.” He points over to the other bookcase across the room. Oh, well that makes more sense. One shelf dedicated to the witch stuff, another to the human stuff.

I make my way over to the other shelf. “How did you get all of these books?”

“Accumulated them over the years. There’s only a few I kept from my time at the Academy, but the rest…either passed down from family or from what I collected on my own.” They’re all titles I’m not familiar with, a majority either in Latin or Spanish. But there’s a couple I recognize that also sit on Zelda and Hilda’s bookshelves back at the Mortuary. My eyes go to one book on demonology, and, just for curiosity’s sake, I pull it out. It’s all dusty when I go to open it, I have to wipe off some with my free hand. Then, at the corner of the title page, lies a name. This book belonged to this mysterious Jaime Luna person as well.

By this time, Hiram comes to my side, bearing a letter opener in his hands. It takes me a good, solid second to register what’s happening before I respond with, “Oh, thanks.” I rest this demon book on top of Alice, allowing me the free hand to grab for the opener. This switch prompts Hiram to grab for the books so that I have more space. It’s a gesture I don’t expect, but…..it’s sweet and thoughtful. Now, I finally run the opener through the top of the envelope, revealing Zelda’s words trapped in a cream-colored interior. I reach for the letter with the pinch of my finger tips and strip it out of the envelope…..

The content itself is smaller than what I pictured. I thought Zelda would send me more than just…..a sheet. Maybe two. But nothing’s written on the back side, or what’s visible to me. I glance up at Hiram, my heart racing, hoping for some sort of explanation. He’s just as much in confusion. He shrugs his shoulders, not sure of what to say. The anticipation is starting to wear on me, so I just go for it. I flip the letter open and take a minute to read what Zelda wanted to send to me.

It’s pointless. There’s nothing about Sabrina’s trial, or whether the Spellman Sisters dreadfully wait for their niece to return home under their care. All Zelda provides me is a basic update on how
life is in Greendale. How my bakery is still there without much activity. Nothing more, nothing less. I lean back against the wall, absorbing what I just read. How can Zelda not show any worry? How can she be so careless about her niece’s well-being? Sabrina’s witchcraft is at stake with the Church of Night, and yet she doesn’t touch on it whatsoever. I know my hunt for Hal has taken a recent priority of my time here in Riverdale, but I’ve at least made the effort to care about Sabrina. I’m trying……

“Well? Any updates on the trial?” Hiram joins my side, looking down at the letter. I could throw down the letter and scream. I could make this fireplace blaze up and toss Zelda’s heartless letter in there. But I’m frozen in my place. Not a single tear sheds, but I can feel my cheeks getting heavy. I curl the letter in my fingers, the metal opener resting in my palm.

“No.” I spit out like sour vinegar. If Harry Potter was a real story, and if those Howler letters were a real thing, I could send one to Zelda Spellman right now. Yet again, Greendale is not that far away. I could just drive back over and have that imaginary fight with that woman in my head a reality. I could go back…..but I can’t leave Riverdale just yet. I don’t want to. I can’t abandon Sabrina here, I can’t break my contract with Hiram and let Hal run loose. And…..I can’t leave FP without saying goodbye, not again. And especially not now that I’m friends with his wife, and his little girl has somehow wormed her way into my heart……

I thought coming back to Riverdale would make me more reclused from society. I thought it would make me realize that I should just stay in Greendale for the rest of my life. But being back here, bonding with people that I never thought I would ever become acquainted with….. There’s too much at stake now. And I won’t let Hal take back any reign over this little town.

I don’t realize my eyes had closed, that I’m holding onto a breath. I don’t realize that my fingernails have dug deep into my palm until Hiram places a hand on my shoulder. The air floods out of me, my nails release from their nasty grip on my flesh. I’m gasping for air, and….oh shit, the tips of my nails are tinted in blood. There’s four little red crescents on my palm, and they sting. I turn my palm quickly towards the wall, just so Hiram won’t see any more of my anxiety manifest. I push myself away from the wall and hold out the letter opener to him. “Typical Zelda, won’t say much.” I tell him, pretending like I didn’t just have a nasty fit of anxiety.

“Figures.” he scoffs, “She didn’t provide me with anything either when I spoke with her on the phone last week. She’s aware that I participate with the Council, so I’m just as much in shock as you.” He huffs and reclaims the metal rod from my hand. “But don’t let it get to you. If I’m being honest, Alice…..I think you’re doing a wonderful job watching over Sabrina. You care for that girl, and it shows.” A calmness runs through me. Hiram thinks I’m doing alright with her? Well, I’m glad someone has paid attention to my efforts. I sigh in relief, hoping I don’t break down crying in front of him. I’ve already cried way too much in front of Hiram, I don’t need to give him another water works show. I don’t need to demand more sympathy from him. So I just mutter a “thanks” and allow the corners of my mouth to raise. He’s right, I shouldn’t have to worry about what’s going on in Greendale. My priority is to look after Sabrina in Riverdale. And I need to do everything in my power to keep Hal from finding her and making her another agent in his chaos.

XXXXXXXXX

We wind up spending all day with the Lodges. Sabrina headed out with Veronica to go Christmas shopping in town while Hiram and I remained in Pembrooke to do more research. I told him about my disappointing scavenge in the town library regarding the Reaper, which he admitted did not
come off as a surprise to him. “Either the town’s done a good job at hiding its dark history, or no books have been made to cover the subject.” he expressed with a sigh. Luckily, he’s got enough material of his own for us to dive into what could really be Hal’s true nature. If he isn’t your average familiar, he has to be something along the lines of a demon. So that’s where Hiram and I began to dig through every demonology book he owned.

Once we scratched the surface, we decided to go back and break down Hal’s kills when he was with me. Hiram pulled out a whiteboard (he has it primarily for his own business, but he wasn’t currently utilizing it, so it helps to have a visual) and began to map out a timeline. We started from when I released Hal on Halloween back in ’92, then we mark out the attacks, the kills - Hiram, some Bulldog I don’t remember all too well, then Darryl Doiley, another random classmate who irritated me, then Hermione, then Penelope. It all happened within a span of 5 to 6 weeks, and I left Riverdale in mid December. It’s been about a week since Hal’s release, so now it’s all a matter of how long it will take for his next attack….if he really did start his comeback with Chuck Clayton.

By the time Hiram and I finish outlining a timeline, it’s around 9 pm. We haven’t eaten since breakfast this morning, and we have no clue if the girls fed themselves during their trip to town. We wind up ordering takeout from some Chinese venue downtown, and we both end up scarfing it down unapologetically. If I’m being honest, it’s so late now and I’m way too exhausted to drive back to the trailer at this hour. I hate acting irresponsible like this, but I’d rather drive back when I’m more awake and in the mood. I tell Hiram this, and I ask if he can arrange a lift back to the trailer for me and Sabrina.

“Why don’t you two just stay here for the night?” he offers out of the blue. “That way the girls can spend more time together, and we can make more progress on our work.”

“Are you sure?” I ask. I mean, I do appreciate the offer, but I feel I’ve already overstayed my welcome. Besides, I’m not sure if Sabrina’s new feline friend will make out okay by itself for so long.

Hiram nods at me. “Please, you and Sabrina are more than welcome here anytime you wish.”

“Okay. Do you want me to take any sheets or blankets so I can makeshift a bed on the couch?” Hiram shoots me a baffled expression. I don’t really see it as a huge deal, so I make it clear. “It’s not my first time couch surfing, Hiram. I’ll be alright.”

“Alice, no. Take my bed for the night.” he insists. “I’ll end up crashing out on one of these loveseats anyway, so my bedroom is all yours. Mi casa es tu casa.” I don’t know what to say.

Hiram was never the type of person to allow classmates, or even strangers, to spend the night at his place. I don’t think he even let another female share the bed with him until he married Hermione. Yet again, Hiram and I are no longer the same people we were in high school. I’m still not sold a hundred percent on the idea of spending the night here at Pembrooke, only for the fear of invading anymore of the Lodges’ privacy. Hiram must have read my expression, or my mind, because he adds in, “I even got a bathtub if you want to use it tonight.”

Hang on - a bathtub? To my full disposal? Fuck it, I’m sold. “Okay, you win. I’ll stay the night.” I tell him as I get up from my spot on the floor. I smooth down my jeans and shake my legs, they’re all asleep from sitting down for too damn long. He rises as well, picking up our myriad of notes and books. I sigh, “I’m gonna go tell the girls about our plans, then I will definitely hit you up on that bath.”

“Of course.” he beams at me. “I’ll have Veronica grab some sleepwear for you. There should be towels and a robe already in the bathroom. If not, let me know.” I thank him with a smile, then I head out of the study at last. Don’t get me wrong, the study is so cozy, but I need a change of
scenery after a full day of research how to hunt down a former familiar that may or may not be a
demon. I make my way over to Veronica’s room and lightly tap on the door. It squeaks a little as I
open it.

I find both girls lying down on Veronica’s bed watching some 80s horror flick. From what I can
hear, it sounds like *The Evil Dead*. The girls pause the movie so I can have their undivided
attention. “Sabrina, would you be alright staying here for the night?”

“Really?” Sabrina perks up. Veronica is just as keen.

I turn to the other girl. “Your father offered his hospitality, and I wanted to make sure it was
acceptable for you.”

“Of course! ‘Brina and I were planning on having a cult classic movie marathon anyway!” Well,
good. They both seem to be okay with this decision. Only one concern lingers in my head, though.

“Are you okay with leaving Salem all alone back at the trailer?”

“He’ll be alright.” Sabrina shifts around on the bed. “We actually stopped by the trailer earlier to
check in on him. If needed, I can have Jughead pay a visit in the morning.”

“Okay, sweetie. I’ll be in the other room if you girls need anything later.” I leave the two girls to
finish their movie as I make my way into Hiram’s bedroom. It’s so clean, just like the rest of this
place. Although, there is a little bit of messiness, like his study - some books are on top of the bed.
It smells like cologne in here, but it’s not so poignant. It’s quite nice and subtle. I take another
minute or two to examine his bedroom, it’s…..it’s actually pretty similar to my own back in
Greendale. Some clothes in a hamper in the corner, books on the bed, curtains drawn shut. Another
minute passes, and there’s a knock on the door. Veronica shows up to bring some sleepwear for
me. I don’t know whether this belonged to Hermione at one point, or if the clothes are purely
Veronica’s…..either way, it feels wrong. But I don’t want to appear rude, so I just take the clothes
and thank her. When she leaves, I finally make my way into the bathroom.

I’m stunned. It’s so clean and immaculate, and….oh, that tub is calling my name. With bath salts
and everything. I don’t think I’ve have a real chance to take a bath since Sabrina’s birthday, so I’m
taking full advantage of this moment. I place the sleepwear on the counter of the sink, then I grab
for a towel on the rack. I get the water running and throw a scoop of salts in, the water fizzes
immediately. While the water fills the tub, I finally peel off my clothes, letting my skin breathe at
last. The warm water is a comfort to my cool skin, it greets me like an old friend. I could fall asleep
right now, it’s so soothing. All that worry that has accumulated since coming back to this town
melts away in this tub. The aroma of the salts kisses my skin. My eyes flutter shut. All is peaceful
and quiet.

A baby cries in the distance. My eyes open instantly at the piercing noise. It’s so faint, yet it’s
heightened in my ears. Do the Lodges have neighbors with an infant? I can’t tell which direction
the noise is coming from, it’s starting to freak me out a little. A minute later, the crying stops. I’m
at peace again. Probably just hearing things. Another minute or two passes….nothing.

The crying starts again, louder this time. I keep my eyes shut to ignore it. This will all pass. Just
relax, Alice. It gets louder, and louder. The crying morphs from a baby’s screams into….into a
young girl’s scream.

**ALI HELP ME**

My eyes fly open, my heart races. My hands grip the rim of the tub as I look around frantically.
“Sabrina?” I call out. No response. “SABRINA?” The silence is eerie. I jump out of the tub and throw on the nightgown in a hurry, the fabric sticking to my wet skin. What is happening to Sabrina? Did Veronica…..or Hiram….. No, they wouldn’t do anything to hurt her, but something else? Somebody else?

“SABRINA!” I rush out of Hiram’s bathroom to enter a room of pitch black nothing. Well, it’s not entirely pitch black. The world outside this window is flashing orange and red, like I just walked into a hotel room in Hell. The room layout is similar to Hiram’s, but it’s dirtier. More ransacked. What happened here? Is….is this still Hiram’s room? Am I still in Pembrooke? The baby crying echoes in the distance. I’m going insane. I turn to a shut door, the crying sounds like it’s coming from there. Sabrina’s voice calls out for me again. More sorrowful. More in pain. I have to get to her. Wherever I am, I need to find a way out. I head for that door.

“You’re not going to find her there, Miss.” someone unfamiliar speaks from behind me. I freeze, swallowing a lump in my throat. A trickle of sweat runs down my hairline, I don’t know if it’s from my growing fear or from this intense heat. I twist my head, unsure of who’s in this strange room with me, and….. Behind me is a teenage boy, the same one I saw in that body bag ripped to shreds. His body’s in tact, yet there’s blood all over him.

I face this stranger fully. “You’re Chuck Clayton.” This boy, his face still creepily neutral, wanders over to me slowly. I want to back away, to run out the door behind me, but I can’t move. My feet are glued to this floor. The boy reaches for my hand, his grip is gentle. He tilts his head back towards where I just entered.

“There’s something I need to show you.” The door opens, but it no longer leads into the bathroom. I don’t know what now lies beyond that threshold, and I don’t know if Chuck is leading me to my death, but I have no other choice but to allow him to lead me through. The baby cries and Sabrina’s screams are replaced by voices chanting in Latin. The boy leads me down a hallway, the doors shaking while bolted shut. The walls above me glow from some fire or flickering lights in the distance. The chanting grows louder the more we move down this hallway. Am I walking into the nightmare scene from *Rosemary’s Baby*? Am I getting lead to a freaky basement where old witches will watch me get defiled by Satan? It’s a gross thought, but I have to play out the worse case scenarios in my head here.

Chuck leads me down a staircase, the burning light grows brighter. We pass by a kitchen, where a bunch of young girls in Vixens uniforms stare at us with blank faces. Their eyes follow us when we walk by them, and I’m creeped out. The chanting increases as Chuck guides me through the living room, out to….a pool. The same pool I saw in that vision earlier this week. Chuck stops at the doorway, gesturing for me to go through. I step out, and what I find…..it freaks me out.

There’s people around the pool wearing all white. Some faces are from the Witches Council, ones I saw the night of Sabrina’s birthday when they chased her back to the Mortuary. Neither Hiram nor Veronica are present, and I can’t find Sabrina in this crowd. But Father Blackwood is there, and so are those Weird Sisters. They all stare out into the pool with blank faces, chanting their Latin in a monotone manner. I can hear that baby cry once more, and it’s louder than ever, even louder over the Latin. My eyes dart to the middle of this crowd, and…..I can’t believe what I see. Standing front in center, in a small semi circle, is Zelda and Hilda, with Ambrose between them. The Spellman Sisters have gold fixated onto their white outfits, each dawning a crown of bones, and Ambrose is dressed in a gold tunic with a gold band around his head. I’ve never been to a real Church of Night meeting, but this….this seems like cult activity. The crying pierces the scene, then I finally see it - someone passes a young baby towards the Spellmans. They all seem so unfazed with this baby in their arms. I move closer to get a better look, but there’s water in between me and them, and I’m trapped. Why is this infant here? And where is Sabrina? The infant screams, and
Zelda, Hilda, and Ambrose lift the baby into the air. I want to use my magic to save this child from whatever is about to happen. I’m about to prepare a spell when it finally hits me. This baby’s aura matches an aura I know. One I’m trying to protect.

“Sabrina?”

It happens so fast. The moment I say her name, the chanting stops. The Spellmans release the infant.

“NO!”

I make a run for it, I don’t care if I wind up in this damn pool, I have to catch this infant version of Sabrina. I won’t let her die---

But she doesn’t fall into the pool. She doesn’t even scream. Instead, she starts floating in mid air, giggling. My mouth hangs, I’m at the edge of this pool deck, on the verge of falling in. The crowd of witches vanishes around me, the Spellmans included. The scene vanishes too, I’m no longer at this pool, I’m in the woods. And this baby Sabrina is not floating, someone is cradling her. Someone that I feared would find her.

He looks at me with the infant in his arms, grimacing. His blue eyes glow, practically burning into my skull. “You’re too late, Alice.” Hal laughs. “She’s under my care now. You might as well just join the others.” His smile fades, his eyes go from blue to….something more sinister.

He lunges out at me, I have to step back. Wrong move, because I fall back into some body of water. It’s pitch-black with traces of red. A figure shoots out a me in between the flashes, the way I saw Chuck getting attacked in…. Oh no. So what I saw…. It really was….

Something grabs me. I turn and find Chuck’s corpse floating towards me. It says, “Go back, or he’ll get you too. This isn’t the place to die.”

I come out of the water screaming. My arms coil around my body, I’m shivering and I can’t suppress my fear. It takes a second for me to realize that I’m back in Hiram’s bathroom, in his tub. I never left this bathroom, but what I just experienced….

I climb out of the tub, almost slipping on the tile. My knees hit the floor and I have to reach for the towel above me. “HIRAM!” I scream, grabbing a hold of the towel at last. I bring it to cover my front as I wipe my face with my hand. There’s traces of blood across my fingers, I finally notice the red tints in my eyes. Was I crying blood? “HIRAM!” I try to move towards the door, but I almost slip again. I have to grip onto the counter to keep myself from falling all the way down.

“ALICE?” Hiram bolts into the bathroom. He’s in shock when he sees my state. He hesitates for a second before he grabs another towel off the rack, racing over to wrap it around my shoulders. I shake as he secures this second towel around me. He takes a hold of my face. “What happened, Alice? Talk to me!”

I coughed out some water, gasping for breath. Then I spit out, “We were right. Hal killed Chuck Clayton.”

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*End of Chapter Seven*
Chapter End Notes

Whew! What a trip! So will Alice and Hiram be able to keep up with Hal's game? How will Sabrina handle "Salem"? Hmm....

Anyways, thank you all so much for the support this past year! I should have a new chapter ready within the next week or two. Until then, Happy New Year!

End Notes

HELLO!

It's here! The epic crossover is here! I'm so excited to start this journey with yal, and I hope you're just as invested as I am!

Regarding the posting of chapters, I might have to space it out due to schoolwork and the amount I still have to write for this story. So, anticipate probably a week or two in between each chapter. But never fear, it will get done!

Thank you all, and Enjoy! :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!