To see (you) with eyes unclouded

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To see (you) with eyes unclouded

by Tiger with spots

Summary

"My parents banned me from watching most cartoons" Kate's brow furrowed, "except for veggie tales" she forfeited. Victoria dropped her pen, utterly baffled.

Because, really, how did she, Victoria Chase (fabulous famous photographer in the making) end up with Kate Marsh (genuine bible thumper and bunny lover) talking about Veggie Tales (of all things) in the first place?

OR IN SHORT

Max Caulfield saves Chloe Price and Arcadia Bay, but leaves collateral damage in the shape of two broken girls; Victoria Chase and Kate Marsh. Somehow, they both mutually help each other grow past their own individual traumas.
OR…

Victoria Chase becomes friends with Kate Marsh and it completely wrecks her gay heart.

Notes

Somehow, in some lucky universe Max Caulfield managed to save both Chloe Price and Arcadia Bay. However, her success doesn't mean everyone's happiness. The events leading up to the storm still happen; the video, the dark room, Kate on the roof, Rachel's body, the end of the world party... However, Max and Chloe managed to get David Madsen to arrest Mark Jefferson and Nathan Prescott on that Friday night. A storm happened, but not the storm.

However, rather than concentrate on our relieved and happy pirates who are absolutely elated at saving the day; we'll instead concentrate on a couple of unhappy and anxious cinnamon rolls——

Victoria Chase and Kate Marsh. Who, unfortunately have no idea how close they were to the apocalypse and are instead left in a universe where, yes, they are alive, but are emotionally wounded.

If Kate Marsh could get Victoria Chase to see the light, how? If Victoria can rebuild what she tore down in Kate, how?

Together it's perfection meets a mother fucking typhoon.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Prologue

“All at once, everything is different, now that I see you.” – Finn & Rapunzel (Tangled)

"My parents banned me from watching most cartoons” Kate admitted with scary ease, as if she had no idea how atrocious that situation was to the rest of Americans. For a moment Kate’s brow furrowed as she thought, "except for veggie tales" she forfeited. Victoria dropped her pen, utterly baffled.

"Wait, the talking vegetables? How did that make it past the Holy Trinity?" she asked. It was late October, nearing Halloween where both girls were in Victoria’s room, on her couch, trying to do chemistry homework together that really wasn’t going anywhere at the moment. Kate looked at Victoria pointedly,

"Veggie Tales is a Christian cartoon." Kate answered simply. The dog goes woof. The cat goes meow. The cow goes moo. Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber are fundamental Christians. Kate and Victoria both maintained eye contact. Where Kate's stare was of simple emotion, Victoria's eyes had widened quite a bit, staring at the other girl as if she were insane. Kate took a breath and elaborated, "Veggie tales is made by a couple of Christian friends that met in Bible College. Most of the episodes retell biblical stories and convey Christian morals. Also, at the end of every episode, when the veggies wave at you good bye, they originally said 'Remember kids, God made you special and He loves you very much!' however when it aired on NBC, they edited to simply say 'good bye.' That made my mother very upset." Kate's eyes squinted a bit when she mentioned her mother.

Victoria blinked a couple of times and for one of the few moments in her life, genuinely didn’t know what to say. First, how did she miss that Veggie Tales was a Christian Cartoon? Was that why her mother scoffed and turned it off every time she did try to watch it as a child? Second, how did she, fabulous famous photographer in the making, end up with Kate Marsh, genuine bible thumper and bunny lover, talking about Veggie Tales (of all fucking things) in the first place?

Pause and Rewind, people.

It was definitely back in the beginning of October... AKA the start of ‘The week from Hell.’ The Party, the weird shit happening, Kate on the roof, more weird shit, her fucking awkward seduction fails, preparing the 'end of the world' party…the police telling her that they found out her name was next in the Dark Room.

No, fast forward, it had started on Thursday October 10th with the arrest of Nathan Prescott (her best friend who turned out to have even more serious mental health issues than she thought) and Mark - Mr. Jefferson (psycho that she both admired and lusted after who took advantage of said best friend and manipulated every single other person she ever met). Also the found body of a dead girl… someone who she had…hung out with several times and even though she was a massive, massive attention whore, slut, bitch-who-owed-her-money…. Her death was actually devastating (not that Victoria Chase would ever, ever, ever admit this). The only light in the vortex of fuck was that the only girl that had ever come out of the Dark room and who had tried to commit suicide by jumping off the damn roof had made it out both events alive. Kate Marsh.

The craziest part was that Victoria felt personally responsible for every single event.

Had she been a better friend to Nathan, perhaps he would’ve told her what the Hell he was doing with Mark Jefferson. Perhaps she would’ve gotten the hint that he was in some serious shit and she would’ve tried to get him out of it. Had she not tried to ostracize and ignore Rachel Amber after
their….whatever the fuck it was, she’d maybe try to stop her from hanging out with Nathan, or get Nathan to stop hanging out with her if she’d known how screwed he was (why the Hell was he walking around with a gun in his pants?). Had she known what type of shady bastard Mark, Mr. Jefferson was, she could’ve prevented Nathan from falling in too deep with him. Had she just done that, she could’ve somehow saved innocent Kate Marsh from entering this entire fucking mess.

But no, Nathan had freaked her out and she let him do his own thing without disturbing him. She was blinded by what she wanted Mark Jefferson to be for her to see who he actually was. She fucked off Rachel Amber and left her to be fucked then she completely fucked over Kate Marsh.

And now, she was left with nothing. No best friend, no mentor, no (faux)lover. She deserved this. Victoria Chase deserved the shittiness. However, she could rationally dissect these events and actions in her brain. Know that whatever choices she made were wrong through and through…So then why did she do these things? Why? She was a privileged, educated WASP that should know better (be better.)

According to her therapist, her parents had (and still) put an incredible amount of pressure on her to be the perfect Chase prodigy. Since she had been rather neglected by the both of them for the majority of her childhood, she had learned how to put up a front, all bravado. In actuality her confidence was shot to shit. She had to overcompensate for everything and she had no idea why. She wanted to tear people down who were stronger than her because she didn't know how to get that internal strength. Her parents taught her entitlement not fortitude. The only person who truly understood how this stupidity affected her may have been broken, but at least he listened and didn’t judge her for being a rich bitch with issues. However, he was taken away that Thursday. Probably forever.

It made Victoria’s head and heart hurt in so many ways. Because, really, what was the reason for her sobbing her eyes out and vomiting everyday? Yeah, she lost her shitty best friend, her stupid crush was a psychopath, her old fling was dead and the girl she pushed to kill herself lived.

It still felt so, so, so damn shitty though.

The spiral of everything in the universe playing the most messed up prank on Arcadia Bay ever caused Victoria to spend Friday night and Saturday getting questioned by the police about everything that had happened. However, it was the only time that weekend that Victoria went outside as the rest of the time she locked herself in her room and sobbed for hours straight. Even in the moment she could agree that this was melodramatic and pathetic. Whatever. Could she just die now?

There was a knock on her door. “Go the fuck away!” she barked at the door, too distraught to care if who the fuck ever got their feelings hurt. A couple moments of silence passed before the voice on the other side of the door surprised her,

“Victoria, it’s Kate Marsh. I’d like to talk.”

Now, the only thing that could overpower the torrent of self-hatred was the haunting devastation of guilt. Part of Victoria wanted to hide and scratch her own eyeballs out. However, she remembered how she had already cried over this girl, how it had taken her several tries to write the stupid card without her hand shaking so hard and how she truly, honestly did want to see Kate smile again. If Kate Marsh wanted a talk, she would get one, self-hatred be damned.

“Come in.” she called out, her voice wobbly. She wiped her eyes and nose, momentarily aghast as the amount of snot on her sweater sleeve, but the door opened and there stood the unassuming, the notorious, the one and only, Kate Marsh.
Too many thoughts, too many things all at once stood and stared at her. The epitome of all Victoria’s internal turmoil though held a tin box in her hands. At first Kate stood by the doorway, watching Victoria. No doubt taking in her slovenly appearance and raw eyes.

“You can, like, enter the void.” Victoria said, glum and not really giving a shit at the moment (and wasn’t really sure if she ever would again). Slowly, Kate approached her. She briefly toed away a couple of clumped up tissues before bravely taking a seat next to Victoria. Victoria, through her stinging eyelids eyed the tin in Kate’s lap.

Even though she spoke so softly, it felt so incredibly loud and clear when Kate said, “I heard that you liked cookies. I thought you could use some sweetness during this dark time.”

Victoria looked away as she blinked slowly a couple of times, thinking. Cookies were stupid and they made you fat. Cookies won’t bring my best friend back, it won’t bring Rachel Amber back either. Cookies can’t change the fact that we have all been fucked over by a psychopath. Cookies don’t take away the trauma of watching you nearly jump off a roof.

But most importantly why the Fuck was Kate Marsh making her cookies? Victoria was the one who ruined her life, not the other way around! Kate Marsh survived being a victim and no doubt was going through trauma of her own-- What was wrong with this girl?!? Victoria had already felt so exhausted and a bit violated at all the detectives investigating her and asking more and more personal questions. She couldn’t even imagine how Kate, a previous victim, had felt in that hard chair in that tiny, stuffy room as they probed her for more and more and more information.

However, Miss Chase, current Princess of tears, fears and self-loathing only mutely stared at the tin, back at Kate, back at the tin, back at Kate.

Kate lifted the present off her lap and towards Victoria, “They’re not fancy but – I believe emotions do transfer into creations, whether it be paintings, photography or food. These were made with love and care – I think you may need those right now.“ Kate answered eloquently. After another moment of bleary staring, Victoria took the box and put it on her own lap. Victoria stared at the envelope on top of the gift. Victoria Chase. Written in neat but not beautiful handwriting. It was cute though, unique lettering and spacing. There was a cat near the corner wearing a pearl necklace. “It’s…been a really hard October for everyone. Especially you. I know you are very close to…Nathan” There’s an obvious pause of discomfort at Nathan’s name and Kate doesn’t even mention Victoria’s now extremely awkward lady boner for Mr. Jefferson, the psycho, but Kate bounced back from that and continued as assured as ever, “however, you don’t have to be alone during this. There are many people here who would help you if you were to reach out. I may not be Nathan, but I’m here to say that I will be there for you if you want me to.”

Victoria wanted to be gracious. To quietly say thank you and let Kate leave the room. Or, better yet if Kate would turn and throw her arms around Victoria’s shoulders and hold her tight because the world just came apart in less than 48 hours and right now Victoria believed that no amount of time or space could help her get over this. But no, instead the words, “you’re nothing like Nathan.” Hissed out of her mouth. Accusatory. Defensive. Aggressive. 180 degrees and running away from gracious, grateful and vulnerable. Old defense mechanisms die hard, as Victoria would learn over the many future years to come.

Kate didn’t even flinch, but there was a long moment where Victoria’s sentence hung in the air, like acrid smoke in a sealed room. When Victoria finally gained the courage to look up at Kate from
beneath her bangs, she was met with a hard gaze of hazel peering at her. “I will never replace Nathan Prescott. However, you probably need a friend who is nothing like him right now, whether you like it or not.” Kate answered, her voice conveying both empathy and a steely realism that made Victoria sink even further into the sofa she sat on.

And with that Kate exited. Thirty seconds after Kate shut the door behind her Victoria looked around, wondering if all of that just happened or if she hallucinated it all. She hadn’t left the room in a few days and hadn’t exactly been eating much, so maybe she just imagined it all. However, the tin box in her hands caught a glint of sunlight, causing it to be the sole spotlight in the dark room. After a moment of staring at the damn thing, she took the card off the top and opened the envelope. It’s self-made, the brushstrokes and ink evidence of the careful thought and care behind the deliberate pictures and writing.

The scene on the card is simple (a quote comes to Victoria’s mind, something about simplicity being perfection). There’s two characters on either side of the card. A rabbit on the left, and a cat on the right. The rabbit held one end of a cord-telephone. Two cups attached with a piece of string. At the other end of the string, the cat looked at the cup on the ground, it’s expression contemplative as if debating whether or not to pick it up.

A simple sentence:

Whenever you’re ready, I am here.

It took Victoria rereading that sentence several times to fully process what it said. Then, she took out a simple chocolate chip cookie and took a huge bite. Fuck it all. Victoria chewed for several seconds. Bursts of sweetness and other flavors flooded her taste buds. Something small plopped onto one of the cookies in the tin. Only then did she realize that tears had welled up in her eyes as the sugar dissolved on her tongue and she feels the chunks of chocolate thicken in her mouth.

There is love. There is care. It’s fucking delicious.

(Victoria Chase, even years in the future, will never admit that Kate Marsh made her cookies so good that she cried.)

When was the last time someone took the time to give her some love and care? Taylor was a good friend, however she had the habit of just going along and placating Victoria rather than being her own person and contributing something unique to Victoria’s life. She also had enough of her own shit to deal with and the constant panic attacks didn’t add love, it just added more anxiety. Courtney, even though sweet, acted like a lackey so Victoria perceived her as such. The last person had been Nathan, but near the end his psychosis pushed her out and only let her in for the shallowness of drugs and partying. Rachel just took everything Victoria had and ran away (That was Rachel’s way with everyone, to be fair). Her parents demanded that Victoria take the time and care to better herself for them, if she truly wanted to show her love. Mark Jefferson never cared at all.

After she managed to swallow the first mouthful and took a second bite Victoria felt with each chew her thoughts began to clearly churn and formulate for the first time in a week. It’s her first decision she’s made since the tidal wave of humiliation, devastation and confusion fell upon her, but it felt good to feel the swell of determination in her chest.

She will accept this offer and become Kate Marsh’s friend. She’ll be the best fucking friend Kate never had. Victoria ate half the box that night and felt really ill and bloated but again, she deserved the suffering so she didn’t complain.

When classes started again that Monday, Victoria Chase felt her head hurt as she ran smack dab into another problem; how would she do this? How could she do this? Victoria Chase had fearlessly
submitted her work to the best galleries, had crashed parties, talked to anyone worth talking to, took no bullshit, (tried to) seduce powerful people (and failed), ripped anyone that crossed her path a new one and had generally did a good job seeming like she didn’t give a fuck.

However, trying to remove all hostility and pretense to approach Kate Marsh was the scariest thing she had ever had to do in her entire life. Every time she tried her throat squeezed and her stomach floated, ready to empty itself.

In the morning, Victoria tried to grab Kate when she exited the door. As soon as Victoria exited her door and saw Kate locking her door, she swiftly spun on her heel and fled back into her room.

Chickened out.

During homeroom she tried to pass her a note, old-school style…She crumbled up that shit. By the time she collected four tiny paper balls she nearly ate them in annoyance.

Chicken.

During lunch she tried to sneak away from her friends and snatch Kate. But she saw her laughing with Max, Stella, Brooke and Warren. Kate’s hands on Max’s arm. The stupid freckled dork was grinning ear to ear. Victoria made a hard left and made a point to talk to Josh if he had a new connect for pot, seeing as Frank was bouncing for a while. Something about needing clarity or some bullshit.

Chicken.

She walked to the bathroom and while she dicked around on her phone, from the crack between the door and the stall she saw Kate come in. She stayed absolutely still and made no noise until the other girl left.

KFC called, they wanted their giant Chicken back.

During her free period she smoked outside by that hidden alcove on the side of the rec center (dubbed the smoker's lair) and saw Kate walking towards the parking lot. She literally followed her, always staying fifty feet behind her. There, Kate waited ten minutes before a car, some fellow church goer, first pulled up to greet her, then they made small talk, then the driver parked, then got out, offered a bag (rabbit food and pet supplies), where she tried to politely pay him, and he stubbornly refused, then he offered to carry it for her back to her dorm, where she politely tried to refuse again, they gently go back and forth where she agrees he'll take it to the front of the dormitory. Then both slowly walk away and out of sight. Of course, during that entire exchange Victoria had just stared and didn't realize that she hadn't moved until her finger tips burned. Her cigarette had burned straight through the butt to her skin.

When she threw the offensive cigarette down with frustration she felt the eyes on her. She looked over and saw a girl...some lackey newcomer of the Vortex Club - Sarah, staring at her. Victoria froze, wondering how long that girl had been watching her for.

Sarah tilted her head, curious and a touch concerned, "Are you Ok?" she asked.

" Who are you? Juliet Watson? Wannabe cunty reporter? Go Fuck Off, TMZ." Victoria snapped as she stomped off, embarrassed beyond all belief.

Bwauk Bwauk Bwauk BWUKAH!

It was hopeless. She couldn’t even look at Kate Marsh. Not because they were from different groups and different castes of the social hierarchy. But because…there was so much history between them.
Was this how Germans felt like trying to become friends with Jews after WWII? I mean, it’s one thing to forgive your bully. It’s another to forgive them for basically ruining your life and giving you fuel to kill yourself. It’s next level shit to let them into your life.

All day Victoria fretted and fretted and fretted. Even though not prone to panic attacks or revealing her nervousness, Victoria had an uncanny way of keeping in all her insecurities. It was a trait that ran in the Chase's blood; iron clad illusions over their weaknesses. The only tells that revealed her anxiety was her constant need to get outside when she could and her need to smoke so often. Indulging in vices also ran in the Chase's blood. However, running around in the great outdoors or inhaling her trusty pack of Parliaments weren't going to help her with connecting to Kate Marsh. Victoria had no clue what to do. Did she just text her (wait, who had her number? Did she have to ask her for that? What would she think?)? Send her private social media messages (but then, what to say? Hay girlie thx for cookies lets be friends? Forgive forget right? xoxo) Do the tea parties like she did with Caulfield? Ok, but let’s be honest; those ‘tea parties’ were really, really gay (and this was coming from a proudly out bisexual woman). Like, she saw them once or twice hanging around somewhere on campus with two mugs and an electric tea-kettle in mid September. They just sat really close to one another and pretty much talked in low voices – pretty close to canoodling. She knew that Caulfield was a tiny queer that was currently hooking up with the Price punk. That came out of damn nowhere, but who cares? (It did make her wonder…no, Marsh was straight as an arrow…)

In conclusion, Hell no. The Chase’s did not do tea parties. They did wine tastings, gallery openings and other classy shit. Not that she could get Kate to any wine tastings or anything involving alcohol ever again, which was completely understandable. In a poor attempt to keep herself from obsessing about Kate Marsh, Victoria turned to another obsession; photography. So she simply paid attention to the lecture.

A new professor, Ms. Washington was her name. Not quite as big as Jefferson but her resume was impressive in different ways. Whereas Jefferson managed to be both a fashion photographer and had gallery openings, Ms. Washington was a big commercial photographer that did some very creative stuff. She had won a few awards over her career – however, she hadn’t any personal gallery openings. But she had a good eye and a very good sense of creativity and how an image should evoke an emotion or a question that dwelled. She may have not been as charming as Mr. Jefferson, but she commanded a presence.

“Today I want you to grab a partner, for the next week we’ll be doing a team project.” Immediately Victoria felt fingers grasp her arm and she let out a small smile; her and Tay Tay would slay. Before Victoria could brainstorm what the two of them could do Ms. Washington continued, “However, and I’m going to go by the honor system on this one since I haven’t been here long enough to see who hangs out with who. I want you to pick the last person you would ever work with. Someone in this room you don’t know and in fact don’t even care to know.” She paced as she talked, her natural afro bouncing as she stepped, “once you build up your career and contacts you’ll have a good network of who you can depend and work on. But it’s never guaranteed and you’ll always have to start with working with strangers. Also I’m a firm believer that getting shoved out of your comfort zone always pushes you as an artist. The best art and work comes not when you’re placated and cozy…but when you’re hungry, got something to prove and are pissed off as all Hell.” There’s a chuckle around the room and Ms. Washington smiled. Victoria glanced across the room at the slightly slouched form of Kate. The cross that dangled off Kate’s neck caught the afternoon sun and glittered. The ‘aha moment' injected her with a shot of adrenaline. This was her chance! This was her only chance! The project was to put together a portfolio of ten pictures that could go together, theoretically creating a pitch package that would be sent to galleries and the such. It would be delivered in two formats, both digital and hard copy within a binder. The deadline was hard the next upcoming Monday morning. If she didn’t see both formats on her desk and in her inbox by 10am Monday morning, they would get...
an automatic fail. Victoria looked around the room, seeing if anyone else was eyeing Kate... *Fucking Hayden! Don't you fucking dare, I swear to fucking God I will fucking murder you* Victoria thought with a vicious fury. She felt her muscles tense, as if she were on the starting line of a sprint. Hayden was getting destroyed.

“Remember the theme: Contrasts. Take from it as you will.” The Professor finished with finality, “now go.” The internal starting gun fired and Victoria felt her thighs immediately spring up her body to where she was the first person to stand up. Victoria saw herself get off her desk and glide across the room quickly, looking at nothing else, no distractions, nothing to stop her. She literally stepped right in front of Hayden, causing him to stumble over her heel (play to win, fucker.) When she arrived at Kate’s back, tunnel vision blacked out everyone else staring at the two of them.

“Kate.” She heard herself say; the trademark nonchalant confidence absent from her voice. Instead, Victoria heard a strange, rasp coming from her throat as she uttered Kate’s name.

The small girl looked up at her, “Victoria.” Kate acknowledged. There’s a moment where Victoria let Kate’s hazel eyes hold contact with her own blue ones. She let that gaze enter and Victoria forced herself to witness Kate as she was in that moment; calm and curious. The small girl felt stronger and more centered than Victoria felt in the best of times. An internal part of Victoria was peeved that Kate could be so cool while her own heart hammered, body hot with nervous heat.

“We’re doing this?” Victoria said with a confidence that almost made it a statement, the only thing that gave away that she needed the other girl’s affirmation was the gentle lilt of her voice at the end of the sentence. A moment. An eternal moment where everything floated, waiting for the gravity of Kate Marsh’s next decision. Then Kate nodded.

“Yes.” She uttered. The entire world fell back into place. The rush of determination that emanated from Kate’s pupils steadied Victoria’s feet to reality. This quiet agreement between the two of them felt solid and heavy in weight.

“Cool.” Victoria answered. She quickly scribbled her number on Kate’s notebook, text her back so she knew Kate’s number, ok? Ok. Victoria’s tunnel vision didn’t defuse until Taylor shook her shoulder,

“I’m partnered with hipsterfield. I’m sure our project will just be selfies.” Taylor whispered, trying to lighten the mood. Leave it to Taylor to try and brush over the obvious question on everyone’s mind; Why the Hell did Victoria ask Kate to be her partner and why the Hell did Kate agree?
The tragedy of the Bathroom Photograph

Chapter Notes

No one said that it was going to be easy. But then again, Kate and Victoria are used to that already.

Or.

Just because you both say you want things to be different doesn’t mean that things will come as simple as that.

But.

You both got to try.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Love at first sight doesn’t exist. Love takes time and love takes work.” – Garnet (Steven Universe)

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Several hours after that fateful photography class later, alone with Kate in her room Victoria prayed that she would die.

Oh this is awkward.

This was way worse than Victoria thought it was going to be.

Both of them were in her room unable to hold a straight conversation about anything without it feeling as though they were tightening nooses around their necks. They both sort of chuffed out noncommittal blasé ideas and tried to mask their sighs of exasperation. Victoria was keenly aware of Kate stealing glances at the door.

Oh Fucking God, why?

Grabbing at any lifelines to avoid the terrible tension, Victoria opened up her Instagram to flip through who gave her likes, the updates from those she followed. Truly mindless shit really. But Kate looked over and asked about it, curious. Victoria showed her, internally glad for the distraction away from their ratchet photography project. Kate flipped through her fashion and style posts. Her eyes drifted up to the 200+ Instagram followers.

“Wow. That’s a lot” Kate said, impressed.

Victoria shrugged, “it’s nothing.” She said, truly believing it. Now, talk to her when she had 3 million followers. She would get there.

“Do you have an Instagram?” Victoria forced herself to politely ask

“Yes, I do.” Kate answered in that way that closed the door on elaborating anymore than the simple fact.
Victoria drummed her fingers along her thigh, desperate to keep this distraction going, “So, what’s your thing?” Victoria asked.

“Huh?”

“Your thing. What’s the topic of your content? Your niche? Your thing? Ya know?”

“Oh, um. Well…I don’t post too much. But when I do, I mainly post pictures of Alice, sometimes doodles… and of the homeless people I meet at the soup kitchen.” Kate answered with a shrug. Victoria then demanded to see her phone and her posts. As she flipped through the selection she noticed: Pitifully bad avatar, pitifully few photos, pitifully lackluster, pitifully bad instagram.

“No wonder you don’t have any followers. You’re all over the place – you don’t have a clear topic. People don’t want to see that, they want to see you – see what you’re up to, what you’re about…” Victoria stopped.

Wait.

You know how epiphany’s hand grabs onto your soul, yanking you back so hard that it’s a slight out of body experience? Victoria felt everything around her slur as she took in everything about Kate Marsh.

Dowdy.

Unassuming

Imaginative

Empathetic

Righteous

Reserved

Suffering.

“You’re a complete contrast from me.” Victoria uttered, still in the stupor of epiphany.

“Yes. I’m pretty sure we were both very clear on this fact from day one” Kate replied, slowly, a little disturbed by Victoria’s complete shift in character.

“no, no, no…you’re nothing like me” Victoria stated, a surge of energy flowing through her veins faster than she could formulate her thoughts.

“I thought we were like two peas in a pod, but we have our differences at times.” Kate said, gently sarcastic with a tiny bit of mirth evident in her dry answer.

However, Victoria’s brain was on absolute fire as she began her tangent, “Think about it. You. I think the only people in your social group is the few friends you have, your church, your family and the homeless people you’ve fed who somehow have smartphones. When a teacher calls on you in class you can’t meet their eyes and it’s like pulling teeth out of your mouth. It’s maddening because even though you’re trying not to be there, you have a presence. People notice you whether or not they want to. It’s so annoying that you’re trying to fade into the background like some loser that I wish someone would smack sense into you.” Kate was about to retort something, having enough of Victoria’s apparent verbal abuse but Victoria steam rolled right over her, “And there’s me, a total
attention whore. I have like, 3,000 friends on my social media page and over two hundred followers on Instagram and I’m just pissed off that it’s not 500 yet. I make sure my fashion sense is impeccable and that everywhere I go everyone has to, and I mean has to know that I am number one. I go to class and purposefully answer the most difficult questions to show that I know my shit. Everyone has to know me even though I hate everyone. Why am I like this? Why are you like that? What are we trying to prove?"

“What are we trying to hide?” Kate asked rhetorically. Victoria felt herself involuntarily bristle. Kate was right about that being a note of intrigue between the two of them, but it bothered her immensely for some reason. Kate looked off somewhere, as if zoning out, “what happens when we collide.” She said softly, as if lost in thought.

“Exactly.” Victoria said, punctuated with a snap of her fingers. She was met back with quietness. It unnerved Victoria how Kate could just become so freaking quiet and how her face just became utterly unreadable.

It reminded her of her parents when they scrutinized her.

It reminded her of Rachel after Victoria would snap at her, angry at Rachel’s non-committal non-chalance.

It reminded her of Nathan at his most tortured moments.

It reminded her of Mr. Jefferson after Victoria would make a pass at him, an innuendo…

“It’s a good idea.” Kate conceded in a quiet voice.

“Glad you’re on board.” Victoria admitted.

Ok.

Now what?

Uh.

Thankfully, Kate saved the awkward from getting too much, “give me an evening.” Kate said, “I have some ideas.”

“Why don’t you just tell me now?” Victoria asked as she sort of (really) wanted to get this done as soon as possible so she could just not deal with so much awkward in her near future.

“I…I don’t believe that I’m as good at words as you are.” Kate spoke, “I’m going to show you some of my ideas. I’m going to draw them out so you can see what’s on my mind.” There was a brief back and forth about how Kate could show her a photography idea using drawings. Victoria, being impatient and always to the point versus Kate needing to till the fields a little and cultivate what was in her mind. It eventually came down to Kate asking Victoria to trust her and Victoria decided to concede (just this once though). Kate then asked for her top followed Instagrams, tumblrs and asked to borrow some of her magazines. ‘Inspiration’ and ‘research.’

24 hours later (Tuesday, 5 days left to finish this) both were back in Victoria’s room. Kate had the smudge of lack-of-sleep underneath her eyes. But she spread out over her desk several large sheets of paper, small rectangles measured out on each one; rows of 4 by 5.

“These are concepts. Concept thumbnails” Kate explained, a little disjointed due to lack of sleep, “once you started rolling with the ideas I began to see some of these images and had to draw them
out before I lost them.” Victoria looked over the concept sketches and felt her eyes widen and her fingers tense. “these are just meant to figure out the global ideas of what we’re doing – how to figure out where the main points are, main lighting, coloring, you know… Alfred Hitchcock would block out every frame and make sure the actual shooting part of the movie was the most boring part of the process” Kate tried to explain more.

There were dozens and dozens of concepts. The simple sketches, done in copic markers, gray scale…were powerful. The series of twenty pictures were blocked out well – the composition of the characters, the spots where light and shadow were clear and concise.

Fucking Hell. So this was what Kate did to get into Blackwell.

To be honest, Victoria (along with most photographers she knew) didn’t use so much pre-production but in this instance it was genius. Even though she was a believer that the production part of any project should be the most exciting part of any project, Kate’s way was the only method that could allow them to nail this project within the limited time frame. So Victoria took a breath and dove into this process by taking a pencil and marking off her favorites.

That simple action snowballed them into collaborating and working together, so close-knit the two of them were during the time that when Victoria absentmindedly stood up to turn on all the lights, she realized how late into the night it was. They had been figuring this out and debating and bouncing more ideas off each other for hours on end. Victoria had absolutely no idea how she didn’t notice the time disappear from her fingers.

It took them the next afternoon to finalize the details and how to unite all the pictures into a sequence. There were two characters. One that loved attention and the other that tried to hide. Now, Victoria had a perspective and vision. All artists had to know what they wanted to say and to convey. Victoria was used to getting her way. She was used to either out-smarting opponents or wearing them down. If anyone dared fight her she would win.

Kate Marsh surprised her on several fronts.

First, Kate would not be worn down so easily when she fundamentally disagreed with Victoria. This totally rattled the self-proclaimed photography protegee. She thought Kate would bow over, just let Victoria do her thing.

In short, Victoria was wrong.

Two, Kate didn't fight fire with fire. She didn't try to strong-arm Victoria and she certainly didn't use her teeth and nails like Victoria did. Kate was like bamboo. Even though she could bend and be shaken by a typhoon, she refused to break. Kate was the drop of water that dripped away on Victoria’s rock. You could scream and try to kick a river, but that didn't do shit and you just looked stupid.

“The lighting in this picture has to be harsher. It has to be dramatic – melodramatically so. It's too blase right now. It needs to be pushed” Victoria pointed out, as she paced around Kate.

Kate, sitting in her place looked up Victoria and calmly replied, “Exactly, but that’s what we’ve shown for her other three photos. Remember the theme is contrasts- so we’ve got to make that matter not just in the individual photos for the entire project as a whole. There will be one with striking shadows – but the scene and subject will have to be different. I’m not saying that each one shouldn’t be dramatic, but we’ve got to remember what each one is saying. Style is fantastic, but only when there’s a point. If the style isn’t the point then don’t use it.”
At this point Victoria felt tuckered out to where she could finally see Kate's point of view. Kate's gentle resistance finally breaking through Victoria's fiery wall of stubborness.

Victoria waved her hand up, waving the invisible white tissue, “Fine.” She conceded, “style is 99.7 percent of all situations, but whatever I get it.” Kate gave her a side smile,

“Allright, let’s go over what we’re trying to convey with each one.” Kate said, picking up the pages that were now the larger, blown up, more detailed drawings of each photo. Victoria leaned over Kate’s shoulder.

“The details here, they need to be green; not overtly so. It has to be really really dark. That way the focus will be drawn to her eyes.” Victoria stated. As she breathed in she was hit with the smell of Lavender and the scent of…Kate. Said artist turned her head slightly to respond,

“I agree, but there has to be some red then to sell it and I don’t want it to be obvious that we’re using complementary colors. Like Transformers – how the entire color grading is all blue and orange…but that’s all they did for almost every frame. Blue and orange. Blue and orange…” Kate rolled her eyes before finalizing her point, “it’s lazy.”

Victoria chuckled, “don’t worry. The primary light is here, yeah? I know a way to block off the red diffusion so it’ll just…” Victoria trailed a finger down the side of the characters face,

“We’ll have to disguise it.”

“Of course, we’ll use that – it’ll hide what we’re doing.”

Kate nodded slowly, taking the pencil and casting a shade there, “if you can do it, then I’m game.”

“Trust me, this is entry-level production. Whatever we want to do, I can recreate. Grew up around C-Stands, bounces and photography crews, remember?”

Kate doesn’t look at her when she immediately replies with a deadpan statement, “I forgot I was talking to a photographer, forgive me.”

Victoria waved her hand back to the huge CHASE SPACE advertisement, “Hello, that’s practically my birthright.”

Kate paused, and cocked up an eyebrow as she asked, “would you like me to bend the knee, your honor?”

Victoria huffed, “We are not amused.”

“I am.” Kate dryly retorted.

After a split moment both of them simultaneously giggled against each other. Victoria felt another sudden epiphany rip her out of her body and throw her high up by the ceiling, looking down. This was banter. They were joking with one another. You don’t just do that with anyone.

Victoria certainly didn’t. Even when she did her best to act charming and likable, there was no jokes and there was always a invisible wall of iron between her and the other. Nothing could breach that barrier without her consent.

Nothing except giggles.

Victoria noted that the painful air that surrounded them had disappeared out the window.
This was actually a lot of fun…

Victoria Chase, fashionista Princess of soon-to-be-fame was genuinely having fun with a nun. Everyone to the fallout shelters! Like, run, bitches!

As Victoria came back into her own body, she could feel the wayward strands of her mighty mop of hair against her neck and chin…They were so close that their bodies were touching. No, they were physically touching. Her chest pressed against Kate’s shoulder blade. Now again, you don’t just do that with anyone.

This was coming from a girl who would rather snort hot sauce than touch anyone she didn’t want to. (That was, like, one time.)

Victoria stood there for a few more moments to savor this new development, enjoying the warmth coming from the sitting girl’s back. She watched Kate continue to add shades of color to the concepts. Kate picked up a marker,

“That’s an ugly color, use that one.” Victoria interjected, pointing at another marker.

Kate momentarily paused, picking up the one Victoria wanted. She held it up as she stared back up at Victoria, no expression on her face. Victoria nodded and Kate uncapped it, “see? Beautiful.” Victoria commented. A minute later Kate stopped, looking up at Victoria again, who was still literally standing over her shoulder and peering at every movement she was doing.

“I take it you like the view?” Kate asked, her tone deadpan. Victoria couldn’t help but smirk at Kate, their eyes connecting as she jested,

“I do.”

It was Kate’s fault that Victoria didn’t feel like moving. Abstinence Abby smelled too nice. Maybe it was all that virgin blood…

It took another day and a half to lock-down what materials they could get for each one. During this time though, Victoria thought about the models that would be great for the shots. Of course they were going to use Victoria Chase, herself. However, for the other character…the contrast… who could work? Taylor and Courtney definitely wouldn’t do. No one from the Vortex club could work. They were shadows of Victoria, simply lesser versions of her. It wasn’t what was needed. They were going to have to look outside Victoria’s group of friends.

Caulfield? The little hipster certainly was the right type of contrast. Both a little confused and wistful, the look was good too. All brunette and freckles with skin that could tan in the sun versus Victoria’s fair, blemish free skin. Her plain-ass sweatshirt and dirty kicks along with the ragged bag was perfect too. However there wasn’t that sense of ominous dread about her whenever she was dragged into the limelight. She did avoid it because she wasn’t used to it. She lacked the…woundedness (was that a word?) – Max was stronger than she let on, it didn’t seem as though she had been ever (or would ever be) a victim. Those emotions would sell the project and Caulfield didn’t have it. However, she would reserve Max as a last-case scenario.

Perhaps Alyssa; the visual contrast was there. However, Alyssa was a more solid presence than others realized. There was a ‘whatever’ to her way of living (she had hideously dyed hair for fucks sake). She held the façade of nothing affecting her. It wasn’t the opposite direction of Victoria, it was another path entirely. Also, she just had a feeling that Alyssa would just look bored in all the photos.

Stella was close, however Stella wasn’t a true introvert. That girl hungered for attention just like the
rest of them. She saw how those eyes followed Mr. Jefferson. How that girl would lap up the Vortex Club’s heels. No, Stella wouldn’t work because she wasn’t a true contrast to Victoria – she was a wannabe.

In true Victoria-esque logic she would only have the best and nothing else. The best for this project was one Kathryn Beverly Marsh. However, after everything that had happened? That was going to be a hard sell. Victoria internally debated whether or not to even bring this up at all. Just ignore it. Just let it go. Yet at the end of the day Victoria’s internal demand for perfection won out and she braced herself while she had the discussion with Kate about her being the other model…

“Why does it have to be me?” Kate pleaded, her eyes going left and right and up and down. Like an animal in a cage closing in, “I can’t do this.”

“That is precisely why it needs to be you. There is no one else that can convey that.” Victoria explained, trying her damn hardest to be “gentle” but firm. Whatever the fuck that meant because it was her first time ever trying to do both.

Kate’s hands clutched at her own sweater sleeves, as if she were going to rip it off, “I’m kind of over photographers wanting to capture me, thank you very much” she said.

Victoria felt a violent twitch in her body as the gentleness fled from her, “Are you seriously going to let that fucktard stop you from ever having your photograph taken again?” Victoria ranted. “Look, let’s be clear here, you’re a very pretty girl, your picture should be taken. And what about when people want to see you or talk to you? Your books or whatever projects become huge and the media wants to contact you again. Yeah, again! Don’t think any of us forgot when the local news came to interview you about your meals on trucks…

“Meals on wheels”

“Whatever, and yeah, people want to talk and see your cute butt talking. The crazy thing is you’re actually out there doing good things for humanity and crap. Unlike the rest of us who’d rather just eat Cheetos and watch Netflix for all we care. You can’t just disappear, not in this day and age where everyone has a phone with a camera…”

“Oh, I’m well aware of that” Kate shot back, her tone like ice. Victoria fought the urge to wince again. God, if she could only go back in time and smack herself for being such a dumb ho.

Victoria decided just to address the elephant in the room, “Look, I get it, I’m a bitch – I’ve done a lot of shitty things. I’ve done a lot of shitty things to you.” She admitted

“Oh, I know.” Kate bitterly mumbled. Victoria wanted to tear her hair out and scream but restrained herself. Kate took a truck ton of her shit before and if Victoria couldn’t even handle the little bit of attitude being thrown at her then she was just being a pussy.

“Most people are going to fight and try to weasel out of things because they’re hard or because it’s a risk and it terrifies them. Most will also try and take advantage that you’re a woman and think you’ll just let them get away with bad behavior.” Victoria’s mother said. Victoria is fourteen while she stands with her mother at one of the ChaseSpace studios. They have some set space where photographers rent out to stage shoots. They’re watching a female photographer argue with the producers about several shots and how to creatively convey the product while the models idle by a chair eating snacks. “Don’t let them get to you. Smile, change methods, persuade, destroy, subvert…but if you are certain of your vision never give it up.” Her mother stated again.

So Victoria did the absolute most mature thing she had ever done in her life and brushed it off,
instead going for a different tactic that she almost never used. She spoke honestly, “but you’re a survivor. You’ve survived that party, you’ve survived Jefferson, you’ve survived me and you got past the roof. Fuck all of us, we don’t control you and we shouldn’t take things away from you. You shouldn’t be afraid of basic shit because of us, including cameras--”

**BAM!** The sound cut Victoria off. Kate had hit the table with both her hands. Victoria stopped, shocked.

She watched the small girl take a few big breaths. Her rib cage expanding and then compressing and then expanding again. Kate wouldn’t meet her eyes but she saw how Kate lit the table on fire with how she stared at it. Abruptly Kate stood up and promptly sped towards the door,

“Where are you going?” Victoria blurted, absolutely confused.

“Just give me ten minutes.” Kate immediately fired back just as she shut the door.

Victoria stood in her room, alone. Then she sat down, rubbing her temple, “this is so stupid” she said to herself. It then just occurred to her that even incensed, Kate had politely and quietly closed the door. No slamming or stamping or tantrums. She was all silent rage. Victoria was impressed at the other girl’s composure, envious of how that childishness didn’t seem to exist within Kate, uncomfortable at having that type of simmering anger directed at her and most surprisingly…

It was *attractive*.

Victoria wondered if Kate had in the past, with that rage simmering under her collar, wanted to hurt Victoria. She wondered what dark fantasies Kate allowed into her brain when she was at her most livid. She wondered what Kate was, in the secrecy of her own mind, capable of. Victoria contemplated what it would be like if, rather than being self-destructive, if Kate was destructive. She briefly fantasized what it would feel like to get slapped by Kate.

Would it hurt?

Oh it would hurt.

It would be so hard that little Kate would knock Victoria to the floor and crawl on top of her… Victoria imagined those hazel eyes blazing as those tiny hands tightened around her throat, squeezing.

It was twisted.

It was *hot*.

(Hey, at least she admitted her kinks, unlike most sick cowards who passively lived out their hypocrisies.)

So lost in her depraved thoughts that Victoria literally jumped when she heard a very real, very stern voice say,

“Fine.”

Victoria whipped her head towards the noise. It was Kate Marsh. Apparently she had let herself back in. Kate said, “however you have to get each shot in one take.”

Victoria stared at Kate, stupefied for a moment before she regained her senses and stood up, incensed, “What? No!” she sputtered, “this isn’t a movie set, Cherie. A shot literally takes a split
second. But time is ---” Victoria sucked in on the hostility spouting through her teeth, “give me thirty minutes after we set up each shot. I can get the picture in that time.”

“Five minutes” Kate countered.

“Fifteen” Victoria fired back.

“Five” Kate rebutted, “if we blocked it out and preplan the entire thing before hand, which we’re already doing, you will get the shot immediately.”

“Ten.” Victoria challenged, “in case anything happens or to allow some spontaneity. Don’t be such a killjoy, this is supposed to be fun.”

“The party was supposed to be fun, Jefferson’s class was supposed to be fun – and look at what spontaneous things happened then.” Kate responded with the cold weight of a glacier. She may have acknowledged that Victoria was right, but Kate’s restrained anger didn’t want to concede so nicely.

Victoria drummed her fingers on the desk chair. This was fucking ridiculous. Ten minutes? That wasn’t anytime at all. However, that didn’t limit any of the prep that they could do. She could literally lock in all the materials before hand and set it up just so. The literal last element would be Kate. Bring her in, click the button. Voila. However, Victoria had seen photo productions. Each shot usually took about half an hour or more. It would be a challenge.

But then again, she was Victoria Chase. She could nail this. She could do the impossible.

No, no you can’t. You’re not good enough. You don’t have the eye. You’re a fucking amateur. You can’t work under these conditions. Bail. Bail. Get someone else. What the fuck are you doing? Her internal critic shouted at her.

Victoria stuck out her hand for a shake. Kate took it. Victoria noted how even though her hand was so small, Kate still gave a firm squeeze; a good professional shake.

Victoria’s internal critic screamed to the heavens absolute bloody murder as the rest of her mind just really liked how Kate’s palm was soft and warm within hers.

The next few days were a blur. After picking out their top nine favorite compositions both girls were a whirlwind of getting materials and locking in the locations and equipment they both needed. Victoria was most adept at getting the exact equipment, wardrobe, make up – she knew exactly what they needed and where to get it. The good news was that she already had the camera and the lenses, which by the way, were the bomb.

(Well, she got the incredible glass because Nathan gave it to her when he went away…)

(Whatever.)

(She could barely hold them now but they would work fantastic on the day and Oh for Fucks sake will she just get over herself, already?)

Kate was great at grabbing the locations and getting through all the redtape and such to make sure they could work undisturbed for the time being. She could also nail down getting a lot of the crew. The upside to publicly trying to commit suicide is that when you needed help for free, most people jumped at the chance.

However there was one picture in particular that was the most nerve-wracking to Victoria.
“The bathroom photo.”

At the time, when Victoria saw the composition, she had loved it. It was from the back, slightly bottom angle looking up at three people. Using the dark backlit nature to frame the two subjects. One girl leaning over a sink, another one leaning over her... off to the side the third character was purposefully darker face unseen, mainly just used to keep the line of focus on the other two characters. It was like a frame out of a psychological thriller – the only sources of bright color being the reflections of the two characters in the mirror. Where, as it was the point of focus, you saw a fourth person staring at them, hidden in the shower stalls.

Moody, atmospheric, fatalistic

Just a touch sexy in that dubiously-consensual manner...

It was Victoria’s favorite and she was so excited to shoot it. It was their first picture within the lineup.

It wasn’t until that Friday morning where they were setting up the lights and with the body doubles in place (Taylor, Sarah and Courtney respectfully) that the realization, like a drunk driver speeding in the middle of the night, hit her hard.

This entire shot was the exact replica of an instance that happened during the week from Hell… When she and Taylor messed with Kate in the bathroom and Victoria wrote the link to Kate’s video on the mirror…

It was literally exactly the same, except a bit more dramatized, clothing a bit more color conscience and with much better lighting.

Mother Fucker.

No wonder Kate didn’t want to be in this shot. She was literally reliving the worst time of her life.

However, like a psychopath once said, always take the shot— so when everything was ready and her makeshift crew looked at her... Victoria waved her hand, “get Kate.” She said as she checked with Courtney to make sure her makeup and hair were squared away. Her heart thudded hard in her chest, she was sure that if her shirt wasn’t on that people would see the dent in her ribcage where her heart slammed itself into it.

Get the shot.

Kate came in, looking just as sullen as that day.

Get the shot.

Victoria’s heart went into overdrive.

Get the shot.

Remember how you felt when you went after her that day.

Get the shot.

Victoria took all those jitters that were alive under her nerves and put them in a box. She took that box and slid it away, away into the darkest part of her mind.

She welcomed back her entitlement.
Of course was going to get this shot. She was a photographer. No one’s stupid issues were going to stop her from being the best. When people thought Richard Avedon was crazy for making his models run and jump, he didn’t care – he followed his artistic intuition and captured perfection. Haters and sheeple would deal.

She welcomed back something truly bitter.

This fucking girl... Who the fuck does she think she is anyway? So what messed up shit happened to you? You think messed up shit doesn’t happen to anyone else? You’re alive, bitch, unlike some people. You hide under your religion but you’re just like us; sinful and disgusting.

I will destroy you.

As she stared down at Kate, seeing her squirm flared her ego. She couldn’t even look at her. Victoria could affect another person to shrink in her presence. The power felt amazing.

Victoria couldn’t help but be fascinated by the reveal of bare skin. She had never seen Kate in a tank top, let alone something like this. The costume was a oversized t-shirt and bed shorts; purposefully of a darker color to bring out her fair skin. However, the neckline on the shirt had been stretched out and cut in a way where rather than hang close to the neck, it was wide and spread out across the collar bones. The back of the shirt hung low, exposing her upper back.

Kate had annoyingly clean skin, as Victoria herself had some weird case of back acne and only managed to get rid of the persistent ones on her forehead due to some nuclear medication. But Kate Marsh had a beautiful shoulder and the expanse of spine, up the back of her neck …Who else had seen the bare form of this girl? Victoria wondered.

Perversely, she felt this strange ego-boost. Kate could try and hide her body. Kate could try and deny others the pleasure of seeing her. Deny them the simple wonder of what lay beneath her clothes. That masochistic wonder of what it would feel to touch another’s skin.

But, she would not deny Victoria Chase.

Victoria saw her.

Victoria would take her.

Victoria reached over, trailing one finger down her arm to where the cusp of the shirt was hanging on the shoulder, dipping one single finger within it and hooking the inseam, she tugged it down just so. Suddenly her entire shoulder blade was out. Kate visibly trembled, now just that much more exposed. Her hands gripped at the sink edge. It made Victoria smirk that much more.

Click. Whirr. Click.

Click. Whirr. Click.

Ten minutes to the dot Victoria was snapped out of her reverie when she heard Kate ask, “Are we done?” The chill in her voice went straight to Victoria’s bones, causing her to take a small step back.

“Yes.” Victoria answered.

Kate exited the shower room without a single glance or goodbye.

Only then did everyone in the shower room take a simultaneous giant breath of relief.
It only just then occurred that Victoria hadn’t looked at the shots in the computer or the camera. Shit. She couldn’t call for Kate to come back. Not after that. Taylor was staring at her, her eyes asking her what the Hell just happened. Actually, everyone was staring at her, eyes asking ‘What the Hell just happened between you two?!’

“Let’s get this dismantled, we got more shots to do.” Victoria snapped. She then exited the shower room, chasing after the other girl. Why? She wasn’t sure why this protectiveness had awoken within her heart. All she knew was that in that moment she had to go to Kate. She had to know if she was Ok. Victoria went to Kate’s room. Knocked. After a couple moments of quiet she opened the door and peeked in. No, not there. Where else? Bathroom maybe?

Victoria stood outside the restroom for a few seconds as she tried to logically talk herself out of it.

*Leave her be,*

*Let her be,*

*Why do you care?*

Victoria ran into the bathroom.

A girl bumped Victoria’s shoulder, she was quickly exiting as Victoria entered. Before Victoria could see who that was sounds of retching filled her ears.

Victoria felt her heart drop and a rush of heat flush her face. Jesus Christ. First stall, second stall, third stall… the last stall, Victoria pushed open and saw Kate on her knees over the toilet.

“Kate” Victoria quietly mourned as she crouched down next to the girl, her hands instinctively going to clasp the other girl’s shoulders. Oh, Kate…

Kate tensed up, snapping her body out of Victoria’s hands, “I really hate you right now.” Kate stated quietly through sickness. Logically, Victoria understood the anger directed at her, however her hands hovered over where they had been thrown off feeling as though she were burned, “I’ll be fine, I’ll be ready for the next stupid shot. Just leave me alone.” Kate explained through dry heaves. Victoria stood there, frozen, unable to look away. After a loud splat of Kate’s stomach acid diving into the porcelain bowl, Kate groaned, “Oh for fucks sake… leave me alone for once!” Kate cursed, her words echoed by the toilet bowl.

Victoria stood up and exited swiftly, not needing to be told twice.

Outside the bathroom Victoria brushed her bangs out of her forehead, and walked quickly to the next location. While she put on her best cool, aloof attitude, Victoria found herself trying to quell a spurned heart. Kate actually said the F-word. Huh. Victoria knew that she deserved Kate to throw a lot more F-bombs at her but it still stunned her a little to actually hear ‘for fucks sake’ coming out of the pious girl.

Kate must’ve really hated her. It was understandable. Victoria hated herself too.

Thankfully, that was the worst photo to do. They managed to get through the rest with no more puking and f-bombs from Kate. Also, when her concern for Kate was brushed aside, Victoria herself had a blast running the shoots and taking the shots. Thankfully about a third of them didn’t need Kate in them.

Victoria had always loved photography sets. She just loved the production of it all. She loved how the art, like a ship, needed an entire crew to make it happen and set sail. Or she could solo it and man
the boat herself. When she was working, when she was commanding and leading everyone to the best vision possible there wasn’t any need for pretense.

No need for popularity

No need for validation

No need for insecurities

With the camera in her hand all she needed to bring was herself, her creativity in full.

This was the only space where she, the one and only Victoria Chase, could flex her muscles and run around. Not the Victoria that everyone wanted to see, not the Victoria that agonized about how others perceived her, not the Victoria that didn’t know who to be or how to act.

Just Victoria, the photographer.

The image was her Holy Grail and she, Queen Victoria, under the will of God would get it.

After the last shot is in the can Kate takes the reign of fully returning all the equipment and rewarding the crew by taking them out for dinner at the Two Whales. Kate took charge of this so Victoria could immediately jump into editing.

Later that evening as Victoria has sorted out the best pictures, Kate came into her room, offering Vic takeout from the Two Whales. Vic gratefully took it, surprised at how hungry she was. She hadn’t eaten all day because she was just that into her work. Both girls began some small-talk. A bit uncertain how to communicate with each other after such an emotional train wreck of a day.

In all honesty Victoria was annoyed that things had become awkward between the two of them again. Ugh. How had they coexisted with this awkward? Thankfully she had a burrito to stuff her face with and not have to speak much.

However, as Victoria was learning, Kate knew just how to offer an olive branch as she said, “I know today was…a bit difficult for me. But, I was watching you and…it was actually incredible to see you work. Like, you just knew what to do and how to bring the images to life. You never stopped moving.

Victoria literally chewed as she watched Kate recollecting her observations. She was struck by how easy it was for the other girl to let out the truth so honestly. Like, it felt like Victoria was slapping herself in the face every time she admitted that someone else was great (better than her) at something. But here was Kate, sincerely praising her, and looking as though she was feeling better because she was admitting it.

"Before I didn't know why you were here at Blackwell. What you wanted to do. But today... I saw how passionate you are and how you're so dedicated. It was actually really cool to see you in your zone. You definitely seem to be Captain of your ship.” Kate said. Victoria felt her cheeks blush as a rush of glee jitter through her chest as well as a swell of pride,

Ok, where the Fuck was this bashfulness coming from? It's not the first time someone's complimented you, Victoria. Victoria was used to other people complimenting her looks, her sense of style, her knowledge of a subject, her nice things.... Victoria just wasn't used to anyone complimenting the sheer amount of blood, sweat and tears she gave to her art. The amount of work and time she slaved away at getting better at her obsession... No one had ever validated her effort before. Oh. Ok. That would explain the sudden feeling of Victoria feeling as though she actually was seeing Pokemon running around. There was absolutely no way it could even possibly be true. “It's
been my dream since I was a toddler, I better be good at it.” Victoria responded coolly. She hoped that by acting chill it would freeze the butterflies in her stomach.

“I’m sure people will know the name.” Kate said.

“People already know my name” Victoria huffed. The Chase legacy was a well-known one within the art circle. Much to her advantage and much to her torture. Victoria then felt a light pressure on her upper arm. Victoria looked over and felt her eyes get ensnared by two hazel irises.

“They will see you, I promise” Kate swore. Victoria felt the weight belief within of Kate’s eyes and how the promise felt so, so close to truth. Victoria had to look away and shrug it off,

“That’s the plan.” She answered with her signature confidence (bitchiness). She purposefully looked down at her burrito and forced herself to take another bite despite having lost all appetite. In all honesty, she didn’t know whether or not to cry at Kate’s earnestness or kick her because she was obviously lying.

No one had ever said that about her work.

Not Mark Jefferson.

Not Rachel Amber

Not the galleries she sent her work to

Not her parents.

No one.

Not long after that conversation both her and Kate picked out the best shots from each sequence… then came across ‘The Bathroom photo’ set.

Fucking Christ.

Victoria looked besides her and watched as Kate took in the photo; her pupils shifting in rapid micro movements.

“I like it.” Kate said so quietly that Victoria at first didn’t hear her.

“I won’t include it without your say.” Victoria promised. She had leaned close to Kate. Close enough to where she could see the pores on Kate’s nose and the specks of brown dotted within her irises. Kate just nodded,

“Put it in.” she said, again, so quietly.

“Ok.” Victoria answered, not yet pulling away. There was this atmosphere between them in that moment; a tiny pocket of trust. Victoria didn’t want to break it.

Through all of Saturday and all day and night Sunday Victoria edited the pictures. Kate came in from time to time to make notes and reaffirm with Victoria that the creative choices worked for the both of them. Victoria prepped the electronic files and monopolized the printer within the photography room to make sure everything was the best. At 9am the morning of she sent the files and Kate made sure the folder was ready and on Ms. Washington’s desk at 10am.

Two days later Ms. Washington reviewed everyone’s work. Victoria made sure that her style and fashion game was on point. If her teacher decided to rip her project to shreds at least she would look
“Victoria. Kate.” Ms. Washington announced as their images flashed up on the projector. Both girls held their breath. “Your contrast subject is simple; as when I read that your two subjects were ‘an attention-whore’ and ‘the school punching bag’ I thought I was going to get some clichéd Mean girls hack.” Ms. Washington paused after that when everyone, minus Victoria and Kate, snickered.

Victoria bit her tongue. She loved that movie. Modern classic.

Ms. Washington continued after taking a breath in, “However, much to my surprise, this turned out to be one of the best examples of this project I have ever seen.” Victoria felt her heart stop and was glad that the dark room hid how stupid she must’ve looked in the moment.

“Both of you went above and beyond to deliver a clear and precise concept from start to finish. What you chose to convey and say was truly coming from a unique perspective. Each one of these photos have a lot to say. Not only do these pictures work on their own, but they work even stronger in sequence, telling a story.”

From the beginning several photos setting up who each subject was and how the subject of Victoria, hunted, fished orchestrated attention towards herself…but never got the right effect. The subject of Kate tried to avoid it, but within her need to hide she was found and scrutinized.

“How you both captured ‘attention’ to be this antagonist, like a terrible lover, is really clever and effective. However, this photo, this one in the bathroom I believe is the strongest shot.” Mrs. Washington pointed out the bathroom photo, “This is the only picture where the two subjects converge but the composition is great and the tension between you two is so evident – there’s even hints of sexuality. This isn’t new, Victoria has clearly preyed upon Kate in the past. So much that Kate’s just resigned to the unknown, and just in the posture and the expression in the mirror expresses such turmoil that there’s no fear, but rather bleak anticipation of what may come. Also, having the reflection be the clear focus point was an obvious move – but one that you two used smartly because you see there’s a fourth person in the room… the girl in the shower. The bystander who watches this sick performance and does nothing.”

Ms. Washington was interrupted by a sudden loud noise. Somehow Max had fallen out of her chair. Caulfield was really a freaking weirdo.

Ms. Washington continued, “The true tragedy of this shot is that, looking at the body posture. At how Victoria is leaning in, reaching out…sensually tugging down Kate’s shirt. How they both are familiar with each other…With different lighting and under different circumstances this would be a picture of romance. Victoria flirting with Kate and Kate being playfully coy. In some ideal world this would be two young lovers sharing moment. But it’s not. It’s twisted and utterly wrong and I, the viewer, am so uncomfortable and feel hurt that it’s not different between you two girls. That in this reality, you’re both stuck in this sick, warped version of a relationship.”

Victoria didn’t know whether or not to vomit, throw her chair at Ms. Washington, run out of the room or a combination of all three.

“The image works because it doesn’t just capture a moment, it clearly evokes that there is history between these girls. Of abuse, of jealousy and a twisted desire- you both wish to be where the other stands and at the same time want to ignore each other but it’s impossible for the both of you for different reasons but also for the same reason—it’s fantastic.” Their teacher gushed.

Even in the dark room if anyone looked they would see how both Kate’s and Victoria’s face bloomed tomato red. Where Victoria’s back straightened up so much that it arched concavely and
she avoided everyone’s gaze by staring intently at the photo (studying it), Kate bent forward, staring at her knees. Both were absolutely mortified.

Their classmates who obviously knew Kate and Victoria’s shared history thankfully had the decency not to find it funny at all and they all felt equally as uncomfortable. Max wrote furiously in her journal. Taylor’s knee bounced anxiously nonstop. Stella cleared her throat loudly a few times, as if that would stop Ms. Washington. Evan, being another avid photographer did study the photograph however a small blush bloomed on his usually stoic cheeks. Alyssa did her best to look as though she were unaffected as always.

“I was not expecting your sequence to just get more and more dire; it reminded me of a trainwreck... you just can’t stop looking. However, seeing as the topic both of you tackled at first seems hackneyed, it was a wise choice to go against everyone’s expectations and do something that would make everyone uncomfortable. In the end, both subjects are clearly stuck in this sort of self-mutilation suffered from outside attention. They contrast each other but are ultimately the same. It’s fatalistic and melodramatic. However, all young people are and the agony is real, so it works.” Ms. Washington paused again at the (very thankful) round of quiet chuckles from her students.

After, Mrs. Washington gazed upon Victoria and Kate with appreciation, “this was truly well thought out and done with care and honesty. It shows. I strongly advise the two of you to put these, especially this bathroom photo in your portfolios, it’s great work. Congratulations you two. A plus.” Ms. Washington finalized as she closed their photos.

Victoria and Kate exchanged bewildered glances. Victoria couldn’t help but crack a slight smirk at Kate’s flustered face, and she saw Kate give her a small smile, no doubt noting Victoria’s own burnt face. Professor Washington then moved onto Taylor’s and Max’s project. A very interesting and ambitious project dealing with memory and how memories are affected by trauma…but Victoria couldn’t bring herself to pay too much attention. She stealthily texted Kate;

Victoria: So...did you wish I was flirting with you in the bathroom in some ideal universe where we’re two lovers sharing a moment?

Kate: Idk. I was submitting to your will in bleak anticipation

Victoria: YAAAAAS. What abuse would you like today?

Kate: Tbh whatever would be the more pleasurable outcome that involved the least injury.

Victoria: Baby if only you weren’t abstinent ;)

Kate: “Pray that you will not fall into temptation” Luke 22:40

Victoria: Pray that you will.

Kate: Mommy told me not to Sin.

Victoria: Exactly why you should Sin with me ;) ;) xoxo

When Victoria saw Kate snort, she couldn’t help but snicker too.

As the other presentations went on, Victoria’s mind turned over and over again. She kept sneaking glances at Kate. The project was over, done with, a huge success. However over the past week they had spent so much time together and she had gotten to know Kate. Like a slap, only then did Victoria realized that she sincerely enjoyed Kate Marsh’s company. She liked her humor, she liked her different perspective of the world and most of all she genuinely appreciated how Kate was
different from anyone she had ever met in her life. But now that the project was over…

After her brain whirred and sparked, she then sent another text,

Victoria: The Chem hw is fkin ridonkulous. Wanna do it together?

Kate: Of course, what time?

Victoria: 4:30pm, my room?

Kate: Coolio, I’ll be there.

Victoria didn’t even blanche at the word ‘coolio.’ She thought it suited Kate.

Victoria: Coolio chérie xoxo

Victoria looked up and over to Kate where she unexpectedly saw a pair of Kate eyes peering at her. Both immediately looked away at the same time and Victoria hated the tiny sizzle of adolescent bashfulness that burned throughout her body. But in the safety of darkness Victoria felt herself smile and how that smile widened into an impossibly huge grin.

She and Kate Marsh were legit friends.

Only after all that, did it lead to Victoria and Kate in mid October in her room, trying to do Chem homework when somehow the topic of Saturday morning cartoons came up.

And how, Kate Marsh had never had that experience in her life.

With the exception of Veggie Tales.

At that moment, after listening to the extent of the pitifulness that was Kate’s entire existence Victoria felt another swell of a new decision in her chest. With absolute certainty she knew that she had to change this.

“Kate.” Victoria said, “We are changing this. Right now.”

Kate looked at her, not really understanding what was about to happen was about to blow her tiny mind and change her life forever.

To be honest though, it was about to change Victoria’s life too, she just didn’t know it yet.

Chapter End Notes

Interestingly, this chapter held up the publication of this fanfic longer than anything else. Trying to figure out what they were going to do for that project took ages. I tried to breeze over it or dump it to try and find another way for them to connect initially.

However, to get these two to connect is to put them through Hell - both of them knew this and they wormed out of every other situation I tried to throw them in. So, it kept coming back to the 'we're forced to do this project together, oh well' trope.

Also, I read a lot of fanfics about artists, or about characters doing artisty things...but it never felt as though the writers actually really understood what goes into creation and
the amount of sweat that goes into it. Since I've had unique experiences within the art world - I really wanted to convey some of that. So, stay tuned for much more nerd talk!

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW

Kate said inbetween giggles, “I’ve never even dreamed that anyone, let alone you would ever say that to me…” Kate looked down, suddenly melancholy, “but you’re right.” She rested her forehead into her palm. “you’re right.” She uttered, voice cracking.

Oh Fuck.

Oh Fuck.

Oh Fuuuuuuuccckkk

I'm coming to adore Kate and Victoria the more and more I write them.

I'm also coming to adore continually torturing the two of them.
Nerd vs Nerd

Chapter Summary

So in this chapter there is reference to the following real media:

Princess Mononoke
Spirited Away
The entire Studio Ghibli line-up
Tokyo Godfathers
Steven Universe

I highly recommend you watch them all.

You will see something called “Sour Berry Panic” this is not a real media, but it does refer to Victoria’s toy model that she has in her room.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Even your gravest mistakes should not stop you from moving forward”

– Edward Elric [Fullmetal Alchemist]

Victoria went through her immaculate blue-ray collection, organized by name/year/country, thumbing through what they were about to watch.

"First thing, we're going to get you into this; entry level, Hayao Miyazaki" Victoria announced.

“Hey-Ya Mirror-Ya a what now?” Kate asked, genuinely curious.

Victoria continued to lecture, “If we're going to cure this utter lack of animation knowledge into your life, we're going we’ve got start slow. Everyone loves Studio Ghibli, regardless of their taste in animation” and if they didn’t they had no soul and deserved to die.
“Studio Jiggly? Victoria, what about the Chemistry homework?”

“That can wait, this cannot.” Victoria said, matter of fact. Kate stared at her with a screwed up brow, expression truly speechless. Then she gave a small shrug, there was no point arguing with Victoria on this, Kate knew that much.

Victoria thumbed through the line up. It was time for baby steps. Kiki’s Delivery service? Totoro? Hmm, maybe even Porco Rosso – she was sure that Kate would appreciate the talking pig in that one. Eh. Maybe that was a bit too much, WWI and all that… Spirited Away? Naw, that one sequence with all the blood may make her squeamish.

“So I was thinking either Totoro or Kiki’s Delivery Service. and even though here in the West they’re considered children’s movies they are both classics…

“What’s that one?” Kate asked, peeking over her shoulder. Victoria followed Kate’s finger where she was met with the case cover:

Princess Mononoke.

Kate picked out the movie and turned it over, reading the description. Victoria felt a sudden rush of concern. It was only a PG-13 rated feature but how could this girl handle it? It was a cinematic masterpiece no doubt about it, but was also full of violence, blood and sacrilegious elements. It was about Pagan animal Gods fighting against corrupt humans after all.

“We can watch that one later, we’ll start with Totoro… look at the iconic design, it’s cute as fuc--”

“Why can’t we watch this one now?” Kate asked.

“I think it’ll be better if you start with either of these ones.”

Kate pointed at Princess Mononoke again, “What’s wrong with this one?”

Victoria felt her patience start it’s great escape, “there’s nothing wrong with it, it’s a fantastic movie”

“Then why can’t we watch it?”

“because you’re not ready for that movie.”

Kate blinked, and a new expression that Victoria had never seen crossed her face; utter indignation, “why am I not ready?”

“Look,” Victoria started, really not too sure how to say what she was going to say gently (so fuck it), “it’s an intense movie, Ok? I don’t think you can handle that now.”

“Why can’t I handle it?” Kate interrupted sharply. It unnerved Victoria how Kate could speak softly but still have such a damn edge on her voice.

“You’ve…” (oh fuck it), “you’ve grown up in a super conservative household, yea? Your family, church, whatever, hasn’t let you done anything edgy or the least bit remotely dangerous. You can’t even drink a latte”

“Coffee tastes like boiled dirt.” Kate interjected bitterly, “I can drink it all day long, it’s just gross. I don’t know why anyone would drink it.”

“Because it’s the ambrosia of the artists and intellectuals and has been since the 1600’s.” Victoria snapped.
“Tea was the chosen drink of royalty and Emperors across continents.” Kate coolly parleyed. Oh Victoria was going to smack a bitch right now --- then she restrained herself. How was she getting so easily baited? The eternal fight between tea and Coffee was not the point right now.

So, she brought the conversation back on course, “Look, when I saw Princess Mononoke even I was a bit perturbed, ok?”

“How old were you when you watched it?” Kate asked

“It was released in 1997, but I didn’t see it until December 28th 2000 when I was seven, so…”

“You were seven watching a PG-13 movie that contained violence and language? I’m not surprised that you were perturbed. However, I’m 18 years old Victoria. I’ve been watching PG-13 movies for years. My family watches ‘The Matrix’ every year. I’m not a child.”

Ok, when she put it that way Victoria felt like a dick. But there was a far, far bigger question,


“The Matrix is a sci-fi retelling of the Christ story. Literally ‘Trinity’ get Neo, which is the ‘one’ re-assembled, to help rid the world of the illusions set up by the machines, which is basically a metaphor for the devil, only then can he wake up his disciples and lead them to...you don’t know this?” Kate asked her.

The cat goes meow. The Dog goes woof. The cow goes moo. The Matrix is about Jesus.

Victoria shook her head, “you know every single movie and tv show that’s about Christianity and yet you’ve never seen a rated R movie before.”

This time whatever sense of politeness Kate had broke as her eyes rolled up to the ceiling and she let out an exasperated grunt, “I’ve seen Rated-R movies. This is still a thing with me apparently? Seriously, how is everyone even coming to this conclusion?” Kate asked the heavens.

Victoria wasn’t going to say that she saw Max’s open journal one day and managed to catch a glimpse about Kate ‘I bet her parents don’t let her watch Rated R movies’ and that she told everyone she knew about it because she thought it was simultaneously pitiful and hilarious.

“Well, which movies?” Victoria demanded. There was a rather long bout of silence in the room as Kate looked away, thinking. She crossed her arms.

“I’ve seen ‘The Exorcist.” She answered, defiant.

Victoria crossed her arms as well, raising an eyebrow, “really.” Victoria stated.

“…parts of itANYWAY I want to watch Princess No keys.”

“It’s Mononoke and I know you’re being a lying ho right now!” Victoria retaliated.

“Put on Princess Key Keys or I’m not watching any of your Jiggly Studio Cartoons!” Kate fired back with a finality that shook the room. Victoria stared at her, so infuriated that she couldn’t even think. Physically she wanted to either throw the bluerays at Kate or launch into a screeching tirade that Kate was an ignorant disgrace and why everything she just said was an insult to the entire history of Japanese Anime, the phenomenal accomplishments of Studio Ghibli and to the creative leadership of Hayao Miyazaki. Perhaps both actions!
Ah. Remember your therapist.

Take a breath.

Before unleashing savagery Victoria took that moment to breathe back the fire through her nostrils. Only then was she a bit aware of just how ludicrous this entire situation had become. Bitch wanted to prove herself? Fine.

“Ok. We are watching Princess **Mo no no ke**. It’s a modern classic and a very good choice. If you piss your pants, you’re paying for the cleaning.”

“I’m not going to piss my pants” Kate grumbled as Victoria pushed it into her computer, having it hook up to the projector

(Another toy Nathan gave her when he was put into jail. This would be the first time she would be using it. The irony that it was being used to play a movie for Kate Marsh was not lost on Victoria)

However, when they watched the film and when Victoria would look over ever so occasionally, she was shocked to see how wide Kate’s eyes were – not in shock or disgust; but unadulterated giddiness.

Sheer glee shone in her eyes as she watched. In that iconic shot where San, the Princess Mononoke, face covered in blood stared straight at the camera, Kate’s eyes literally mimicked Ashitaka’s; widening in ardor. When San terrorized the Iron Town she saw Kate’s fingers tighten in excitement, her little fists bouncing up and down on her thighs.

“Are you rooting for San?” Victoria whispered to Kate as San leaped over the townspeople, fighting for her life and for the one chance to murder the Lady Eboshi.

“She’s kicking so much butt right now, how can you not?” Kate whispered back.

When Ashitaka fired his arrow and the Samurai’s head flew off, Victoria saw Kate’s lips peel back to reveal a grin. When San rode one of the wolves into battle, Kate’s face wore a beaming smile.

At the end of it all Kate immediately turned to Victoria, stating with a seriousness that she didn’t see too often in teenagers, “this is my favorite film of all time.” Victoria had to give her a nod and a small clap,

“Welcome to the darkside.” Was all Victoria said before Kate went onto a tangent of why this film had become her favorite of all time.

Listening to Kate geek out was surprisingly a wonderful passive activity for Victoria. It was because Kate didn’t geek out over the same things that she did, or that other fangirls and fanboys did.

Level 1 fan simply gushed out what seemed “cool” and “awesome” but that was about the extent of where they could go. Yeah, perhaps they could identify the most obvious points that touched them emotionally…but when one fan said it, the others all agreed and it got boring real fucking quickly.

Kate though, Kate was quickly showing Victoria that Kate was a level 5-6… What she saw was a true analytical breakdown of art and an extremely eloquent response on how each aspect was significant.

God, how this girl ranted about color and composition was electrifying. How she talked about music and timing was truly interesting as Victoria was not musically minded nor musically gifted. How she spoke about design, Victoria could get behind on.
“The dynamic between Ashitaka and San is truly romantic. Not like ‘the Notebook’ or ‘A walk to remember’ where it’s all just contrived and fake…Like the part where San stabs Ashitaka in the chest, it was the best—“

“Now I know what turns you on” Victoria quipped, very amused.

Kate paused enough to give Victoria a level, stern look, “well it is wildly written that stabbing is a physical metaphor for rape.” Victoria stated, factually. Kate looked at her as though Victoria just kicked her rabbit. Victoria waved it off, “oh don’t be so offended, lots of people have that fantasy…”

Kate interrupted, “Speaking of Ashitaka,” Kate may have been talented in a lot of things, but smoothly switching topics was not one of them, “that thing he says; to see with eyes unclouded by hate. I have never heard a character from any movie say something that resonated with me so much. To see with eyes unclouded by hate…that’s exactly what I have tried and continue to try and do everyday in every action in my life…” she explained, her eyes glittering.

You’re so obviously Ashitaka, Kate.

Kate looked at Victoria, curious,” I’m not the prince of a persecuted ethnic minority in feudal Japan.” Kate said slowly. Victoria realized that she said her thought out loud. Then, she realized with irritation that she couldn’t just leave the topic because Kate was looking at her like that and God Damn it you can’t just ignore a girl when she’s looking at you like that,

“I don’t mean literally, duh, miss white girl from Oregon. But you’re all for good virtue and trying to spread it where ever you go. Maybe you’re not part of a persecuted minority, but you definitely know what it’s like to be unlike the majority…”

Kate, even though feeling very shy at the moment couldn’t help but quietly quip, “It’s hard to find others who’ll twerk for God.”

Victoria’s entire train of thought derailed as she absolutely cackled out loud.

Who knew Kate Marsh had a sense of humor?

Now that Victoria thought about it, Kate Marsh, even though very serious in her endeavors, was never actually a serious person nor a religious robot. Before the party she had always been smiling, with her friends, doing a lot of different things and pretty fearless as she ran her clubs, played her violin and kept putting up the stupid abstinence fliers, but never actually trying to convert anyone.

Victoria and the other Vortex club members had continually been astounded by Kate’s doggedness. No matter what they did, no matter how many times they defaced her fliers or trolled her social media pages or whatever… Kate had marched on and did her thing with a smile on her face. Perhaps rather than ignore them, Kate had internally saw what her bullies found funny and laughed along.

Perhaps it was because of that humor that helped make her, the Christian Terminator (The Abstinence Android?) untouchable.

Until she was touched by too many people all at once. And too many people saw how she was physically touched.

And that’s when she became depressed, withdrawn and suicidal. However, when Victoria turned it over, it had taken a lot to push her to that point. Victoria, herself, would’ve gave up ages ago. She would’ve fled for the hills. That, or hide who she actually was, find out how the social hierarchy worked and conquer that shit.
Which is what Victoria did.

Victoria continued, “you understand what hatred can do to the soul and are all about forgiveness… Also, when you really want to, you can kick some serious ass.”

There was a shy smile on Kate’s face, a gentle pink coated her cheeks, “thanks Victoria.” Kate’s voice dripped with such sincerity that it made Victoria’s skin crawl.

“That, and you totally have a thing for feral hot chicks.” Victoria added, unable to let that stupid mushy feeling of gratitude ruin her observation. Kate simply down, breaking eye contact.

Kate drummed her fingers against her lips, thinking. Then she put her hand Victoria’s knee. A sharp tingle ignited underneath her kneecap and flutter up her leg, through her body. “Lady Eboshi.” Kate stated, a small smile on her face. Lady Eboshi was a supporting character and minor antagonist within the movie. She was a BAMF that ran iron town and could fire a gun like no one else. She had an obvious attraction to Ashitaka (Ashi-kate-a? Haha, get it? No. No. She wasn’t going to say that out loud ever) but seeing as Ashitaka only had eyes for Princess Mononoke, Lady Eboshi’s affections go nowhere and she continued on her warpath against the Gods.

That part alone made Victoria feel very uncomfortable for some reason.

“Alright, then, miss Casting director. Who fills up the other spots?” Victoria asked, snippy.

“Chloe Price is absolutely San.” Kate fired off. Victoria wanted to protest, a bit indignant that she wasn’t Princess Mononoke but she thought about it. A half feral girl that grew up amongst wolves and had a death wish to avenge whatever problematic loved ones she had? A lost soul who didn’t know where she belonged? It could be no one else.

“Again, now I know your type” Victoria jested. Kate ignored her, the tips of her ears pink. Kate rubbed her chin,

“Max is Moro, the wolf Goddess.” Kate decided.

Victoria snorted, “Max is not a wolf. She’s…a deer.”

Max; small gay, indie-folk loving, kind-of dumb, hipster, (great) photographer.

Moro; a large, terrifying, man-eating, prophetic wolf God.

You can see why they don’t equate.

However, Moro loved San, her Princess Mononoke more than anything. She was more than willing to do anything to protect Princess Mononoke…Also Moro had the perfect rivalry with Lady Eboshi, both determined to defeat the other.

Again, unexpected but a perfect choice.

Kate took her time to deliberate the next role. "Do you remember Rachel Amber?” Kate asked. Victoria felt every single hair on her body rise, stiff in

Anger
Revlusion
Agony
"Yes. The dead girl." she said between her teeth. The girl Nathan killed. Kate paused, debating whether or not to continue,

"She's Jigo." Kate stated. Victoria felt her lips morph into some deranged sneer, 

"Jigo? Why the Hell is Amber Jigo?"

"She's certainly much prettier than Jigo, but when we first meet him he's incredibly charming, supportive and appears to be neutral of all the conflicts in the film. However he knows much more than he's letting on and is familiar with everyone. Then his true motives are revealed and the actions he takes are incredibly selfish and have massive consequences. He's not a bad guy, he's not a good guy, you still like him...but ultimately calculating and selfish and still a good guy." Kate finished.

Victoria wanted to either laugh or to cry. Maybe both. There was a bitterness that rose to the surface. How did Kate know so much about Rachel Amber? How did she come to such a dead-on analysis of the girl wonder? "That's quite a explanation... Were you two friends?" Victoria asked, unable to keep the salt from spilling out her mouth.

"No, we weren't friends and we talked sometimes. We had a couple classes together. She was a nice person. People liked her a lot... practically worshiped her when she came in the room. People kept saying that she was this naturally amazing person. However, from what I saw was that she was much sharper than she let on. Like, she understood human nature and psychology much more than even I do. But she liked attention a bit too much and was very willing to play off people's insecurities to get it. It was kindof freaky how she just got everyone to do what she wanted. So I stayed away from her." Kate explained, a bit wary. She may have not known Victoria's history with Rachel but she was catching on that this was some sort of dangerzone with Victoria.

Victoria brooded. She was intensely angry at Kate in that moment. She was so jealous of Kate's ability to pick up on Rachel's manipulative nature that it made her furious. How could she not have seen the major problematic qualities within Rachel Amber that would fucking wreck with her brain and her heart and her cunt? Even now, months later and a death later she was still so furious at herselt for getting hypnotized, just like the rest of the sheeple in Arcadia Bay. How many people did she do this to? Trap them and then leave them an emotional wreck?

"You knew her, right?" Kate asked. Victoria sank her nails into her sofa, 

"We had some of the same classes and we went to the same parties. That's hardly friends" Victoria snarled. Kate didn't flinch. It infuriated Victoria more.

Kate then said, very cautiously, "I thought you may have had some experiences with her seeing that you have graffitied your dislike of her all over parts of Blackwell"

"What the Fuck makes you think it was me?" Victoria snapped, her defenses up and claws out.

"I'm sorry, Victoria, I thought wrong. Graffiting isn't your style, even though everyone else in the Vortex Club seems to think that vandalizing property is fun." Kate openly placated, "It's just you're the only one I've seen who doesn't butter the praise on about her, unlike everyone else. But from what I observed, no one really knew Rachel Amber, they only saw what she let them see ...except maybe Chloe, but even then she was on the Rachel train like everyone else. However, just from how you act and don't buy into the hype...I just figured that you actually knew her." Kate explained.

Victoria felt some of the will to fight leave her blood. She had known Rachel Amber. The
consequences of that affair had left her far too hurt and humiliated to ever say it aloud. She could never admit that she had known Rachel Amber and what it had done to her already fragile pride. It was eating her alive. But Kate could see it anyways. It was both a immense relief and it freaked her out. "...who else can you cast?" Victoria asked, changing the subject. Rachel Amber hopefully would never be a topic that they would tackle another day.

(Maybe. A very small, very wounded part of her heart hoped. The part that wanted to sob while someone held her and stroked her hair...)

"The guy who broke his arm? He’s Warren.” Kate continued.

"The buffoon with a heart of gold? Kohroku.” Victoria corrected, mirth in her voice. That was Warren in a nutshell.

“Juliet is absolutely Toki.”

Victoria laughed out loud at that. That was spot on. Toki, the wife of Kohroku, was all in-your-face honesty and aggression. She couldn’t even imagine how Warren could handle Juliet at all in real life.

“Madsen is Gonzo” Kate decided. Victoria had to lift her hand for a little high-five with Kate. Who else could play the big, burly, temperamental, over protective, overly paranoid bodyguard? Kate was freaking nailing the Blackwell recast of Princess Mononoke.

“But that one giant Boar God. You know, the one that’s incredibly stubborn, goes crazy with hatred and becomes literally overcome by his inner demons? I don’t know who fits that. Originally I thought maybe Luke, but he’s more peevish than anything and I’ve never seen him lose his temper at anyone…”

“Nathan.” Victoria answered. After a moment of silence, Kate nodded her head.

“Accurate.” Kate murmured.

In her mind Victoria thought about the ugly, grotesque tendrils of a demonic hatred squirting out of Nathan’s arms, chest, his face and mouth. How no amount of reason or affection from his friends and most trusted ones could get through to him. The only release from his madness was the kiss of death.

~~~___~~~~

The next morning after Victoria woke up and hated her life, she was about to blast enough trance music to get her through her morning routine when, instead Kate’s violin catches her attention. Kate hadn’t played her violin during the mornings since before that party…

Victoria listened. Her ears pricked as Victoria swore that she recognizes the rise and falls… This is one of her favorite soundtracks of all time, one of her favorite tracks of all time. “Ashitaka’s theme” from Princess Mononoke. She leaned against the wall and just let the music chill down the fury within her veins. There are some sudden jilts and Choppy stops as Kate plays it again and again, practicing certain parts to get them solid, Victoria puts on her makeup, picks out a cute outfit and makes it out the door in a much better mood than she’s had in a while.

She playfully tapped Kate’s door twice as she passed it. While she met up with Taylor down the hall she turned around to see Kate outside her door, looking around a bit confused. As Kate looked down the hall, she briefly made eyes with Victoria. Vic winked and did a small wave before turning away to start her day with her friends.
So, it seemed as though Victoria and Kate would continue like this. Occasionally doing homework together and having secret rendezvous into watching animations and slowly, get closer and closer…

However, the previous day’s activities were much too fun. Externally, the cool popular bitch, Victoria, could and would very much like to ignore Kate…keep their interactions to a minimum. Keep up appearances, you know?

But the real Victoria, that internal chubby weeaboo & N33t that lived underneath her skin was so, so, so excited that it was moonwalking within her unconscious. There was another person that loved animation, just like her. Not like just a passive consumer…but another person who could absorb the entirety of a movie and break it down to each carefully handled component. She could take each frame, each creative choice and explain how it touched her, her opinion of how it worked, how it didn’t work, how she would change it….

Internally she was screaming in happiness. Her entire spirit was screaming in such happiness that she couldn’t even concentrate for a couple of days.

So, being absolutely unable to discipline herself when it came to indulging her true vice of cartoons, the very next day Victoria, at first over text, badgered Kate into ditching homework…

Victoria: It’s just a quick break
Kate: It’s not a break, it’s a movie.
Victoria: Come.
Victoria: Just for a quickie ;)
Kate: A quickie is not 100 minutes! I know that much! Wait until I’m done with my hw!
Victoria: Just the opening, just see the first 10 minutes! Then I’ll let you go be boring and responsible
Kate: IT’S A TRAP. Let me finish my hw
Victoria: Come on.

There was ten minutes of silence. Victoria felt the sting of annoyance, the damn girl was ignoring her. No one fucking ignores Victoria Chase.

Victoria: Girl.
Victoria: I know where you live
Victoria banged on their shared wall to emphasis her point.
Victoria: You can’t hide, biyotch.
Kate: I’m not in my room. I’m in the library. Sorry.
Victoria banged on the wall again and again and again and again and again and--
She then heard a muffled yell, “Victoria! Stop!” Psh. As if Kate could actually lie to Victoria.
“Get your ass over here!” Victoria yelled back.
“Victoria!” Kate whined loudly. Victoria whipped out her phone and texted,
Victoria: Come on bunny hop on over. I’ll make it worth your while ;)

Victoria heard a rather loud exasperated noise. Two minutes later her door opened and she saw an adorably annoyed Kate Marsh. “You’re too much!” Kate accused.

Victoria smirked, then smoothly retorted, “better than too little, Cherie.” Then patted the seat next to her on her couch. Kate dragged her feet and then fell into her seat next to Victoria.

“This better be worth it.” Kate complained under her breath.

Victoria’s smirk grew chesire cat sized, “I always make sure it’s worth it.” She purred.

Of course after watching the first ten minutes would make anyone glued to her seat and Kate would stay for the whole movie. Then they nerded out, bonded and Kate would be forced to do her homework late and Victoria would just shove hers off to Courtney. Life was good when Victoria Chase got what she wanted.

Basically using this method over and over again, Victoria got her to give Kate a Studio Ghibli crash-course relatively quickly. Victoria got to listen to all of Kate’s opinions on Miyazaki’s lineup.

“I love how San’s journey—“

“Chihiro” Victoria corrected.

“Cheerio’s journey is—“

“Chee. Here. Oh. Come on, say it with me—“

“Let me finish! Then I’ll have the Japanese lesson with you, I promise” Kate laughed out loud. Victoria was about to jump in with a retort full of otaku sass but was floored by the sound of Kate’s laughter. This was the first time she ever heard a genuine, spontaneous sound of joy just erupt from Kate Marsh.

It made her mood soar in a way that she hadn’t felt in years. There was a grin so wide on her face when she immediately began to speak the few sentences she knew in Japanese. When Kate laughed even harder Victoria felt both annoyed that she had never known how beautiful Kate’s laugh was, and felt blessed to finally be the cause of the beautiful phenomenon.

After calming down, “How many languages do you speak?” Kate asked her. Victoria’s eyes unconsciously glanced up to the ceiling as she counted them off,

“Besides English, I’m fluent in French, conversational in Italian, I know some sassy Spanish…”

“And here I thought you were sassy in all languages,” Kate interjected. Victoria rose an eyebrow at her, trying to smite the smile threatening to break open her lips, “forgive me, I forgot how polite your Latin is” Kate added, her tone dry but eyes twinkling with mischief.

“Te Futue” Victoria shot back. Kate only answered with a small smile, her eyes still twinkling. “And as you can tell, I’m learning Japanese for shits and giggles” in actuality, Victoria was more determined to become fluent in Japanese than any other language, but she wasn’t ready to admit that to God, let alone Kate.

“You’re a polyglot.” Kate stated, a bit too obviously amazed. Victoria felt miffed that Kate was so surprised that she was intelligent. She wasn’t just the popular bitch on campus for looking so hot. It was because she was better than everyone else, duh.
So, being a vengeful Goddess, Victoria added, acting absentminded, “I’m also fluent in cunnilingus.” Staring dead into Kate’s eyes she licked her lips. Victoria had expected for Kate to look at her blankly and ask what was that. Then it would be invitation for Victoria to give a too-long and too-embarrassing explanation of lesbian oral sex.

However, she hadn’t expected that Kate’s mouth would purse, and a sheer red blush would rise from Kate’s collar up to her cheeks.

Kate, apparently, already knew what that was. Huh. Not as naïve as Victoria thought.

Not that it deterred Victoria from wanting to torture Kate a little, “Want to learn? I’m a good teacher” Victoria said, her voice low and smoky.

“As I was saying, I enjoy that Cheeryless’s journey, is not the typical good guy versus bad guy template of most other movies” Kate interrupted Victoria, talking louder and faster than she usually did.

Victoria’s internal nerd couldn’t take it anymore as she snapped, “Oh for fuck’s sake, stop! Stop! it’s Chihiro!”

After their quick decimation of the Studio Ghibli line-up, Victoria then began to show her cartoons:

Random episodes of Gravity Falls, Star vs.The Forces of Evil, Teen Titans, Some Adventure Time… Whichever Kate responded to, they would continue watching that.

One such cartoon was Steven Universe.

"The background art is phenomenal." Kate said aloud, mostly to herself. Victoria raised an eyebrow, she actually had never noticed the background art, "the colors, the mood it strikes - just by simple design they're great." Kate further explained.

At one point, Kate threw up her hands, “these song compositions are fuh-lipping amazing.” She forced Victoria to stop and rewind at certain points, trying to point out the simple, but brilliant lyrics and chord processions…Even though Victoria did enjoy the music very much, she didn’t get it. But watching Kate so excited made her excited.

“Listen to the ending song…” Kate explained, “it’s not an entire composition, it’s a cut-out…it’s beautifully put together, and now it makes me so agitated that I can’t listen to the entire piece” Kate said in good-nature, smile on her face as she listened to the same thirty seconds. Again and Again and Again and…

“We’re going onto the next episode.” Victoria punctuated by stopping Kate. Sorry, but she foresaw herself going nuts.

Victoria wondered if Kate would be bothered or would ask about the blatant queer undertones or subtle comments on gender and love within the show. If anything, either Kate didn’t catch it…Or, as Victoria observed how googly and teary-eyed Kate got when the character of Pearl lamented over her unrequited love and devotion to Steven’s dead mother…Kate appeared to be more endeared to the show because of it.

Hmmm. Interesting.

So they began a weekly Saturday morning cartoon session, just the two of them. However, Victoria began to block off late evenings where she was able to show off to Kate her immaculately organized box of collector's edition anime movies (the latest one they watched was the underrated Satoshi Kon
Tokyo God Fathers' So far, it's been Kate's favorite of his collection much to the surprise of Victoria.)

It’s not all rainbows and sunshine though, as Victoria painfully learned when she tried to show Kate her absolute favorite 80’s anime cult classic, the infamous 12 episodes of ’Sour Berry Panic’. She loved Sour Berry Panic so much that she couldn’t help but buy herself a ludicrously expensive handmade model of the main character (her favorite character) Agent Blueberry (it also glowed in the dark!!!!) If anyone asked, she would shrug and say it was a gift from some famous artist her family knew, which wasn’t a complete lie because George loved the craftsmanship of these models.

“Why are they all named after berries?” Kate asked her again for the third time. Victoria rolled her eyes, not getting what was so difficult about this,

“It’s a fictional sci-fi futuristic metropolis on Saturn…it’s how they name their hierarchy within the governmental agency”

Kate bit a knuckle on her finger, brow scrunched up, “but this series gets incredibly serious and intense. Do you know how jarring it is to hear the characters scream at each other ‘Die Blueberry, die!’ or ‘Damn you Raspberry! I should’ve known!’ or, the most ridiculous one by far, ‘It was Boysenberry the entire time! He fooled us all’? Like, it makes this sound like a comedy…”

“Because it is also a satire of American spy movies” Victoria expressed again.

“I know, but this isn’t like the ‘Naked Gun’ where it’s super obvious that it’s a satire. This is getting really intense and they’re still using these ridiculous names… like right there! That guy just got his head blown off—”

“Agent Cranberry.”

“Look at all that graphic blood, and look at the slow-mo and how everyone is crying and traumatized…This is serious and it’s meant to be emotionally impactful to the viewer. “

“It is.” Victoria growled. She had cried at this scene when she first saw it at age thirteen.

“But for me, the characters skintones that match the actual berries and them calling eachother by strawberry, lingonberry, huckleberry, goji…it just makes me hungry. I can’t take this seriously.”

“Japanese Anime has always been far more subtler than American media. They appreciate the art of subtext and understand the audience can put two and two together rather than just be spoon-fed all the information. In conclusion, You’re heartless and can’t appreciate high-brow material.” Victoria grumbled, very bitter and very put-off. Kate sucked and was a terrible artist. Period.

Kate just stared at how Victoria stubbornly crossed her arms and scowled at the screen. She briefly thought about commenting how Victoria looked like a brat but decided against it. Kate watched for about ten more minutes before she said, “I like how Agent Blueberry can make her skin glow in the dark.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty cool.” Victoria agreed.

But then it came down to their further analysis of who was best character and it was war.

“That’s the point of Blueberry, she seems to be good and sweet, but the reveal to the other characters and the audience is that she’s a badass who has to struggle not to be as brutal as she actually is. Everyone constantly underestimates her and she has to be polite and know her place because she’s
the rookie but when she gets pushed to the edge she just lets loose and it’s so satisfying. That’s why she’s the main character.”

“I know that, and it’s a common hero arc.” Kate explained, “but Rogue Raspberry, to me, is far more interesting.”

“What’s interesting about her? She’s a bitch.”

“Exactly, the set-up is that she’s just this awful girl that betrayed the organization. But then as the series goes on, you learn why she is the way she is. How she was abused by Boysenberry, her father, and pressured to be the perfect agent and how she couldn’t take it anymore. Also once Agent Blueberry helps save her life, she can’t help but help Agent Blueberry find out the truth of the organization…”

“Yeah, but but only after Agent Blueberry saved her ungrateful ass from getting shot out into space and saved her from getting tortured by Agent Lingonberry”

“True.”

“The fact that Agent Blueberry can even summon compassion towards her is a testament to her character.”

“I know Agent Blueberry is pretty cool. But I still like Rogue Raspberry better.”

“Yeah, yeah. Rogue Raspberry is the stereotypical brooding asshole who, ‘guess what everyone!’ suffers from a painful past and thinks that’s a great reason to lash out at everyone. Boring, much? Even Agent Cranberry is more interesting than her.”

Kate lifted up her hands, irritated, “Interesting? It was obvious that Agent Cranberry was going to be the sacrificial lamb. Really nice, older, funny mentor that pushes the hero to be their best when no one else sees their potential? He’s going to die. It’s been that way since Genesis.”

“Agent Cranberry is way better than Rogue Raspberry”

“Again, I still find her more interesting because she’s complicated. Agent Blueberry is complex, this makes her a good hero, but Rogue Raspberry is human in how she’s hard to like. She’s the perfect foil to blueberry. Where blueberry, even though an outcast, can’t help but win over everyone that crosses her path. Raspberry pisses off everyone she meets on purpose. Where blueberry fights to stay sweet and good, Raspberry has forsaken that path and has sworn to be sour. But Blueberry can’t help but be sour when the chips are down and Raspberry can’t help but be sweet when someone has sincerely helped her. This is why their dynamic is the strongest in the show and is what drives blueberry to be the top agent and help prevent the invasion of the Aphids.”

“Psh. Agent Huckleberry and Agent Blueberry are cuter together”

Kate let out a groan of disagreement, “this whole, childhood friends-we-met-eachother-first-so-we-should-get-together is so…boring and lazy. Also, that one part where he saves her in episode ten and twelve? That came out of nowhere. Like, it was shoved in there to remind everyone that ‘hey, there’s a male love interest here and he’s not useless’”

Victoria reluctantly relented, “Ok, I’ll agree with you on that.”

“Agent Blueberry felt far stronger towards Rogue Raspberry than towards Agent Huckleberry.”

“Rogue Raspberry made her life Hell! She outs Blueberry’s secret about her faulty genome sequence
that makes her the joke of the city and she physically broke her spine for literally shits and giggles in episode 4"

“Exactly and during the series Agent Blueberry is angry about it, but as they cross paths more and more Agent blueberry empathizes with Rogue Raspberry and learns that she’s wounded, broken and lost. Also Rogue Raspberry feels intense guilt over how she treated Agent Blueberry. They are mirrors of each other, that’s why she chose to forgive her…”

“It was still great though when Blueberry punched her in the face and threw her out the window in episode 8”

“Oh yeah, that was a great scene. Anyways, that’s why she lets Rogue Raspberry get away at the end. That is why, the literal last shot of the entire series is two meeting again on that beach in Jupiter... really visually creative way to adapt a summer getaway on another planet, actually.”

“You see in the shot that Agent Blueberry has her hand on her gun… it’s meant to mean that she’s going to continue her fight”

“Well, for me, it’s quite obvious that it’s a rendezvous point. Her hand on her gun is her struggle with her dedication towards the organization, everything she’s learned and with her intense feelings for Rogue Raspberry. Did you see the expressions on her face?”

“Yeah, pissed as all Hell.”

“Yes, but the close up on her eyes? That’s yearning. She wants to be with her. Also, did you see Rogue Raspberry? She is literally wearing a bikini, she’s exposed, she has no weapons. She’s laying out on the lounge chair, waiting for Agent Blueberry to come to her.”

“She’s being an arrogant ass, gloating that Agent Blueberry couldn’t kill her last time.” Victoria pontificated.

“Did you see the look on her face?” Kate stressed, “Raspberry looks relieved, happy for the first time in the entire series. That pose is also clearly invitational…”

Victoria jeered, “And you know what ‘invitational’ looks like, how?”

“I’m abstinent, not blind!” Kate frustratingly defended, “The point of abstinence is to know what sexual invitation looks like so you can avoid the temptation of doing…whatever! And that pose of her spread out on that lounge chair, tipping her sunglasses down is. Very. Clearly. ‘Invitational.'”

“They’re not in lesbians with each other! They hate each other. It’s the perfect rivalry.” Victoria protested.

Kate shook her head, not believing it, “They’re in love. They have a passionately secret affair for the rest of Agent Blueberry’s career where Rogue Raspberry helps her along the way and Agent Blueberry lets her get away with criminal activity as long as it’s not too egregious. I’m calling it.”

“That’s not cannon!” Victoria complained.

“It’s my head-cannon” Kate answered, defiant, “and we don’t know what happens after the end. All we know is that they stop the Aphids from invading and Agent Blueberry lets Rogue Raspberry go.”

“I would’ve just shot her in the face.”

“This why you’re not the main character” Kate sighed, exhausted.
“Oh, look at you miss ‘Agent Blueberry’ the epitome of sweetness. If only you had as much brains as you did sugar.” Victoria sneered, quoting Rogue Raspberry’s signature insult to Agent Blueberry.

“Rogue Raspberry you stop being such a sour puss!” Kate declared, quoting Agent Blueberry’s most common phrase towards Rogue Raspberry.

Victoria whipped her head around, ready to go on a full geek blitzkrieg but stopped herself. Kate also stopped herself, both of them simultaneously realizing the three tons of irony that was the entire conversation.

Uh.

This got awfully Meta awfully fast.

Welp. Victoria has nothing to show for that explanation. Other than a very flushed neck because holy Cow that is embarrassing and Victoria felt rather naked at that moment.

“That’s just my thoughts.” Kate concluded, rather lamely.

There was a good minute of silence between them after that. Both of them truly did not know what else to say.

…

…

…

From the ashes of uncomfortable was born a curiosity.

“So…you’re totally Ok with two female leads have a Sapphic relationship? Where they have intimate berry relations?” Victoria asked, not entirely rhetorically. If anyone was going to ship fictional lesbians, Kate Marsh was last on that list.

“Yes. It’s beautiful. Why wouldn’t I like it?” Kate asked, her eyes narrowing at Victoria.

“…” Victoria sighed and ran a hand through her hair, “you know that your incredibly Amish background is incredibly misleading—“

“That I’m a homophobic, anti-science, socially right-winged, racist bible thumper from nowhere?” Kate interjected. Again, the way she said that was polite, but man that tone was indignant.

“First,” Kate began, “the Amish are derived from Swiss Anabaptists, who only live in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. I’m a mainline protestant that descended from the first French Canadian missionaries that went to Oregon to convert the Native Americans.” Kate continued, now on a tangent, “Second, the greatest commandment of all religions is love. Love for your fellow human being regardless of social status, race, deviances and any other difference. Each of us is made in God’s image – beautiful and beloved, unique and whole. If lepers, criminals, the disfigured, the mentally ill, the promiscuous and the forsaken are allowed God’s love and forgiveness why would that exclude homosexuals? That makes no sense. Love and acceptance is the summary of all Jesus, Mohammed and Siddhartha specifically taught. It is the very human, very flawed human followers that have complicated and perverted this message because humans have always targeted what they do not understand, which of course, is why religions started in the first place. To create warm places of community where strangers could depend on each other. The more I study religions and talk to others the less and less I believe discrimination is a part of any religion. It is the duty of the religious
and to religions to protect and accept especially the disenfranchised. So no, I don’t find anything wrong with homosexuals or homosexual activity as long as both parties are happy, everything is consensual and they aren’t hurting anyone else; just the same as anyone else.”

Welp. That was more about religion than Victoria ever cared to know about.

However, Kate was now on a full on ramble, “not that, I, Uh, know very many homosexuals or associate with any of them. Well, there’s Max and Chloe so…I do hang out with some. Not that I mind! Of course, gay people are awesome- I just- Uh- um. But the current Alliance organization at Blackwell is already pretty big but they don’t do anything. Not because they’re, uh, homosexuals, but the organization itself doesn’t do anything. I know they include allies in the alliance organization but I just feel, er, unnecessary? And, I’m already busy running the religious studies group and volunteer at the chapter of ‘Meals on Wheel’s I’ve started…Not that I don’t care, because I do, uh, very much so, but um… yeah my mom would be so pissed if she learned I was helping gay people, not that I would let her stop me or anything but after everything’s that’s happened I don’t want to give her an aneurysm, but then again everything I do threatens to give her a heart attack so why should that stop me…” Kate’s entire tangent had decided into this awkward jumble of mumbling and speaking out-loud, as if more to herself, than to Victoria.

Victoria rubbed her temple, not sure why Kate had descended from her eloquent religious history lesson to a terrible mess of word vomit. What was she even saying? What was she trying to prove?

Hold up.

Victoria’s gaydar began to ping.

Holy mother of….

Victoria stared at Kate. Her gaze hard, searching for what was making her gaydar go off like crazy. Kate finally met Victoria’s eye-contact and suddenly Kate’s expression morphed to what a person would look like if they were caught dragging the dead body out of the room.

Naked
Exposed
Guilty
Oh so f*cked

Victoria felt her own heart flat-line.

Was Kate Marsh a rainbow flying queer!?!?!

Victoria knew that she should stop. Change subjects. Let Kate escape the madness of being a maybe-gay buried in a religious sea of intolerance. Victoria knew that she needed to stop digging, stop poking, just stop.

But then, Victoria almost never knew when to stop.

And she needed to know.

“Kate. Do you find women attractive?” she asked, point blank, straight shooter. Kate flinched as though she had been physically struck. She then took a unnaturally long pause,
“Everyone knows that women are attractive…” Kate answered, completely reasonable and logical, emotionless. However, her arms had tensed, now locked straight. Her fingers squeezed into the couch cushions, her eyes refusing to meet Victoria’s.

PING PING PING PING PING PING PING

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

Victoria’s mind imploded into it’s own big-bang theory. Kate was in the closet! But not so in the closet that she hadn’t done the massive amount of research to try and defend herself and others when it came down to it. Was she planning on coming out? No, from how Kate was acting now, she was scared shitless of how she was gay. She was queer who happened to be a Super Christian and her family and everyone back at home probably disagreed, like, really disagreed with her gayness and…

Ho boy this was an absolute mess.

Considering that now there was a video of her slutty-ing it up with a bunch of guys. But hey, there had been a handful of girls in there too that Kate had made out with. That portion of the video was the best part to be honest.

Anyways.

The way Kate was acting now reminded her of back when Mark – Mr. Jefferson was teaching and Kate entered the class, head down and avoiding Taylor and Victoria’s gaze. When Taylor threw shit at her and how Kate took it…

Like a victim.

The memory made bile rise in the back of her throat, but she swallowed it.

She took out her phone and looked at it and said, as if off-handedly, “Lesbi-honest, in this room I have full bi-fi bars.”

Kate looked up at her, a bit confused, “really? Usually the wifi is only Ok—“

“I’m talking about the bi-fi.” Victoria corrected. Kate blinked at her, not getting it.

“Some people like to walk straight down the street, I prefer to ride my bi-cycle.” Victoria tried again.

Kate looked at her as though she were insane.

“You have a bike?” Kate asked, again, truly unsure where all this was coming from. Victoria squeezed the skin in between her eyebrows. Part of her wanted to smack Kate upside the head and just be the sass lord that she was. Come on, she was really trying to lighten the mood here!

No, no, no. The last thing she wanted to do was make Kate run out of the room and cry. How would she understand? Why didn’t Christianity have anything referring to…

Hold up.

Victoria put her hand on Kate’s shoulder (Kate was staring at her as though Victoria was about to turn into a dolphin.) then she said, calmly, slowly, “it’s not Adam or Eve. It’s Adam and Eve. That’s why it’s called the BI-ble.”

There was a moment of silence. Then she saw Kate’s eyes widen, an expression of ‘mind-blown’ dawned on her face. “Oh!” she gasped out. Then a very wry grin stretched on her face before it
broke into up into laughter.

“Now do you get it? I was this short of physically taking your marker and spelling it out for you. I’m bisexual, and it’s totally cool if you are too – or lesbian, queer, 2 on the Kinsey scale, heteroflexible, whatever you choose to label or yourself or not. Basically, it’s nice to find another gay unicorn in the wild. You should be proud” Victoria momentarily winced at her choice of words, “Nbd Kate. Nbd.” She finished.

There seemed to be a rather wobbly smile on Kate’s face, as though she was a mix of relieved, humored and kind of (absolutely) terrified.

“Another wild gay unicorn…” Kate said under her breath quietly, as though the revelation dawned upon her was both a Godsend and a Curse.

Then she began to giggle.

“What?” Victoria asked, a bit perturbed because Kate hadn’t stopped giggling.

“You just told me I’m a wild gay unicorn” Kate said in between giggles, “I’ve never even dreamed that anyone, let alone you would ever say that to me…” Kate looked down, suddenly melancholy, “but you’re right.” She rested her forehead into her palm. “you’re right.” She uttered, voice cracking.

Oh fuck.

Oh Fuck.

Oh Fuuuuuucckkkk

Then it felt like all the emotions she had other than panic fell straight and heavy into her stomach. Kate Marsh was on the edge of having a gay freak out.

Victoria really didn’t know how to handle a gay freak out. She barely even knew how to handle Taylor’s panic attacks, let alone a sexuality crises. From what she heard and read, for religious people sexuality tended to be a freak out subject. What was it called? ‘Gay Panic?’ It really shouldn’t be, her parents were very open about sexuality and how it was fluid and morphed and that as long as everything was consensual and you were safe, it didn’t really matter as much as people thought it did. However, her parents were artists…Kate’s family lived, breathed and farted out the church.

Oh Fucking Christ, Kate’s lower lip was doing that trembling thing and she looked like she was going to cry.

“Hey, it’s 2013 – gay people are amazing.” Victoria commanded, loudly, “You know what? Queers run the world. Look at all the most amazing artists in history. The writers, the painters, the film makers, the actresses the journalists…They’re all gay!” Victoria ranted, “Everyone who has ever done anything cool was gay! Eleanor Roosevelt, Marlene Dietrich, Angel Haze, Florence Nightingale, Mary Shelley, Ramona Lofton, Katharine Hepburn, Tracy Chapman, Jane Addams, Patricia Highland, Ellen Degeneres, Jessica Clark, and she can be as non-chalant as she wants but Kristen Stewart is not fooling anyone!”

“Kristen who?” Kate squeaked, completely overwhelmed by Victoria’s passion.

“K-Stew, Bella, the Twilight girl!” Victoria barked, right now very high off her rant,

“Sparkly vampires?” Kate squeaked again.
“Yes! That piece of shit! Anyways, it’s not what society told you to be, but when has society ever been looking out for the best, coolest and most progressive? Never. They want you to be boring and fit into some binary box in order to collect statistics and go about their bland lives. You’re an artist! It’s in your definition to imitate the truth of your reality and your unique experience that makes people uncomfortable within your creations. You need to feel empowered by the fact that you’re a queer Catholic illustrator, musician humanitarian. Whatever you do, whatever you say is going to be that much more authentic... and that’s all an artist can do. Authentically express themselves in such a way that others can understand.” Victoria finished, breathing a bit harder. She hadn’t gone on such a tirade in a while. Ok, there was that one she had yesterday with Taylor about the new trend for jeggings going fucking everywhere… but still, tirades took a lot out of you.

“…I’m actually a Christian illustrator musician humanitarian.” Kate joked softly. Victoria scoffed. Weren’t they the same thing? “but that was very…authentic of you, Victoria. I truly do appreciate what you’ve just said. Thank you.” Kate said, looking up at Victoria like a person would look at someone who was pulling them up from a well. It made Victoria’s heart gush compassion and made Victoria immensely uncomfortable.

“Whatever, I’m just preaching the way of the artist. Stop whipping yourself, Ok? People have a lot weirder secrets and a lot worse shit to hate themselves over.”

Kate just smiled at her, looking as though she had just stepped indoors after having been outside in a storm.

“I never thought you knew so much about lesbian history.” Kate observed.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me.” Victoria snapped.

“You’re right.” Kate confessed. At Kate’s admittance, it felt as though there whatever toxic smog lifted and floated away. Victoria felt as though she could breathe again and after that monologue she did take a good breath. Ok, Kate Marsh no longer looked as though she was going to cry. Good. Now she just looked as though she stepped out of a roller-coaster; very frazzled. What could Victoria do to lighten the mood and get her back onto her feet for the time being?

Gossip.

“Alright, come on you unicorn, who do you find attractive? Who makes you feel the gay?” Victoria demanded. Kate’s head jerked away again, the cherry red flush spreading up her neck to her ears. It was sickly adorable. Victoria decided to throw the girl a bone once again, “I’ll start then, Taylor Christensen, of course. We’ve made out several times, drunkenly, but still it was fun and hot. There was that senior last year…what was it…Aha! Jesse Fitzgerald? We hooked up once, she was gorgeous but surprisingly she was a terrible kisser. I’d do Juliet Warren if she didn’t look so fucking constipated all the time. There’s that new girl, Tricia Lincoln who I’ve tried to see if she swings both ways – unfortunately she seems really straight, which is a shame because the legs on that girl…. Also, there’s this one girl in our science class…Leslie?

“Lucille Martin”

“That girl! That beauty mark on her lip? Ugh, I want to make out with her face so bad. But she’s such a nerd and parties even less than you do…I heard she’s part of the weird-ass Dungeon and Dragons group. I don’t know whether or not I’m disappointed or appalled.”

Then Victoria looked pointedly at Kate. Waiting. Kate twiddled her thumbs before, like the terrified messenger, answered very, very softly.
“um, Dana Ward.”

Victoria didn’t know why sheer annoyance was the first thing she felt, “So you dig the skanky look, too? I thought that was just horny guys who liked it. But hey, you learn new things everyday.” Victoria snapped. If she had fur it would’ve bristled. This apparently awoken Kate’s energy back because she suddenly sat up straighter, stronger,

“It’s not that.” Kate defended, “She’s genuine, compassionate and was one of my first friends here. She truly listens when you talk to her and she’s always trying to make people feel comfortable. She just happens to be gorgeous, but that wasn’t what made me like her in the first place.” Kate then added under her breath, “I didn’t notice the low cuts until later.”

Victoria crossed her arms, still feeling a bit annoyed. But then, she asked, “so, ‘sixteen and pregnant’ was the one that lured you in and got you wrapped around her finger. So where did that doomed romance go?”

There was a pause as Kate mulled this over, then, “How do you think I was convinced to go to the party, Victoria?” Kate asked with a small, sad smile. Self-deprecation at its most cheerful.

The gears in Victoria’s locked in place for a moment, stunned, then began to roll at full speed. She had wondered in the past how Kate even got to the party. Of course it was Dana Ward! Of course she was the one who invited Kate to the party! She was that type of girl who didn’t know what “VIP” meant. Kate, now being the cute little baby queer Vic found out she was, went. But Dana had been a shitty party partner, leaving Kate at the first sign of dick there was. A flare of anger ignited in the back of Victoria’s throat. Really, when Kate was drugged up and getting pawed at by the entire football team and then some, where the Hell was Dana? Skanky bitch.

No.

No no.

No. No. No. Victoria had to convince herself not to go down that road. She was far worse for filming Kate at her most vulnerable and spreading it around. Nathan actually drugged her and brought her to Mark Jefferson, who masterminded all of this in the first place. Everyone was responsible for what happened and the more mature part of Victoria begrudgingly knew that she couldn’t blame anyone, least of all Dana, for what happened.

She could, however, still be pissed at the damn cheerleader.

Victoria decided to try and lighten the mood by continuing, “So, anyone else? Or should I just label your type as ‘girls who wear too little clothing?’”

Kate shot her another look of ire to which Victoria snapped, “girl, it looks like the fabrics wear Dana, not the other way around, she might as well be a parading underwear model.”

“She can parade around me with that body” Kate muttered under her breath.

“Woah! Excuse me!? Say that again, biyotch!” Victoria interjected, not believing what she heard. Did Kate actually say what she thought she just said?

“Max Caulfield.” Kate answered, with a blush, purposefully answering Victoria’s previous question and not the other immediate one. Evidently her distraction tactic worked because Victoria rolled her eyes at her answer.

“Oh please, as if anyone’s surprised. Everyone already knows how much you and Maxine ‘hang
out’. How you both go on walks by the beach, critiquing each other’s work – aren’t you two also planning to make a book together?’ is that the hipster version of “Netflix and chill?” Please, your ‘tea dates’ don’t fool anyone.” Victoria huffed, a bit bitterly. If everyone thought Dana was hot (she’s just a skank!) then everyone was also obsessed about Max. Max is so talented. Max is so cool. Max is apparently so cute with all her stupid freckles and really nice smile…

Ahem, that didn’t excuse that Max was an abominable hipster and had zero style.

Kate gazed at Victoria, a thoughtful look on her face. Victoria could see the gears turning within those hazel eyes. Why did it feel as though she had just wandered into a trap?

“You know an awful lot about my activities together with Max.” Kate began, slowly, “if I knew you any less, I’d almost think that you were interested in Max…or me, but that’s just ridiculous.”

A pink hue rose to prominence on Victoria’s cheeks, “I’d almost rather bang that waitress in the Two Whales than Caulfield.” Victoria retorted. Again, Max was not cute and Max had no style and she was a stupid hipster and Victoria wouldn’t touch her in a million years.

OK, IT WAS ONE WEIRD SEX DREAM! IT’S NOT LIKE VICTORIA THOUGHT ABOUT IT ALL THE TIME IT JUST COMES BACK SOMETIMES WHEN VICTORIA SAW MAX BECAUSE IT WAS REALLY FUCKING WEIRD AND IT WAS RAINING SQUIRRELS AND MAX’S PUSSY WAS LEAKING STRAWBERRY JAM AND SHE HAD TO EAT IT OUT and Max kept saying ‘Oh Victoria, you’re Frenchier than Louis Daguerre’ and ‘you’re fixing climate change, fantastic’ When Max came everything in the world turned neon green and then Max turned into a elephant and skipped into the sky. Then Victoria’s teeth fell out, turned into Gremlins and ran away.

To be fair, Victoria had been irresponsibly mixing her drugs that night, but still, too weird for her liking.

Ahem.

Kate continued as though she didn’t hear Victoria’s outburst, “It reminds me of those young adult novels – you know, where the protagonists obsessively track their love interest’s habits, whereabouts and whatnots? And it’s only years later when you realize that it’s stalker-like, possessive behavior and not at all ideal traits in a romantic partner?” Kate looked away briefly and tapped her chin thoughtfully, “I hate those books.” She muttered under her breath before resuming eye contact with Vic and continuing, “If you’re so curious, I can invite you to our next tea date, show you what really goes on behind the chamomile – I’m sure you’d enjoy it.” Kate punctuated her statement with a smile as Victoria’s face burned with slight embarrassment.

Did fucking Kate Marsh just school her on her inherent pettiness?

“I would’ve thought that trashy young-adult novels were your thing.” Victoria sneered at her, masking her humiliation by switching topics. It’s a classic defensive move, usually used by insecure people who don’t want to confront the real issues.

You are insecure. Max Caulfield makes you obsess with how you’re not good enough and have to fucking try so hard to be cool and act like an elitist, meanwhile she just genuinely doesn’t care what anyone thinks. She just is elite. She just is talented. You admire her and hate her and hate yourself that you can’t just be chill around her.

Kate, as she’s learning, makes her squirm for the same reasons and others as well.
Kate chuckled without any humor; someone who has heard the same stupid joke way too many times and is trying to be polite about it, “they’re my mother’s thing, that’s for sure. She did try to get us into it as she bought the entire Nicholas Sparks limited edition Christmas book collection and gave it to my sisters and I collectively when I was 13.”

“Wait, hold up, how did Nicholas Sparks get passed the book burning? Isn’t it all love and sex and stuff?”

Kate explained again, patiently, “Nicholas Sparks is a Christian writer. His works are all about Christian values. He never writes about adultery or premarital sex, or all his main characters are influenced strongly by faith and do not fall into temptation. All of his featured couples are white and heterosexual and get married.” Victoria shook her head in disbelief,

“Why am I surprised that I shouldn’t be surprised?” Victoria drawled sarcastically.

Kate glanced up and saw the mortified expression on Victoria’s face, it made her pause as she smiled wide, “I know, right? My younger sisters like them a whole lot, however I personally believed for a while that I would be doing God’s work by burning the lot of them.” Kate was cut off when Victoria let out a very loud snort,

“Seriously?”

Kate’s eyes glittered with a devious light as she answered, “Still do.”

This was certainly unprecedented. “Wait, so, what do you like reading then? What do you watch?” Victoria asked, genuinely curious. Kate did not watch cartoons, Rated R movies, or any ‘distasteful’ movies, probably didn’t look at porn, comics or anything else. What did this girl consume?

“…I love horror novels. Stephen King’s ‘It’ is my favorite book, besides the bible of course” Kate revealed. Victoria had to clench her jaw to prevent it from dropping. Cute little nun-girl loved Stephen King, the (no pun intended) King of horror?

“I imagine your mother was thrilled with this development” Victoria stated, again, sarcastic.

Kate shrugged, “I had to check the books out from the library and hide them. I would read them when I could. Actually she did find out once, I had carelessly left it on my bed under some covers and she found it. When I came home she chewed me out. Reminded me never to get caught again.” Kate unconsciously rubbed the back of her head, “she made me volunteer at the youth group even more. Thought I wasn’t spending enough time with our lord and savior”

“Wait, pause and rewind Saint Kate. Your father is a pastor, your entire family are Christians, you all go to church, you read and study the bible at home and you already went to Youth group….How the Hell do you spend even more time with God?”

“I hear you, we’re already taught that God is always with you, where ever you are – so I thought this was just getting redundant, mother.” Kate grumbled the word ‘mother’ as if a bad taste was in her mouth, “However, as it turns out I really do enjoy volunteering, plus I got to spend more time learning art as the artists in town were called in to teach at the youth group, or they happened to be at the town rec center where we were anyway. Best part was that I rarely had to spend anytime at home, so the time I did get to myself between activities I spent reading more Stephen King.” Kate finished, her shoulders doing an unconscious wiggle of success at the memory. Victoria stared at her, apparently in a constant state of disbelief during this entire exchange.

Victoria never associated ‘Kate Marsh’ with teenage rebellion, the drugs, alcohol and sex. However,
it was fascinating to know that Kate mutinied in her own Kate way. Victoria felt a bloom of respect for the girl as well as a tiny flush of affection; a fellow queer insurgent.

“How did you even get here?” Victoria asked, “like, if your mom’s going to Damn you for reading ‘The Shining’ then how did they let you come to a school full of artists who basically swim in sin all day long?”

Kate let out a long sigh, rubbing her palm against her temple, “I first applied here secretly. I just wanted to see how talented I was compared to all the others that applied…but my parents saw the acceptance letter before I did and confronted me about it. I was so blind-sided. I had no idea that I could get in. I wanted to come…”

Kate paused, deliberating. Victoria eyed Kate, waiting impatiently.

“Do you remember in Spirited Away? That scene in the middle of the movie when Cheerio—“

“Chihiro.”

“The scene where Cheery has to clean the muck master and nearly dies? But she keeps pulling and pulling and pulling until the bicycle pops out and all the resistance falls away? Yeah. It was like that. Except my father really supported me.” Kate finished that sentence with a warm smile at the mention of her father.

Victoria let out a loud guffaw, the image of a tiny Kate Marsh going up against a giant Sewer God was amazing. Actually, Kate Marsh in that pink Japanese garb, gathering everyone to unclog a river God was fucking perfect.

Victoria debated whether or not to ask the second most obvious question, but she decided that she had to, “how did they let you come back?” she asked quietly. There was a pause and Victoria held her breath, as if she had tripped a land mine.

Kate let out another sigh, however this time it was punctuated by a weary smile, “Same thing. But my father still supported me. Lots of bible verse quoting, but it worked all the same.”

“Cool.” Was all Victoria could respond with. Kate ran a hand through her thick bangs, suddenly looking very exhausted. There was a moment of clear moment of empathy that sparked in Victoria’s heart. Empathy was an emotion that hardly ever woke within Victoria. Years of having elitism and child abandonment issues drilled into her made it hard for her to feel sheer connection to anyone. The last person was Nathan, who was the only person who could understand ‘first world rich kid problems’

But that look of sheer defeat and internal turmoil on Kate’s face? Oh, she immediately identified with that and God Damn she felt for the other girl. So, she used her knee to nudge against Kate’s, “Hashtag #shitty mother’s club. Hashtag #welcome Kate Marsh” Victoria said.

Victoria wasn’t expecting a feeling of pure, unadulterated happiness when Kate gently used her knee to nudge back. “Thanks for having me” Kate replied softly, “where should I put all my baggage?” she asked, full of self-deprecation.

Victoria lifted her chin, “In the closet with the rest of mine.” She responded, nonchalantly.

“I thought I just came out of the closet” Kate quipped. Victoria let out a loud snigger. Shit, this girl was quick. After Victoria’s snorts died down, Kate asked, “Your mom ever made you feel like you were going to Hell?” even though it was mainly sarcastic, Victoria heard the depressed teen in that statement. She nudged Kate’s knee again,
“If your definition of Hell is; never being able to meet up to her standards of perfection and being made to feel like shit and that you should’ve been aborted – then no, I wasn’t going to Hell, I was in it. Actually, still in it.”

Kate returned the knee nudge, “Hey, put your baggage in the closet with mine.”

“Excuse me, I’ve never been in a closet and don’t plan on going in. It smells like moth balls and it’s, like, dark and crap.”

“You’re right. But hey, at least you have all your baggage to keep you warm.”

“and lonely internalized homophobia”

“Again, nothing like hellfire to get you hot”

“Ohhh, hot and bothered? Sign me up for the sin”

“Don’t worry, you’re already on the VIP list, when the party happens Satan’s minions will let you in.”

Victoria held back a laugh, but shot Kate a very amused look. Did Kate just give a subtle zing about the Vortex Club parties? Yes she did. When Marsh was in the mood she could certainly knew how to epee her opponent. En garde, Kate Marsh.

“Harumph, I don’t think your mother would appreciate your comments.” Victoria huffed, pretending to flip her non-existent long hair.

“Jokes on you, my mother never appreciates my comments.”

“Jokes on you, neither does mine”

Both of them then said simultaneously, “Hashtag #Shittymothersclub”

Both of them broke into hysterical laughter at the same time.

She also wasn’t expecting Kate to look up at her, her wayward threads of hair in her face, eyes crinkled because of that sincere grin on her face. Victoria didn’t expect to feel a tingle shoot up from where their knees connecting, up her thigh and settle, sparkling in her stomach.

“So…Victoria Chase, most popular girl at school, soon to be famous photographer and Queen of bi-sexual puns. Who knew?” Kate said, grin gracing her face and twinkle in her eye. Victoria rolled her eyes to suppress her embarrassment.

“I hate puns, they’re the lowest form of humor.” She scoffed. Then, she added hesitantly, “But, I don’t know, bi-puns just explain how I feel about it all, I guess.”

“So, did you come up with those puns or…?” Kate asked.

“Oh Hell no, I have some dignity.” Unlike pun master Caulfield.

“Then how do you know these?” Kate asked.

Victoria pulled up tumblr and searched “bisexual puns” She then let Kate scroll through them. At first, Kate was chuckling then she was outright laughing, “oh my gosh, some of these are so terrible.” Victoria just grinned,
“It just gets better.”

The rest of the night they talk more about sexuality. Well, it’s more of Victoria talking about her own experiences with it (minus Rachel Amber), the gossip about other people’s gay experiences and Kate listening to her. Victoria couldn’t believe how Kate was soaking it all up, being very attentive and looking sincerely appreciative of the stories.

Wait… Kate hadn’t talked to anyone else about this.

Kate Marsh struck her as the type of girl who listened more than she talked. Who was there for her friends and was the emotional foundation that could keep a group together and up. But who actually cared to dig this deep for Kate? For most people, herself included, at first when it came to Kate Marsh, you got what you saw:

A person who cared a lot, did a lot, and was generally happy with her choices in life. She was sweet, pious, dressed like a fifties house-wife and…that was about it.

But scratch the surface and there she was, just another girl who was confused, lost, and terrified. However, unlike most, she actively tried to do her best under the immense circumstances around her and not use her anxieties as a crutch to hurt others.

It came to Victoria that Kate had never let her guard fall and polished that outward persona to the point that no one knew that it was a wall. Then her guard, that protective barrier she had built had been smashed to bits…

But even then, Kate Marsh had gotten on that roof in that rain and was prepared to take the weight of her secrets to the grave.

Now, watching Kate Marsh lounge and relax on her couch as she listened, she looked as though she was finally allowed to be comfortable in her skin around another person for the first time.

Victoria Chase felt only honored that she could help Kate be more confident in who she was:

A wild gay unicorn.

It’s 2AM in the morning when Kate began to nod off on her couch. Victoria felt the sudden strong urge to sweep tiny Kate into her arms and carry her own bed and let her sleep while Victoria continued to dick around on the computer until 3am as per usual. This was coming from a girl who fucking hated to share. She hated to share her bed most of all. You had to be VIP, MVP and pretty special for that privilege (Only Nathan, Taylor and…Rachel had done so in the past). Even when hooking up, Victoria either did it at their place, a neutral place or immediately kicked that person out after all was said and done.

But not too long after, sleepy Kate returned to her room and Victoria went to bed feeling both better than usual, and acutely more lonely than usual.

The next day she got a text from Kate. Contained was a picture of a golden, cute cat(wearing a pearl necklace) riding a huge adorable whale.

“Meowtoria rides the Bisexu-Whale everywhere she goes. Not that her mother cares.”

She did literally laugh out loud in class, getting many stares and a hard glare from her teacher.

Chapter End Notes
Holy shit, that became a monster. I debated splitting this into two but I couldn’t find any good point that wouldn’t interrupt the situation.

Having Kate and Victoria argue, bicker and talk to one another, like actually talk to one another as two radically different girls would; has been immensely gratifying. I hope when you read their exchanges you feel the same way.

If you don’t understand the epic nerding out, part of me says sorry as I nerd out hard after consuming any sort of quality media (should’ve talked to me after I played this game) the other part of me says “watch the movies and cartoons, then you’ll understand why they’re nerding out so hard”

Anyways, now all of that is out of the way…the story will start to pick up it’s pace

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW

…as soon as the words left her mouth Victoria knew she fucked up. Something snapped within Kate and her head whipped up to stare straight at Victoria. For a long moment Victoria could see the murder blaze out of Kate’s eyes.

Musical Influences:

Dear Theodosia - Regina Spektor and Ben Folds (cover of Hamilton Musical version)
As my Guitar gently weeps - Regina Spektor
Laughing with - Regina Spektor
Us - Regina Spektor
Actual Nightmares

Chapter Notes

So, I have a tumblr @llamas-dynamite

I really have no idea how to use this and I'm figuring it out step by step. So, if you want to chat about lis, Chasemarsh, or life or the creative process or writing -- I'm there!

However, if you also want to rack up good karma for next Christmas, you can also go over there and tell me how to use the darn thing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Without even thinking about it, I used to be able to fly. Now I'm trying to look inside myself and find out how I did it.” – Kiki (Kiki’s Delivery Service)

During the late evenings and Saturday mornings things between Kate and Victoria were going so, so well. It’s a safe haven for Victoria’s geekdom and Kate’s inner sass lord (which by the way was impressing Victoria, who was the Queen of shade). They’re growing closer so quickly and Victoria couldn’t have asked for better results when she reached out to her former victim. Or, when her former victim reached out to her and she took the olive branch.

Either way, it’s surprisingly less bumpy considering their horrendous history.

However her and Kate don’t really hang out during school hours too much. Sure, they text all the time. Nerdy references, funny observations, general snark and flirtations. Well, Victoria sent the flirty texts and Kate just responded very dryly or answered with biblical proverbs about abstaining from temptation, which amused Victoria immensely. To be fair, Victoria send flirty texts to all her friends, so, please don’t take it the wrong way.

Victoria certainly would never be serious about flirting with Kate.

Just look at her clothes, ew.

And abstinence? Sheesh. Hell no. Life was too short to wait.

However, it wasn’t to say that Kate wasn’t pretty or that she didn’t have a attractive personality. Victoria could admit that there was a certain look that Kate had that was enticing to people. She saw how some boys silently watched her enter and exit the classroom. How the attraction glowed behind the corneas. She saw how Max lowered her chin and her gaze softened, as though she were bashful around Kate’s presence. Even Price, when she came over to pick up Max, she was so excited to mess with Kate’s bun and pinch her cheeks. God, that punk was like a twelve-year-old boy with her affections. She was ten times worse around Caulfield. Victoria was even suspicious of Dana's regard of Kate. Seeing as whenever the two talked, she had to touch Kate. A hand on her shoulder, on her lower back, resting around her shoulders...

So, if Kate wanted to capitalize on this she just really needed to actually apply some style to her life. Victoria wanted to either cry in agony at how Kate grew up with absolutely no fashion aids in her life, or cry in relief that somehow an artist as talented and with as much potential as Kate somehow
grew out of that mulch of Christian monotony.

However, that girl who was the heart of many people, who, if Victoria had to be really honest, was starting to wiggle quickly into her own heart…

She wasn’t looking so hot this week.

In fact, Kate was starting to look more and more like a deflated balloon.

The past week had been a rather strange one. First, Kate’s responses to messages had gotten slower and slower until sluggish. This, even though irksome was not the most unusual thing seeing as Katie got up to a lot stuff. Clubs, volunteering, spending her time with peasants such as Caulfield, Price, Ward or any of the others in the “weirdo squad.”

But second, Kate had bailed on all of Victoria’s movie and cartoon sessions. She had thrown whatever excuse she could. Meals on Wheels. Max. Church stuff. Religion. Even walking Alice… Who walks their bunny? Something strange was going on.

They may have not been attached at the hip during the day hours but Victoria kept an eye on her. Whether it was from down the hall or from across the room, Victoria would check in on Kate occasionally.

The first thing that alarmed Victoria was Kate’s posture. Now, maybe Kate did not sit at her desk with a military straight back as Victoria did, but Kate was alert – head up and her eyes full of bright clarity. Unlike Caulfield the space cadet whose head was always somewhere else. Starting from Monday she was slouching again, as if folding into herself.

When she walked her head was constantly down and rather than her quick light bird step she usually had, she was shuffling.

She wasn’t talking much and was even avoiding the weirdo squad at lunch, choosing to be alone and draw somewhere off by the parking lot. Victoria only found where she was when she went back to her car to get something she forgot in the backseat. There she was, almost hidden behind some tree, nose in a sketchbook, hand moving rhythmically – as if conducting.

As polite as Kate was and as much as she tried to avoid people’s concern there was no denying that Kate Marsh was acting depressed. Victoria wasn’t even going to be difficult in revealing that it concerned her. In truth, everyone who noticed was concerned. She saw Max sit by her side before Homeroom and Photography started. Dana stood close to Kate, as if using her height to try and shield her by the lockers. Alyssa and Stella on Kate’s heels when she returned from lunch. Even Warren and Luke, peevish as he was, tried to keep her spirits up.

Kate, as always, was gracious but nothing was getting through. Kate was someone who held her cards tight against her chest. So, she began to withdraw a bit more and more. This was making everyone redouble their efforts, which began an unfortunate process of Kate trying to escape everyone.

There had been a couple of times where Victoria decided to fuck it and just approach the girl because this wasn’t good.

Yet every single time she would be blocked by Blackwell’s number one skank:

Dana

Ward
First time was innocuous, “oh, Victoria! You know the Vortex party on Friday?”

Victoria, so jarred that she had been unexpectedly blindsided snapped, “Yes, you can bring your skater boy as a plus one, as much as it makes my eyes bleed.” she made a move to step away when Dana actually reached forward and put a hand on her forearm, “I know that, I was going to bring him regardless of your eyes – but I just wanted to confirm that it’ll be held in the duplex on Fishers drive? And not at that mustache-guys house on Apex street?” she asked, good-natured. Victoria felt her hand curl into a fist under Dana’s touch.

She knew what Skank Ward was doing.

There had been already three massive group texts saying exactly where the party was going to be at. There was not a doubt in her mind that Dana already knew. She was just stopping her from talking to Kate. By the time Victoria answered Dana’s asinine questions, Kate was gone and Dana made haste.

The second time was blatant, it was after first period and Victoria summoned up the courage to catch the girl when, from the left a tall girl jumped right in front of her, Victoria bumped into her, “oof!” “That’s a cute outfit you have one. Really well put together. Where did you get them?” Dana spoke, again very good-natured, but the interest was as fake as drywall.

“Why? You’re thinking about actually wearing clothes now?” Victoria sneered.

“Well, it is getting colder out” Dana quipped without missing a beat, “like I could do with more sweaters.” Victoria’s eyes glanced down to that notorious cleavage. A sight that even Kate had paid attention to. A slight burn of jealousy sizzled within her sinuses.

Victoria with a smoothed impolite answer, ‘I agree, wouldn’t want your best assets to freeze off’

Dana laughed, “well, at least I have some assets” again, totally good-natured and friendly fencing. If it had been any other girl, they would have laughed along, played along. But Victoria was growing more and more peeved at how fast Dana was bouncing back and how undeterred she was; like a girl on a mission.

This isn’t the first time and it won’t be the last.

After the week of Hell, Dana had joined what Victoria called the ‘Kate Marsh Protection Squad’ (consisting of Caulfield, Daniel, Warren, Alyssa, Luke and apparently Price). She had done this several times. When Victoria and Kate had their (absolutely stellar) photography project, Dana had volunteered to be on the crew; one to help Kate, but more importantly to keep an eye on Victoria. In between takes Victoria felt the girl watch her every move. At one point when Kate and Victoria had to discuss a detail and both were not on the same page. It had been a little heated as Kate was under duress in being in the photo and Victoria was being a passionate photographer. Dana had come in behind Kate, asking if there was a problem – of course while looking directly at Victoria. Victoria was two miliseconds from throttling Dana but before Victoria could rip Dana a new asshole Kate had quickly turned around and gently reassured the cheerleader that it was fine and if Dana could give them some space “that would be very nice”.

It seemed as though every time Victoria even just took a step too close to Kate Marsh, Dana Ward was there to reinforce the radius.

Her favorite method consisted of pestering Victoria just long enough for Kate to move away into some classroom. Dana then would quickly exit and leave Victoria wanting to throw something at her.
Objectively though, she couldn’t blame Dana for what she was doing. If the roles had been miraculously reversed, Victoria would’ve torn Dana’s skin off for even attempting to approach Kate.

In a strange moment of compassion, Victoria wondered just how guilty Dana felt for ditching Kate at the party. She wondered if Dana ever felt it eat away at her in the middle of the night. Or when she surfed the web and saw ‘Critically acclaimed Mark Jefferson, arrested for kidnapping and exploiting his students’. She had known from Kate herself that Dana had been a good friend to Kate over the previous year. Good enough for Kate to have a crush on her. However, it seemed as though Dana was the type that when involved with boys she ignored her friends. Bitch.

Victoria, even though irked, could respect that Dana was trying in her own way to make amends and be a good friend again.

There was another reason why Victoria and Kate didn’t spend much time together during the day or when the populace was about... it wasn’t just Dana that stopped her from greeting Kate during the day. She had been stopped by the stares. The glares.

Even the school’s losers, like that zit-possessed Daniel, found the courage to shoot her looks of contempt.

After the week from Hell, the first thing everyone went digging for was –

Who took that video and who uploaded it?

Every single person already knew it was Victoria.

Kate may have been strange and no one may have understood her uber traditional ways but before the Week from Hell Kate was still the school sweetheart. The teachers, the kids from all the cliques (including members from the Vortex Club), the entire community had very much adored Kate.

And Victoria pretty much took out her sadistic creativity on the most-well-liked girl in Arcadia Bay in full view of everyone.

Strike one.

But then there was Nathan Prescott. The boy who killed Rachel Amber. The boy who apparently almost shot another girl in the bathroom (still no one knew the identity of the girl). The boy who was a massive dickhead to everyone else. The boy who became the apprentice to a psychopath.

Her best friend and known right-hand man.

Strike Two.

The nail in the coffin was the psychopath in question: Mark Jefferson. Victoria had been so stupidly cavalier that she had been trying to seduce Mark that she made another stupid decision to make sure everyone knew. That way other sluts wouldn’t try anything as he was her territory.

Wrong.

Move.

Strike.

Three.

So, not only was she a heinous bitch, who had a sick best friend that killed the most popular girl in
the history of Blackwell, but she willingly tried to sleep with a psychopath who was her bloody teacher of all things.

Bonus;

Now that Rachel was dead, all the crap she graffitied about her now seems really distasteful.

To conclude; Victoria Chase was on everyone’s shit list.

Before, it had been the petty ‘I want to be you so I hate you but I love you more’ type of adoration that Victoria ate up. Someone had to take that place and she was the only one who could fill that void.

But now it was this quiet insidious sickness that followed her wherever she went, like AIDS, SARS, HIV, Genital herpes… People didn’t want to be her anymore. They just didn’t like her. But they still needed someone to fill that head bitch role so they let her be.

However, since Victoria was still the fiercest richest girl on campus no one could directly harass her. Not like they did Kate Marsh.

But there was cowardly things done in the background, when her back was turned; Her locker had been sprayed the adequate, VIC SUCKS PSYCHO DICK. Victoria had rolled her eyes, if one wanted to be technical she had wanted to suck the dick – she actually never got to.

Or

Luke ‘tripped’ into her corner of the lunch table she ate at, causing her food to splatter all over yet another expensive outfit of hers. What was up with all these losers and trying to ruin her clothing?

The old Victoria would’ve gone after her peers with a vengeance, how dare they even think that they could get away with that. No one fucks with Victoria Chase. But now, she took it as much as she could. She deserved this.

Except that one time a complete and utter fucker in a car decided to throw a can at her while zooming away and shouted, “trash!” She and the vortex club found out it was some loser in the science department. During the night they covered his car in bologna and slashed all four tires (no one fucks with Victoria Chase.)

But usually it was just quiet contempt that people threw at her back wherever she went.

She wanted to scream out at everyone in the hallways. This was unnecessary. She had no idea how much help Nathan had needed and how far to the wayside he had fallen. Had she known of course she would’ve done everything to help him or stop him. She didn’t know that Mark Jefferson was a psychopath, no one did! Everyone drank the Jefferson koolaid so stop acting like she was the only guilty one! She had no idea about the dark room. About Rachel Amber.

But, the video was all on her. That would be a responsibility she would take with her for the rest of her life.

In another way, she wanted this type of abuse. Was this how Kate Marsh felt…?

But to pull Victoria out of her never-ending thoughts and back to the present; what was Kate Marsh feeling now?

On Wednesday while Victoria dicked around on her computer, reading fanfiction and browsing fan
Theories until 3am she saw Kate’s light on beneath her door when coming back from the bathroom. What was she doing up?

However, this may have been a blessing in disguise, there was no one else around. No one to stare, judging and wary. No stupid Dana Wards. Now would be the time to talk…

She texted:

Victoria: You’re up past curfew, what are you doing?

Kate: Can’t sleep. Just drawing.

Victoria: At almost four in the morning?

Kate: I have to.

Victoria: Are you drawing Watchmen? You’re going nonstop.

No answer.

Victoria: Come on, you’re awake. I’m awake. That means one thing…

Kate: that we’re both insomniacs.

Victoria: Yes, and that there’s something fun we can do just the two of us ;) xoxo

Victoria felt herself sigh at her unresponsive phone.

Victoria: It involves getting in bed… ;D ;D <3 xoxoxo

There’s no answer from Kate. No answer for a few minutes. Victoria felt a small sting of being miffed. Come on, at least entertain her double entendre. Call her an idiot. Call her a pervert. Come on Kate.

Victoria: …Watching cartoons! Come on, let’s catch up on Steven Universe! Or would you be down for some 90’s golden era. U gotta see The Powerpuff girls ftw!!! Xoxo

As the minutes passed in silence, Victoria felt her anxiety swell and sweat bleed through her pores. There was a huge reason that Victoria kept up a rather large wall around herself. There was a reason that she made sure most interactions she had made the other person chase her --- that she didn’t care too much and that whoever was in her attention was more nuisance than company.

The real Victoria, the one with no self-confidence and the one who still suffered from neglect, took years of this from her parents. Chasing after them for affection, attention, anything. She couldn’t handle this waiting period. This silence.

She had learned two things got them coming,

1) Photography

Even though it’s a love that runs deep through her blood and soul, she can’t do it 100% of the time. She’d go nuts.

So, more often then not,

2) Bad behavior.
Victoria would grab at chaos and throw herself into a fight. She would provoke and agitate until a self-created storm thundered away all around her and whoever was in the vicinity. The cacophony of mess would be all consuming – no time nor energy to spend thinking about why you weren’t good enough or why people didn’t love you…

But silence?

She couldn’t handle silence.

She was terrified of silence.

She lost her shit at silence.

So, Victoria stood up, stomped towards the shared wall and banged it hard with her fist. She felt the side of her hand sting and she waited.

She lifted up her fist to bang again but a small knock returned. There was an initial flood of reprieve when she heard Kate respond. Then a spike of vexation.

Victoria: Good to know you’re alive and ignoring me.

No response.

This was literally going to drive Victoria up this stupid wall or straight through it.

Victoria: Girl. What’s wrong?

Victoria: Everyone knows you’re upset.

Victoria: don’t you dare lie to me.

Kate: “All mankind are liars.” – Psalm 116:11

Ok. Red flags waving. All the red flags waving.

Victoria: And you are literally the worst liar of all mankind.

Victoria: Be a party foul

Victoria: And spill

Ok, whoops, maybe not the best idiom but Victoria wasn’t exactly the most tactful at 3:30 Am in the morning.

Kate: Go to bed, we’ll talk about this in the morning.

At least that was some form of answer, however Kate was proving to be a most frustrating (skirter? Dancer? Avoider)

That’s how Victoria found herself in front of Kate’s door and knocking on that barrier. It would be easier to tear down than a wall anyways. No answer.

Tap Tap Tap Tap Tap Tap Tap Tap Tap.

The door opened and Kate peeked out. Victoria put her hand on the door frame, preventing Kate from closing the door again. Unless the girl wanted to take off her hand.
She looked like a zombie. Not the Dawn of the Dead or the Walking Dead zombies but rather the 28 Days later zombies. Her eyes were so red, as if staring at something for far too long and she looked like she had just been dragged on the road.

However, Victoria hid the alarm within herself, “You’re telling me everything.” Victoria dictated. Kate looked up at her, a bit bleary, a bit irritated but ultimately lacking the energy to fight her.

“You’re too much.” She answered softly, stepping back and opening the door. Victoria entered the void.

"Better than trying to hide in my bunny hole and avoid everyone” Victoria sassed back. Her eyes adjusted to the dark room, illuminated by a sole atrocious lamp that used an equally as atrocious lightbulb that hit everything with this harsh fluorescence. As Victoria sat down on the sofa, she noted how everything, visually, seemed so brutal. The severe shadows. The severe edges everything seemed to have.

“I haven’t slept in two days” Kate answered, her words still slurring a bit. Victoria gazed at the table. It was covered in drawings. All done in inky pen and some grey scale marker.

A sudden chill sprung up each individual vertebra.

Gone was the genuine charm and the full heart of what Victoria had seen within Kate’s work.

In was macabre, on the edge of grotesque and…chilling.

There’s a picture of a rabbit. It looks dead. And out of a huge gaping gash running from the throat to the belly the blood is just whorls and whirls and spirals…Fingerprints.

It’s all fingerprints cascading through the page, making a puddle of touches that spread out from the corpse.

Another drawing is a girl whose mouth is stretched open painfully, out of her throat and mouth is a person’s wrist attached to a hand. Another hand grips at that hand with a vice. Which grows out another hand, reaching for something only for it’s wrist to be crushed in another hand. This repeats until a fence like cross hatch pattern happens.

Another rabbit one, on it’s back, a single human hand crushed it’s throat with an iron grip. The rabbit’s mouth opened wide in a scream that cannot be heard through the page, but rang loudly through the mind. Within the rabbits eyes fingerprint whorls in place of irises.

Another one, the only one with color. A simple one, another girl, her naked torso leaning back in an awkward angle. Teeth marks all over. Angry, bruising bite marks on her neck, her breasts, her ribs, her pelvis. Around her there are legs, other female legs wearing clogs and knee-highs and skirts. A single arm, it looks slender and female, has reached down and put two fingers in the naked girl’s mouth.

She looks dead.

Ok. This was bad. Victoria wanted to run, get the fuck out of there. Whatever was going on with Kate Marsh was bonkers and it was too much for Victoria. There’s another one.

Dead whales on the beach. Just dead whales.

Immediately her mind froze and an image of a boy she had loved so much appeared behind her eyes.
Nathan Prescott and his whale songs. He listened to them religiously. ‘it’s the only thing that can get me to relax’ he would gripe at her every time Victoria would tease him about them.

What he was going through, is going through, is bonkers too. She should’ve stayed by his side. She should’ve demanded that he let her in. She should’ve showed more just how much she cared. Maybe then…just maybe…

Victoria looked at Kate Marsh who was curled up on the other end of the sofa. Her chin rested on her knees. She looked miserable.

“Kate. What’s going on?” Victoria asked. No annoyance. No sarcasm. No humor. Just concern. It sounded weird on her own tongue. It made herself shiver at how much her heart felt exposed. Kate blearily blinked a few times.

“I go through days and moments where I’m fine. I’m absolutely OK, I have my friends, I have my art, I have my violin, I have my Alice and everything’s going great.”

She then ran a hand through those thick bangs, her lip trembled,

“Then the nightmares come and everything comes flooding back…”

Victoria’s tongue swelled and dried within her mouth, “What are they about?” Victoria asked with difficulty. She had to.

Kate’s eyes dull and she stares off into the room as she mumbled, “Sometimes it’s just hands. Just fingers pressing into me.” She pulled her knees up to her chest, “I can’t stop thinking about the hands. I dream that there’s just hands touching me, grabbing me, pulling me. At my waist, at my arms, at my legs, at my face…their fingers get under my clothes.” Kate absent-mindedly scratched at her own neck, “but the craziest part is that I enjoy the feeling of someone else touching me. I like it. I want it. But I hate the strangers. I hate how they’re just pawing at me and I don’t know who they are. It feels so gross. But it feels a bit nice too. But there’s hundreds and hundreds of hands. It feels so gross and I hate that it’s not clear. It’s just overwhelming. I just want to see someone, anyone that I know. But I don’t. I never do. I can’t breathe.”

Victoria felt her own fingers curl at her lounge pants.

“I sometimes think I dream of the darkroom.” Kate continued.

Victoria felt every bit of blood run cold. The dark room.

Mark Jefferson.

“Sometimes I dream of him carrying me down the stairs into a bright room. I dream that his arms are warm and I feel dead. I dream of soft voices. I dream of his hands touching me. I think I hear Mr. Jefferson calling me a fucking cunt because I was rolled over at one point. Then he says I’m good. I’m so good. That I’m perfect. I knew something terrible was happening but all I could do was just accept it. I just had to take it… I just let it happen,” Kate babbled on.

Victoria felt sick. The nausea alone enough to bowl her over, but she couldn’t move. She had to keep listening. She had to keep looking at how Kate’s expressions kept getting more and more extreme. How the harsh lamp light heightened the girl’s trauma.

“but I don’t know how much is a nightmare and how much is truth. I mean, it was an actual nightmare, wasn’t it? The detective told me that it’s not clear whether or not Mr. Jefferson ever sexually touched the victims … they asked me over and over and over again whether or not I
remembered. I have told them over and over again everything I know and I see that they’re frustrated at my lack of memory. I’m so angry that I don’t remember most of what happened to me. I’m so glad that I don’t. I’m horrified that I don’t.” At this moment Kate shranked into herself, trembling. Victoria remembered those stupid commercials on T.V that played a long time ago. Where it showed you all the abused dogs and cats, and how you needed to donate money so that they wouldn’t be put down.

“Sometimes I dream that Mr. Jefferson told Nathan that he did a great job and that he could do whatever with me since it didn’t matter anymore… Since I never took a rape test after it happened, they don’t know…I don’t know if…” Kate had to stop for a moment because she was shaking so hard. Victoria feels something retched in her stomach lurch,

“Nathan wouldn’t do anything to you.” Victoria blurted out. “I know him better than anyone and yeah, he’s sick and mentally ill, but he’d never hurt you” as soon as the words left her mouth Victoria knew she fucked up. Something snapped within Kate and she whipped her head up to stare straight at Victoria. For a long moment Victoria could see the murder in Kate’s eyes.

She had known Nathan since they were eight and her parents had invited the Prescotts over to their house in Seattle and since their family was even richer than theirs her parents had let her play with both Nathan and Kristina.

With both their parents being part of the Northwestern faction of the rotary club and being part of the art scene she saw and kept in touch with Nathan fairly often over the past ten years.

Enough for the two of them to become best of friends.

But did Victoria actually know Nathan?

Like how Nathan had been carrying a gun with him. When did he even get a gun? Apparently he had nearly shot someone in the bathroom. Who? Only Madsen and the police knew that information and they were still keeping very tight-lipped about it. Nathan had attacked Warren for no reason and was going after Caulfield during the week from Hell. Nathan had been full of regular, angry male aggression but he had never gotten into fights before…or he had just never told her about them. Victoria’s best friend had gone on a terror spree that she had thankfully been excused from.

Also, she had always been vocal about her adoration of Mark Jefferson. But when did Nathan start to hang out with him? How did he get into some sort of twisted puppy/master relationship with that man? It had already been a massive burn when Mark clearly favored Rachel Amber over her. It had been rubbing salt into the wound when Mark clearly fawned over Caulfield and was doing his best to ignore Victoria.

But in that police interrogation room when the detectives told her that Nathan Prescott had been an accomplice to Mark Jefferson’s schemes for nearly the past year?

That felt like when that weirdo, Samuel, dropped his stupid paint all over her outfit and she had to wait for Taylor and Courtney to run into the dorms and get towels.

Something that completely blindsided her and left her humiliated, cold and alone.

The only one who truly knew what happened between Kate and Nathan was Nathan Prescott and currently he was under house arrest and his family wasn’t allowing any visits.

(That would be a question for him in the future. One he would hopefully answer).

Kate Marsh shared no heartache over Nathan Prescott and looked so offended that Victoria braced herself.
But rather than school Victoria’s ass, Kate stood up and went to her desk where there were more drawings there. Victoria stared at her as she began to gather them up in her hands, as if trying to organize them. “He had twelve other victims over the past ten years since he started teaching. Mark Jefferson only killed about a third of them. He killed the ones that were particularly troublesome or weren’t exactly what he wanted. But except me, they’re all dead. Do you want to know how the rest died?”

Victoria didn’t answer. She knew that if she opened her mouth there would be Hell to pay. But she didn’t look away from Kate. She owed her that much.

“They killed themselves.” Kate answered with vehemence, “they all go to parties, they all get unexpectedly wasted and they all wake up having no idea what happened but feeling ‘gross’ and pretty certain that something violating happened. Their peers don’t believe them, Mr. Jefferson gaslights them and eventually they can’t take it anymore… the first victim killed herself two years after the event. The other one killed herself five years later. Another just killed herself last year, seven years after it happened to her…” Kate gathered up all the drawings in her hand, looking at them as she turned around to face Victoria once again, “But by the time the noose tightens or the pills are swallowed or the bathwater fills red Mr. Jefferson is already long gone…” The papers within Kate’s hand crumpled as her tiny hands made fists, “he just watched them kill themselves. Over and over again. It was his strategy for no one to find out… the only deviance was Rachel Amber but that was because Rachel was never supposed to be in the dark room, even though she was having relations with Mark Jefferson, she lacked what he wanted in a photography subject.” Kate looked at Victoria, making sure their eyes connected, as she further crushed the papers within her hands, “Nathan Prescott brought her there as his own first subject, like an apprentice wanting to prove to his master that he was ready for the next step” Kate spat out Nathan’s name. Now that might as well been a physical slap. Victoria knew she did that to make a point and it drove home. Victoria did look away for a moment, sickened, ashamed and feeling like she had to diffuse a bomb with no tools.

Kate continued to maul the paper within her hands, “I can’t get over how I almost fell into that trap. I almost went ‘all according to plan’ for Mr. Jefferson. If Max wasn’t on the roof…” Kate stopped for a moment, biting her lip hard. Victoria felt something vile go up her spinal tap.

She remembered how the rain chilled her wrists as she lifted up her phone to record Kate. She remembered the drops of cold pelting her face. She remembered as moments passed the sheer terror igniting within her as everyone realized that Kate Marsh was serious.

She was going to jump.

She remembered squeezing her phone so hard, unable to look away, unable to do anything but just watch Kate Marsh lean over that edge.

She remembered, for the first time ever in her life she had seriously prayed to God. She didn’t even believe in God but there had to be someone/something that could hear her terror.

God, don’t let her jump. Please don’t let Kate Marsh jump. Please, put anyone else up there, put me up there but get her down safely.

Fucking please.

I want her to live.

Then Kate turned around, doing an actual about face on that ledge and students screamed. Victoria caught herself from doing so, swallowing the sheer panic within her throat. Oh fucking Jesus she’s going to fall backwards off that damn ledge.
She remembered hearing Dana Ward shout for Kate Marsh. She remembered hearing Alyssa, Stella, Warren, Daniel and even Brooke Scott who to save her life never seemed interested in anything, shouting for Kate Marsh. The weirdo Squad stood together, united in their adoration of a suicidal girl.

She remembered that she was frozen in her spot. Still recording. Still getting the shot. The achingly macabre, beautiful picture. Knowing that she couldn’t say a word. Finally, begging the universe, she simply uttered, “Katie.”

Right after she said her name everyone saw Kate disappear back onto the roof.

The Wierdo Squad cheered. Everyone cheered. The Ambulance blared. Victoria let her arms drop and let the rain get into her eyes. Taylor’s hand tugged at her arm. She said something. Victoria numbly stood there and didn’t move until she saw Kate Marsh and Max Caulfield exit the dorm hall. How tiny Kate was immediately swooped up in some EMT’s arms and carried into the red van.

There, alone, stood Max Caulfield who looked absolutely bewildered. Victoria watched as Max then was taken by David Madsen, who already had Nathan, and the three of them made a swift exit towards the Principal’s office.

Only then had Victoria finally left to her room. She sat on the bed, still soaked and shaking as she rewatched it all again.

When the video ended Victoria found herself sobbing and unable to stop.

When Nathan popped in, unannounced and swung his arm around her cold, wet body she clung onto him like he was the only lifeline she had.

She bawled into his collarbone, “I’m fucking terrible.”

“No one knew she was going to jump.” His hand warm and stable on her shoulder.

“How could I do that to her? How could anyone do that to anyone?”

“Hey, hey, she brought it on herself. She drank too much and couldn’t handle it, it’s not your fault” his thumb rubbed soothing circles.

Victoria remembered crying and knowing that Nathan was lying and both thankful that he was there to comfort her and hating that he was even doing this for her.

Victoria remembered thanking the universe that Kate was alive. Thanking the universe that Max Hipsterfield had somehow gotten up there and brought Kate down.

Victoria remembered cursing herself for her cornering Kate and hating herself even more that it was Max, “Miss girl with a gift”, and not herself for being up there to bring Kate down.

However, Victoria’s brief departure into memory Hell is interrupted again by Kate’s voice, “I should’ve never been on the roof. I should’ve been stronger than that, I should’ve seen through it all…”

Sounds of ripping brought Victoria to rapt attention as she saw Kate tearing the drawings within her hands. “I should’ve never gone to that party.” Kate declared in a voice dripping with self-hatred. Victoria stared at the emotional wreck, flabbergasted.

“Why did I even think it was a good idea?” Kate said again, this time her voice rising in significant
volume, “I’m such a fucking idiot!” That made Victoria stand up. Why was Kate blaming herself? She knew she needed to sit there and listen. She knew she had to take this like the bitter medicine it was. But Victoria refused to sit there and listen to Kate accuse herself of something that was absolutely not her fault.

Now was not the time to watch the show and record.

She was going to intervene. Better late than never.

In a couple of strides she approached Kate. For she, herself, had enough freak-outs in the past to identify them. Before, Nathan had been there, Taylor sometimes was there, but usually she destroyed everything in her vicinity because the hatred was so strong.

How you were sucked into this whirlpool of thick choler. There was no escape. You just spun and spun and wished to die. All you could do was hope that perhaps you would finally run out of air, that you would suffocate within it all and it would just end.

Kate was drowning in that poison.

Right as Victoria got to the infuriated girl, Kate threw up the shreds of paper within her hands, seeing red “And my sinful homosexuality clearly hasn’t helped anything at all, seeing as that was what helped me get to this point!” Kate shouted, incensed.

“Kate!” Victoria hissed, grabbing at Kate’s arms. She was going a bit loco and Victoria was certain that if she was already agitated, Kate was going to get a lot more crazy if their hallmates came to her room demanding to know why Kate was shouting about homosexual sin at four in the morning.

However Kate tensed up her arms, bending them sharply and pulling Victoria down where they met eye to eye, “And you” Kate seethed, “I still have no idea what the Hell was going on in your head when you decided to upload that video and make it go viral. Seriously? It was such a priority in your life to make me suffer that you spent your time and your energy and your creativity and your money to buy a domain name and make a website. I will concede that maybe I wronged you or made you upset, I wish you could tell me what on Earth I did to you that warranted that. What, Victoria?” Kate demanded within her hold. Victoria felt how Kate’s arms shook within her hands. Victoria couldn’t say anything though. She had no answer. Whatever reasons she did have were long, convoluted and full of her own twisted internal bullshit that would never ever excuse her actions.

All she knew in the moment was that she couldn’t let go of Kate. She had to hang on through this storm.

That and she had a good feeling that Kate was going to strike her. Part of her wanted the smaller girl to finally tear her apart. Rip out her hair, bite her, bruise her, scratch her until she bled and bled and lay on that floor at Kate’s feet. This was a one-way bullet train to fucked up.

Kate continued, clearly not deterred by Victoria’s silence, “I’m still getting anonymous e-mails harassing me about it. Apparently it’s been downloaded and continues to be shared. Like this one I got today, the person just wrote ‘the sequel needs more cock in it, be a proper fucking whore next time and eat the cum alright :)” yeah, he actually added the smiley face. As if that makes it any less violating. The worst thing is that the person is so, so, so unoriginal and blatantly not creative because I’ve already gotten dozens of e-mails saying pretty much the same exact thing. Also there’s still people in my church community calling my parents, wanting to warn them that their daughter has been processed by Satan’s demons and that she needs to be exorcised.”

The heat of a thousand suns boiled the insides of Victoria’s throat, lungs and stomach. The guilt, self-
hatred, indignation and internal Hell raged a fire so hot within her body that Victoria felt the world fuzz out and turn orange. She couldn’t breathe but she refused to look away. Victoria didn’t even blink when she stared deep into Kate’s livid eyes. The fury fucking burned at Victoria’s nerves to the point where she literally felt the sizzle. She was so scorned by the other girl that it hurt like a bitch.

But, Jesus, when Kate Marsh was wrathful it was mesmerizing.

“I know you hurt Victoria, I know you suffer in ways I don’t understand but sometimes I still want to hate you so bad.” Kate swore. Victoria still gripped Kate’s forearms with a vice and she still bit her tongue, “but then we talk, and you show me what makes you passionate and I see that you are an artist in love with working and progressing. You share with me your animations and I see them inspire love within you. We work together beautifully and it confounds me. We spend time together and I see how beneath it all that you are incredibly witty, you are truly unique and that you actually care… ” Kate finally took a breath. The tipping point of her angry fevor finally crossing.

Victoria heard that Dana Ward was organizing a package of gifts for Kate while she was in the hospital. Victoria held her card within her hands and fighting to feel solid she walked to Dana’s room and walked in on Dana arranging the basket of gifts, cards and balloons.

Dana whipped around, her stance wary and defensive.

“Victoria. What do you need?” Dana asked her, while polite, her disdain was barely hidden. Victoria and Dana had never really been friends. Sure, part of the same club, went to the same parties. However, several nasty, petty incidents leading up to the Zack sexting business had not put her in the cheerleader’s good favor. Not that she ever cared before now.

Kate Marsh on the roof pushed Dana from Camp Don’t-like-her-but-won’t-bug her about Victoria to Camp Victoria-can-fuck-herself, (now growing steadily and accepting new members all the time.)

Victoria just extended her hand and Dana saw the envelope. She took it.

Dana held the envelope in her hands and turned it over a couple of times. But she didn’t put it in the basket. She stole a glance at the trashcan, clearly conflicted on what to do with this letter.

“Please, Dana.” Victoria asked, voice quiet. Dana and her locked eye contact and both saw how the rawness was mirrored in the other. Victoria, for once letting down her pride, let Dana witness her silent desperation. After a couple moments,

“I’m sure she’ll appreciate this.” Dana said, finally putting the envelope in the basket. Relief and heartache flooded Victoria’s senses in that moment.

Victoria, still gripping Kate’s wrists, tugged back, bringing them even closer together, nose to nose, “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.” the whisper barely making it’s way out of Victoria’s constricted throat. She wouldn’t have tapped on the wall if she didn’t care. She wouldn’t have texted Kate. She wouldn’t have come over. She wouldn’t have wanted to watch cartoons. She wouldn’t have listened. She wouldn’t have taken this brutal verbal thrashing from Kate. She wouldn’t have stayed to witness her anguish.

But somehow, somewhere along the way, she had come to care about Kate Marsh.

‘I just want to see your smile again…’

Suddenly, a wash of clarity cleared up Kate’s eyes, “I know that if you had known about Nathan, you would have done everything in your power to bring him back to grace or stop him. There was absolutely no way you nor anyone else knew about Mr. Jefferson, he was just that good at
manipulating everyone. I don’t know if I’ll ever truly understand why you chose to share the video and make me feel so low…But I believe that it was never your intention to push me to try and jump. I forgive you Victoria. I truly do.” By now Kate’s eyes glimmered under the strength of a terrible lightbulb. “I wish I could wipe my hands clean of everything that happened and just move on with my life but the video, the dark room, my own sins keep coming up again, reminding me that it’s not over. They’ll follow me for a very long time. When it all comes back again… it gets hard for me to remember why I forgave you and why I’m moving on. I hope you understand.”

This space between them is just suffocating heat. Victoria felt Kate breathe out and felt the puffs of humid agony that hit her mouth and chin. But she’s not going anywhere.

This time, she’ll be the one to bring Kate back to earth.

“I will never understand but I get it and I will do anything to help you.” Victoria whispered again, her throat not letting up,

Kate looked down, ashamed. She pulled back her arms, and Victoria let the fabric slip away from her numb hands.

Kate turned away from her, going back towards her sofa, “I’m sorry, I’m going nuts right now. You really, really don’t need to deal with this. Please leave.” She muttered.

Victoria stared at the other girl who moved like a zombie and sat down on the sofa, “Kate.” Victoria managed to croak out, getting her stupid throat to work again. Kate looked so small. How did a volcano of anguish explode out of this petite girl, just minutes before?

“Leave me alone, Victoria.” Kate stated, truly sounding exhausted. Defeated.

“Katie.” Victoria pleaded. The utter care that slipped out of her mouth even surprised Victoria herself. However, it appeared to work when she said that because Kate looked up at her, eyes watery and red-rimmed. The fury had fled and all that was left was loss.

Victoria had been there. She had been there when Kate came in and offered her cookies. However, Victoria didn’t have to deal with the nightmare of the Dark Room. She would never have to deal with the video. She’d never have to deal with a religious community that hypocritically wasn’t forgiving nor understanding.

Victoria finally understood why Kate was still in utter agony, why she couldn’t sleep and why it all was still there. Kate was getting out of October in pieces and had to put herself back together again.

They both were.

But where Victoria’s demons were internal, Kate had to deal with external forces dragging her back to that Hell where she had to continually climb out from again and again.

Victoria didn’t have cookies, but in that moment she knew exactly what she had to do. She walked over to Kate and bent down on her knee, making sure that even slouched and looking at the ground, Kate would make eye contact with her.

She put a hand on Kate’s knee, “Come with me.” Victoria stated, calmly.

“What?” Kate said, not really understanding what was going on anymore, “I just freaked out on you. Why aren’t you running?” Kate rationalized, her hands flitting around. Victoria caught one of those hands within her own.
“I am. But you’re coming with me.” Victoria said, again, serious as stone. She stood up, still holding Kate’s hand.

“Get your jacket, we’re going out.” Victoria stated clearly. Kate stared at her, again, speechless. Soon, Victoria felt that small hand strengthen and tighten around hers and Victoria took the cue to pull her up. Quietly, Kate got her jacket and they made a brief stop at Victoria’s room so she could get hers. They sneaked out of the dorm and in the early morning, fresh chill in the air, the two girls moved quickly to the parking lot.

There was some noise there though, as the there was some beat up truck that was parked near Victoria’s car. There were obvious voices within it and the windows were fogged up.

Victoria knew that truck…

As they got closer, the voices became clear. Victoria rolled her eyes. Of course it was Max Caulfield and her dirty punk girlfriend doing really dirty things her even dirtier truck.

“oh, fuck, yes, YES - you’re so fucking hot…” someone groaned. Then, there was a rather loud, ungraceful grunt. Ugh. Whoever came had the worst orgasm noise ever.

Clearly not as naïve as Victoria thought, Kate blushed bright tomato, her eyes widening as wide as plates. Her lips twisted to resemble a squiggly line. At least Kate clearly agreed with her on that climax noise being the unsexiest thing ever.

Some panting. Then, “I’ll perform Chloelingus for you anytime” another voice said slyly.

“…What?”

“Get it, because your name is Chloe and I just ate you out…”

There was very loud, hyena-like laughter that erupted inside the car and it caused both Kate and Victoria to sprint to across the parking lot. Their savior being a very stylish, brand new VW beetle, thank you very much. Victoria yanked out her car fob and the car beeped hello as it unlocked.

“Did she actually use a pun?” Kate asked, her voice squeaking in trauma as she opened the passenger door.

Victoria yanked over the driver’s side, “this is why I could never sleep with her.” Victoria snipped. She already wanted to smack someone every time they used a pun. If someone ever, ever dared use one on her when doing the vertical tango she’d probably bite their tongue off.

Kate locked in her seatbelt and Victoria started the car, reversing. Then, as she straightened out, she drove by, passing the truck directly. Victoria shoved down her horn and let it blare out loud and proud.

Several loud shouts of confusion and anger from within the truck as Victoria pressed the button to make her window go down.

“Put a condom on your puns and get a room!” Victoria shouted out the window as she sped out of the parking lot. Victoria glanced over at Kate. The other girl’s eyes were wide, but there was an amused smile on her face. Victoria smirked and looked out the front window. Clearly, Kate approved of her actions.

After that, they drove in silence, not saying anything at all. Occasionally, Victoria would check on Kate, but the other girl would just be staring out the window. From then on, Victoria paid attention to
a dark road. From there she followed the coastline where black waves churned. Led by LED’s that provided a path through the blind night. Finally, up, up a hill she went until she stopped at the final place that cars could go. Kate looked around, a bit surprised,

“The lighthouse? What are we doing here?” Kate asked Victoria. Victoria undid her seatbelt but leaned back, enjoying the heater.

“Relax. We have some time and it’s warm in here.” Victoria said coolly. Kate nodded and continued to look out the window in silence. When the sky suddenly switched one shade of blue lighter, Victoria unlocked the car, “follow me.”

Kate followed her up the path towards the lighthouse. All that could be heard was the rustling of trees and the sounds of the waves crashing against the rocks. Finally, they reached the apex of the cliff. Both walked up to the edge.

The most ideal panorama of the entirety of Arcadia Bay.

“It’s beautiful.” Kate breathed out. Victoria nodded, feeling the breeze wake her up.

“Just wait a bit, Cherie. Your mind is about to get blown.” Victoria said in her usual certainty.

It was only when the dawn of light slowly brightened on the horizon did Kate Marsh realize that Victoria had taken her there to watch the sunrise. “Victoria,” Kate asked, perplexed, “why did you take me here to watch the sunrise?”

Victoria shrugged, “you were contracting some serious cabin fever, so I thought you needed to get out and away for a bit. I didn’t think you’d approve of driving to Portland, so this is a good substitute.”

“I would love to go to Portland, but we’d miss so much school…”

Victoria rolled her eyes, “Exactly.”

Just then, the sun peeked over the horizon.

Kate gasped.

Victoria took the first few moments to feel the majesty of the sun slowly climbing up the land. The light spilling over the miles of ocean. Victoria stole a quick glance at the girl besides her and saw how Kate’s mouth had dropped open. How those hazel eyes glistened in pure gratitude and how the sight drained away the agony from her bones.

“It’s absolutely amazing.” Kate uttered. Victoria nodded. Sunrises were as natural as breathing and happened everyday, however to watch one was always magnificent. Both just watched and took in the beauty. How the birds began to chirp louder and louder. The sea glittered warm yellows. The sand glowed a copperish gold… How Arcadia Bay and the beautiful Northwest coast awakened.

There was something tugging at her hand. Victoria looked down and saw how Kate had reached over and had with her pinky, a little cold, hooked it loosely with Victoria’s own little finger. Victoria looked back up to the sun and feeling like it was the most natural thing in the world, turned her palm so she could intertwine the rest of their fingers together. When Kate’s hand tightened the hold Victoria felt tingles run up her arm.

There, holding hands, they watched the rest of the sunrise in a serenity that Victoria had almost never known.
Sometime last year, when Rachel Amber was alive and still in Victoria’s life and doing all the right things to ensnare her affections, they had come here. It had been after a party where Victoria could still drive and Rachel had directed them here. They had watched the sunrise and at that point Victoria had become enraptured by the other girl. How she had confidently soaked up the rising sun, as if charging her radiance for the day. Shortly after, on that very dewy bench behind them, they became intimate and their train-wreck of an affair started.

Victoria would feel more ashamed if she wasn’t so damn certain that there were dozens of others that had gotten frisky on that bench.

After all that, though, Victoria had never gone back. She had seen the lighthouse in the distance when driving around town and had wanted to burn it down. She wished she had never gone there. She had damned the stupid lighthouse to fucking Hell and wished someone, anyone, something would tear it down. Raze the peaceful pocket of tranquility that misled her into making such a huge mistake.

But now, watching the rising sun light up Kate’s face. Seeing the hope and the warmth return to the other girl’s body… Seeing how she truly, truly could appreciate everything that this was.

Getting used, mind-fucked and getting her heart put through a meat grinder was completely worth it. She’d do it again just to see Kate---

Smile just like that.

*I just want to see your smile again.*

Victoria remembered when she had written that into Kate’s card when she was in the hospital. At the time she had no idea why she felt so compelled to include that. Now, she remembered.

Rachel may have hypnotized you with her charm, her beauty…

But Kate Marsh’s smile?

It, like the rising sun, lit up the entire world.

~~~___~~~

Getting through classes was a bitch that following day. During homeroom Kate snoozed into her doodles, which Victoria snapped a picture of and sent it to her later. Even though it felt like her brain was running at half speed and talking was more difficult than usual, Victoria felt so light, and was in a great mood.

She looked like shit, but man was it a good day.

After that morning, nothing could get Victoria down.

So when it’s a bit too obvious that Max Caulfield was trying to ignore her that entire day she waited until photography class to where she purposefully sat on Max’s desk before the girl came in.

Max walked over, standing by her awkwardly.

“Hey Victoria.”

“Hello Max”

“So…uh…what’s up?”
“Nothing much, didn’t get too much sleep last night…but then again, you didn’t either.”

There was a pink that visibly heated up Max’s neck, “Heh. Yeah. Not too much…”

"Imagining you getting it on is like watching a mouse get some on the Discovery Channel. Kind of cute, disturbing and ultimately disgusting"

"Need to watch mice get freaky on the Discovery Channel? Jealous much?" Max countered, despite being a little pink in the cheeks, she was laid-back and friendly. Victoria still wasn’t used to this saucy Max Caulfield. What had happened to that autistic girl who just zoned out in class all the time and never looked you in the eye when she talked to you? In a way, Victoria liked this new more confident Max.

“In a way, yes. I would always much rather be having sex. So I’ll congratulate you on the action, Caulfield. But in a dirty-ass truck that’s about to break and with a girl dirty enough to give me Krabs? I’ll be celibate before taking that chance.”

“Where’s your ticket entry? We weren’t looking for an audience, so stop listening.”

“Says the girl whose banging her girlfriend in a public parking lot. Trust me when I say I want to pour bleach into my eardrums after hearing what I heard.” Victoria then tapped her chin in fake thoughtfulness, “but maybe if I had your pun game I’d get more tail…What was it? Eating out Price’s Pricey—“

“What were you even doing racing out of Blackwell at 5 in the morning?” Max interrupted, trying desperately to get her dignity back. Max had fallen from confidence and was bright pink. Victoria felt her comfortable smirk form on her lips. It’s still too easy and it’s still too fun to do this to her.

At that moment, Kate came in, still moving like a zombie. However, this time Kate’s head was up and she was as perky as a person who hadn’t slept in three days could be. “Some things are best kept secrets, Caulfield” Victoria answered. As Kate sat down and looked over, Victoria winked at her. Kate smiled, a little bashful. Max looked up at Victoria and over at Kate, sensing something was up. But before she could ask, Victoria hopped off Max’s table and made haste back to her own desk.

~~~___~~~~

Finally Halloween happens. That entire week is full of pranks, sugar and craziness. Victoria really did enjoy this holiday, not just because of the excuse for the mischief and debauchery but because her inner nerd got to come out and enjoy the costumes.

For herself, she teamed up with Taylor and Courtney went as the three eponymous Heathers from the cult classic, “Heathers” Victoria, of course, was Heather Chandler.

Caulfield was a pirate and kept announcing that her best mate would come when the school day was done. But of course, pirate first mate Price came during lunch. No one could (and no one really wanted to) kick her off campus that day so the two pirates made mayhem in the classrooms.

Brooke somehow made a semi-functional Metroid Prime costume. Victoria was immensely impressed (not that she would show it, ever.)

Warren was the Reddit mascot. Wow. What a surprise (Victoria couldn't have been more sarcastic if you paid her).

Alyssa was Rose from Titanic, where she dryly said that she let go of Jack and he’s freezing somewhere in the Atlantic (Actually hilarious). Evan was Robert Capa (pretentious asshole). Dana
and Trevor went as Leia and Han Solo (cute but, like, entry level geek – nothing actually too impressive).

Zack and Juliet dressed as Nancy Drew and Nancy Drew’s boyfriend. (Good initial concept but Zack’s lack of character was both pitiful and almost unacceptable yet completely understandable given the loser he was)
Justin chose to be Shaggy and another skater loser dressed as Scooby (good idea yet poorly planned, if you don’t get the whole group, why bother?) Which was strange because there was another couple that dressed as Freddie and Daphne but none of them were friends and it wasn’t planned at all and it was driving Victoria crazy that there wasn’t a Velma--- Ok. Breathe.

Luke didn’t wear anything because fuck the establishment…

But the one costume that made Victoria do a double take was Kate Marsh’s. Simple black frock. Broomstick. Cutest large red bow.

“I’m the white, Christian version of Kiki from Kiki’s delivery service” She would tell people. A lot of the school didn’t quite get it, other than it was very cute. However, the nerds and outcasts that actually watched the classic anime were more than overjoyed.

In fact they were going nuts. Kate, for the first time in a while, stood confidently in face of the attention. She also brought up her witch ‘familiar’…Alice, her bunny. She hid her in her backpack that day but between classes and in the halls she was swarmed by people wanting to touch her rabbit and coo at her get up.

Victoria watched from afar, proud and impressed of her new friend.

And a tad envious of how everyone else could go up to her and nerd out. And touch her rabbit.

Stupid plebeians. It was as if they’d never seen Kiki’s Delivery Service. Or a rabbit.

…

She would tell her later how awesome her costume was. With how ballsy and cute it was to bring Alice around, despite the fact that it was very against the rules to bring pets.

Yeah, she wanted to tell her now but, whatever, Victoria could wait…

…

Ok, this was complete and utter bullshit!

Victoria’s internal nerd was out and about that day. And the weeaboo had enough. She was going to go over to Kate and tell her personally how awesome her costume was. No one, least of all her annoying insecure self, would stop her.

So before photography class, Victoria gathered up the courage that she’d believe with long confident strides she began to walk over to the cutest girl in the room. She side stepped and ignored all obstacles or distractions:
“Hey Victoria, awesome costume—” Dana jumped in. Victoria literally put her hand up to where it touched Dana’s shoulder and she gently pushed off, using the girl’s momentum to spin her away.

“I know.” She dismissed, continuing on her way.

Finally she arrived at her destination; Kate sitting at her desk, doodling. Victoria perched on the table next to her and put her arm down besides the notebook, getting Kate’s attention.

“Katie’s delivery service?” she asked, voice low but still filled with mirth.

Kate turned around and her hazel eyes twinkled, “Yes.” Kate reached into her bag and took out a sentient ball of fluff, “And this is my familiar…Alice”

If Victoria was already trying to suppress a smile, the fluffy bunny completely broke through and Victoria felt a childish grin erupt on her face. Katie offered it, nodding her head, encouraging Victoria to yes, run her fingers through that soft hair. Do not deny the fluffliness. Give in. Give in.

Victoria gave in and began to pet Alice as they continued, “a most excellent costume choice. Who gave you the idea?”

“Well, a new friend of mine tied me down and forced me to watch all of her Studio Giggly movies —“

“Studio Ghibli.” Victoria interjected, breaking the mood and playfulness for just a second.

“Studio Glib key,” Kate resumed without missing a beat. Internally Victoria felt herself cringe. They would work on Kate’s Japanese pronunciations, “and even though I really wasn’t sure of what I was getting into” the both of them couldn’t help but break into mutual soft chuckles, “it turned out to be an amazing body of work. And when it came to Costumes…this was easy, distinctive and most importantly in my budget.”

She had a point, but if Kate wasn’t afraid to geek it up...“Maybe if you let your friend know earlier what you planned to do, perhaps they would’ve pitched in to make a Ashitaka costume…” Victoria suggested, as if off-handed.

“I would have to have a Princess Mononoke for that to work”

Victoria felt her own volume sharply mute. Even without their brief and hostile history Victoria was reluctant to enlist Chloe Price to help her with anything. Then, Victoria felt a small hand touch her knee, “Or a Lady Eboshi.” Kate suggested. Victoria gave a small smile for an answer. Man, if they came into Blackwell dressed as Ashitaka and Lady Eboshi…the nerds would have an aneurysm. Perhaps she finally found the person she could drag to anime conventions and cosplay? Hmmmm. That was a longterm mission. Patience Victoria.

“Your friend sounds like a geek.” Victoria said, her voice overtly catty to disguise her self-deprecation.

Kate smothered a little snort, “Oh, she’s the biggest geek I’ve ever met.” Victoria frowned and looked away, trying to hide her insecurity. She was a bit of a weeaboo: Not that she liked to admit it, “but she’s also the prettiest geek I’ve ever seen.” Kate added.

Victoria perked up again, suddenly very interested, “Pretty or hot?”

Kate gave a slanted, cheeky grin, “hotter than Hell” she stated. Victoria couldn’t help but shoot Kate a smug smile. About damn time Kate acknowledged she was hot. Kate had learned that one of
Victoria’s favorite things was getting her ego stroked. But, you had to make sure that it wasn’t just flattery – Victoria was sharp enough to differentiate between the two and hated people who could only give shallow flattery. Kate was always good at applying subtle differences much to Victoria’s benefit, “we usually hang out every Saturday, except for this upcoming one”

“What’s wrong with this one?” Victoria snapped, again breaking the playful mood.

“Well, there’s some huge parties happening this weekend. I think she’ll be too tired to watch…”

“She’s never too tired to watch cartoons.” Victoria snapped. Kate looked up at her, curious.

“Never?”

“If she’s as big of a nerd as you think she is. Never.”

“So…this Saturday, I’m meeting my geek, who’ll most likely be hungover and hating everything, to watch Steven Universe at 10am?”

“This Saturday morning at 10…1030 you’ll meet your geek and watch cartoons because you both have no life.”

“Ok, I guess I have plans then.”

Until Ms. Washington came in dressed up as the black, female version of Walter White from Breaking Bad, “I am the one who knocks!” Kate and Victoria stayed within their own bubble, ignoring everyone else.

Hidden in Alice’s thick fur, their fingers brushed and pressed against each other’s.

Chapter End Notes

Whew! First off, Happy Holidays to all of you! (Or Happy Festivus((for the rest of us)))

So, interestingly enough, this chapter was not included in the original outline! However, as it came clear that this story is about Victoria and Kate reaching out to each other and mutually moving on, they were going to have to address some really ugly things and bring them to light to each other.

However, when the idea for this confrontation came to light, Kate’s anger truly ripped it out of me within a day. Then it came to tying it in nicely and making the details surrounding the event just right… which took time.

Again, if you're waiting for things to get easy between them...

You're going to to wait a bit longer.

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW

“She’s a heinous whore and owes me two grand” Victoria only saw red. She breathed
red. Red poured out of her lips.

“Two thousand—why on Earth did you give her so much money?”

“It doesn’t matter! She never paid me back!”

“Vic, you’re speeding…”

“Everyone goes 10 over! It’s not the end of the world, calm down!”

Kate’s hand crept up to grab the ‘oh-shit’ handle above the car window.

**Musical Influences**

Pendulum - FKA Twigs
Eye wash - Subtle
The Gone Girl Soundtrack - Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross
Madder Red - Yeasayer
Crazy

Chapter Summary

Dear Diary,

Who likes gay girl emotional train wrecks?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“T’ain’t all bad, miss. Thou art alive. Thou art still living.” – Ghost Boy [Coraline]

“Stop it. I’ll pick you up.” Victoria answered without thinking twice about it. Something alarmed her when Kate looked at her funny, as though that would be the last thing she expected Victoria to say.

They were in their room working out bullshit Chem homework (seriously. The only chemistry she needed was for her fun times and her dealers had to deal with that shit) when Kate was explaining that she was missing their Saturday morning cartoon session because she had taken up the task of volunteering to teach some Christian kids Violin at the Arcadia Bay church from that morning till afternoon. She was just talking out loud (mostly to herself) about how she had to make sure to get to the bus station at exactly 4:00pm or she’d be forced to wait another hour before the next bus came. However the parents always wanted to talk to her and she was pretty sure the eight year old boy had a crush on her and would also pull for her to stay and blah blah blah blah blah.

Victoria hated a number of things. Victoria hated a large number of things. Blithering on and on and on was amongst the top of the list.

Especially when there was such an easy solution right there in front of Kate’s nose

So, Victoria just threw it in her face and got it over with.

Kate’s hazel eyes immediately enlarged. Her tongue quickly wet her lips as she asked, “…really? It’s a bit far and I don’t want to bother you because I would hate to make you drive out all the way there just to get me—“

Victoria quickly clasped her hand on Kate’s forearm. No more blah blah blah blah.

“Relax. I have to go get some mascara and the Sephora out there is the only one that has it in this hick town.”

Kate’s lips pursed, and she stared at Victoria.

Victoria never drove peers. Fucking peasants could walk for all she cared, she wasn’t a charity. But,
Victoria was more than willing to drive friends (those who have deemed themselves worthy.) Like, she would occasionally drive Taylor and Courtney to go somewhere and ditch Blackwell for the weekend. When Taylor revealed that her mother had a tumor in her spine, Victoria drove Taylor to the hospital an hour away and didn’t think twice about it. She ended up making that trip several times. Still didn’t think twice about it. Nathan had always driven her around, but she’d be willing to do it in a heartbeat. She had driven Rachel around, picked her up at places and dropped her off at others…but that had been an entirely different situation and one that she regretted and would not be repeating anytime soon.

A slow smile spread across Kate’s lips and her eyes twinkle. Victoria felt a blush of embarrassment heat up her cheeks. Apparently Kate had figured out what a special occasion this was.

“Thanks Victoria” she said with such sincerity that it coated Victoria’s jaded heart in so much honey that she could cough it up and taste the sweetness.


Victoria rolled her eyes, “whatever. Say ‘thank you’ again and I’ll make you walk your ass back to Blackwell.”

Kate just kept smiling and her eyes kept glittering in gratitude. It tickled Victoria’s heart and made her want to bite Kate’s cheek until the smaller girl bled. Victoria looked down and eyed at the stupid problems once again.

Later on that week she’s chilling with Taylor by the front of the Prescott dormitory steps and they’re idly gossiping and the such (you know, what cool kids do). Courtney isn’t present because she’s been tardy to homeroom too many times and is dutifully suffering in detention. Then Taylor nudged her shoulder.

“You know the new issue of Vogue is coming out…”

Victoria grinned. She, Taylor and Courtney wore the fashionista label as badges of honor. The two girls shared a high five. “This Saturday, we have a 4 o’clock happy hour in my room and decimate it? I still have that bottle of Pinot Grigio…” Taylor goaded,

Victoria was about to agree but snapped her fingers, “shit, I can’t do that time. Can we do it later? Like, after dinner?”

Taylor’s head tipped left, “what are you doing?” she asked. Ugh. Victoria felt like a big idiot. This was tradition. It was practically sacrilege that she had some sort of other appointment. She never forgot this, Hell, she was usually the one to plan this. It had to be perfect – they would actually drink (classy) white wine and act even snootier than usual as they flipped page by page…How did she forget?

Victoria answered as nonchalantly as she could, “Kate’s volunteering at some church and I’m picking her up at 4, so unless you want to have the shindig in my car – and you know how much it fucking pisses me off when people spill shit on my seats, it’s Italian leather you know? That times a no go.”

“Oh.”

Victoria felt her ears prick up. What was that tone? She made eyes with Taylor whose eyes quickly
Taylor shifted in her space. Her chin lowered as she made eye contact with Victoria, “You’ve been spending a lot of time with her lately…” she said, cautious.

All of Victoria’s defenses flared up, and she threw a sneer, “What? You’ve been minding my personal schedule? Tell me what I did last Thursday at 2pm.”

“You were in English.” Taylor smoothly responded, then, something a little dark came out of her voice, “I’m not your secretary, I’m your home-girl and I know your schedule better than anyone.”

That makes Victoria quiet. Taylor had a point and Victoria does care enough about her to know when she’s misbehaving.

Once, when Victoria was young she had been fooling around with her father’s beautiful old 1972 Nikon. She had dropped it and the concrete pavement outside dinged the beautiful aged case and chipped the equally gorgeous glass attached to it. She put it back exactly as it had on the table and ran for her dear life. Her father had confronted her the next day, passively asking whether or not she had been using his camera. She lied, of course. The sweat bled through her shirt at the time and she couldn’t help but try to avoid her father’s knowing eyes. She wished that he just yelled at her and got it over with. He never did.

She hated how she felt the same around Taylor in this moment.

“Look, Katie…” Victoria began,

“Katie?” Taylor interrupted, suspicious. Since when did Victoria refer to Kate, twerks-for-God, Marsh by something as endearing as Katie?

“It’s Marsh.” Victoria swore, defensive, “I’m going to Sephora anyway. She’s on the way back – it’s not a big deal”

Taylor nodded in that slow way that the said that she understood…

But didn’t necessarily believe her.

(Just like her father had done long ago.)

You see, it wasn’t what Taylor was saying. It was everything she wasn’t saying. How Victoria was having secret rendezvous with Kate (in form of watching cartoons, but still), was now referring to her by affectionate nicknames and was now also driving her places. Victoria was also doing everything in her power not to talk about it or let anyone else know what was up…

It looked a lot like…”The R word” all over again. Not that Taylor ever talked to Victoria about Rachel. Victoria liked to convince herself that Taylor had no idea what had happened between her
and that cunt—but if she were being honest she was deluding herself. Taylor was far more perceptive than people gave her credit for.

Yet, they both also never talked about Kate…

God, no wonder Taylor was suspicious. Everything looked entirely suspicious. Victoria hated that she had an MO apparently when it came to liking girls. But that was a entirely a misconception because she did not like Kate that way. So Taylor should just chill out.

In a way, she couldn’t blame Taylor for acting a bit spurned. She knew last year when the whole… R-word debacle went down, she wasn’t a very good friend. She had flaked on Taylor a lot and been shady the entire time. But even then from day one Taylor had stuck by her. Even through Victoria’s moodiness and even through Victoria’s particularly nasty phase the girl had stuck by her. Taylor was loyal, and that quality alone Victoria treasured. She knew, through her parents lectures and otherwise that loyalty was especially rare. People would leave you, stab you in the back and throw you under the bus if they had the chance. Taylor Christenson, despite having plenty of occasions to, never did.

Victoria let a huff of hot, guilty air out of her nose before she continued, “you are my home-girl, Tay. We’re going to do this, after dinner alright?” she reached out and touched her friends elbow, “I’m not bailing. I wouldn’t miss this with you for the world.”

There was a small smile of sheer appreciation that graced Taylor’s face as her eyes glanced at Victoria’s hand then up to her face. “Awesome, I’ll let Courtney know.”

When Taylor brought the phone down from her face after her text was complete she also reached out and cautiously put her hand on Victoria’s forearm, “I think it’s good that you two are hanging out.” Taylor said slowly. Victoria huffed, annoyed as she slid her arm away, crossing it with her other arm over her stomach.

“We do one project and everyone thinks we’re besties” Victoria jeered at no one in particular. In her peripheral she saw how Taylor held her gaze on Victoria, her hand hanging in midair where Victoria’s arm had been.

That aside, Victoria knew how bad Taylor had felt over the entire video thing. If Victoria had been captain of the fuck-over-Kate ship, Taylor had been her first mate. Both were guilty. However, while Victoria (justifiably) got most of the school’s scorn, Taylor had been hiding under the radar for the past month or so. However, she had spotted Taylor talking to Caulfield several times after their photography project (again, it dealt with the fragility of memory; a tiny bit pretentious and a bit too ambitious but nonetheless interesting with some great shots. However, it didn’t have the same emotional punch as hers and Kate did. (Gloating totally intended) – she had no idea how that happened – but Taylor seemed nicer to the weirdo squad over all. However, Taylor was avoiding Kate. To be fair, if Kate hadn’t reached out to her she’d probably be doing the same thing. She was impulsive when it came to concocting and enacting plans. She was a coward when it came to facing consequences.

If Victoria were braver she’d push aside all pretense and talk with Taylor openly about it. Perhaps she’d even suggest that Taylor talk to Kate about it. She imagined that Kate would invite Taylor somewhere private where she’d take her tea set and over earl grey they would bury the hatchet and build the bridge.

Maybe another time.
That night in bed Victoria shuffled idly, restless. The image of Taylor’s expression of disbelief pacing back and forth within her mind. The stupid silent accusation of Victoria’s amorous affections for Kate refusing to silence itself.

Ok, just because everything that was happening would outwardly seem very similar to ‘the R word’…It wasn’t. Victoria didn’t like Kate. She didn’t like Kate. She didn’t like Kate. She didn’t like Kate.

Correction. Victoria did like Kate platonically.

Platonically.

Ok, look, for herself, the one and only Victoria Maribeth Chase, to like you, romantically, it was, like, a big deal. You had to be not only attractive but to also get past all of Victoria’s guards, walls, jadedness and worm your way into her most vulnerable self.

Victoria wouldn’t just be passive about this of course. When she sensed that anyone was on their way, she would be hissing and screaming and kicking and biting. So, whoever could do that was already very special.

But after the chaos and death of Rachel, the fall and loss of Nathan, topped off with the utter humiliation and horror given to her courtesy the hands of Mr. Handsome-Pyscho Mark Jefferson… No one was getting through. Not again.

Ugh. This late-night-over-thinking-about-everything was getting out of hand. Usually a session of masturbation would do the trick but none of her go-to fantasies were doing the trick. Out of spite she conjured up the image of Kate, sitting on the floor, giant sketchbook on her lap. That unruly hair refusing to stay in it’s bun and rebelling as several locks jumped out in all directions. Her lips were slightly parted as she concentrated on the image her pencil created.

It was a pretty scene, but nothing that got her juices flowing (you know what I mean? Yeah, you know).

See? Another reason why she couldn’t like Kate. The girl couldn’t provide any good spank material. I mean, what type of sexuality did that girl even have? Other than the time she made out with the football team, but that was just sloppy… But seriously was there any proof of desirability within her body--

Her unconscious flashed a single image; The bathroom photo.

Victoria remembered being back by the humid showers…

The back of her neck… the gentle divot of her spine. When she had tugged that sleeve down it exposed that much more of her skin. How she had been close enough to see the muscles within Kate’s forearms tighten as she squeezed the sleeve. How the open gap of the fabric hinted at the swells of tender flesh on her chest.

This time though, Victoria leans in close, furthering tugging the shirt down as she kisses the side of Kate’s neck, hot and wet. She pulls Kate body into her own, as she kisses down that flawless back. At one point she bites down and hears Kate gasp out in pleasure.
She remembered within Kate’s room that one time where Kate had blown up at her before Halloween. How Kate’s face had been so close to her, those eyes blazing…

*When Kate turns towards her, those eyes are ignited with that same burn…*

She remembers the night of the party…How Kate also threw herself at several girls. Once in their arms how she, dazed, would gaze up at the female with unabashed desire, lips wet, swollen and waiting. How she had gripped the girls collars and stood up on tiptoe to capture their lips. A gentle flick of her tongue slipping into the unexpected girl’s mouth.

*Kate grips at Victoria’s shirt pulling her for a kiss and Victoria tastes her tongue. Her hands slip down to her waist and yanks the smaller girl flush against her body. Fantasy Kate just moans, nipping at Victoria’s lips.*

Victoria hissed as the heat between her legs finally began to build up and up in beautiful pressure.

She comes to the image of Kate, hoisted up onto the sink, leaning back onto the mirror as her legs loosely wrap around Victoria’s waist. Their tongues tangled together. Kate’s nails deep within Victoria’s skull as Victoria’s fingers are buried in Kate’s shorts, surrounding by wet heat.

As Victoria’s body relaxes and prepared to sleep, her mind snapped upright, rigid. She just masturbated to Kate Marsh.

…

Fuck it. She’ll deal with it tomorrow. It’s just Rule 34 anyway.

Masturbation fantasies don’t always have to make sense. Like that one time she masturbated about Watson. To be fair it was after she had written that stupid article slandering the Vortex club. She had fantasized what it would be like to sit on her face and hate-fuck that girl until she begged for release then leave her blue-balled. But she didn’t like the damn girl. She still disliked Juliet with an unreasonable passion. Also imagining about dominating other girls was more about ego than it was about amour. Like, she’s also imagined tearing Caulfield’s clothes off, tying her up, bending her over and whipping her ass until the damn girl came in humiliation…

Again. Ego. That’s all.

But last night hadn’t been a hate fantasy. It wasn’t a power trip.

That Saturday afternoon, as Victoria drove to the church and felt the wind whip through her bangs she remembered in the fantasy how Kate’s eyes morphed from timid to alive. How Kate’s fingers had gripped at her shoulders with urgency. How whenever fantasy Kate demanded a kiss, Victoria obeyed… How her own thighs still clenched when she thought about Kate, lips wet and parted, coming with her legs wrapped around Victoria.

*Rule 34. Whatever.*

Victoria got to the location early. Quaint little church building that really needed a paint job? Home of the ladadada angel saints whatever? Yup, Kate was hanging out here. She sent a text saying she’d wait outside.

Kate: Oh! Thank you so much!
Kate: (✿´‿`)  
Kate: Oh dear these parents won’t let me leave. Pls wait five mins sooooooo sorrrrry!!!

Kate: ■ _ ■

Victoria: w/e. I’ll be here.

Victoria: I better get something.

Victoria: Good.

Kate: My eternal gratitude?

Victoria: …

Kate: A bible?

Victoria: ffs just get here already!

Victoria leaned back against her car hood, smoking. Yeah, it was bad for you, whatever. Every artist who ever was anyone smoked, used to smoke in their youth or was still smoking heavily. So fuck you.

She lifted up her foot to stub it out on the bottom of her shoe when she saw a couple of adults walk out of the church. They looked at her and gave her that doofus smile; the look a mutt gives you when it wants to run over and slobber all over your knees.

She promptly lit up another cigarette and took a long, hard drag. The adults turned a sharp right and left. She hated dogs, mutts especially.

Stupid church-goers being all friendly. Probably were going to ask her to join them on whatever stupid activities they did. Who did she look like? Kate?

Katie was probably the only person in Victoria’s internal rolodex of people that could get away with it.

Katie…

Victoria brooded as she inhaled once more. Why was she thinking so much about this? She didn’t like Kate Marsh in that way. That would be so problematic…I mean Victoria was so nasty to Kate before. Like, unquestionably nasty.

Their friendship was already full of emotional landmines! Like, half of the time Victoria felt heavier than a beached whale around Kate. Bloated with all the fucking feelings. Suffocating under guilt, uncertainty and insecurity.

To add romance into her already complicated feelings was stupid.

Victoria goofed around on her phone, texting Taylor, but she still couldn't concentrate.
And this was just becoming retarded because there would never be romantic feelings! There weren’t even any sexual feelings! She wouldn’t even hook up with Kate let alone pursue that bundle of deep-rooted issues. She didn’t want to touch that. Not at all. Masturbation fantasies or otherwise.

“Vic!”

Victoria looked up and there she was. Wearing frumpy clothes as always (it was time to commit arson to those threads, seriously.) But in that abysmal skirt and sweater there was a pretty girl smiling and coming towards her.

One hand gripping and swinging the violin case, the other hand waving a cheerful hello.

And just like that, Victoria remembered why she came.

“Thank you so much for coming” Kate said again as she approached Victoria, “I’m sorry that I wasn’t able to tell you that it was taking longer because my phone just ran out of battery – I’m sorry again, but thank you, again.” Victoria felt annoyed that her voice somehow became lodged in her throat. Jammed from the feeling of giddiness that was worming around her internal space. Victoria swallowed and felt her esophagus working again.

She couldn’t help but lay it on thick as she tipped down her sunglasses, “well, someone needed a ride…” Victoria put her phone down on the hood of the car as she ran her hand along the beautiful hatchback as she walked towards Kate,

Kate chuckled, “so, you got a hotrod?”

So, it was quite obvious that Kate knew absolutely nothing about gear and technology, let alone cars. However, the way she measured what a ’hotrod’ was, was adorable. Victoria decided not to lecture her, but play along instead. So she smirked as she asserted, “German engineering. I only accept the best.”

Kate quickly assessed the car, “good taste.” She confirmed.

Victoria leaned forward, face closer to Kate as she added in a low voice, “I meant that for the company I keep too.”

A tiny blush did erupt on Kate’s cheeks but rather than stay flustered Kate simply reached up and took Victoria’s sunglasses off her face and twirled it within her fingers, “Even better taste.” Kate said as she put on the sunglasses, punctuating her statement with her own cheeky smile. Then Kate promptly skipped off to the passenger side before Victoria could answer. Victoria, genuinely taken aback, shook her head and chuckled under her breath.

God, they flirted like two pretentious teenaged intellectuals in some stupid Rom-com. And Victoria was having too much fun doing so to stop.

Again, Victoria flirted with all her friends. So, like, don’t take it the wrong way. She’d never seriously flirt with Kate. This progression of ‘banter compatibility’ was common place and was no reason for alarm or for suspicion. As Victoria got into the driver’s seat, Kate, still wearing her sunglasses, tipped them down and looked up at her with a mischievous grin on her face.
Ok. If Kate did that more, perhaps Victoria would flirt with her seriously.

As soon as Victoria settled into the seat and buckled up her Kate handed back her sunglasses, even though playful was always compassionate at the end of the day. Victoria took them back with her teeth. The small display of sexuality was enough to bring a gentle pink to Kate’s cheeks before she turned away from Victoria, “you’re certainly frisky today” she said, voice soft.

Victoria simply let out a chuckle from deep within her throat.

She took the sunglasses out of her mouth, cocky “You like it.” She teased. From the side of Kate’s cheek Victoria saw Kate give a small smile. There was an exhale of confidence within her ego. So, there was another reason that she decided to pick up Kate. For she, had a bone to pick with her about Steven Universe.

“So. Rose Quartz…” Victoria began. Kate gave out a playful exasperated sigh, “She’s not pink diamond.”

“She is so pink diamond, like, it’s written all over the show”

“Please, which episode does it clearly state this?”

“In between the lines, honey, don’t you know subtlety?”

“Victoria, I know all about subtlety and the allusions on the show are enormous but sometimes if the writing’s on the wall…”

“The writing says she’s pink diamond. Not my problem you’re illiterate.”

Kate let out a soft laugh that re-energized Victoria to continue this back-and-forth. She already knew that the other girl wasn’t going to be persuaded, as was she, but Victoria wanted to keep this harmless nerd-fight going for a bit longer. Her internal geek swooned and stretched as they parleyed. Victoria would occasionally sneak glances at Kate. You know, it shouldn’t keep surprising her that Kate was genuinely pretty. And for such a pretty girl she really, really needed a new outfit – several new outfits (fucking new wardrobe). Then her attractiveness wouldn’t get bogged down by some creepy cultish garb… Kate could be really nice eye-candy…

“Katie, I’m organizing an intervention for you.” Victoria stated, out of the blue.

Kate looked over at her, genuinely concerned, “what for?”

“The fact that you still allow these…potato sacks on your body, no, correction, potato sacks would look better, but still the fact that you continue to wear this – ugh - is cause enough for national security. You need help. Professional help.” They stopped at a red light and Victoria turned over and tipped her sunglasses down, cheshire smirk on her face.

Kate rubbed her temple, “Again, Victoria, you can’t burn all my clothes.” she sighed.

“I’m not burning everything. Look, we can donate them if that makes you feel better. Charity, right? Anyways, we can keep the classics. The white button ups – except that one with the huge collar because really it hasn’t been the 80’s in thirty years and it must go, the cardigans – all the solid shades. You can keep a couple – no, one, just one of the skirts because they’re more versatile than
“Vic…” Kate moaned.

“Get in loser, we’re going shopping” Victoria quoted with perfection.

“No, I’m already in – let me out. Where’s the eject button?” Kate joked. Victoria clicked on the child-lock.

“Nope. We’re going shopping tomorrow.” Victoria finalized. It’ll be fun. Get out of Blackwell for a bit. She’ll even accumulate some Karma by helping Kate not look like some Catholic Latch-key kid. Win-Win for everyone.

“I can’t do tomorrow, I’m sorry.” Kate responded, suddenly a lot less light-hearted.

Victoria scoffed, “Your church isn’t going to take all day is it? Doesn’t that end, like, at lunch or something?”

Kate paused, hesitating. Victoria playfully gasped, scandalized, “you have a date.” Then there was a bit of malice within her chest, “who is it? I have to judge them. Now.”

“It’s not a date in that sense. I’m going with Max and Chloe to the cemetery to pay respects to Rachel Amber.”

Oh.

Like unseen water, tension filled up the car so quickly that Victoria held her breath as she felt it go up past her eyelids, above her scalp until it pushed against the roof of the car.

*That smile*

*That skin*

*That Aphrodite presence*

*That dragon tattoo*

“…I think you should go.” Kate said.

Everything in the world soured at the moment. The flowers lost their color. Clouds came over the sky. Her skin felt dry. Nothing was fun and everything was dead. At least that was how the universe was to Victoria right after she heard Kate say that sentence.


“Well, you don’t have to go with us, but I believe that you knew Rachel much better than most did. Also that there may have been some unfinished business between the two of you – “

A rather unfriendly laugh forced its way out of her throat, “Oh unfinished business? Oh, honey, if only you knew”

Rachel reached forward and tussled Victoria’s immaculately styled hair, “what are you—“ Victoria
protested to which Rachel just leaped back, all grins and laughter,

“IT’s better messy.” She declared. Victoria could only stare, even though miffed, the sight of Rachel, laughing and looking at you like that was enough to let Rachel always muss up her hair.

“Exactly. this may be a good time for you to lay them down and find peace---“

“Find peace? There’s nothing for me to find! They found her dead body and buried her, that’s it.”

Victoria struggled to readjust her clothes as they stuck to the sweat on her skin and refused to cooperate. Victoria reeled in the envy as Rachel just threw on her flannel, those dirty, damaged jeans and looked glamorous. As Rachel looked down at her phone (always checking the millions of texts she got) Victoria stole secret glances at the other girl as she tried to get her leggings to work. Let’s hang out, Victoria wanted her to say. Let’s just chill and watch something together. Victoria willed Rachel to say. I just want to stay with you, Victoria prayed Rachel to say.

“Shit, Frank’s getting angsty already.” Rachel looked up at her, expectantly.

As Victoria numbly got her keys, she saw Rachel flash her that smile worthy enough to be on billboards, “you’re the best.”

Kate drummed her fingers against her thigh, as if deliberating whether or not she should prod further. “Why are you so agitated?” Kate asked, deciding to prod gently.

Rachel kissed up her neck and even though the tingles of pleasure sparked heat in between her legs there was a prick of uncomfort that chewed at the back of her throat. Victoria broke away, her hand on Rachel’s shoulder keeping her from continuing her delicious assault.

“That girl, the one with blue hair…” Victoria began. Rachel looked at her, eyes flashed wariness.

“Yeah, Chloe. She’s a good friend.” Rachel answered, dismissive.

She tightened her grip on Rachel’s shirt, preventing her from coming in for just a moment. Just a friend? The way Chloe looked at Rachel was devotion personified. What did Rachel do with her? What did she promise to her? Did that friend know what Rachel was up to with Victoria?

“Don’t worry about her.” Rachel cajoled.

Victoria couldn’t get over how that girl had hugged Rachel. How she had looked at her with such adoration. How those big blue eyes had gazed at Rachel with such longing when Rachel left her to get into Victoria’s car. It reminded her when she was child and her mother promised to spend time with her but would get called away to do something at the Chasespace. Some sort of new event she had to be a good hostess at. Some other person she had to meet and make nice with. Some other party she had to make an appearance at. How Victoria as a child would watch her mother go, hoping desperately that she’d come back soon. That her mother would remember that she was the special one…

She remembered how fucking heart-broken she felt when, late past her bedtime, when she was already under the covers, she would hear her mother’s footsteps finally returning. Her mother’s jovial laughter as she spoke on the phone to whoever how it was such a wonderful time, such a wonderful success the day had been and they – her mother and some strangers Victoria never knew -- would have to be together again soon.
She wondered if Chloe lay under her own covers, wondering, waiting, wishing for Rachel, too.

“Vic.” Rachel spoke, her lips brushing against Victoria’s own.

Victoria sank into Rachel’s mouth, shoving Chloe far back into her unconscious.

“I’m agitated because you think that this is some big deal for me when it’s not. I’m fine. I’m alive, she’s not, end of story.”

“You’re not fine.”

Rachel was giving her a look. That look. Where her lips were slightly pursed and her eyes told her that Victoria was over-reacting. That Victoria should be fine with dropping her off to see Frank, then picking her up again a few hours later. It was completely fine…

“Who are you? My therapist? You’re not qualified to psychoanalyze me Kate, drop it.”

“No one needs to be qualified to see that she sets you off--”

“She was a bitch that manipulated everyone into thinking she was some sort of Glinda the Good witch that was nice and could grant everyone’s wishes. Guess what? That was a fucking lie, honey. Wicked Witch of East - She just ruined people’s lives.”

Victoria squeezed her coffee cup so hard that the hot burning liquid came through the lid. Through the window she saw Rachel perched on Mark Jefferson’s desk. Speaking with him. Laughing with him. How he smiled at her, his gaze adoring. She reached out to playfully touch his goatee and Mark just grinned. Victoria felt the scorching burn from her hand through her entire body.

“Then what wishes did she say she could grant for you?”

“When I’m here with you, Vic, it is just you and me…” fingertips ran up her forearm, grasping at her bicep. Another set of fingers ran up her thigh, grasping at the sensitive skin there…

“As if I was one of the stupid sheeple that believed her shit.”

Victoria wanted to yank her own hair out. This was becoming absolutely insane. The string that Rachel had her on felt like a noose. She wanted out. She wanted sanity. However, when Rachel clapsed her face just like that and leaned in just like that and kissed her just like that…She felt that string of hope squeeze around her neck.

Kate crossed her arms, “So you’re angry that she manipulated others?” Kate clucked her tongue, “I don’t believe it.”

Victoria’s hand actually smacked the steering wheel in utter indignation, “What the Hell do you mean—you believe that some guy walked on water and healed lepers but you don’t believe me—“

Kate quickly interjected, “Because you’re Victoria Chase. If people are idiots and choose to do something idiotic then it doesn’t concern you. It’s not a bad thing, but you don’t care. If anything, I wish I cared less because a lot of people can’t be helped anyway.” Victoria felt her own fingers flex around the steering wheel as she glowered at the road. It vexed her how Kate had gotten to know her so well so quickly, “But if someone wrongs you personally then it’s a huge deal—“
Victoria exploded, “It is a huge deal! That heinous whore owes me two grand” Victoria only saw red. She breathed red. Red poured out of her lips.

Kate’s eyes widened, aghast. She blinked as she tried to process what she just heard, “Two thousand —why on Earth did you give her so much money?”

“It doesn’t matter! She never paid me back!”

“Vic, you’re speeding…”

“Everyone goes 10 over! It’s not the end of the world, calm down!”

Kate’s hand creeped up to grab the ‘oh-shit’ handle above the car window.

“Vic…What happened?”

A vicious dog fight became murderous within her chest. The dog that acknowledged that Rachel had genuinely broken her heart and wanted to let it go versus the dog that never wanted to admit that anyone, let alone Rachel Amazing Amber, had that kind of power over her and wanted to bury the entire thing within her skull so deep that no one would ever know what transpired. “Nothing happened! It was just bullshit! She’s just a fucking slut that waltzed into my life and decided to mess everything up like a brat who hasn’t been potty-trained…” Victoria knew that she was making no sense but the two dogs had bit at each other’s throats and it constricted Victoria’s ability to speak to make sense. All she heard within her mind were snarls, barks, yelps, growls…

“Victoria, stop the car” Kate pleaded.

“I’m not stopping the fucking car! Calm the fuck down!” Victoria shouted. Her eyes blazing something furious at the other girl.

She looked at Victoria, face full of genuine compassion, curiosity and a bit of fear, “What did she do to you?” Kate asked.

Everything within Victoria’s mind and soul just stopped.

It was the one question that half of her had been dying for someone, anyone, ANYONE to have the clarity and compassion to see and ask. It was the one thing that the other half of her feared the most that anyone would ever have the clarity and compassion to see and ask. Both dogs froze in the middle of their fight, dumbfounded.

Victoria froze. Dumbfounded.

“Victoria, the road- THE ROAD!”

Victoria snapped her attention back at the front window.

She gasped.

Too late.

Part of the car had already swerved off the road and onto the dirt. Victoria twisted her arms as hard
as she could down to the left. Everything was already out of control.

A loud ear-drum breaking skeevng sound

Followed by a body-wracking

KA-THUD --

-- as the right wheel skipped against a tree before landing roughly back onto the ground with another body-shaking

BOOM.

Loud

Scratching

Loud

Crunching

Two bodies tumbled within their seats

Pile-driving through bushes.

Shouting

Finally.

Victoria’s brakes work.

The car awkwardly stopped on top of some shrubbery and rocks.

The inertia throwing both Kate and Victoria so far forward, their seat belts jerking them back. Whiplash faster.

Kate and Victoria panted both physically shocked to the point where their brains were so shot up on adrenaline that they were unable to comprehend anything.

What

The

Actual

...

Victoria’s fingers were still glued to her steering wheel. Kate still grasped the ‘oh-shit’ handle with both of her hands, half lifting herself out of her seat. Victoria’s ears and brain rang so loud she didn’t
know if she was breathing or not.

Then at last, something came through to her eardrums. Katie speaking, breathless,

“Victoria, are you Ok?”

Out of Victoria’s throat erupted a glass-shattering scream.

Then. Something coherent,

“NO. I AM NOT-- OK.”

Kate’s eyes were frozen in a state of wide confusion. It’s uncertain whether or not Victoria terrified her or she’s still high off the rush of adrenaline from before but she took in a huge gasp of air, as if about to dive under water. She let go of the ‘oh-shit’ handle and tried to open the door,

Kate, quiet, “Vic, please unlock the door--”

“WHY THE FUCK DO YOU WANT TO OPEN THE DOOR?” Victoria screamed at her, her nerves an absolute live-wire for any and all emotions in that moment.

“BECAUSE I NEED TO CHECK THE DAMAGE ON THE CAR!” Kate screamed back at her, her nerves exactly in the same condition as Victoria’s, apparently. If Victoria had been any less amped on almost-death-hormones she’d have the manners to be surprised that Kate—Miss very nice, polite, considerate Kate Marsh, just screamed at her. But in actuality, Victoria bared her teeth, still white-knuckling the steering wheel. The adrenaline still burning the back of her eyeballs, shooting her logic function to all Hell. The only thing she could do was feel as though everything was ending and what was even going on?

“OPEN THE DOOR!” Kate screamed again. Victoria just shrieked. Aggression. Confusion. Kate found the stupid unlock button just as Victoria found it and they both jammed the button simultaneously. Kate fucking fell out of the car when she opened the door and tried to hop out on wobbly legs.

Victoria heard the thud and the ‘oof’ and it brings her back to where she is. Where the Hell is she?

She got out of the car and almost fell over herself. The dirt is uneven and packed with rocks.

They had somehow off-roaded thirty or so feet into the woods. The foliage around them made the road hard to see, despite a clear trail having been mowed through. All of the realizations are coming through numb and as if wrapped in towels – thick, muddled and hard to process at first.

She has a flat tire. Plain as day. Victoria kicked it as hard as she could and felt some sharp hot pain shoot up her toes and shin. She swore loud and full, as though trying to fill the trees with Mother fucker, Bitch, Fucking, Fuck.

(But she couldn’t)

Victoria goes back into the car to check on her phone. Time to call Triple A on this shit. Wait. Where was her phone? She searched frantically everywhere, panic filling her chest. Where was her phone? Where? Where? Where? No. No. No.
The memory hits her hard. Before, when she had picked up Kate at the church and had slid over to her, her hand running along the roof of the car…She had put the phone down. *On the roof of the car.*

Then she had driven off…

It’s such a careless mistake.

**Mother**

**Fucker.**

Great. Just great. Now her phone was on the road somewhere between here and some rundown church. Had it not been run over by now some jerk probably already pocketed it.

The fact that she had essentially cut their only life-line ripped out the wrath of the Banshees from Victoria as she swore loud and high-pitched

Kate though ignored her, and already circled the car twice. She’s gotten on the ground, hands on the dirt, her face nearly pressed against the rocks as she checks the underside of the car.

She got up, again, breathless but more stable, “Victoria, can you please pop the hood?”

Victoria, still smarting from her foot and her might-as-well-be-dead phone snarled, “what the hell are you going to do?”

“Just shut up and pop the hood!” Kate shot back, whatever patience having had been crushed from the accident. Victoria snarled something nasty between her teeth but she finds the switch within the driver’s seat and the hood popped. Kate immediately ducked her head down, surveying the components.

“What are you even doing?”

“I’m seeing if there’s any internal damage to the engine or to any other important components, if not then we’re in better shape than we know.”

“And if we’re not? We can’t call Triple A because my phone’s gone”

“What happened to your cell?”

“It’s fucking gone! That’s what!” Another exasperated shrill sound, “do you know how much that fucking phone costs?”

Kate, apparently not too interested in Victoria’s panic or phone, continued as though everything was just dandy. “The good thing is that nothing appears to be leaking, I checked under the car…hmmm, the radiator’s still full of water….”

“Well that’s fucking fantastic, now we’re going to have to go and hitch-hike like hippies. You want to know what happens to two young girls on the road? We’re either going to be raped, killed, kept as torture slaves or the fucking disgusting truck driver is going to want one of us to give him head and I’m not---“

“No one is giving anyone a blowjob” Kate snapped, “we may not even need to hitch-hike.”
“How the Hell do you even know this?” Victoria shook her head, “and don’t you dare say…”

“The church? Yes. A mechanic goes to my church and became a good family friend, when I learned how to drive he taught me basic car maintenance and repair.”

Victoria let a growl of sheer exasperation rip out of her throat, “Fucking why!?"

“In case I got into trouble and there was no one around and I couldn’t call anyone – like now.” Kate retorted as she looked over everything under the hood, “my family can’t afford Triple A or to have high insurance.”

“Oh, the good ‘ol cross uniting all the bumpkins and low-collar workers under one roof, how that’s worked out so well for the rest of the country thus far…”

Kate twisted the oil wire and ripped it out with force, “Yes, I get it! The church is backwards and has a resistance to progress and has a messed up education system. They’re frightened of things that aren’t explained well in the bible and react terribly to things that aren’t strictly black and white. But you want to know the great thing about the church? They stick together, they look out for each other and they share information. It’s a safe haven that has helped meld me into who I am. There will be Hell to pay when I come out as a Gay unicorn but I will not trade my experiences with my church for anything and I do not regret having them in my life.” Kate briefly turned away, checking the oil wire, “the oil’s fine.”

“Isn’t that fucking lovely? A bunch of people always there for you whenever you’re sad or lonely or need to learn how to fix your fucking car? Guess what for the rest of us in the 21st century it’s not like that! We have to fend for ourselves!”

Kate jammed the oil wire back into it’s socket, “Fend for yourself? You’re driving a brand new buggy!”

“Beetle Coupe!”

“So sorry,” Kate seethed quietly, “But, really, what car payments do you have to make? You can afford the best insurance and the best phone and the best toys and are going to an elite art junior college without ever having to worry about the tuition, there are kids younger than us already on the streets forced to sell their bodies-- how the Hell is that fending for yourself?”

“You had your entire family around, your church goers – they were always there – who was there for me!? My parents were always gone making the Chasespace the number one gallery on the west coast; Seattle, Portland, San Francisco-- they open for the best photographers, artists and speakers in the world! That and constantly networking amongst the most elite, the top 1%, you heard of them? Who was there when I was sad, lonely or needed to fix my car? My fucking nanny whose only there because the pay is gold! And she knew jack shit! You have two sisters! Do you know how much I fucking wanted siblings when I was little? I begged my parents for one because I was tired that no one would hang out with me. Yeah, I get the best toys but I have to do the insane amount of research to know which ones were the best and why and then ask my parents get them for me. You want to know what they give me if I don’t tell them? Just bills. Rolls of them. Fucking blood money, as if that can validate them never giving me time of day to teach me anything outside of photography. Why do you think I know more than anyone else about the technicalities and the specifics? That’s the only thing they’d spend their time with me on, that or telling me how to network within the art world and how everything is dog eat dog so you better sharpen up your knives because everybody
wants something from you so you better protect what you got and take what you want. That or taking me on hundreds of bullshit events with stupid bullshit people who matter! And stop looking at me like that!”

Kate looked at her, eyes big and concerned. As one would look at an injured bird that was squawking at them. As if she were just some crippled little thing hopping on the floor, frantic and in pain and needing help.

So Victoria squawked even louder than before, “I don’t want your pity. For Fucks Sake you’re the last person that should be throwing me a pity party, I’m capable, a strong independent woman— Stop looking at me like that!”

Kate didn’t stop looking at her like that. Large hazel eyes bled empathy; truly seeing Victoria beneath her tantrum. It was something that Victoria hadn’t experienced much. Before, there were certain people she had wished would look at her like that. But now, Victoria felt all her clothes, all her pretense, all her façade’s dissipate until she were naked. All her privacy rendered for display under Kate’s powerful gaze.

“Oh fuck this!” Victoria shrieked as she stomped away.

“Victoria!”

“Fuck off!”

She stomped into the woods, infuriated and so upset that she wished she could destroy all of Arcadia Bay. Just blow it all to bits.

Fuck everything!

Fuck everything!!

Just Fuck!!!!

She kicked at a tree with her already injured foot and screamed curses to the Gods.

From behind her, “Victoria.” Kate again. Victoria didn’t even hear Kate come after her. When she turned around her vision was assaulted by those hazel orbs full of soul and compassion.

“I swear to fucking God—“ Victoria roared but was cut off when Kate’s hands grasped her shoulders, “Get your hands off me--!”

Victoria sunk her nails into Kate’s wrists – how dare Kate touch her. The sharp tips tore through the soft flesh with vengeance. Through the storm that was Victoria’s rage, Kate, still as a mountain, maintained eye contact. She was unfazed by the anger, unfazed by the pain. Unfazed.


“She didn’t hurt me! If she ever tried I would’ve kicked that skinny ass –“

“You’re upset.”

“I’m not upset--!”
“It’s ok to be upset.”

“I’m not-“

Softly, but firmly Kate persisted, “Rachel hurt you. She hurt you very much and you’re upset. You should be angry, you should be sad. You should be feeling this way. It’s ok Victoria. It’s ok to feel wronged… How did she hurt you? Please. Tell me how she hurt you.”

Just like that Victoria felt the waves of rage begin to part. Her hands loosened their death grip. The forest was quiet. She could hear her own panting. Her body began to feel again.

In Victoria’s personal life, there was rarely a time to explain herself. When she was upset, everyone that surrounded her seemed to just want to placate her until she felt better. Toys, treats, trips, anything to distract her from the actual issue. Anything to make the actual issue just go away. However, Victoria knew when her problems were being glossed over because whoever didn’t care, or because whoever thought the problems didn’t matter. So she never really dealt with her problems. No one asked her why she was upset. No one had really asked her to explain what had happened to make her upset.

Other than her therapist.

Who she visited with disdain, didn’t listen to half the time and resented the fact that her family was paying the woman to listen to her gripe.

Her therapist explained that since she was neglected and thus the positive emotional support she needed wasn’t given when she was actually upset, she lashed out at little things to get people to react and give her some sort of attention. However, Victoria developed unhealthy coping mechanisms and an unhealthy belief that there was something wrong with her, personally, when she was actually sad.

But Victoria couldn’t remember the last time someone told her that her pain in the moment was validated. That she should be upset… That she had been, in total actuality, hurt. That it was ok. When was the last time someone just wanted to wholeheartedly understand what was wrong?

Victoria felt her eyeballs stinging as something large and unseen welled up within her throat.

Victoria raised her hands to her face, trying desperately to stop the tears. But it was like an unstoppable flood of

Anguish

Exhaustion

Frustration

Gratitude

Disbelief

Like a pin pricking a water balloon… everything just came out and it’s so unexpected that she began choking.
Victoria felt hands gently rub her shoulders, “There, there,” Kate said ever so softly, “come here” and then she felt those same fingers skirt around her back and pull her down. Victoria can’t uncover her face she’s flushed with so many feelings:

Shame
Sorrow
Vindication

Finally she slides her wet hands off her face where they travel and grip at Kate’s waist. She buried her eyes into the crook of Kate’s shoulder and neck. Victoria bawled. She felt fingers stroke the back of her head and massage her back. It felt like comfort. It felt like safety. It felt like understanding. It felt an awful lot like love.

“Let it out” Kate reassured. So Victoria did. Loudly and wetly.

Kate lowered the both of themselves down slowly to sit on the root of the tree. Victoria came down with her. She curled up into the smaller girl, hiding within her warmth and solid presence.

Finally, words come out. She brethes out the toxic that’s she’s kept within her for more than half a year, so old and festered that it feels as though hard, gritty pebbles slide off her tongue and into Kate’s skin. She just says the most important points; her and Rachel had a thing. She fell so hard (Icarus and the sun). Rachel used her. Rachel used everyone. Rachel and Mark probably fell in love. Mark doesn’t give a shit about Victoria. Rachel left. Nathan killed her. Mark’s a psychopath. Rachel’s dead. It’s such a twisted web of fucked up that Victoria felt both responsible for and powerless to stop. As if she were Pandora that opened the box and suddenly revealed the vileness of the world.

She’s also pretty certain that Rachel was the one who gave her that embarrassing case of Chlamydia.

Kate listened

And stroked her back

And listened

And stroked her back

Until finally, finally the last of the bile exited Victoria’s mouth and the typhoon of anguish passed and the broken sunlight slipped through the leaves and got into her eye.

“What she did to you wasn’t very nice” Kate said aloud, “I’m sorry that she hurt you so much.”

“It’s not your fault.” Victoria answered. No energy left in her for snark, for bite, for bark…

“Still, you shouldn’t have had to suffer like that. It wasn’t right.”

It’s ironic coming from Kate Marsh. It’s so ironic that she’s so sincere about it. Part of Victoria wanted to smack Kate because she, herself, does deserve to suffer. She’s a piece of shit. However
she’s too exhausted and it’s a topic that they’re both growing weary of talking about. So instead, they both sit there in silence as Victoria felt herself come back together with each stroke of Kate’s fingers through her hair and on her back.

“She’s gone and people still worship the ground she walked on. Even after everything that’s happened. Even after it’s well-known how messed up she was. Everyone still loves her. Even the other people she used and threw away still love her…”

Kate hummed in agreement then, “do they actually love her though? Or just love the idea of her?” she asked, quietly. Victoria didn’t respond, content in the moment to just hide in Kate’s neck.

“Perhaps you don’t have such a large following like her, yet. But those few who do love you, despite their flaws, truly do love you as you are. That is beautiful and rare and should be appreciated.” Kate said again. Victoria closed her eyes. Nathan. Her parents. Taylor. All fucked up. But sincere. Was it enough? No. But was it sincere? Yes.

“Ok, ok, I’m ok” Victoria said, gently pushing herself out of Kate’s embrace. There’s a big wet, snotty spot all over Kate’s collar, chest and neck. Victoria winced and wanted to apologize, but was still so raw off emotions she couldn’t bring herself to. She wiped the gooey shit off her face and when she saw the translucent white crap off her arm she couldn’t help but give out a defeated huff. She was pathetic.

“Well. That’s what happened. Rachel Amazing Amber messed up my life and she still somehow finds ways to wreck it beyond the grave.”

Kate’s hands rise up to her shoulders where her grip is firm enough to be comforting as she continued to look into Victoria’s blood shot eyes, “Victoria. You know about idolatry, right?”

“…”

“The false prophet?”

“I can’t believe you’re making this about Jesus.”

“Just listen. Whatever beauty and powers she had were just an illusion. She was just human and flawed, like you, like me, like everyone. She was never this Goddess. Everyone else called her that even though it was just fantasy. Also, now she’s dead. Whatever she did have is gone. Forever. She can’t touch you now, not physically, not emotionally, not spiritually.” Victoria in this pause notices the rich red crescent moons on Kate’s wrist. She lifts up her own heavy hand and with her fingers rubs over some of the wounds, apologetically. Droplets of blood smear on the pale white of Kate’s wrist.

“But the point is this, even if Rachel were still alive whatever control she had over you and others, whatever manipulation she could conduct – you gave her that power to do so.”

“Exactly, that’s why I’m fucking retarded-“

“Victoria, you made a mistake. You gave someone your trust and affections when they didn’t deserve it. Everyone makes this mistake. But do you know how lucky you are? You’re still here. You’re alive. You have learned! You are one of the smartest people I have ever known and if you choose to, you are going to come out of this knowing better, being stronger and being better than
Rachel Amber ever was. You still have time to solidify your influence on this world. You have a lifetime. Day by day you continue to influence people.”

Victoria snorted.

“seriously though. You may not know it, but how you act every minute with people does impact them. You don’t get devout followers by somehow grabbing masses of people at once. You do that one person at a time, Victoria. That’s how she did it, each person she met she made them feel amazing. It’s not something you can’t do either.”

“As if I could ever—“

“Of course not in the way she did it. That wouldn’t be authentic and people can smell that a mile away. Do it your way. Your unique, Victoria Chase way. I guarantee that over time you’ll collect the people who adore you. Just be you, Victoria.”

Victoria felt the stickiness of Kate’s blood in the whorls on her fingertips. She looked away at the random pieces of nature that has stuck itself onto her leggings. There are tiny rips and the such too.

“No one likes me.” Victoria admitted in such a quiet voice. She felt seven again. When she first sat on that lounge chair in her therapist office. Knowing that this stupid confession to this stupid grown-up stranger wouldn’t change anything.

“I like you.” Kate says back, her voice sounding like a blanket of affection. Victoria looked up and raised a very skeptical eyebrow at her, “it took me a while.” Kate confesses quietly. A sudden snort of sheer amusement shoots out both of their throats and they both laugh.

“But once you showed me who you actually are… I like it very much.” Kate assured, smiling at her. Victoria observed how Kate’s face that had bits of dirt and grease smudged on it. How her hair was haphazard. How the girls sweater also had black smudges of car grease on it. But damn, do those hazel eyes look like a galaxy.

Everything about her was so bright that Victoria had to look away, unable to handle it.

“I like you, too.” Victoria admitted to the trees in the opposite direction of the actual person it was addressed to.

“Thanks, Vic.” She heard Kate say, gratitude in her voice.

“T ook me a while too.” Victoria couldn’t help but add.

Both of them snorted and laughed again. “Fair enough.” Kate chuckled.

Once the bit of humor went away, Victoria looked up and saw how the light couldn’t quite faze out the harsh shadows of the trees, “I just wished it all never happened” Victoria swore, forlorn. She just wanted to erase Rachel. Erase Nathan. Erase Mark Jefferson. Erase the video. Erase it all.

“One cannot change their fate, Victoria, but one can rise to meet it if they choose” Kate said. Victoria’s head whipped around, caught off guard.

Another brilliant quote from Princess Mononoke.

Victoria continued to stare at her, truly speechless. Kate’s lips crinkled with a tiny bit of mirth, “I think it fits, no?”
Victoria felt her own lips crinkle and mirror the girl in front of her, “fantastic writing either way.”

Both of them chuckled quietly. There was a beat of silence.

“Aren’t you ready to go back to your car?” Kate asked. Victoria nodded. Kate got up and helped Victoria get up, her legs having lost most feeling in them. She winced as they walked back. Her toes hurt. Ow. But she watched the back of Kate as she followed. Kate wiped her nose on the cuff of her sleeve. A smudge of bright red trailed from her nose to her cheek.

Victoria rose up her hand and saw how her fingers were stained a rusty red filter, courtesy of the blood on Kate’s wrist. She saw how Kate swung her arms slightly at her sides, the droplets even though very slow, still flowing down onto the heels of her palms. She remembered how in *Princess Mononoke*, Ashitaka meets San, for the first time. Saw that face staring at him covered in blood. Without words, without a doubt, he knew in that moment that she was truly something special to him.

That he…

Victoria kicked that thought out the door before it finished.

Back to her currently still-in-the-woods Beetle coupe.

“Alright, Captain. What do we have to do?” Victoria asked, turning to Kate and for once, laying her pride down and letting someone else take the lead. Kate gave her a small, but brilliant smile.

“We’re going to fix that tire.”

~~~___~~~~

“Yes, every car has a instruction manual in it. It’s either in the glove box or in the trunk…”

Victoria stared at Kate as if she had grown an ear on her nose. What.

~~~___~~~~

“Well, that’s certainly clever” Victoria mused out loud as they took the lining out of the trunk and took out the wheel-wedges, the jack and the lug wrench.

“Of course, Victoria, it’s been standard procedure that the car would provide tools so the drivers can fix things in a pinch.”

Victoria held the lug wrench in her hand, both disgusted that she was going to do this and honestly a bit excited that she was going to do this, “So… regular people do this, themselves, all the time? Or is this just something that you church-goers do?” Victoria asked. Wasn’t this Triple-A’s job?

Kate stared at Victoria as though she could seriously, seriously, seriously not believe that Victoria wasn’t kidding.

~~~___~~~~

Victoria learned that even if one doesn’t have the arm muscle to loosen the bolts on the tires, there’s
simple tricks for people who aren’t mechanics and aren’t bodybuilders.

Kate lodged the lug-wrench onto the bolt at a horizontal angle and stood up on it. The steel stressed against her weight, “and then,” she did a little hop and the lug-wrench went down, sharply, loosening the dead bolt.

“Well, now I know that gymnastics goes into removing flat tires” Victoria replied, sarcastic to hide her genuine wide-eyed amazement at the clever move. Kate snorted at her as she got on her knees and used her hands to remove the deadbolt.

“Just wait until I teach you how to maintain your radiator”

“Let me guess, I’m going to need to know some Native American dances? Run in a large circle clockwise then hop on one foot—“

“You’re being silly. You finish this.”

Victoria crossed her arms, a rather sly smirk on her face, “but you’re doing such a fine job, I don’t want to break you out of your groove…”

Kate stood up and pointed at the tire. A very short stare down. “Fine.” Victoria got on her knee and started to work the lug wrench.

Kate was so amused, “you really have never done this before—”

“Oh shove it, Rosie the Riveteer.”

--

However, later on Victoria can’t help but dig out of her dinged car a camera (that has survived the bumpiness. That is what money gets you; durability. Unlike Caulfields shitty polaroid tin can). And snapped photos of Kate taking off the spare tire.

“Vic” Kate protested, a bit annoyed that Victoria wasn’t even taking care of her own car.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be your grease monkey soon enough. I have to take some shots. Just ignore me. Five minutes, tops.”

Kate, having enough sense to that the artist had come out of Victoria and thus couldn’t be reasoned with, rolled her eyes and went back to work.

“You’re the best, Cherie.”

Kate answered that with a loud huff.

Lodging the lug-wrench into the bolts, climbing up and loosening them. Then putting the jack in the proper place and pumping so it rose higher and higher with ease. Victoria felt her eyes widen that the car was coming up so easily. “German engineering.” She confirmed to herself quietly as she got more shots.

“That and basic physics” Kate quipped without looking at Victoria.
As Victoria pressed down on the buttons on her camera, “I’m a photographer, I provide beauty and truth to the world. Let the nerds figure the rest out.” Victoria retorted.

Victoria knew that she should be helping Kate, that she should stop. But the set-up was too perfect. The large trees. The dirty ground. The mauled bushes. All perfect contrasts to Kate, tiny, cute and absolutely determined had the best actions and poses that Victoria dutifully caught. Even though she hadn’t checked the photos, Victoria didn’t dare look away for a second. Her finger squeezing on the button a split second before her mind could say yes to the frame.

Always. Always. Take the shot.

However, she did have to stop, when Kate, holding the dilapidated tire, cried out “Vic! This is heavy!” and Victoria did run over to Kate to help her carry that to the trunk and get the spare.

~~--~~

As penance, Victoria did put the spare tire on. She whined and listened to Kate’s instruction and threw out as much snark as she could.

~~ ___ ___~~

“Ready?”

Victoria looked back at Kate who was in front of the car with both hands bracing it. Meanwhile she herself was at the driver’s side, door open and gripping at the frame, “are you sure the two of us can push 2 tons of steel?”

“Don’t worry! We just need to get it moving, after that it’s easy.”

Victoria double-checked that her car was in neutral then grumbled under her breath. How did she get here, pushing a car out of the forest?

“3   2   1   –   Go!”

Both of them heaved and hoed. It was a bit difficult to unhinge the stubborn branches out of the crannies of the car, but Kate was right, as soon as the car began to move inch by inch…

They began to push it out foot by foot and gather some speed. Victoria was able to effectively reverse steer the car out, back onto the side of the road. Kate cheered loudly, and ran over to Victoria to give her a double high-five. Victoria, still in disbelief, held off and told Kate to get in the passenger side.

“Moment of truth.” Victoria said as she revved up the car…and began to drive…

Smooth sailing.

Then she hollered out in sheer glory, Kate joining in with her.

Victoria’s mind began to race, her car was really scrapped up and would require a headache to repair, her phone was gone, her makeup was smudgy and ugly all over her face and her outfit was completely ruined (again.) Yet, Victoria was absolutely giddy, “I can’t believe I just did that…we just did that”
“See? Basic car maintenance doesn’t have to include giving strangers oral sex” Kate chirped. Victoria grunted and shoved Kate’s shoulder. “But seeing as I did almost all the work and told you exactly what to do… what payment can I get?” Kate chirped in good humor.

Victoria pulled over the car, unbuckled her seat belt and leaned over the centerpiece, reaching over to Kate’s leg… “VICTORIA I WAS JUST KIDDING.”

Victoria unbuckled Kate’s seat belt, “Oh? I don’t mind really, better you than some gross truck driver” Victoria gently squeezed at Kate’s inner thigh, “We should go to the back seat, it’ll be much easier for me to--”

“OK. OK. YOU WIN. I REGRET EVERYTHING.” Kate was cherry red from her neck to her hairline, looking absolutely scandalized and absolutely adorable.

Victoria smirked, rebuckling herself up. She always won. They continued driving when another decision formulated itself within Victoria’s brain,

“I want to go to the cemetry.” Victoria declared. This sobered Kate up as she quietly thought about Victoria’s revelation, “I can drop you off…”

“I’ll go with you.” Kate answered.

Kate looked at Victoria, her face and tone calm, but eyes serious, “I have nowhere to be.” She concluded.

Victoria nodded, “Guide me there.” She said. Kate did just that.

Later, as they approach an intersection Kate asked something that Victoria honestly never thought about,

“Did you love her?” Kate inquired, not looking at her, “do you still love her?”

Love. Victoria stopped at a red light and thought hard. Long hair through her fingers. That laugh that stopped her breathing. Those lips that melded against yours perfectly and always knew what to do, what to say, how to kiss in the moment. How to be so intimate with you that you felt that you were the only one in the world that mattered… Was that love?

“It’s green.”

She tapped down on the gas, answering “no. I didn’t love her. I wanted her. I obsessed about her. Just as much as everyone else obsessed about her.” Rachel had somehow attained such a mythos in her mind that she became magical – not even human. That certainly wasn’t love. “I wanted her to love me. I wanted her to make me feel like I was special, like I was something worth loving. But she did that to everyone, apparently.”

Kate interjected, “Rachel wanted everything because she didn’t know what she wanted. She felt alone and couldn’t stand it, which is why she kept seeking attention from anyone and everyone. That’s why she wanted to get out of here and be a model/eventual actress. Someone like that never deserves your affections anyway.”

Victoria doesn’t know why that answer took the air out of her lungs and floored her more than
anything else. Part of her wanted to berate Kate, she didn’t know Rachel and thus had no idea what she was talking about. She didn’t get how intoxicating it was to be in Rachel’s attentions. She had no idea what it was like to be in Rachel’s eye.

But then again, that maybe was why Kate’s answer nailed more truth than anyone else’s mythological waxing about Rachel Amber. She saw the situation for what it was. Epiphany injected through Victoria’s skull and directly into her brain as suddenly everything brightened and cleared.

_The dog goes woof. The cat goes meow. The cow goes moo. Rachel Amber never deserved her in the first place._

How did this never occur to her? It wasn’t that she didn’t deserve Rachel, it was the other way around! Like, this is the most obvious thing ever. Just like how her car had an instruction manual. Just like how Cowboy Bebop was superior to the original Batman animated series. Just like how you don’t mix Givenchy and Chanel… A feeling of relief and a demented glee filled her up until her frown inverted into a smile on her face.

“You’re right.” She uttered. Rachel had just been a girl. A pretty amazing girl in her own right, but just human like the rest of them. Victoria glanced at the other girl and Kate gave a small assured smile and a nod in return. She was right. Victoria felt purpose flood her veins.

At the cemetery she parked and Kate pointed her the way to the tombstone. “I’ll stay here. I’ll give you some privacy.” Victoria gave her a nod. At the end of Sour Berry Panic, Agent Blueberry had to finish the job alone. Before she had been terrified that she was incapable, but at the end…

She was ready.

Every step resounded within her muscles like a growing percussion.

Yes. She couldn’t change fate. She couldn’t change that she met Rachel. She couldn’t change that she fucked Rachel and fell hard for her. She couldn’t change that her best friend killed Rachel. She couldn’t change how Rachel fell in love with Mark Jefferson. She couldn’t change how they had met and how it had wrecked her life.

But she could rise to meet her if she chose.

Until there, a stone emblazoned with RACHEL DAWN AMBER (July 22nd 1994 – April 22nd 2013)

“Forever a beautiful soul”

Well she certainly would be ‘forever young,’ as dark as that thought was. In her minds-eye a figure emerged. Flannel, auburn hair, piercing green eyes, torn up shorts and a dragon tattoo sat on the tombstone.

Hey, Vic. That voice still as crisp and low as in her memory.

Victoria didn’t open her mouth, staring the other girl down. Rachel just chuckles, the vibrations evident in this mental body.

Good to see you too. Didn’t think you’d come. Is the only way she’d respond to the hostility. There is sincere gratitude in her eyes though.
“You owe me money, bitch.”

Rachel’s face falters. It happens when she knows the other person is genuinely upset and she has nothing to offer for explanation or placation. That really wasn’t supposed to happen. She answers, lamely.

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When Victoria returned to Kate some time later, Kate smiled at her.

“Did you see the deer?”

Victoria answered with a perplexed look. “Oh, there was a deer standing not too far from where you were. It was watching you the entire time.” Kate pointed up on the hill to where it was supposedly.

“Did you take a picture?”

“My phone’s out of battery, remember?”

“You could’ve used my camera.”

A sheepish look crossed Kate’s face, “uh, sorry, it didn’t occur to me.” Victoria rolled her eyes,

“Ugh. Non-photographers.” Victoria opened the driver’s door.

“I can draw it for you later,” Kate hopped into the passenger side.

“Deal.”

Both drive back in silence, momentarily interrupted by Kate’s instructions on how to get back to Blackwell. Their quietness is also broken when they pass by the church and they find Victoria’s phone and both began to cheer loudly again. It’s scratched and screen cracked as all Hell, but it’s her phone. It’ll be another headache of a bill to repair but she got it back. Kate tests it out and apparently the touch screen still works even though it’s nearly unrecognizable. As Kate plugs it into the car to play some tunes, Victoria (who is dutifully paying attention to the road, thank you) sneaks some glances at Kate.

Kate Marsh.

She wasn’t Rachel Amber.

Once, a long time ago, this car had been made for speeding, windows down, hip-hop and rock music blaring and two white girls jamming along without a care for the world. She and Rachel had tumbled into the backseat, the front seat – anywhere they could and the entire car had smelled of Rachel for days, for weeks…

What if her car had crashed with Rachel?

Oh, if they couldn’t call anyone they would’ve hitch-hiked for certain. Just abandoned the car and kept going. Then there would be that problem of gross ass drivers wanting blowjobs. They probably
would’ve gotten out of it, Rachel would’ve figured a way out. It would’ve gotten crazy though. Then Victoria would have to deal with the problem of Rachel trying to ditch her when things got too boring or when more exciting things were in the peripheral.

If they were to keep metaphors going;

Rachel was the car crash. Exhilarating. Anarchy. Destructive. Overwhelming feelings. Nothing was the same after Rachel was in your life. With her there was the promise of no plans and all impulse. To put off all consequence to tomorrow. Beautiful messiness.

"Hey Vic," Kate interrupted Victoria's brooding. They were at a red light and Kate was looking at her, hand outstretched. The sunglasses. Apparently they had somehow found their way under the seats when the crash happened and Kate found them. She was offering them back to their rightful owner.

Victoria waved her off, "You can keep them." Victoria answered. Kate gave her a incredulous look. "I have three more laying around my room." Kate gave a small smirk, of course Victoria had, like, five of the most expensive sunglasses she'd ever held in her life. But Kate put them back on her own face. The sunglasses were now a bit lopsided due to getting thrown around in the crash (Victoria would take them back to fix them for Kate)

Yup, Kate's cheeks were still marred by dirt, grease and blood. However Kate, sunglasses on, her elbow on the window lip, jaw resting on her grimy hand, setting sun giving her a halo around that dirty blonde mess of hair...she looked gorgeous.

Kate wasn't Rachel but she was revealing herself to be a force of nature all her own.

She took the full impact of Victoria’s fury and agony and somehow stood still, unwavering. With her tiny hands full of blood she had taken out her tools and mended Victoria back to where she could stand. She had leant her elbow and got Victoria back on the road again.

All poetic shit aside, for fuck’s sake, she just literally dealt with Victoria’s meltdown and then changed her fucking tire – who even does that? And still she was in the car with her. Kate was still riding with her as though everything was somehow better…

Rachel would often propose that the two of them ditch everything and go to Los Angeles. Victoria would smirk in response, but never dare answer. She knew if she even entertained the other girl, there would be a serious chance that she’d not finish Blackwell on time and not make a gorgeous portfolio. Also, Rachel was impetuous by nature and trying to get her to commit to anything longer term was going to be a terrible idea because that girl could bail and run like a champion at the first hint of boredom, trouble, hardship….anything really.

But with Kate…

Victoria wanted to go to Los Angeles, go to San Francisco, go to Vancouver, go to Paris, go to Brazil, go to fucking Antarctica for all she cared. She just wanted to go anywhere with Kate.

With Kate, there was not the promise of addictive chaos and gorging on vices. No, things wouldn’t be neat and tidy with her either. There would be dirt, grit and rolling up their sleeves to let the sweat flow. With Kate Marsh there was a promise of a journey. A true adventure where no matter what
happened, expected or unexpected, they could get over it. Together.

Rather than flee from their problems, they could tackle them head on and cry and hold each other and just….feel better afterwards.

Victoria just wanted to keep driving and never stop.

The only thing that would make them stop would be a majestic view where she’d pull over, take some photos and then launch herself at the other girl and kiss Kate so hard that she saw the stars of Victoria’s passion.

She wanted to take Kate into her arms and lay her down across the backseat. To spread Kate’s legs and make good on her promise to pay Kate for everything that she was, again and again. To make the windows fog so thick that only way to see the outside world is to drag handprints down the condensation. They would make the inside of this steel box so humid that their sweat will be absorbed in the Italian leather, the plastic, the steel and she’ll just be surrounded by Kate every time she got into the car.

Then they’d drive again. Repeat.

Victoria never wanted this car ride to end.

And that only meant one thing.

And it made one dog within her prance and dance, howling in utter excitement. It made the other dog wail, tail between it’s legs, terrified.

Suddenly a rather bumping, catchy beat began to blare, abruptly cutting off Victoria’s brooding. Kate turned it up. Victoria blinked, her brain rapidly spinning, she knew this…Besides her, Kate uttered out, gently,

“I remember when, I remember, I remember when I lost my mind…”

Victoria’s eyes widened as for a moment she went back to Middle School…This song… it was huge. Everyone loved it. The radio killed it. It had been years and years since she heard this…

Yet there was Kate Marsh singing along, louder still, “…But it wasn't because I didn't know enough--I just knew too much…”

Both of them belted out, “DOES THAT MAKE ME CRAAAAYYYYYYYYYYYZZZZAAAYYYYYY!?! DOES THAT MAKE ME CRAZZZZAY? POSSSSSSBBBBBLYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!”

There they were on the highway, singing a modern classic on the top of their lungs after one of the most emotional days that they both had in their young days.

“Come on now, who do you, who do you, who do you, who do you think you are,” Victoria sang out, voice cracking.

In unison, “Ha ha ha!”
“bless your soul,” Kate sang as she tapped on the window lip.

“You really think you’re in control” Victoria banged out the beat on the steering wheel.

“WELL I THINK YOU’RE CRAAZZZYYYY!!!!” The both of them sang on the top of their lungs, “I THINK YOU’RE CRAZZAAAYY!” Kate reached over and grabbed Victoria’s hand, “I THINK YOU’RE CRAZZZZAAAAY ---!!!” their fingers intertwined.

Yes, Victoria admitted that she was crazy.

Crazy about Kate Marsh.

Chapter End Notes

Excuse me, I meant emotional gay girl car crashes.

Whoof. Again, this wasn't included in the original outline but the scene of Victoria and Kate arguing about what to do with her busted car kept bugging me and the crash was inevitable. The rest came out of me like a wreck.

Now that's all out of the way, and Victoria has finally acknowledged her (totally gay) feelings for Kate...

The real fun can begin ;)

Musical influences:

Skin and Bone – The shook twins
Time to swim – The Shook Twins
Call me out – The Shook Twins
Novels of Acquaintance – Rising Appalachia
Sailing away – River Whyless
I admit I’m scared - Eskimeaux

And, of course,

Crazy – Gnarls Barkley
Chapter Summary

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO BE A GOOD PERSON?

Part One.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“A heart’s a heavy burden.”
—Howl’s Moving Castle (2004)

Victoria exited that car in a daze. As she walked across the parking lot she felt as though she were gliding through some sort of viscous fog. Warmth surrounded her and stung at the scraps on her legs. Logically, of course she was woozy. She just experienced one of the most emotionally explosive moments of her life and crashed her car and wrecked her phone. Logically, she should be a bit out of it.

“We made it.” Kate breathed out, relieved.

Victoria barely heard that sentence. So lost in this haze that Victoria didn’t speak much. But physically, whatever Kate did, whatever turn, whatever strange detour, whenever she even stopped, Victoria mirrored her actions. As if she were her silent shadow, content to never speak as long as she could follow the one who walked in the light.

“so…you’re going to be ok?”

Victoria heard herself through a filter. Muddy. Not complete.

Yeah. We’re fine. It’s just a car. My insurance will cover it. And my parents will get me a new
“Ok, but...um, I’m glad you went to the cemetery, I know it was really hard for you. I’m also honored that you would trust me so much with...all of this”

Girl. I crashed my car and you single-handedly saved our asses. I should be thanking you.

Kate laughs and for a moment everything blazes bright then fuzzes back to normal,

“Anyone would’ve done that for you. I was just lucky Mr. Silver was willing to teach me the bare minimum that he did.”

I was just lucky that it was you. Victoria didn’t say that though.

In front of Kate’s room, “I got to go and meet Stella for a group study session. I’m going to be late.”

Yeah. You go do that. Have fun nerding it out, I’m going to shower and veg out. Join me later.

“Perhaps. I’ll see you later, Vic”

The door shut.

Victoria glided into her room, still numb to the world until finally, she’s alone.

Only then did her senses suddenly became enveloped in a hailstorm of feelings:

She wants to destroy everything.
She wants to organize everything.
She wants to break the windows
She wants to clean her desks
She wants to scream into the heavens
She wants Kate Marsh.

That single emotion clogged all her senses in this moment.

**Want.**

Wrung dry from the events of the day, Victoria made the uncharacteristically passive decision to just wait it out. Wait for the want to leave. She waits for it to exit from the vicinity and never come back.

As she took a shower, she scrubbed at herself attempting, half-heartedly, to hurry the process of wiping the desire off herself. However, even sparkling and smelling like Chanel Number 5, her attraction to Kate hung on, staining her brain, staining her skin. Later that night as she, along with Taylor and Courtney, scrutinized the new issue of Vogue she pulled heavily from the bottle of Pinot Grigio trying to forget about a certain someone.

She lay in bed that night, truly exhausted. When she closed her eyes and willed for sweet unconsciousness, the image of Kate stayed bright behind her eyelids. How she was lit gorgeous from the golden hour light, hair a mess, face dirty and wearing her sunglasses-- God, why didn’t she take a picture because something that beautiful and attractive should be on the mantel of eternity-- and holy *fuck* what was wrong with her!?!?

How was this EVEN happening!?

Why? Oh God, why *Kate*? Why not anyone else? Please, why couldn’t this be Taylor? Courtney? Stella? Dana? *Caulfield*, God Damn it she’d take Alyssa over Kate--

Sleep. She’ll move on tomorrow. This is just a fluke. A total weird, random act of hormones. Much like her sex dream with Max (which again, we don’t speak about).

A loud PING from Victoria’s dilapidated phone woke her up. A text notification...From Kate? Groggy, she opened it. Contained within it is drawing of a cat and a bunny changing a flat tire off a VW beetle, then pushing it back onto the road.

YOU CAN DO IT. Written in Kate’s scratchy, unique, charming penmanship.
She’s touched. Her heart rolls around in happiness and adore gushes out of her pores and it makes her fingers shake as she tries to text a response.

That was just endearing. She’ll move on after that.

She can’t move on.

Her head screamed at her to stop throwing silent, secret smiles at Kate from across the room and the hall, to stop texting Kate, to stop inviting her over to her room, to stop being so vulnerable and soft in her presence, to stop wanting to support Kate and help develop her confidence further. Just stop, Victoria.

Cut her out, Victoria. Act cool, act collected. Don’t let her have so much. Victoria would steel her nerves at the start of each day. Promising herself that this was it.

All it took was one look of honest attention from Kate and her saying that nickname that Victoria only allowed the closest of the close use (‘Yes, Vic?’ was amongst her favorite things to hear from Kate’s lips), and Victoria’s resolve crumpled.

This is going to end so badly.

No, seriously, what was up with her and becoming so dead set on unavailable people?

Her parents used to go to France every year during summer, sometimes during winter break. They would schmooze with various elite artists. However her favorite family were the Bugiardini’s. Only because of their gorgeous daughter, Andrea. That girl literally made Victoria realize she was half-gay. Andrea was the first person that Victoria felt as though she could break open her own rib cage and give her heart to.

When she was around 10 she had decided that her love was too grand to hold back anymore and she was going to do the honorable, brave, right thing and confess her amorous servitude.

Andrea literally scrunched up her face and called her gross. They never talked again and still to this
day hadn’t spoken a word to each other. Fortunately her parents had opened up a Chasespace in Monaco, rather than Paris so she hadn’t seen her too much since.

According to her occasional social media stalking she saw that Andrea had grown to be a pretty woman and dated Italian male models. Whatever, she could suck all the cock in the world for all Victoria cared. Bitch.

Then there was that young, dashing photographer that had a showing in their studio space. After the last showing of his work before he went off to Sri Lanka for his next project Victoria had approached him and tried her first hand at seducing someone.

It went terribly as he turned bright red, was incredibly uncomfortable and loudly declared that he was going to call his girlfriend, who had been his highschool sweetheart and that he was planning on marrying. He then talked to her for an hour and refused to stay in Victoria’s presence.

Then there had been Rachel Amber. No details necessary.

Then Mark Jefferson. Again, no details necessary.

And now she had to pick the most contrary person in her vicinity; an uber Christian, artsy, humanitarian. As if that wasn’t already problematic enough, this girl was also the previous victim of Victoria, her best friend and their sick photography teacher (the holy trinity of awful people).

And yet Victoria was utterly infatuated.

Part of this made Victoria want to kick something and throw a tantrum because this made no sense at all. To have such a...a... crush on Kate was mind-boggling. Well, if she was going to be captivated, then Victoria decided that she would remain at this level of captivated. She would be no further besotted by this other girl!

Then Kate would reveal some other unique aspect of herself to Victoria and she’d find herself suddenly in a deeper than she was before. Such as what just happened yesterday afternoon:

They were in her room, trying to do Chem homework (and getting very distracted as per usual) when Kate quietly grasped Victoria’s hand, her eyes literally beaming with revelation – like Arthur pulling out the sword for the first time. “I want to create an animated series.” Kate told her in a lower voice,
as though she was telling her a conspiracy.

“I’ll still make children’s books, of course, but,” Kate continued, in that way where she spoke calmly but her hands jittered and how big her smile was showed just how much she restrained her excitement, “It never really occurred to me that this medium can actually reach a much further audience. It can make a bigger impact than I ever even imagined!”

Victoria felt her entire body buzz with
Glee
Pride
Excitement
But mostly,

_Arousal._

Victoria relished the simmering heat within her abdomen as gently tugged back at Kate’s hand, pulling her closer. She leaned over to Kate, close enough to see faint blemishes on her skin. Victoria felt a smirk hook and lengthen her lips, “I can see it now, Veggie Tales 2.0. This time using bunnies- -You’ll make your mom so proud.”

Victoria saw in hilarious detail how Kate’s expression changed to ‘particularly miffed.’ “I am not making Veggie Tales 2.0! I don’t even like veggie tales that much.” Kate grumbled, pulling her hand away from Victoria and leaning back, “it’s too preachy and the art is genuinely ugly.” Victoria cackled in response, as Kate continued, “I’m being serious! I know I can make a show ten times more creative and a hundred times better than Veggie Tales--- why are you still laughing at me?” Kate demanded.

“I know you can, I already know that you’re going to make something phenomenal” Victoria said, reaching over to pinch at Kate’s cheek, “I just love it when you’re saucy, mmmm” Kate gently smacked at Victoria’s hand, giving her a loud, indignant harrumph.

Victoria bared her teeth at Kate, salacious, and rolled her tongue in her mouth, obnoxiously purring - as if turned on (she was). Kate turned away, cheeks red and intent on ignoring her. She was only successful for a minute or so.

It was one thing for Kate to be an amazing artist and perhaps an eventual children’s book author…
However, Victoria dating a future show-creator who had the best ratings of all cartoons? Who would eventually go to comic-con and host her own panels? Both her internal geek and her ambitious bitch panties just dropped. She was wetter than the river and was ready to swim all up in that if you know what I mean (VICTORIA STOP BEING SUCH A THIRSTY HO. STOP. SERIOUSLY.)

Victoria felt so infuriated with herself for falling so hard so fast. So, she’d lash out from time to time. Mostly, this bit of viciousness would be directed, ironically, at Kate. *Come here, go away, I adore you, you’re disgusting, you’re beautiful, I want you, I hate you…*

However, both to her great pride and to her great detriment she had also aided in Kate’s growing confidence. For some reason that Victoria was both grateful for and much too scared to ask about, Kate wanted to stick around and be her friend…which meant she would stand up for herself.

Victoria, being incredibly insecure and freaked out when people called her on her shit, would hiss something mean. Kate did not bark nor bite…But she did stamp her foot down, not taking it.

And thus, they would fight.

The weird thing was that Victoria usually loved a good fight. The nastier the better. She loved flexing her claws and scratching some bitches up. She liked to fight because the feeling of conquering was fantastic.

Scratch that, she didn’t like to fight, she liked to win.

*She loved to win.*

But fighting with someone on even ground?

Or where it became glaringly obvious she was going to lose?

She had no patience for that crap (and to be completely honest no fortitude for losing but as if she was ever going to admit that to anyone, therapist included).

Even within her childhood her parents rarely fought and when they did it was icy cold and silent. A
lot of passive-aggressive attitudes towards one another and ignoring would happen before somehow, somewhere off screen her two parents would make up and be fine again. How did her parents fix things? Every time they things were bitterly cold between the two of them Victoria had always thought they would divorce. Her parents always bragged to others that they were the perfect match for each other and Victoria honestly believed them. They had each other’s back, were each other’s confidantes and first mates. They worked together and made the Chasespace the prestigious art space it was today.

They’ve never exposed what their problems were. They were even more tight-lipped on how they both worked through them. In a way it completely aggravated Victoria that her parents were more concerned with keeping up the façade that they were the perfect couple rather than just being the perfect couple by showing how they could withstand life, together.

So, you could see how poorly equipped Victoria was at this whole ‘arguing for prolonged periods of time to get to a better conclusion’ sort of thing.

At first Victoria didn’t want to put up with this and she was certain that Kate felt just as exhausted at her emotions constantly getting kicked past boiling point. They had screamed at each other and had exchanged cutting words multiple times. Yet during the mania both had metaphorically and literally grabbed onto each other when the other threatened to leave. Whether it be by sheer grip strength or by gentle caresses, both didn’t want to let go. Together, they somehow got through that photography project with an A+; through Kate’s low moments of nightmarish insomnia with a sunrise and even through car accidents and came out singing. These events had changed both Victoria and Kate to where they knew for a fact that conflict would neither break them nor scare them apart.

It could bring them together.

After experiencing several of these incidents it had thankfully removed all the unnecessary tip-toeing and political correctness around one another. Both were no longer afraid of getting angry and becoming vocal.

For the first time in both of their lives, they were willing to fight.

Both of them, before, had never thought it was an option for different reasons.

Kate had mistakenly believed that she was supposed to be the nice one, the bigger person as Jesus would have been. Her mother had always guilted Kate into thinking she was a bad person every time she fought back. Her father had always preached that she should do what Jesus would do and that had unintentionally misled her to just take whatever outside abuse until it became too much. Thanks
to surviving the roof; to some of her good friends (Super Max, Alyssa, Stella and now, Chloe); and even a bit to Victoria, herself, Kate’s spine was growing and she was starting to finally not give a flying fuck what others thought about it.

“Vic, don’t put it that way.” Kate had chided her when Victoria was admiring Kate’s changing attitudes out loud.

“I call it as I see it. Just imagine that I’m a preacher and I’m saying the will of the land.”

Kate reached over and picked off some lint off the sleeve of Victoria’s sweater as she said, “an intelligent lady such as yourself can compliment someone using so many different words, you know?” a sly smile on her face.

Victoria swiped her bangs to the side in a fluid, haughty manner, “As an intelligent woman, I can use all the words in the world, I know that these are the best words to use. You don’t give a fuck, Kate Marsh and it’s beautiful.”

Even though Kate had rolled her eyes, that small smile was still on her face, “Thank you.”

For Victoria it was strange because her first reaction in a fight was to completely annihilate the other party. Burn the ship and leave. But now when Kate refused to burn the ship with her it made Victoria not want to give up until they made up. That usually meant that she would have to apologize for something and then they would talk more about their feelings and everything would be ten times better. Just the process absolutely sucked and was even more painful than usual because it was Katie.

Ugh.

Victoria had taken Kate out on a picnic in this national park area an hour or so away from Blackwell because wouldn’t it be fun to just get away for a while? Just be in this beautiful, private place, alone, together? By the way she also brought some expensive cheese, prosciuttos and baguettes from that one import shop in town that purely survived off Victoria buying all the French food there. Doesn’t it sound like fun to stroll around the beautiful nature together and just talk about life--- oh my fucking God it was such a romantic gesture that she wanted to stab herself in the eye. Nathan should’ve shot her in the bathroom. And here, within all this romantic view, they battled…

“Why are you even so concerned about this? This is literally none of your business. You’ve been hanging out with busy-body hipsterfield way too much. Get your nose out and leave it alone and stop lecturing me, you’re not my mom and even that wouldn’t help.” Victoria’s patience had long gone and even though her particularly vicious side was still restrained she wanted to get this over with and was finding anyway to verbally do that.

“I know you don’t listen to your mom and I’m not trying to scold or lecture you! I’m just trying to
see why your first instinct is to hurt others rather than, I don’t know, not? I just want to understand where you’re coming from” Kate responded, her patience also having exited the premises as a drawl of dark sarcasm leaked into her words ‘I don’t know, not?’

Victoria felt a sting of pain when Kate said she hurt others. It was one of those things that she was well aware of and usually took pride in. Stay away from the big dog on campus, you know? But it was one thing when someone weak and insignificant bitched about you behind your back. Someone who could easily be swatted down. It was another thing when someone like Kate stood up and pointed at you, declaring that you hurt people on instinct and it’s not ok. And she wouldn’t be so easily swatted down and she just stayed there and wouldn’t shut up about it. It reminded her of when she was little and a group of children, who had gotten fed up at her crap began to chant ‘Vic the Dick’ ‘Vic the Dick! ‘Vic the Dick!’ ‘Vic the Dick!’ That had hurt. A lot.

It made Victoria think there was something wrong with her.

And she hated that Kate was able to somehow just pry open really old, hurt emotions that had kind of molded and festered within the doldrums of her unconscious. Part of her wanted to strangle the other girl because how dare she be able to access the vulnerable parts of her so easily.

“Oh, honey, don’t you already know?” Victoria mocked, bitterness flying from her teeth,“Someone with everything has no reason to be the way they are. Rich Bitch problems, you know?” The smaller girl lifted up her hands, a bit exasperated,

“I get it.” Kate implored, “you have massive issues. They are justified. The more I get to know you, the more I get why you are the way you are”

“Then back off and stop jumping up and down on my balls” Victoria seethed.

“Victoria you don’t even have any—“

“Because you stomped them off me”

“Vic, that’s just gross.”
“Like your stupid want to change who I am. Mother Theresa you can walk your ass back to the lepers because not even God can help you with this one”

“You don’t need God’s help! You just need to be aware of yourself from time to time! How, just because someone irks you or you don’t know them at all… that doesn’t give you the right to misbehave and be so mean whenever you feel like it! I have massive issues, Taylor has massive issues, so does Courtney, Max – everyone does!”

At this, Victoria could only scowl and look away. Stupid Kate had a point.

“Hitler had massive issues too and was incredibly insecure, however that didn’t justify him trying to take over the world” Kate continued, clearly on a tangent.

Victoria’s face whipped back to stare at Kate. She stood there, feeling her body just fill with such aghast, “You did not just compare me to a megalomaniac who killed six million Jews on top of millions of others.”

Kate’s eyes widened, realizing what the Hell she had just said. “Ok, you’re right, that was completely uncalled for—”

“Oh Fuck this.” Victoria grumbled and walked away.

“Victoria, wait!” Kate called out, chasing after her.

“Sorry, I need to gather my troops to invade Poland, Seig Heil, jerk.”

Great. So this is why she doesn’t like me. She thinks I’m the Millennial Hitler. Victoria’s heart wailed in agony. It wouldn’t matter if she whisked Kate on a thousand romantic dates—- Kate would always hate her.

“Victoria… I’m sorry, I was wrong.”

Finally Victoria stopped and saw the sincerity out of Kate’s eyes. She bit her tongue and forced herself to glare at the smaller girl,
“Yeah, you just said I committed war crimes and attempted genocide.” Victoria hated that her voice sounded like a little girl whose hand got burned. Genuinely hurt.

“Vic, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to use that example, that was the first out of my head. I spoke too soon. Really, that was mean of me.”

“It was mean.” Victoria said quietly, really annoyed at herself that around the smaller woman she was so quick to show her belly and be vulnerable. She remembered how offended she had been and how she sulked when the kids had chanted ‘Vic the Dick’ at her. Then she developed tougher skin and realized that if other kids had a problem with it then they were just weak. After, she made sure to fill herself with pride when other people called her mean. A bitch. Whatever, nasty people got what they wanted. But Kate was different. Kate was now special to her.

“Take it from me just now. Blurting things out without thinking, just because the other person annoys you, or you don’t understand them, isn’t the right thing to do all the time…”

“Look, Kate, I get it. Be nice to fellow mankind. You do that well. But this is who I am! Mean, bitchy --- Hitlerish! Take me as I am or find another friend that’s nice and easy”

“Victoria! You’re not Hitlerish! Yes, you have no patience and have a chip in your shoulder from understandable circumstances and yes, when people are idiots they deserve your wrath--- but I know for a fact that you’re truly not a jerk. You just do that sometimes because you think you have to—“

“Sometimes I think? I have to! All the time! I’m the head bitch on campus that’s just what we do and that’s what --”

“Who wrote that rule book? Who’s putting a gun to your head?”

“No one! Everyone! Just---Ugh!” Victoria cried out, frustrated. What did this girl not get? She had to be the bitchy one. Everyone expected her to be the bitchy one! Everyone wanted her to be the bitchy one, they just wouldn’t admit it, “what do you even want from me?” she demanded, about to go on another tirade when Kate cut her off,

“I just want you to be yourself! Be that amazing, hilarious, protective, loyal--- geeky woman that you are—“
A shotgun of different emotions fired within all of Victoria’s senses; indignation, touched, anger, gratitude, insecurity, “Don’t tell me what to do” Victoria retorted, her defenses flaring fever-pitch.

“Exactly! You don’t like it when people, society, anything tries to tell you what to do or how to act or what to believe and yet here you are, prescribing to some sort of belief that you must tear down and belittle anyone that even steps into your radius--- again, I’m not saying that sometimes it’s not warranted, sometimes you’re justified and even I know that, but not all the time! I’m not trying to change you, I’m just trying to point out what you may not see…You’re much more gracious than you think, you don’t have to follow BS rules – that’s all.”

Little jerk had a point.

“People take advantage of niceness, you know.” Victoria responded, low and slow, like a cobra hissing it’s warning.

“They do and you’re right.” Kate conceded, “however, you’re smarter than most – perhaps smarter than me in that regard. I believe your intuition will tell you when to extend your hand and when not to. I’m just saying you should listen to it before acting.”

Ugh. Why was Kate giving her so much credit? She was just a piece of shit who couldn’t get it together. As soon as she let people in they would see that absolute weakness within her and destroy her. Taking a moment of silence, Victoria rubbed her arm, self-conscious.

Mark Jefferson, Rachel Amber, Nathan Prescott, her copious drug use, her love of anime and animation, her choice of friends, her lack of respect of anyone without prestige or strength, her general hatred of humanity…Look at what all those decisions had brought her?

Those were just a few of the many decisions that had led Victoria to strongly believe that there was absolutely no way she could trust herself to ever do the right thing.

Her parents were (and still were) always on her case to be sharper than the rest and to see what was truly happening in the situations surrounding her. She would need that skill for the rest of her life. However, she was constantly blind to the truth when chasing after what she wanted and it regularly smacked her in the face, breaking her nose and taking a few teeth along with it.
She had never made a good decision in her life.

Kate took a step forward and lightly grasped Victoria’s elbow, right below where Victoria’s other hand was squeezing her own tricep. Victoria felt her thumb soothingly rub her sweater, brushing against Victoria’s little finger,

“You’re not the same person as before. I know that for a fact.” Kate said tenderly.

Ugh. How did Kate know what she was thinking? Was she that easy to read? Victoria let out a little huff out of her nose as a retort but a tiny smile crept on her lips. In defiance of her brain her pinky hooked around Kate’s thumb and pulled it upwards. Slowly both of their hands unhinged from Victoria’s arm and their fingers tangled together. Victoria brought their hands down where it hung between them, together.

(In the back of Victoria’s mind, the mostly locked away goofy part screamed out in demented glee that this was super GAAAAAAAAAAAAAYYYYYY and then she shut that the Hell up.)

“I find that a lot of people will respond very well though, I believe that the majority are good… Perhaps stupid, but still good” Kate squeezed her hand a little, “you’d be surprised what happens when you decide to show compassion towards others…”

*People will take what you have, or will try to if you’re not careful. Don’t let them.* Victoria bit her tongue.

Victoria looked hard into Kate’s hazel eyes. She wanted to ask her, how can you? After everything the world and others have taken from you. How can you still extend your hands towards them? How can you be so willing to make friends with people who are most likely shitty, useless or stupid? Yet Victoria let it remain unsaid.

“Fine. I get it. You have a point. Let’s move on now.” Victoria huffed. She had tried to be gruff and nonchalant. But within Victoria’s chest her heart began to float, jittery with nice feelings. Kate believed in her. Kate thought she was amazing. Kate was holding her hand like it wasn’t the cutest and the gayest thing ever! They had gotten past another fight, better, stronger and being even more gay (unfortunately minus the gay) than before. Life was mostly good!

(Could be more gay, though.)
“Ok, so…still up for that walk we talked about?”

Shit. She had forgotten that they had wanted to take a walk around this area…it had been around that time where somehow the fight erupted out of control.

Ah.

They had attracted an audience.

Victoria saw over Kate’s shoulder, yards away, an elder couple had stood still and were watching them. It appeared that they had been there for a while. Kate caught Victoria’s gaze, followed it and turned around to see the couple head-on. Kate politely smiled and gave a courtesy wave, “hello!” Kate called out, genial.

The elder couple waved back, “Lover’s quarrel over?” The woman called back in good, knowing humor. Her husband grinned, holding back a loud chuckle.

A gentle blush rose to Kate’s cheeks as she smiled and answered back, still polite, “we’re fine now, thank you. We’ve kissed and made up, already.”

The elder couple turned away to leave and Kate shook her head, addressing Victoria with a small smile, “I guess that was an awful lot like girlfriend drama—” she abruptly stopped talking as Victoria leaned forward sharply, her face floating centimeters away from Kate’s face. Kate put up her hand and pushed off Victoria, leaping back, “Victoria!” she gasped, scandalised. A predatory grin broke across Victoria’s lips.

“We haven’t kissed yet,” she said, salacious tone thick over her tongue. Kate rolled her eyes,

“No, Victoria.”

“You’re the one that said it” Victoria retorted.

Kate groaned, “how do you switch from angry to…frisky so quickly?”
Victoria reached, running her fingers along Kate’s shoulder, “you bring it out of me,” she said, pouring the sultry down on the other girl like syrup. Kate’s blush deepened another shade of red and Kate quickly turned away, chuckling.

“Come on, Casanova, let’s go on that stroll.”

Oh, if only. If only she knew just how much friskiness she brought out of Victoria, heehee…

Anyways.

As the rest of the afternoon was saved by that lovely stroll and they were able to, again, enjoy each other’s company, part of Victoria’s mind was ruminating over something that Kate had said.

Compassion.

Compassion allowed you to get taken advantage of.

Compassion was for the suckers that got their backs stabbed later.

Compassion was something that her family, her previous group of friends and peers never talked about. Never discussed. So, what was it exactly? Kate Marsh had mountains of compassion, most likely pounded into her from the Church, but still Victoria felt disgusted, awed and enamoured by this quality within Kate. From what she observed the compassion seemed to serve her well. As since the first day Kate walked into the school she had become the sweetheart of this tiny town. No doubt she was equally popular back at her place and would be anywhere she went.

There was a power in that.

And what the Hell, if these feelings weren’t going to go away then what use was moping around? Victoria wasn’t some sorry loser that ate shit and whined about it. No, Victoria Maribeth Chase was a winner. She went out and got what she wanted through sheer force of will! Maybe Kate was Ashitaka and perhaps she initially thought Victoria was Lady Eboshi…but it didn’t mean that Victoria couldn’t prove that she was Kate’s Princess Mononoke all along!

Kate wanted her to show compassion? Done! Easy!

But to who? And how?
Even a month after the week from Hell, Victoria was still the pariah. Other than the usual silent stares of contempt and having people keep randomly vandalize her locker, which Victoria would be more pissed about if she hadn’t done the same shit so much in the past. God, karma is such a bitch.

*I believe your intuition will tell you…*

Victoria hoped that she would be able to recognize what that sounded like when the time came.

The next day when Courtney was jabbering about the essay and how, don’t worry, she’ll have Victoria’s ready before the due date. That was when her intuition first stood up, megaphone in hand.

*Don’t let her do it.* She heard it bellow. Initially she ignored it because, come on, she didn’t want to write an essay for American Literature. She barely read the book. She was a photographer not a writer—

*Stop her. Now.* Her intuition cuffed the back of her head, hard.

“Actually, don’t.” Victoria stated before she could chicken out. Courtney blinked at her,

“Don’t what?”

“Don’t write the essay.”

“…We need to write it in order to pass—“

“No, no, write your essay, don’t write mine”

Courtney looked at her as though she just spoke in Chinese.
An unnerving amount of silence.

“…why?”

“Because I don’t want you to.” Victoria snapped, because really, what the Hell was so hard to understand about this?

Courtney’s expression changed to that of a puppy that just got kicked.

“Oh my God was the last one not good enough? I thought you’d get an A on that for sure but was it only a B+? Because I swear I’ll make it up to you and write this one ten times better don’t be mad —”

“Courtney, stop!” Victoria interjected, now a bit freaked out at how this was becoming a whole lot more complicated than it should be. Courtney shut up and looked at her, a bit of terror on her face. Was Courtney always…this reliant on her apparent happiness? Like, Victoria was aware Courtney would do anything for her and liked that. However she hadn’t caught the desperation within the other girl. Usually that turned her off exponentially, that was one of the emotions that was a turn-off no matter who you were (one reason why she despised Stella). But how had she not noticed this in Courtney? “you writing my essays was nice,” Courtney’s face fell, she looked as though she was about to be sick, “they were all great, like, I never got any less than an A on any of them” Victoria switched her words, thankful that Courtney looked alive again, “but I want to write my own.”

Courtney took a couple moments of silence, looking rather pensive – then pissed off, “Did Mr. Torchio say that it wasn’t your writing? Because that’s a load of bullshit, I’ve been writing your essays since the beginning of the year—“

“No, no, he didn’t say anything to me” Victoria cut her off again as a sting of guilt stung her chest. How long had Courtney been doing her homework for? She knew that there was the better, last third of the previous year when she started, “ I just think it’s time that I write my own crap.”

Another.
Victoria found Courtney’s still distressed facial expression to be really disconcerting.

“Can I at least help you?” Courtney persisted.

Victoria lost it and gave up, “Fine! You can proof-read and help me edit it! Just let me write the damn thing!”

That, for some reason, seemed to relax Courtney.

Victoria took the entire agonising evening to hammer something out. She had to skim through the book several times. God, why did the writing have to be dryer than a saltine cracker? However, late at that night as she looked it over she couldn’t help but feel a little proud. See? She could write shit too. She didn’t need Courtney to do her literary dirty work. She could handle it herself.

At two am in the morning, tired but satisfied, she attached it to the e-mail and sent it over to Courtney. In the body she wrote, “it’s not perfect yet but it’s ready to be beta’d.” She was confident it just needed tweaks from someone who paid attention to grammar and shit.
The following day they met to discuss it. It took about half an hour before Victoria realized that they had gotten side-tracked with the latest Blackwell gossip (ok, but seriously, Meghan cheating on Curtis with Aaliyah and they broke into an abandoned train car and got freaky? Lesbi-honest, that was pretty juicy).


Courtney swallowed, as though to wet her throat. She nodded, “of course I read it. I uh, proofread it and edited the first pass. I printed it out and marked it up – It’s my preferred method of going through drafts, so the tree’s can suck it.”

“Then what about it?” Victoria interrupted, knowing that Courtney was trying to go on another tangent.

“So, um, er…Ho, hum…” Courtney chittered, stalling.

“Well?”

“I’m sorry, Tori, I’m, uh, trying to find the best place to start” Courtney worded as though she were tiptoeing through a minefield.

Victoria felt her defenses start to buzz. That was never, never, never a good thing to hear from anyone. “Well, come on, get on with it. I don’t have all day.” Victoria demanded. So maybe there were some mistakes and stuff but all of that would be easy to fix. Also, she was hyper aware that Courtney’s forehead now brightened with sweat.

“Ok” Courtney squeaked, “so, so, soooooooooo—”

“So what, Courtney?” Victoria snapped, feeling agitated and, annoyingly, nervous. Courtney legitimately twitched, then wet her lips before she spoke,

“So, I understand what type of argument you’re trying to make. It’s not a bad argument Per se, in fact this will be the most common point that everyone’s going to make—“
“How do you know that?” Victoria interrupted. *RUDE, much?* She was a creative, intelligent individual who had a unique point of view...

“Well, this is the one that’s most clear, on the surface level it appears that the book is pitting rules against free will. It’s one of the themes that seem to be the most evident which is why everyone talks about it.” As Courtney began her explanation Victoria saw how the girl eased up and how her trademark elitism came back. It had been one of the reasons why Victoria liked Courtney. She was even more shameless in judging people (seriously, that girl never wanted anyone new to join the Vortex Club, no one was ever good enough) than Victoria was. When Courtney spoke in that snooty way, she didn’t just do it for the sake of being a snob, when Courtney spoke she had a point. This girl could critique; style, food, people, anything like nobody’s business. Now, the good thing about her was that Courtney wasn’t stubborn; if she was proven wrong or was surprised, she’d change her tune quickly and without remorse.

Like how, she very suddenly switched from being team ‘Fuck Caulfield’ to team ‘she’s weird but pretty cool’ (members including Taylor, Hayden and Zack). She recalled a very recent conversation:

“She actually wanted my help on outfits, I mean if she came to me then you know she means business and knows who to come to.” Courtney had told her with pride sometime in October. Victoria felt irked that one, Courtney could switch her view on people so quickly and two, why didn’t Caulfield come to *her* for fashion advice?

And now she was witnessing Courtney morph into this literary analyst as though she had consumed mountains of this type of material and could dissect it and organize it…The nauseous feeling of ‘inadequacy’ began to swirl within Victoria’s chest.

“---However, if you actually read the book and analyze how the characters react, you notice that Damien, the main guy---“

“He decides to leave his prep high school and go on the road and have adventures” Victoria interrupted, wanting to get to the point.

“Exactly, now that seems to be very pro-America, ‘the individual’ is King. I’m going to do what I want and the man can’t stop me. However if you track what happens to Damien, he self-destructs. Now, he keeps spouting and charming all the people he meets with his very Kerouac ‘vagabond’ philosophy however he wrecks everyone’s life.”
“It was never his intention though”

“It was never his intention though; it’s never a philosophy’s or a religions plan to fuck anyone over. This is an example of how prescribing to a way of thought may not exempt you from doing bad things. This is why religions, political parties, philosophical ideals and whatever have always had bad people who do really bad things or can be damaging to societies…”

Victoria’s heart palpated. Not only did she know where this was heading, but Victoria for the first time in her life realized that she was in the presence of a writer who wasn’t just good, she was very good.

“Now, like, take Amanda—“

“The girl that Damien knocks up in the first town he visits?”

“Yeah, her. So, even though she gets knocked up and her dad, at first, seems like a huge douchebag she decides to stay in her town, go to school and eventually gets accepted into a college in New York, which is the city Damien wanted to go to but dies before he gets there? Also the popular girl that makes her life a living Hell is the one that helps her get the abortion and the polyamorous trio down the block help foster her love of mathematics and encourage her to become an engineer…”

“Wait, they’re Poly? But only Cheryl and Bud are married. I thought they were friends with Brock and he was over everyday for coffee and cigarettes and poker and whatever.”

“Possibly, however I believe that it’s a coded way to call them Poly – like did you notice how no matter what time of day Amanda visits them Brock is always there? Or how they all don’t have dinner because they’re waiting for Brock to get home? Yeah, it’s pretty obvious that they’re together in the book…”

What the Hell did they even read the same book?!? How did she miss bisexual Poly trio? She never would miss the bisexuals! Bi’s made everything better!

“Wait, what are you writing about?”

“Why do you want to know? We’re working on your essay now.” Courtney said as if an unquestionable fact of the universe. This dismayed Victoria. Was Courtney truly this willing to just
completely not include herself in the conversation?

“Because I want to know.” Victoria commanded

“Oh, well I’m presenting that Amanda is the actual heroine and is the most accurate representation of the morals of the story and Damien is the villain. Thereby representing the contrast of fascist ideology versus compassionate society. How ideals can lead to dogma, which can be more insidious than authority.”

Now Victoria stared at Courtney as though she were speaking Chinese. Since when was Courtney the expert on contemporary American literature? Since when did she know anything about narrative structure and writing? Since when did she know anything about philosophy?

Just as quickly as that comfortable confidence came, it went, “So, um, sorry I got distracted, so back to your essay… so, paragraphs two, three, four and,” Courtney inserted a little cough, then tried to sneak in, “five and six— are redundant”

“What do you mean redundant?”

“As in they all say the exact same thing”

“No, they’re all written different! They use different words”

“Just because they’re all written differently doesn’t mean they don’t say the same thing. The English language has 26 building blocks to make an infinite amount of sentences, words, stories and arguments.” Courtney began, patiently. Victoria nodded and bit her tongue, forcing herself to listen.

“But if I choose to say ‘I like tacos’ and then in the next paragraph say, ‘the only Mexican food I choose to eat is Tacos’ and then in the next paragraph say ‘burritos are not nearly as enjoyable to me as Tacos’ it’s all ‘I like tacos’ just in different flavors. You know what I’m saying?” Courtney explained, again, reminding Victoria very much of a elite Harvard professor. Victoria blinked at her, rendered mute. Courtney ran a quick hand through her hair before concluding, “Soooooo, you, uhm, just wrote ‘I like Taco’s’ in a lot of different ways but never actually wrote why you like tacos…”

“Why do I have to explain why I like the tacos?”

Courtney clicked her pen button twice, effectively cutting off Victoria before she spoke quickly, “Because this isn’t a personal opinion piece. This is an academic essay that must be critically applied with intellectual sources. Like, if you’re the only person in the room screaming about how you love tacos but can’t prove that anyone else loves tacos no one will take you seriously. But if you take evidence that other very important, famous people have loved tacos and why they did, or how loving tacos has historically changed and/or impacted society somehow – then everyone is more bound to believe you.”

Courtney twirled her pen through her fingers, as she continued, “however if this were a creative non-
fiction essay than you can write all about how you love tacos, but you must write about how loving tacos has changed you because personal works must be about transformation, change or realization---a miniature hero’s journey…”

Victoria was this close to losing her mind. How did Courtney know this much about writing? How was she this good? How was she able to break this down using tacos as an example?!

“Ok, Ok, what else? What else?” Victoria begged, trying to get this torture session to end as soon as possible.

“There’s a lot of basic grammar mistakes, a few typos and a lot of fragments, I marked them all in red” as soon as Courtney took out her marked-up version of Victoria’s essay, Victoria felt the urge to shove her head into an oven. Her paper looked as though the red pen had a fucking seizure all over the white and gone ape shit. “…Also your sources aren’t cited…” Courtney mumbled

Victoria lifted the stupid book and slap the table with it, “who the fuck even cites their sources?!” Victoria exploded, angry.

“Major news publications, scientific journals and any other written articles meant to be taken with intellectual honesty” Courtney babbled, terrified.

Victoria was mortified that she was such a terrible writer. How did she even survive without Courtney before? It finally dawned upon Victoria that Courtney was absolutely indispensable. And as she dragged herself through the metaphorical glass of embarrassment and getting served the big plate of her own steaming pile of shitty writing it also dawned upon Victoria that Courtney was kind of a brilliant writer.

Wait.

Courtney was also in the journalism department.

Fuck.

Everyone always thought that Juliet Watson was the defacto journalist on campus.

What about Courtney?

She never went for the low-hanging fruit, instead, she chose to blindside the reader with a contrary viewpoint and very eloquently explain. Rather than Juliet’s aggressive, in-your-face perspective, Courtney laid the hints down, leading the reader to come to her surprisingly smart conclusion.

“…I have to rewrite this from the beginning.” Victoria uttered in shock. Courtney shuffled a little, massively uncomfortable. She didn’t want to be the messenger saying ‘Victoria Chase can’t write worth shit’ but hey, life’s not fair.
“Well, I did prepare a essay for you just in case...” Courtney began but she trailed off when she saw Victoria’s eyes ignite something incredulous and absolutely indignant.

“No.” Victoria refused, much like a child who refused to eat their broccoli, “I’m not taking your, your... pity essay. I’m going to rewrite it better.” At least her pride was trying to come in and save whatever was left of Victoria’s dignity.

Courtney’s eyes bugged out of her head as she blurted, “but you always have before—“ then she bit her tongue when she realized what she said when Victoria’s eyes bugged out of her head. Holy crap, Courtney was going to die--

Victoria clutched at her skirt, refusing to let go and make a rash decision; “well that was then and this is now so I’m going to rewrite it by myself” she seethed at Courtney. Before, she had always gotten a delightfully sick power trip when she got Courtney to do her homework. She had believed that it was through the strength of her sheer presence that made Courtney bow and do her bidding… Perhaps a little of that was still true but much to Victoria’s horror, Courtney mostly did her homework because she just saw Victoria as a terrible writer that couldn’t save herself.

WHO THE FUCK DID THIS BITCH THINK SHE WAS SHE’S A FUCKING NO ONE WITHOUT VICTORIA BITCH FAKEASS TRYHARD SLUT WHO GIVES A SHIT YOU CAN WRITE GOOD---

Stop.

Ugh.

Wow. Jealous ho much, Victoria?

Courtney was just trying to help her. As always, Courtney probably honestly believed that she was doing Victoria a solid by covering for her awful writing skills. It was more likely that Courtney found that this method was the most efficient way of proving her loyalty and friendship. Victoria had just been an uber asshole to the other girl by completely taking advantage of Courtney’s kindness.

Victoria sulked. Was this how the Emperor felt when it was revealed he was naked?

Courtney watched Victoria from behind some wayward bangs, “….would you like my help?” she asked tentatively.

Victoria wanted to scream a big fat NO because holy crap she had always believed that she was better than the other girl, in terms of riches, pedigree and intelligence but now she was feeling
absolutely inapt and it was making her insecurity writhe in agony.

Victoria ran a hand through her hair, squeezing at the back of her own neck.

Courtney had never done anything wrong.

Never.

She had been much like a little puppy, following her every move doing every single little thing to please her…

Don’t kick the puppy, Victoria’s intuition warned her.

Victoria let out a frustrated grunt before she answered, “Sure. But not until I do the rewrite. Also, please never write a backup essay for me ever again. If I can’t figure this out then I deserve to suffer, compris?”

Courtney nodded.

She kind of fidgeted there in silence.

“You can leave now. I need silence to work.”

“I-I can be silent”

“Go. Now.”

Courtney jumped up and fled towards the exit.

“And Courtney” Victoria said, stopping the other girl before she could escape and before Victoria could talk herself out of it.

Fuck you!!! She wanted to scream at the other girl.

Can you stop being jealous for once in your life, Victoria?

“Your…” Victoria felt her entire mouth hurt and her throat squeeze upon itself, “your writing is really good.” Victoria forced out of her mouth as fast as she could before barfing. She took another shaky breath and continued, “I’m... really glad that it’s you helping me and not...some …
dumbass….Thanks. ” Even though Victoria clenched her fists and could barely look at the girl, Victoria did mean what she said. She was grateful that Courtney had been giving her so much help for basically nothing in return. She was a bit disgusted with herself for not noticing just how talented Courtney was. Maybe that’s why it hurt so bad to say it all out loud, because this girl was genuinely talented in writing where Victoria was terrible.

Courtney’s eyes widened and it looked as though she was about to cry. “It’s not a problem at all, anytime Tori, I mean it” Courtney gushed. Victoria looked away for a moment to collect herself. All these feelings were really overwhelming and kind of annoying.

“Ok, now go – let me fix this mess, when I need you to come back I’ll let you know.”

Courtney nodded, that dumb look of happiness glowing brighter and brighter on her face. Courtney practically skipped out of her room in sheer happiness...

Victoria fought against the urge of throwing her shoe at the back of her head. How dare that girl be cheery when Victoria was going to suffer--- She took a breath. Let her be talented in writing. Victoria didn’t care much about writing as she was more talented in being able to visually explain things without words but by using images and art to get her point across. Victoria felt a bit better about herself when she put it that way. Well, now that Courtney was going to have a lot more free time, she’d better use it well. Perhaps now she could take down Juliet Watson and become the writer on campus. Any amount of suffering was worth it to see Juliet go down. Victoria sighed, rubbing her temples. Now this meant that she, Victoria herself, was going to have a lot less free time.

Of course Victoria distracted herself by complaining to Kate. Ok, maybe she was humbly not so humbly bragging about how she was becoming a compassionate good friend. Then again, she figured Kate would want to know just how much success she was getting out of implementing Kate’s suggestions in her life.

Victoria: This is what happens when you’re a good friend, you get migraines and have to do useless crap. Like writing essays. Life sux.

Kate: sometimes that’s what being a friend is though – you go through pain to make sure the other is happy

Victoria: I want a reward.

Kate: Being a good friend is a reward all in itself.
Victoria: I say you give me a reward.

Victoria couldn't help herself. She knew that she shouldn't overload Kate with sexual innuendos and flirtations...but she wasn't used to restraining her own desires. Sometimes her salacity rebelled against her rationale with a passion. The only reward that Victoria wanted from Kate was for her to physically stick her open mouth against Victoria's so their tongues could tango and they could swap spit. Maybe Kate would even grope her over her clothes... Her greedy lust aside, It wasn't like Kate had to do anything she didn't want to. for Victoria never dreamed of forcing her to do anything she wasn't comfortable with. At the same time there was absolutely no harm in casting the suggestions in the blind, blind hope that Kate would take the bait. Perhaps she'd finally figure out that Victoria just wanted to know her...in the biblical sense, as well. Besides, this would be one of the best motivators for Victoria to continue on her quest to level up as a person! Also she'd absolutely make sure that Kate would only have the best time. In Victoria's mind it was truly a win-win situation.

Kate: You're right.

WAIT. THAT WORKED?

Victoria: !!!! I'm so excited!!! Xoxo

HALLELUJAH PRAISE JESUS.

Kate: Tell me when you want to pick up your new, beautiful bible ;)

...

Victoria:....

Victoria: Fuq dis, let me go back to being a shitty friend.

Victoria: Actually I don't want to be friends with anyone.
Victoria: I want slaves

Victoria: Lots and lots and lots of slaves.

Kate: “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” Luke 6:31

Victoria: Oh no. Don’t u be droppin bible verses on me!!!!!!!

Kate: “Love one another with brotherly affection. Out do one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10

Victoria: Kt I want slaves not bibles

Kate: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Proverbs 17:17

Victoria: KT JUST GIVE ME THE SLAVES.

Kate: By slaves you mean bible verses? Ok! <3

Victoria: SLAVES AS IN DEGENERATES THAT DO MY BIDDING. NOT JESUS WORDS. DO YOU EVEN ENGLISH, BRO? >(:(

Kate: “ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:29-32

That one gave Victoria pause.

She had to paced the room a couple of times, before she could write a response.
Victoria: Fine. No slaves. Stop the wrath of God pls. I need to be a good friend and finish this stupid essay. (-.-*)

About two minutes later her phone buzzed,

Kate: need help?

A smile bloomed up upon Victoria’s face. More private time with Kate Marsh? This could very well be a blessing in disguise. Victoria felt previous animosity and aggression exit through her pores

Victoria: Well if you don’t mind slogging through this pile of shit. Get your boots and shovels.

Kate: “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” – Proverbs 21:17

Victoria felt that smile stretch along her face and she stared out the window, waiting for Kate. That was a bible quote she could get behind on. Kate was coming over and that meant there was still a high chance that they ditched the work and watched cartoons instead. Hmmmm, Puella Magica Mahou Madoka? Or a history lesson with an episode of Angry Beavers? Either way, Victoria wasn't sure if her intuition kicked in or if it was just her logical reasoning that caused her to endure that first trial with Courtney. However, it was all well worth it if she could spend some private time with Kate Marsh at the end of the day.

Chapter End Notes

First off, a huge, (excuse me, I mean YUGE) shout out and thank you to @Heart_Taker. I know it was cruel and unusual punishment to make you beta these two parts, but you're an absolute Saint for deciding to stick it out.

Again, thank you @Heart_Taker

I highly recommend you go over and read their ChaseMarsh fic, "Road to Redemption" which was one of the inspirations that helped me start to write this story in the first place (ChaseMarsh solidarity, yo)
MUSICAL INFLUENCES:

Machine - Misterwives
Watercolors – Mal Blum

And do you have more time for even MORE Victoria character development? Head on over to the next chapter! It should be posted in the next 24 hours!

PREVIEW

“Excuse me she said what?” Victoria trilled. Of all things that Kate could say about her – ‘oh Victoria is amazing’ ‘Victoria is hot’ ‘Victoria is so talented’ she said…what?!?!
Chapter Summary

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO BE A GOOD PERSON?!

NO, REALLY. WHY?

(Part 2)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“*My, what beautiful blossoms... this one's late, but I'll bet that when it blooms, it will be the most beautiful of all.*” - FA ZHOU (Mulan)

The second instance her intuition gave her a swift kick came in the following afternoon. Pretty much daily at around 3:30 pm Victoria would walk outside and smoke in that alley besides the gym center, dubbed ‘the shark tank’ because it was right next to the large tag of the Shark on the wall. As well as the constant blanket of cigarette butts that lay on the ground (apparently they all looked like little tiny sharks? She didn’t come up with that stupid nickname).

It was the perfect time, her classes were finished and no one else was there. That or when they saw her coming they made haste and scammed.

But after the week from Hell she noticed that pretty much daily at around 3:30-4pm that a janky ass jeep would hobble up by the curb and Chloe mother fucking Price would hop her skinny punk ass out of the truck and loiter around.

Sometimes she’d wander to the skaters and talk to Justin. Grab a skateboard and do some tricks. Sometimes she’d just lean against her truck and brood. Sometimes she’d even have a book that she’d thumb through as she sat on the grass.
But she was always waiting for the one and only, Maxine Caulfield. Part of Victoria thought it was endearing, she was so ride or die for the hipster. At the same time she thought it was disgusting. She was like a dog, like Frank and Pompidou. Except she wasn’t sure who was the drug dealer/burnout and who was the dog in that relationship.

But pretty much almost everyday she was there, like clockwork.

“Ugh, you’re so much better than her.” Victoria complained once when she wanted Kate to hang out with her and watch Full Metal Alchemist but Kate blew her off (ok, to be fair she did say she had previously made plans with them but still) to hang out with Chloe Price and Caulfield.

“What makes you say that?” Kate asked her, voice low and deliberate.

Victoria gave off the most obvious reasons; she’s a borderline junkie who flunked out of Blackwell. She’s bumming around not doing anything. Her mom is a waiter and her step dad is Mad Dog Madsen. She’s a loser.

Kate listened carefully, taking in every word. Afterwards she looked at Victoria dead in the eye and said slowly, “Chloe Price is a flawed, troubled girl. Aren’t we all, though?”

Something that reminded Victoria of light glinting off a knife’s edge flashed within Kate’s pupils as she continued, “and yet I have never met someone with as big of a heart as hers, Max Caulfield included and she’s my guardian angel. Chloe can be very selfless, even more than me. I have a lot I can learn from Chloe Price. Perhaps if you didn’t judge her so quickly, you could too.”

Ooooooh, that had started another fight between them. They moved past it and were on even better terms than they were before, just as they did with all their other fights.

Part of her was still so pissed though. That piece of trailer trash was a literal reason Victoria fought with Kate while their relationship was still so fragile.

Another part of her was curious. What did Kate see in Chloe Price? All Victoria saw was a tall, lanky girl with a grubby beanie covering atrocious blue hair. Her clothes a mixture of a leftovers found in a moshpit and a skate park. To be honest though, the tattoo was kind of hot. A little sizzle of jealousy came back. So, along with skanky cheerleaders and lame hipsters, Kate liked foul punks too?

Why couldn’t Kate just be normal and dig the hot, preppy rich girls who were soon-to-be-famous photographers?

But within Victoria’s annoyance that cat of curiosity began to stretch and awaken. What was it about that girl that Kate found so inherently special? What was it about Chloe Price that Kate was influenced by?

From the very few interactions she had with the other girl over the past year and some change...
didn’t see much. Chloe had always been standoffish and contentious towards the Vortex Club and… and well, around anyone that Victoria hung out with anyways.

They had interacted only briefly and it had almost always broke out into fights. The arena was always at vortex parties that Rachel had taken Chloe to. The first time, Chloe spilled some shit on her clothes (as all the losers were want to do, Victoria observed ) Victoria shared some scathing words, Chloe ended up dumping her beer on Victoria’s head and pushing her. Rachel broke them up just in time and dragged Chloe away before anything could happen. At another party, Victoria had done her best to ignore them but Rachel had been giving her the eyes all night and every time she had tried to walk over and escape with Amber, Chloe had been there barking at her. Fed up, Victoria took a can of beer, shook it with fury opening it up in Chloe’s face. The cheap beer sprayed Chloe with a vengeful gusto. Chloe had shoved her so hard that she had fell over a chair and right onto her ass. Chloe was about to leap upon her when Rachel, again, grabbed Chloe and dragged her away. After that Rachel made sure that Chloe and Victoria weren’t at the same parties, or if they were, Rachel wasn’t there.

In all the times that Victoria ever saw Chloe, she was loud, crude and reckless. Also she absolutely stank of pot and cigarettes and, arguably the worst sin of them all, dirty old clothing…

The only time she saw any amount of softness within the other girl was when she had been picking up or dropping off Rachel and she was there, waiting. At those moments it was as evident as the sun how utterly in love Chloe was with Rachel. How they would embrace and how Chloe would say soft things of affection in Rachel’s ear before they parted or right as they reunited.

What a fucking idiot.

But then….

Ugh.

Maybe so was Victoria (Not anymore! Kate! Make sweet sweet love to me!)

Like, she could deny it all she wanted, and perhaps she hid it well, but at the time she was just as smitten by the Amazing Rachel Amber.

Perhaps they were both fucking idiots in that way.

And her intuition pushed at the back of her knees and pulled at her feet to go forward. Go. Go towards Chloe Price.
As she got close, Chloe’s head whipped up, immediately on guard. Victoria stopped a good several feet away, as if approaching a feral dog. (Sign: BEWARE OF CHLO-DOG. WILL SHOVE. WILL BITE. NO RACHEL HERE. ON YOUR OWN, BITCH.)

For a split second Victoria panicked.

**What the Hell was she doing?**

Her intuition forced her facial expression to remain neutral and her arm to stretch forward, towards Chloe. In her hand, a pack of cigarettes, “want one?” she asked aloud. *Here you go, puppy, please don’t bite my face off.*

The girl stared at her, her blue eyes flicking back from the pack back to Victoria’s face. As if she didn’t know whether or not to take the gift or bite the hand off. She then shrugged and stretched out her tattooed arm, “sure, if you’re offering.”

For the next five minutes neither of them spoke. They just smoked in silence about a good 5 to 7 feet away from each other.

Victoria felt her heart drum in anxiety,

This was a fucking terrible idea.

Why did she ever offer her a cigarette?

What did she know about her and Rachel?

What had Chloe done with Rachel prior?

Did Max talk about her behind her back? What did she say? That she was a talentless hack? That she wasn’t even worth mentioning?

Oh God, what did Kate tell Chloe about her? Did Chloe know how much of a geek she was? Did they all laugh at her?

Finally, Chloe flicked the dead cigarette butt and gave a curt nod at Victoria, “thanks.” she said, her face a stone wall; lack of all emotion.

Then Chloe jogged away. As Victoria’s eyes followed her, she saw in the distance as Max rounded a corner, now in sight. She watched as the tall girl literally jumped on Max. Both of them then ran around each other, goofy and insipid until they wound up back in each other’s arms. How they were oh-so-perfect for one another.
Victoria couldn’t help but admit to herself that it was truly endearing to see those two losers have such strong mutual feelings towards each other. Perhaps it was because she had seen how Chloe’s heart had been so used before and it was nice to see that she found someone who would treat it right. She was envious but felt whatever malicious feelings went away under that picture perfect scene of two idiots in love.

Victoria left.

However, much to her annoyance, she still didn’t get what Kate saw in Chloe and why she was so eager to just up and go with her on whatever dirty adventures... I mean, Caulfield was already perfect bait for Kate to go anywhere. However, if Chloe was as troublesome and grating as Victoria remembered, Kate wouldn’t be able to stand it for very long, with or without Max there. Victoria was still miffed that Kate was a bit in love with Max but she forgave her because, well, Kate was just ignorant of the other choices out there that would be much better suited for her romantic and sexual needs. Like, how there were women literally right in front of her that are wayyyy better than Caulfield in every single way.

Not that Caulfield would ever go for Kate though, she already had Price.

...

Oh God, what if they were Poly? What if Thelma and Louise were like Cheryl and Bud and they were looking for their Brock in the form of Kate?

WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK THEY BETTER NOT TOUCH KATE BECAUSE KATE WAS HERS AND SO PRECIOUS AND THEY ALREADY HAD EACH OTHER GREEDY WHORES COULD EAT HER---

Ok. Calm down Victoria, Kate is not an object that you can just take. She’s a person and if she makes the conscious decision to be their Brock than she can and it’s alright.

...

IT WASN’T ALRIGHT AT ALL. KATE WAS NO ONE’S THIRD WHEEL SHE THE NUMBER ONE SHE’S VICTORIA’S NUMBER ONE BECAUSE THAT’S WHERE SHE BELONGS AND THE STUPID WONDER TWINS COULD GO FUCK THEMSELVES WITH THAT STUPID POLAROID CAMERA---

Woah.

Ok.

Now that she was doing this whole ‘be aware of yourself” thing.... Sometimes it even shocked Victoria, herself, how much of a jealous ho she could be.
The next day, same time, Chloe showed up in her abysmal truck, wandered up to a certain place and waited. Victoria, there for her daily late afternoon fix, decided that the last time wasn’t so bad and that she should try again. It would be what Kate would do, anyways.

Again, offered her a cigarette. Chloe, would give her the most pensive look, even with her lip curled as if ready to snarl at her. Then, addiction giving out, she would take the cigarette.

Both would smoke in silence.

Max would arrive. They would part. It was alright.

Even though every time both stood together the tension was so thick it chafed against her skin… it was alright considering violence hadn’t erupted yet. This happened a couple of times without incident.

Until one day a sharp, low growl completely ripped Victoria from her protective mental barrier, “what do you want, Victoria?” it took said girl a couple of seconds to realise that Chloe had asked her a question.

She looked up and was met with Chloe’s blue eyes. How did she never know they were blue before? That rare blue that looked carved from ice… For a split second Victoria just wanted to take a picture. For a split second she wanted to take Chloe Price onto a set, pose her carefully and give just the right amount of light to fully ignite those eyes like now. Use the Leica prime 35mm, take a bounce and just direct natural light onto her face and voila-- However she was brought back into the moment by the sheer strength of Chloe's gaze. She peered at her with the scrutiny of a magnifying glass. If said magnifying glass were sentient and hostile.

Being on the opposite end of that much enmity made sweat ooze and swell out of the pores on Victoria’s temple. Her mind raced. There was no way she was seriously going to say; Hi! I want to know why my current crush thinks you’re amazing when I think you’re a genuine piece of shit. Perhaps if she made a joke? I wanted a smoking buddy and you were convenient? I Your car's a complete lemon, but I got the mechanic for you? I think your tat is hot, can I touch it? Yur eyes are byootiful, can I takez pics, pls?

Chloe, as impatient as ever asked again, “look, we don’t go shopping together and eat froyo afterwards.” she leaned towards her, as if to try and sniff the pungent truth off Victoria. All at once, her senses were assailed by the memories of the rapacious times between them before--

Loud hip hop. Loose, rowdy bodies. Red cups everywhere. Some AirBnB house that the Vortex club rented for a night. Teams of teenagers who think they're so cool. Chloe, no beanie yet, blonde with blue streaks in her hair. She's in her face, cornering the taller girl. Victoria wants damage.

"look, just put your damn threads in a washing machine tomorrow, what is your deal?"
Hatred pours out of her so loud and hot that she can't pay attention to anyone else that's drunk and watching them, “My deal is that ignoramuses, like you, who have no idea what quality is think they can just fucking wreck everyone else's things -- just like a rat that crawled up some God forsaken sewer”

Victoria’s shoulders rose up as she hissed, “As if I’d ever go shopping with you- you look as though you just went dumpster diving”

Chloe threw up a long arm, aggravated,

She dumped the remaining contents of the drink on top of Victoria's head. Victoria absolutely shrieked some curse. Chloe then threw her beer can down, the trail of piss-colored droplets sprayed all over Victoria's legs and socks.

“Exactly. This. We’re not friends Victoria. You hate me--”

While the beer was in Victoria's eyes, she felt some force push her chest back. Even though she can't see in the moment, she knows a fist is coming and throws her arms up to brace herself.

Victoria snarled, “I don’t hate you. Don’t give yourself that much credit, Price.” Something dark and vicious sizzled within her blood. She hated Rachel and hated hate how Chloe worshipped that girl's memories. She hated how Chloe had let that girl walk all over her...

A body somehow collided in between them and there's shouting from bystanders and Chloe's cursing and Victoria's screaming "what the Fuck is wrong with her?" Rachel is in Chloe's face, trying to calm her down. With her arms around Chloe, Rachel made haste without even sparing a glance towards Victoria. Soon, Victoria's left alone, dejected by her paramour and covered in warm beer that's growing stickier by the second.

“Don’t worry, that feeling is 200% mutual,” Chloe drawled, savagely sarcastic, "so why are you letting me bum these off you? Are these laced with cyanide or something? ” Chloe flicked the cigarette with scary accuracy to where it hit Victoria’s shoe with enough force for her to feel it through the leather.

And how dare that punk! She was wearing genuine brogues made and imported from Scotland that fucking--

Victoria kicked the still smoking butt back towards Chloe, incensed, “Laced with what? No! Why does everyone think I’m some homicidal maniac? They are simply cigarettes that are loaded with
tobacco and other additives; unlike the pure shit in your cigarettes! ” Victoria felt the spit fly out of her mouth. Her peripherals frayed with red.

She felt the tip of her finger curl around the metal tab and yanked back with such force that she cut her own skin. Rotten pleasure bloomed behind her eyes as Chloe got drenched in fizziness. Chloe let out a shrill of surprise and leaped back, trying to stop the onslaught of sticky liquid. As soon as the beer lost it's momentum and Victoria can no longer shake anything else out, she chucked the can as hard as she could at Chloe, nailing her collar bone, "whore!"

Chloe was now in her space, standing up at her full height, which was a good inch and a half on her, “then what’s up, Vic? It’s obvious that you think I’m trash, it’s obvious that you don’t want to be here with me, so what the fuck’s going on?” the stench of virulence infected the direct diameter around the two girls. War drums began to beat within both of their ears. Instinctively, Victoria took a step back as Chloe took another step forward.

The other girl came at her with a speed she didn't foresee coming and two hands somehow grabbed at her jacket sleeves. Victoria tried to claw her eye out.

However before Victoria can make that wish come true, Chloe used her weight and inertia as she throws Victoria back...

Victoria clenched her hands until they formed fists! Her brain went into a frenzy of furor: What the actual Fuck was her problem? Victoria didn't even fucking do anything-- And she actually gave her cigarettes! Ungrateful piece of- Oh, she was going to wreck this whore. Whip this bitch until she fled back into the deep filth that was the bottom of a meth house where she fucking belonged---

...As she stumbled backward, trying to get her balance she hits a chair and her legs fly up and over her as she tumbles down. She landed with such a thud that the pain explodes from her tailbone to the rest of her body.

Adrenaline forced her to scramble as Chloe grabbed the piece of furniture and threw it away with one arm. Victoria knows it just a matter of time before she--

Kate grasped at the sleeve of her jacket as different, newer memory cut in. Kate coming after her when they fought in the park last week, 'Look, I get it, you have issues - but so does everyone else…'

A drop of clarity rippled among the sea of infuriation.

Chloe had major issues.
Just like her.

Just like everyone else in this God forsaken town.

Oh, *who cares* about that stupid sob story? Boohoo, you're poor and your family life sucks, *fuck you!* She was trying to be nice and Chloe threw it in her face. Fine! *Fuck her!* Let's fight, bitch--

She felt the weight of Kate's fingers on her elbow again, *I know for a fact you're not the same person as before...*

You're, right here. Victoria, you're right here. This isn't last year. Come on, girl! Don't let her get to you so quickly -

Victoria forced her fists to unclench and threw them in the air in symbolic surrender, “Look, I get it! The other times we hung out sucked! We can go back and forth about who was the big bad bitch but does it look like I want to fight you, now? “ the storm of tempestuous emotions overcomes her again and she bites her tongue to keep from saying nasty things.

Chloe very visibly stopped her forward advancement. As her arms lowered, so did the vehemence in the atmosphere,“Then what do you want from me?” Chloe spat. However her voice was less venom and more genuinely curious. Victoria threw down her hands, squeezing her eyes shut for a second as the chaos of emotions and vitriol warred within every atom within her heart.

*After Rachel somehow got Chloe away from her, Victoria picked herself up, limbs still shaking. There's a dark realization that she's not going to see Rachel tonight and probably won't get a stupid placating text until 4 or 5 in the morning. She flinched when Courtney rushed over, very worried and wondering what the Hell happened while she was off getting drinks for the two of them.*

*Victoria, still boiling with loathing told her, "God, I can't wait until she contracts HIV and dies."

An echo of Kate's voice seeped into that memory... *You’re truly not a jerk*

Victoria opened her eyes and again, forced another breath of air in between her gritted teeth, then “I don’t know! I just heard you were cool from a lot of people and wanted to see what all the fuss was” She then rubbed her temples because this was a lot to bear at the moment-

Chloe’s eyebrows both shot up into her beanie, “a lot of people?” she said softly, bewildered. Victoria really didn't know *why* she was concentrating on that stupid piece of information however
she also didn't give a fuck because she currently had the biggest migraine known to mankind. Also, she had exaggerated because, really, only Kate had vouched for Miss Punk Ass, but Kate’s word had more strength than a lot of people, so, basically same thing. Right? Right.

*The first time Victoria ever saw Chloe at a party, she was with Taylor and it was in the school gym. It was the first Vortex party held on campus and there's a stupid thrill of being able to drink on campus without the school saying jack shit about it.*

"Ew. What the Fuck is she even doing here?" Victoria hissed to Taylor. Her friend shrugged, "Rachel brings her to these parties." both girls watched Chloe shuffled around, hands in pockets, eyes shifting, wary. How she just stuck by Rachel's side as she floated between people. She didn't say too much, giving occasional noncommittal nods and the such. It was only when she found the stoners that the skinny vagrant finally had a smile on her face.

"God. She's pathetic."

Victoria continued, energised by the flare of old vexation, “Maybe everything sucked before because we were drunk and stupid—” *and Rachel Amber had been there*, “and...”

Victoria looks up at Chloe and paused.

Uh.

Chloe’s blue eyes was giving her this very earnest astonished look that took all the breath and energy out of Victoria, “the benefit of the doubt. Some shit like that. You know?” Victoria concluded, also a bit bewildered herself. Chloe looked so... *young* at that moment. Just like a lost child.

All the memories suddenly vanish.

The loud shitty playlists, the drinks, the voices, the bodies, Rachel, the outrage all disappear.

It's just them two again. Right here. Right now.

Chloe’s skeleton relaxed as she processed what Victoria said. She took a couple of steps back and Victoria could breathe again. In. Out. In. Out. She felt herself came back fully into the present.
Chloe stepped on her still smoking butt on the ground, “Eh. I guess we were drunk and stupid. Both of us were big, bad bitches.” Chloe took several seconds to grind that butt until the filter shredded and the tiny flakes of tobacco became dust on the sidewalk. Victoria waited for some sort of vocal elaboration from the other girl. She waited for several more seconds. ..

What? That was it? That was all she was going to say about that!?? Seriously? No, I'm sorry or hey, Victoria, you were being a big person and wow, can I learn some basic manners from you!

Oh for Fuck's sake, the punkass bitch couldn't even look her in the eye. Victoria wanted to stomp off, say something that would completely own that skinny burn-out into thinking twice about ever talking to her again. Oh, why did Chloe’s issues have to be so annoying?!!?

Victoria took out her pack again. After that stupid drama Victoria needed a damn cigarette. There was only one left. Thank goodness the universe decided to spare her a bit. She pinched it between her fingers. Suddenly a tingle of... feeling came through her. Victoria sighed, deciding to heed that feeling she wordlessly stretched her hand out, offering the tiny white stick to Chloe. A smokeable olive branch, if you will. After a moment, Chloe took it. A loud, crisp, strike from her lighter and Chloe inhaled. She exhaled the smoke through her nose. Then, silently she offered the cigarette back to Victoria.

Victoria stood there, stupefied. Chloe wanted to share it. 

Fuck it.

Victoria took it back and inhaled. Then she offered it back to Chloe.

A slight refreshing breeze blew as both of them passed a 21st Century peace pipe back and forth.

Day by day, Victoria felt that with each cigarette shared the awkward energy that bore down on the both of them eased.

With each cigarette Victoria noticed that they both would stand closer and closer to one another. Inch by inch they grew comfortable. With each exhale both of them mutually began to realize that the other wasn’t some sort of ominous concept…They were both just girls with bad smoking habits.

One day, a week or so later she saw that when Chloe drove up she already had a lit cigarette in her mouth. For a bit she shuffled on both feet, well, maybe she shouldn’t go over then. However, much
to Victoria’s surprise she found her own two feet treading over there anyway, “I guess you don’t need mine, today.” Victoria said. Again, super casual, keeping it cool.

Chloe simply stretched out her arm and wiggled her fingers, “if you’re offerin’, I’ll always take. You got the fancy shit.”

Victoria can’t help but smirk, genuinely amused at the Chloe’s choice of words. So, as per ritual, she offered, Chloe took the new one, lit it up with the cigarette already in her mouth and attempted to smoke both. When Chloe pretended to stick both of them into her nostrils, Victoria sincerely laughed at her utter ridiculousness. “Aw, fuck, the smoke’s getting in my eyes” Chloe complained.

Victoria laughed harder.

Later on, Victoria would realize that was the most civilized conversation they had ever had. Also, the most entertaining by far – and that was including the almost blows they had have in the past.

Soon enough Chloe and her stood side by side, inhaling toxic smoke into their lungs and skipping their way to cancer-ville. Honestly it was all good.

Until one day, Chloe spoke again,

This time, her crisp voice caught Victoria's full attention, “So, uh, how’s photography going?”

Victoria shook her head, “what?” Maybe she heard wrong, but was Chloe Price actually asking Victoria about her life?

Chloe shrugged, soldiering on despite being obviously awkward, “Eh, Max told me you’re a photographer too. Like, you’re really serious about it and hella good, so how’s it going?”

Victoria arched an eyebrow, truly taken aback that Max Caulfield, the one and only, had even taken the time to speak about her. She didn’t think she was on Max’s radar at all. She shoved away the pleased tingling within her heart and shrugged,

“Yeah, it’s my life’s calling. Born with it. Raised in it. Going to be famous because of it.” Victoria answered, a bit of her trademark arrogance coming out.

A sad little smirk came on Chloe’s face,

“Going to go to Los Angeles, too?” Chloe remarked, more to herself than to Victoria. A sudden chill ran up Victoria’s spine. Another reference to the oh-so-holy Rachel Amber. She always went on and on about how she was going to La La Land and becoming a star…

“Maybe, but I prefer New York to be honest” Victoria responded as off-handedly as she could. Spilling her guts about Rachel to Kate had been one of the most emotionally explosive events of her life. She didn’t even dare entertain what it would be like to talk to Chloe about Rachel. So they were going to skip way the hell past that.

“Yeah, Bun Bun showed me some of your project. It’s intense”

Victoria didn’t hear any word of that sentence other than ‘bun bun’.
“Bun Bun?” Victoria blurted more than a bit offended.

Who the Hell would anyone call someone else ‘Bun Bun?’ That was the most grossly saccharine degrading nickname ever and Kate deserved so much better than Bun Bun. She should be called something respectable, honest… ‘Darling’ was the only one that Victoria could think of without puking. Ah, French endearments would work much better as well: the most obvious would be ‘Mon Ange,’ or ‘Mon Petit coeur” or perhaps if she was feeling particularly sweet, ‘Mon Rayon de soleil’

Seriously, she would never call Katie something as asinine as ‘Bun Bun.’

“Yeah, Kate Marsh. Bun Bun.” Chloe explained, thankfully mistaking Victoria’s scrunched up face for misunderstanding rather than offense. Victoria remembered what she was trying to do and swallowed her urge to scratch the other girl,

“Ah. The hair bun. The bunny. I get it” Victoria said, her tone so deadpan that flies flew out of her mouth.

Chloe rubbed her nose and continued on, apparently not noticing anything wrong afoot, “Yeah, so you and Bun Bun’s” Victoria’s eyelid twitched violently, “project was actually pretty cool… Super Max also thought it was really well done. I thought the one where Bun Bun is getting grabbed at and is surrounded on one side of this broken glass window and you’re all alone on the other side and you were both staring at each other was hella sweet.”

Ok. First, what was up with the girl and the word ‘Hella?’ Second, Victoria truly never, ever thought she’d ever, ever hear Chloe Price sincerely complimenting her work. So, Victoria responded in the one way she thought never in a thousand years she’d respond to Chloe.

“…Thanks.”

There was a few moments of mutually happy silence between the two of them. Both girls couldn’t believe they were having a pleasant conversation.

Chloe stubbed out her cigarette, Victoria on instinct offered her pack again, “So…uh, the bathroom pic.” Chloe began as she took a cigarette. Victoria felt herself tense up. She was still ultimately proud of the bathroom picture and was still going to shamelessly put it within her portfolio. However that image came absolutely loaded with emotions for her.

“Yes, what about it?” Victoria asked as she took another one out herself, shoving it into her mouth and lighting it as fast as she could.

Chloe pointed her cigarette at Victoria, “so, I’m just going to say it like it is because I don’t know how else to ask, but was it supposed to come out all dark and sort of sexy but in a ‘that’s fucked up’ way? You know in that porno ‘you’re going to take it and like it’ kind of way and it’s a bit rapey---”

“---That effect was completely unintentional when we shot it, it just came out that way when we developed it and it’s not ‘rapey’ it’s supposed to have an air of dubious consent” Victoria snapped so suddenly that her cigarette flew out of her mouth. She stomped it out with vengeance. She made a point to stare in some opposite direction away from the punk because she didn’t want Chloe to see how red her cheeks were. Of course, she was absolutely mortified. Again, still proud of the photo, but don’t forget that Kate was the victim in the picture and Victoria was the ‘rapey’ predator. Chloe took a second, staring at Victoria. Then she shrugged,
“Alright. That’s what bun bun said too.” Chloe took a long drag off her cig before she chuckled, “You both used ‘dubious’, I didn’t even know what the word was before. Dubious. Heh.”

Chloe inhaled once more before turning to Victoria, “Hey, Vicky”

Victoria whipped her head back towards Chloe, “Victoria.” She corrected, sharply. She hated that fucking nickname, not even her own mother called her that stupid--- You know who did call her that? The stupid fucking kids at her prep school when she was in the first few grades and boy did she correct them soon enough. God, she was going to shove this lit cigarette into Price’s eye--

“Your photo is hella dubious.” Chloe finished herself, then she cackled wildly.

Victoria stared at the other girl, really not knowing what to think. What? Like, technically she was correct but why was she so amused?

“What is so funny? What the Hell is wrong with you?” Victoria demanded.

“It’s a hella funny word! Dubious. Duuuu bbb—iii---ouuus”

“Dubious isn’t funny! Dubious is…problematic!”

“Come on, say it ten times and you’ll get it.”

“I’m not saying ‘dubious’ ten times fast!”

“Come on, just do it girl, it’ll be Hella funny”

Victoria spitefully began “Dubious Dubious Dubious Dubious Dubulililuouslubluh bluh—Fuck!”

Chloe howled in laughter. “Du Bu lululu!” she parroted at Victoria. Victoria tried to yell some sort of creative, nasty curse at Chloe but couldn’t do it because her mouth was too busy laughing. She tried again, “you—fuck---“ she managed to get out in between breaths.

Chloe rose two fingers up to her lips, spread them in a wide ‘V’ and then in between them flubbed her lips, “Dubulullululu!” she said, wagging her tongue through her fingers.

This was, by far, one of the stupidest encounters that Victoria ever had and yet Victoria couldn’t stop laughing.

“You’re a fucking idiot” Victoria wheezed. God, she was stuck at this stupid bent over pose because the giggles were cramping her stomach badly.

“Uh….Hi guys”

Maxine Caulfield. Victoria immediately stood straight up, her cramped torso screaming in protest. She smoothed out her skirt, trying not to internally freak out. So, she usually left way before this part…How did she not notice her arch-rival coming over?

“Maxipad!” Chloe chimed, wrapping a long arm around Max’s shoulders and pulling her in and smooching her cheek. Max blushed and Victoria noted how the pink brought out her freckles even more, “oh captain, my captain” Chloe said, nuzzling her nose into Max’s face.

“Dude, we just saw each other yesterday.” Max protested with a smile.

“I didn’t see you for five years in a row, we have to make it up now” Chloe reasoned. Max simply grinned, a shy rouge painting her cheeks.
Meanwhile, Victoria attempted to subtly slip away as this public display of affection was really strange and making her feel really uncomfortable but was stopped when she heard Max say, “so, uh, what were you two up to?”

“Aw, she just let me bum a ciggy off her and we got talking about her and bun bun’s bathroom photo and how it’s not ‘rapey’…”

“For the last time—” Victoria defended,

“But she literally said the exact same thing that Bun Bun said…” Victoria’s eyes bugged out when Max playfully lifted up her hand to the back of her head, lifting up two fingers to make bunny ears and Chloe did a tiny hop and kept talking as though nothing had transpired, “how it’s…”

“‘dubious’—” both Max and Chloe said at the exact same time in the exact same goofy over-exaggerated, terrible British accent. It literally stopped Victoria in her path as she could not believe how incredibly in sync these two were.

“Oh come on!” Victoria tried to interrupt again, trying to keep up with these two girls was a nightmare,

Both girls blatantly ignored her, “Say it ten times fast, Super Max!”

“…why should I say it ten times fast?” Max asked, peering at her girlfriend cautiously.

“Because it’s hella funny! Come on Super Max!” then Chloe began to chant, “Super Max, Super Max, Super Max…”

“WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU TWO?” Victoria cawed. No, seriously, what was WITH these two? Both girls looked at her, unperturbed, as though they didn’t get what Victoria’s deal was. Then Chloe, chill as a cucumber, turned to Max and shrugged,

“Well she said it ten times fast.”

Max turned to her in disbelief, “You did?” Max blurted. All of Max’s attention on her, Victoria felt her neck heat up. “Can you do it again?”

“No, I’m not doing it again.”

“Bun bun was right, once you get the stick out of her ass she’s kind of funny” Chloe mentioned, as if Victoria wasn’t right there in front of her.

“Excuse me she said what ?” Victoria trilled. Of all things that Kate could say about her – ‘oh Victoria is amazing’ ‘Victoria is hot’ ‘Victoria is so talented’ she said… what!??!

“But then it kind of goes back in and then she’s like all high-maintenance again. In and out – kind of like gophering”

“ewwwww” Max laughed.

“What the hell is ‘gophering’?”

“It’s when you have to shit but it doesn’t go completely out and it goes back in, but you try to push it
out. Like a gopher popping it’s head in and out of it’s hole, a shitty gopher."

“That’s... **Disgusting.**” why did Victoria have to learn what this was? She could've gone her whole life not knowing what this was and would've died a happier woman.

The two strange girls just laughed.

“Fuck you two weirdos, I’m out.” Victoria said and turned her heel, high tailing out of there for her own sanity.

Chloe threw an arm around Max and waved, shit-eating grin on her face, “later, Vicky.”

“Victoria.” She shot back at her, the bite not really there.

Sheesh those two girls were weird.

---

That evening Victoria had wrangled Kate into her room again and both had just finished watching an episode of Steven Universe. Kate hummed along to the ending song, “I could even learn to love like you…” Now, Victoria could’ve gotten lost in the adorableness of it all but something was itching in her chest. She had to know…

“Do you think I have a stick up my ass?” she asked. Kate abruptly stopped humming when she turned to her, surprised.

Innocent as a cherub, “Why do you ask?”

“Well, do you?” Victoria persisted, evading the other girl’s obvious evasion. Kate blinked, then looked away, her teeth tugged at her little lip.

“You are sometimes very uptight…” she admitted quietly.

Victoria let out a sharp sound of frustration, “Just because I’m more mature than everyone else on this stupid campus and I take my work very seriously that makes me uptight? Ugh, I’m surrounded by children.”

Kate used her knee to nudge against Victoria’s thigh,“When you relax and don’t let insignificant little things get to you, you’re quite wonderful.” Kate said gingerly, trying to lighten the mood.

Victoria threw up her hands “Insignificant things offend me because they’re insignificant and shouldn’t even exist. Everyone should be offended when people say or do stupid things. Whatever.” Victoria huffed. She crossed her arms, inconsolable. So this was why Kate would rather hang out with the weirdo squad? Because Victoria was high-strung and wasn’t as fun as everyone else? Did
Kate find her company less welcoming than others? That thought truly chilled her heart. Kate deliberated for a couple of moments. Then, Victoria felt a couple of fingers walk up her arm, playful.

“You do call me a nun all the time and I don’t mind it. You are a princess and I don’t mind it either.” Kate said, impish. A tiny shot of gusto cut through the coldness within Victoria’s heart in that moment. Kate called her a princess. She liked that.

When Kate put it that way it didn’t sound so bad. In fact, Kate should call her that more often, “Then call me a princess. Don’t say I’m high-maintenance or… I gopher a stick out my ass or something like that.”

“Gopher a what? What does that even mean?”

---

One of Victoria’s unexpected discoveries was that one of the best things to listen to was Kate Marsh’s laugh. Usually she laughed this gentle, easy to listen to chuckle—but to hear her laugh loud and full bellied? Well, that was infectious and joy-inducing. Another great thing to listen to was her morning violin practices.

Strangely enough, she hadn’t heard it much.

Actually it had been a couple of weeks where it had been all quiet on the Katie front where it came to her violin.

At lunch as she went back to her car to get something, she saw Kate in that same hidden place she saw her before, almost hidden away, drawing in her large sketch book. The same place she always hid when she wanted to be alone and draw. During the week when Kate had her last insomnia attack, this was the spot that Kate had holed up in. Victoria internally debated for a second whether or not to bother her…

She approached the girl, calling out.

“Hey Mozart, where’s the morning symphonies? “

Kate jumped, a bit shocked. When she was over here she was almost never disturbed.

“Don’t worry about it, I’ll be out of your hair soon and I won’t tell anyone where your little hide-out is.” Victoria explained as she snuck around the bush and trees that nearly blocked Kate from plain sight.

Victoria quickly pestered Kate about her absent morning violin practices.

Kate nodded and answered apathetically, “They’re taking a break. They’ll be back shortly.”

“A break? Are you taking a break? Why?” Victoria asked, concerned. The last time Kate stopped playing her violin was when she was depressed and suicidal or not sleeping for days on end. What happened now? Who did Victoria need to kill to get Kate to be happy again?
“They will be back soon, I’ve just been busy with the colour compositions project” Kate assured.

Victoria reached into her bag to take out a cigarette, not completely believing in Kate. Her grip slipped, and her lighter dropped to the ground.

Kate swiped it then stood up, offering her the lighter.

“trust me.” Kate said with that voice that made Victoria realize that she did and how it bothered her less than it should have.

Victoria took it the lighter, their fingers brushed against each other’s. Hmm. Kate never wore nail polish.

“You don’t care about smoking?” Victoria asked as she popped a cigarette in between her lips.

Kate shrugged, “You’re legally an adult. It’s your own decision. To each, their own.”

“Huh.”

“I also believe that the D.A.R.E program does more harm than good, as there are far more effective ways to get people to stay away from drugs, or to indulge in them safely, but that’s another tangent for another time.”

Victoria waved her pack, “Should I offer you one, then?”

A wry smirk on Kate’s face as she shook her head, “No. You should not.”

Victoria felt that little fuzzy ball of amour swell in size for Kate. There were even people in the vortex club who snorted Adderall and whippets but would go on a crusade if someone were smoking. It was stupid. Kate, unlike those losers, was actually enlightened.

“It’s cool that you don’t mind.” Victoria couldn’t help but mention. Even though Kate was awesome in all her uniqueness, this was probably the first time she was ever cool in the ‘proper’ mainstream, pop-culture type of way.

“I don’t mind when you smoke with Chloe” Kate blurted. Victoria raised an eyebrow at her as she took in Kate’s expression. It bugged her how Kate looked so… pleased about this turn of events.

Victoria waved it off, “whatever, you’re weird.”

“You like it, princess” Kate chirped, cheery as a sparrow. Victoria lit one up. She took a deep drag. Kate was totally right, even more than she knew. She exhaled through a smile.

Kate’s nose scrunched up as she blinked furiously and coughed, “bleh! Why did you--? You just blew that in my face!? Vic, that’s not cool! Oh gross!”

A slap of embarrassment hit Victoria in the face. She had been so lost in her feelings again that she truly didn’t realise that she just blew that huge puff of smoke into Kate’s face. But that expression on Kate’s face made Victoria laugh, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry” she said, trying to reach out for Kate’s arm, “come on, let’s kiss and make up” Victoria couldn’t help but jest (mostly jest).

Kate hopped away, squawking, “No, Victoria! No kisses for you!”

“Oh please, it was an accident…Hey! Come back here!”
After that one incident the rest of the day was relatively a chill one. None of her classes had any serious projects, so she mainly passed the long hours by texting her friends and trolling Kate. Kate sent her back many different drawings of a pissed off bunny wearing a gas mask. Victoria noted the incoming fashion change within the campus as people were beginning to bundle up more and more as the temperature dropped. After classes ended Victoria gathered up her crew of Courtney and Taylor and they were planning to just chill on the steps in front of the Prescott Dormitory since it wouldn’t be too much longer when they could---

A rather loud sound of something heavy getting shoved into a wall ripped Victoria out of whatever idle thoughts she may had been thinking. What was that?

Logan yelling something harsh as he dumped out Daniel’s backpack all over the ground in front of the poor, pudgy loser. Behind Daniel’s God-awful wire-rim glasses, his eyes didn’t hold fear. Rather, he just looked defeated. Like a beaten dog that could only look up at you, forlorn, from beneath droopy eyelids.

A memory flickered behind her eyes: Early October, Kate, eyes red-rimmed and suffering.

Logan wore the same expression she had when she had towered over Kate in the bathroom... That same heinous smirk that curled her lips as she drew out the link to Kate’s video on the steamy mirror. Her intuition jumped-kicked the back of her scalp and not a conscious thought stopped her as she blazed a warpath straight towards Logan.

“Logan, what the fuck are you doing?” Victoria called out, furious.

Logan was so caught off guard that he did a little jump. He made a confused, non committal grunt. Victoria again looked from a, now, terrified Daniel back to the thug, Logan.

She took another step towards Logan, “Oh look at you, able to shove around a nerd who’s never lifted a weight in his life -- Big tough guy you are” Victoria seethed, just about ready to lay a pounding into Logan herself.

“Mind your own business” Logan bitched, but he was already shuffling away, tail between his legs.

“What? You want to fuck him? Be a gentleman and buy him dinner first,” Victoria sneered at his retreating form. She heard him hiss ‘bitch’ under his breath but didn’t care. She turned back towards Daniel who was staring at them as if they were the apocalypse incarnate.

He then dropped down to pick up his scattered papers, pens, notebooks, binders… Sketchbook. It was open to a random page

A life drawing of Kate, it was of her leaned over, her eyes downcast – focused and thinking. Her cross dangled as if swinging in the blank space of white. Victoria leaned down to pick it up. Damn, Daniel. It was good. She handed it back to him. As Daniel took it back with shaky, doughy hands, Victoria snapped,

“Watch yourself, Daniel, I’m not always going to be there to bail you out from meat sacks like Logan.”
Daniel squeaked something in response.

“What?” Victoria hissed.

He pushed his glasses up his sweaty nose, “You know my name?” he asked, breathless.

Victoria’s mouth pursed, stunned silent. In her pause, Taylor handed him back his backpack and Courtney had gathered up several rogue brushes that had escaped. Why was he so concerned about this? Well, to be honest, she only knew his name because Kate had talked about him and she had seen the two of them sketching together and comparing work on campus sometimes. Kate had spoken highly of his talent. He wasn't too good with design, but his life-drawings and realistic portraits impressed Kate a lot.

She stood up, harshly brushing away the dirt on her knees, “of course I know your name, but try and stay away from Logan—“

“He finds me—” Daniel bleated. Even his zits quivered in demoralized emotion.

“--He won’t anymore.” Victoria cut off his blithering. Then she got up and exited without another word, Courtney hot on her heels. She briefly heard Taylor say something to Daniel; something along the lines of ‘we got you.’ Then she heard Taylor’s light jogging, catching up to her side. At that point Victoria was already rapid-fire texting on her phone to Logan a nasty warning. She sent it to the Vortex group text so everyone could see.

A response:

Logan: the fuk u care

Victoria saw pure red but Courtney and Taylor were already on their phones, shooting off their responses backing her up. Then Hayden, who had Daniel help him on a project. Then Sarah. Then a newbie named Corbin who was an illustration major and had several classes with him. Dana's simple but perfect response to Logan was the finishing blow.

Logan shut the fuck up.

“He’s fucking disgusting. How does he get any action at all?” Victoria fumed as they sat down on the steps of the Prescott dormitory (as per usual). Dana had such terrible taste in men if she had let him touch her, let alone impregnate her with his spawn (thank you Planned Parenthood). The other sluts that surrounded him at parties were no better.

“Football player.” Taylor quipped.

Victoria scoffed, “Remind me to never hook up with one again”

“What about Jacob?” Courtney asked. Victoria briefly searched through her memory banks, who the heck was…oh yeah. New running back for the Blackwell Bigfoots. He was a cutie for sure. She had been talking with him briefly before. They used to flirtatiously text back and forth and she had tried to convince him to join the Vortex Club. Honestly? She had forgotten all about him.

“On to the next one” Courtney said.

A faint note of music hooked Victoria’s ear drum before she could answer. She quickly scanned the surroundings to see if she could find the source of the faint notes travelling through the air. Aha. Over there was the sole reason she forgot about Jacob, football players or any other men for that matter; Kate Beverly Marsh. She was standing off by the Tobanga... with her violin in her hand? Well, so that’s when and where she moved her practices to. Outside, in the later afternoon, way out by the woods... A little strange.... Victoria could barely hear what she was playing.

She nodded back towards Courtney, “Preach, girlfriend.” Victoria purred, keeping an eye on the girl far away.

A while later she was in Taylor’s room, hanging out and looking at some new style guides they had found when Victoria, in the corner of her eye, caught Taylor staring at her several times. Finally she looked back at Taylor straight in the face, eyebrow raised. Taylor simply grinned at her.

“What, Tay?” Victoria asked, curious.

Taylor got up and rummaged through her accessories box, then came back and offered her a red scrunchie. Victoria raised an eyebrow, what was this? Elementary school nineties crap—wait. It was part of their Halloween costume—she was cut off when Taylor kissed her cheek.

“My love, there’s a new sheriff in town” Taylor quoted with perfection (the kiss included). Victoria blinked, in that moment her mind both absolutely blank and began to whirr, processing what Taylor just said. It was one of the final quotes from the iconic movie ‘Heathers’ the same movie the three of them had dressed up as characters from.

‘Heathers’ was Victoria’s favorite 80’s movie of all time and she had adored Winona Ryder’s character, who even though was part of the popular and notorious high school group the ‘Heathers’, she ended up saving the school from her psychopathic new boyfriend and finally from the Heathers themselves. At the end she ended up vowing to take on the Heathers and protect the rejects of the school, those who could not protect themselves.

She had always secretly envied, admired and hated that ending. How could someone as amazing as Winona Ryder abandon all her reputation for a bunch of losers who didn’t matter? No one would actually do that! Status was the only thing that mattered in society, why sacrifice it for literally nobodies?

She remembered being twelve years old at her old prep school, there was a girl with cerebral palsy that walked with a scissor gait. She remembered the jilted way that girl held her arms to herself and how she talked with a lisp. Most kids, already unnerved, just ignored her. But there was a small group of kids who would make snide comments at her or go up to chat with her and try to get her to say as many words with ‘s’ as possible. Or who would make zombie noises behind her as she walked, slowly, awkwardly from class to class. Victoria was one of the kids who ignored her. There was one time where she had tripped on something and fell. It was visual agony to watch her struggle just to get back up on her own two feet.

Victoria took a step forward—
But was beaten to the punch as a taller, older boy with thick brown hair and freckles ran over and
helped the girl up. Victoria swiftly turned away and left before she could hear the girl’s sincere
thanks to the boy.

Ever since that point even though Victoria loved watching Heathers, she usually turned it off before
that last poignant ending came on.

But now, telltale scrunchie in her hand, Victoria realized what Taylor was telling her. Before
Victoria could control herself a huge smile erupted on her face. An absolute light giddiness swelled
within Victoria to the point that every cell in her body was jittering in delight.

She was mother fucking Winona Ryder!!!!!

Both girls recognized that this was one of those situations where things on an existential level were
just beautifully unexpected. All they could do was laugh loud and proud.

“Quick, where’s the girl in the wheelchair? I’ve got to take her to prom” Victoria declared, still
laughing.

“What? I thought they ditched prom to watch movies together” Taylor said, trying to get her breath
back,

“Fuck no I’m not ditching prom for anything, I’m making the better ending. We’ll be homecoming
queens together, Mean Girls style.”

Both girls laughed even harder, “Unfortunately we don’t have a fat girl in a wheelchair” Taylor
responded, still chuckling and wiping a stray tear of laughter from her eye,

“Damn it. Do we have anyone on crutches then? Which reject must I hang off my arm to disrupt the
social hierarchy?”

Taylor took a moment to drum her fingers on her desk before proclaiming, eerily casual, “well, if you
really want to give everyone an aneurysm – you could always take Kate Marsh.”

Victoria’s head snapped up, alarm bells ringing in her ears so loud that she almost didn’t hear herself
say, “what.” Taylor could’ve mentioned anyone else of the weirdo squad; Stella, that girl with the
robots, Alyssa, Luke, Fuck, even Daniel. Why did Taylor mention Kate? Victoria was determined to
keep that brilliant girl well guarded away from the rest of her life; her current most precious secret. It
had to be just coincidence that Kate was brought up. Logically, Taylor did have a point, if she truly
wanted to shock everyone then Kate would be the number one choice. Former bully and victim go to
prom together and win lesbians of the year.

“Hey guys!”

Courtney bust into the room, “guess who has new nail polish?”

“Ohhhh, let me see!” Taylor answered, loud and playful, skipping over to their mutual friend.
Victoria swallowed, quickly pushing all her anxiety into a hole and becoming interested in nail
polish. To be fair, it was really nice nail polish.

The next day something amazing happened.
It’s the Tuesday right before her birthday, (November 14th, losers! Save the date because it’s literally
the only one that matters!). She was in Chemistry class (insert literal groan here) and as the class
waited for Ms. Grant to arrive she stood by the beautiful big windows and looked outside, longingly.
Why couldn’t she had smoked another cigarette when she had the chance?

That’s when she noticed Daniel and Kate sitting side by side, talking. Some artbooks were out, no
doubt some work by Hans Boucher or Angus Hyland.

Then Kate looked up, catching Victoria through the window where she smiled at her.

How was this different?

Well, you see every time Kate would smile at Max, her eyes would literally glitter with love. It was
off-putting, mostly because Victoria was envious that Kate would never look at her and those
beautiful hazel eyes would never sparkle with love. It hurt even more because Max wasn’t the only
one who Kate’s eyes would spark at.

When Kate would look up and talk with Dana or Chloe, there was this aura of genuine affection.

When Kate talked to Daniel or Warren her eyes would bleed a type of protective, sisterly adoration.

When Kate was with Stella and Alyssa her eyesight seemed to stretch out arms that embraced the
other two with trust.

When Kate looked at her through the window and they made eye-contact, and a beautiful smile
erupted on her face…

Victoria stared at the girl, stupefied as she saw the twinkle in Kate’s eye that flowed out just a little
bit of warmth.

Like cocaine that went up your nose straight to your brain, Kate’s look went through her eyes
straight to her heart where the feelings billowed through every nerve and every cell…

Victoria clenched her jaw to keep herself from being an open-mouthed idiot that was staring.

She felt her cheeks stretch as she returned the smile back at Kate. Class started and she returned to
her desk, but fuck all if she could pay any attention to Ms. Grant.

So…that’s what it felt like to be in Kate’s eye.

Back in the day, When Rachel looked at you, it made you feel as though you were unworthy to be in
her presence. As though you would never be enough to be with her.

When Kate looked at you it made you feel as though you were better than you actually were. As
though you, for a moment, actually were that hero you wanted to be. Someone, who was adored by
Kate Marsh. Her regard made you feel as though you could fly.

For the first time in her life, Victoria truly knew how Winona Ryder felt when she marched down
that hallway, covered in ash and debris. When she decided to fuck her popularity and shove it to the
‘Heathers’…

That she had made the right decision and that her intuition led her well.

The next day, Wednesday and November 14th (HER BIRTHDAY MOFO’S!!! WHO’S READY
TO PARTY?! had gone pretty sweet. It was nice to be the center of attention while not lifting a finger. She had gotten several gifts from her friends and Vortex club members. Some other people even got her a gift; like Caulfield. She had been sincerely touched about that, actually. Sure, she had mixed feelings towards freckle avalanche, but it didn’t change the fact that Victoria respected her work immensely and, ugh, maybesometimesfoundherreallycool. Ahem. Now, the only reason that her birthday hadn’t reached fantastic was because first, she hadn’t partied yet and second, Kate was mysteriously M.I.A

Like, in the morning when she had gotten up there was no music. When she passed by the door, it was already quiet. Kate was gone.

She did receive a text

Kate: Happy Birthday Victoria! I hope it’s awesome!

Then, a picture of a bunny holding a gift, the caption stating; Patience is a virtue…

Ok. What was that about?

She had tried to send her some texts; normal, playful. However Kate wasn’t responding. Hello, what was her deal?! Was she purposefully ignoring her?! At homeroom all she did was glance at her, give her a playful smile then look away. As soon as homeroom ended she scurried off before Victoria could catch her.

Another text of a drawing – a golden tabby, pearl necklace around it’s neck, following a present on a fisherman’s string

Caption simply said;

It’s coming…

At photography she and Max huddled close together and closed off at her desk. Victoria already could sense that they were conspiring something. Especially when she saw that they kept sneaking glances at her and would look away when Victoria tried to stare at them head on.

Kate then wouldn’t look at her during the entire class.

And she wasn’t answering any of her texts!
Victoria hated a lot of things. Arguably the number one thing was being ignored. It linked back to a lot of insecurities she had and that she knew she had to overcome, mature, get over, blah blah.

Still though, Kate was ignoring her.

_On her birthday._

_Heresy._

_She was dead to Victoria._

That evening she was getting ready to go out… Ok, so what it was only in the middle of the week and not even thirsty Thursday? It was her birthday and they were going to get crunk. That’s just how life works, Ok?

A knock on her door.

“Vic.”

Victoria’s ears tingled as she recognized the voice. She opened the door to see Kate grinning at her.

“May I come in?” Kate asked, smart-ass smile on her face. For a moment Victoria seriously debated throwing that door in Kate’s face. For a moment she stood there, acting as her own makeshift door. Finally, unable to slam the door, Victoria parted the way and let the small girl stride into her room. She was still peeved at Kate for ignoring her and giving her all those weird-ass texts. So, Victoria barely acknowledged how Kate was wearing a rather large backpack as she came in.

Victoria coolly ignored Kate, going back to her mirror and re-adjusting her outfit, “Well, what’s up? I’ll be going out soon, so let’s have at it”

In her reflection she saw how Kate stepped right by her, an envelope hung between her index and middle finger, Victoria turned to face Kate, curious,

“First, please take this” Kate instructed.

Oh! A birthday card. Probably hand-made and artistic and cute as fuck. She wasn’t sure why Kate had waited, I don’t know, _until the near end of her actual birthday_ , to give it but whatever. Surely she had her reasons.

“Thanks, Kate.” Victoria said but was interrupted when she felt Kate’s hands at her waist, pulling
her away and leading her back to the couch, “Second, please take a seat.”

“Excuse me, I’m not done yet—“ Victoria protested

“Sit your butt down.” Kate softly demanded.

Well. When Kate put it that way she wasn’t going to argue with that. So Victoria sat her ass down on her sofa.

Also Kate getting all saucy and demanding?

It was, kind of, **really hot.**

Victoria spread her arms along the sofa edge,“Alright, what’s step three, chief?” Victoria mocked,

Kate just smirked, a hand on her waist. Victoria watched as the fingers rose and fell like a tiny sound wave, (**confident Kate was making her so wet, VICTORIA CONTROL YOURSELF**) “Open your card.” Kate responded, coolly.

Victoria opened up the envelope. To be fair it was a gorgeous card...Booklet? There was a few pages, binded together with ribbon... Done with ink and water color. That alone was enough for Victoria to treasure this for the rest of her life.

To the one and only fabulous Victoria Chase.

On the front cover was a cat, the same golden short-haired tabby, pearl necklace on with a crown on it's head. A very self-satisfied expression on it's face.

Victoria then flipped to the first page;

I know where we've come from is less than ideal.

Both the cat and the bunny sat away from each other, not looking at one another. Both looked pretty miserable.

However, I am constantly surprised how whenever life has tried us...
The cat and the bunny held paws as both of them fell out of an exploding plane (this caused Victoria to snort)

We have overcome it, together.

The cat's parachute opened, and the cat and bunny held onto each other as they floated, safe.

But getting to know you, having you in my life has been enlightening and ultimately most rewarding...

The cat and Bunny sat in front of a laptop, obviously watching some cartoons.

The cat twirled the bunny in front of a mirror. Literal sparkles coming off the bunny.

The cat held a camera in one paw as in the other one showed the bunny test prints. The bunny and cat frozen in a pose of teamwork.

But most importantly, fun!

The cat and bunny posed Rogue Raspberry and Agent blueberry costumes, guns out (this caused Victoria to laugh out loud)

Thanks for being my friend. I thank God that you were born because your presence in my life has changed me. And I sincerely mean that for the better.

The cat, cigarette hanging out of it's mouth, lay curled around the Bunny, who had a sketch pad in it's paws. The long, golden tail wrapping around the bunny in good humor. Both smiled at each other.

From my heart.

the same picture as the previous page, this time from an angle that just showed the bunny and Cat silhouetted by a sunrise in the background.

Kate Marsh.
Victoria's eyes stung, overwrought with sudden emotion pressing with force behind her face.

She'd had never gotten a card that was just so raw with appreciation for her.

No. She's not crying. She's not going to cry because she's pretty sure that Kate would freak out if she busted out bawling right now. Also she had all her make-up on now so she'd look particularly scary if the tears got flowing.

She flipped to the last page...

The cat sat in front of a stage, waiting in anticipation as the curtain was still drawn...

**NOW ONTO THE PERFORMANCE!!!**

Victoria lifted up her head, looking at Kate, puzzled, “Ok, Kate, what’s going on?”

“Just a surprise…” Kate said, a coat of deviousness on her face as she turned away from Victoria.

Victoria’s eyes widened and she felt her mouth go dry as Kate rummaged through her bag, her perky rear high in the air.

*Oh my God is this a lap dance?*

When Kate turned around she was holding her violin and the bow in the other hand. Victoria was both still incredibly intrigued and incredibly disappointed.

She drew the bow down on the strings and a crisp, alive note rang clear in the air.

“I’m going to give you your gift. It may not be something fancy, or expensive. But I think you’re going to like it.” Kate said as she tuned her violin.

“Wait, I want to record this”
Kate visibly froze in mid-action, looking very much like a deer in headlights. She licked her lips, “this is just for your eyes only…” Victoria felt her throat go dry.

*God why couldn’t this have been a lap dance -- Shut up, Victoria!*

Victoria relented, feeling a bit guilty that her first reaction was to record her. She brought her phone down, “alright. For my eyes only.” It took a couple seconds for Kate to recover and she shook her arms out again before raising the violin back under her chin.

Kate had a nervous smile on as she spoke, “Hello, Victoria Maribeth Chase, today is your 19th birthday and for you I’ll be performing a melody. I call it…”

Victoria clapped her hands in front of her face, childishly excited, “Victoria is the most amazing, hottest person with the best photography in the entire world?”

Kate’s smile froze and she slowly shook her head, then corrected “actually, it’s ‘Do Weeaboo’s dream of Weeaboo sheep?’”

Victoria couldn’t hold in her scandalised gasp, “Rude.” she snapped at the musician. Kate just chuckled and then her fingers began to pluck at the strings. The fast beat…Victoria’s eye’s widened.

“The Dragon Boy” from Spirited Away. One of the most iconic musical tracks from master composer Joe Haisaishi. Victoria couldn’t hide in her grin, this was one of her favorite soundtracks. Then, suddenly, brilliantly the music perfectly morphed into the opening of Full Metal Alchemist. A chill ran up her spine as not only was Kate absolutely nailing these violin covers, but the transition from song to song was nearly flawless. Then it hit her… Kate was playing her all of her favorite songs from animation… Because then she somehow *hammered* in Sour Berry Panic and Victoria nearly jumped up because *how the Fuck does anyone do that and make it sound that fucking cool?!?*

Somehow, in someway Kate was mashing up all of the animation soundtracks that they had watched together in this truly amazing and catchy way. Yeah, Victoria had heard her playing through the wall during the mornings and sometimes in the later afternoons but holy Shit Victoria never caught how she was actually super mother-fucking talented. The music was one thing, but watching how Kate performed with her entire body. Her shoulders, her arms, her fingers moving with rapid speed and strength, her hips, her knees, her feet moving in deliberation with the music. All she could do was stare at her, all senses absolutely transfixed.

So, this was what she had been doing. She had been off practicing and composing this elsewhere so Victoria wouldn’t be able to hear what she had been doing. She had been composing her gift this entire time...

When she somehow mixed together the extremely dramatic ED credits of Puella Mahou Magica Madoka with the Gravity Falls theme song Victoria nearly screamed out because holy shit Kate Marsh just blew her tiny mind. This was amazing!

But then right at the ultimately dramatic downswing of her bow, Victoria took in a breath to cheer however, was stopped when Kate rose a finger to silence her. Then she readjusted the violin and
began to play something…

Victoria’s ears pricked up and the hairs on her neck stood erect.

Kate opened up her mouth and sang, "Peach or plum or strawberry, any is fine, you see, come on and share this jam with me ~~~"

It was the first duet sung between Steven and Connie within the show Steven Universe. It was insanely cute and romantic in that purest of ways that fucking dies as soon as you turn fifteen and the typhoon of hormones and reality come charging in.

Kate sang through her grin, "I'll do my best to give this jam the sweetness it deserves~~" 

Something within Victoria, the deepest darkest geekiest part of herself that only ventured out at 2am in the morning when she browsed fanart, cosplay and fanfiction lurched out, busting past her ego and insecurities and she stood up, singing out loud, "and I'll keep it fresh, I'm jamming on these tasty preserves~~"

In tandem they sang while maintaining eye-contact, "Ingredients in harmony, we mix together perfectly, come on and share this jam with me~~ee~~~~~."

Duh duh dun Dun. Done.

Kate then bowed. Victoria just stood there, breathless, frozen. Kate stood up straight, staring back at Victoria. Her ribcage expanding and decompressing rapid as she sucked in breaths.

A beat.

“Holy shit Kate” Victoria uttered.

A bead of sweat dripped off Kate’s chin as she panted, “You liked it?”

“You blew my fucking mind, what do you think?” Victoria implored.

“Yes?”

“Yes! Yes you crazy girl, yes, yes, yes!”

Both girls burst out laughing.

At the end both girls wore wide, uniform grins on their faces. Victoria wanted to say something akin to 'that was awesome' or 'you're so cool' or 'I'm right now kind of in love with you' but she just stood
there, grinning, the joy in her body rendering her mute. To her advantage, Kate just also shuffled from foot to foot, at her, smiling like an idiot.

"I'm not getting a ukulele" Victoria's insecurities blurted, "I can't stoop to Hipster trash level." However there was only soft geniality in her voice. She wanted to bury that she had no musical talent at all. Her parents had sent her to piano, flute and yes - even violin lessons but she had been so terrible that her teachers had kicked her out. Or, gently advised that her artistic talents lay elsewhere, as they bullshitted.

"As long as you sing with me, then it's all good Vic" Kate replied, all delight. Then her mouth twisted, chesire-like, "Besides, you could always borrow Max's."

Victoria groaned, "I thought she already had a guitar."

"She just got the ukulele, something about it being more portable."

"She is such a hipster."

"I know, it's amazing."

Both girls laughed out loud and much to her surprise, Kate opened her arms wide. It took her a moment to realise that Kate was offering a hug. For a moment, Victoria was tempted to not accept it. This was too weird. Victoria’s cautious eyes gazed at Kate’s open, waiting arms. They traveled up Kate’s sweaty, flushed neck, up her pink cheeks and locked with Kate’s hazel eyes. They twinkled bright and Victoria felt her veins just get absolutely flooded with *Warmth.*

It took another moment for Victoria to take the courage to step into the embrace. She felt those arms tighten around her and Victoria couldn’t help but tighten her own around Kate in response.

“Happy birthday, Victoria” Kate said with such sentiment that made Victoria melt.

When she felt Kate's arms tighten around her body, she finally understood why Max was always hanging off Kate. Why everyone was always touching Kate.

Bible Thumper gave the best hugs.

Victoria couldn’t help but to pull the smaller girl deeper into her torso, feeling Kate’s warmth press tight against her body. She felt Kate’s heart beating fast, still high off performing. She smelled Kate’s sweat on her temple. She felt the damp heat radiate off her skin and through her clothes. She felt Kate’s massive amount of hair coat half of her face.

This hug was lasting too long and Victoria could shove her foot up the ass of anyone who dare judge her. However, Kate came in to try and subtly address the growing awkward, “You smell really nice” Kate said, her voice a little sheepish. Victoria felt her ego purr, she was already very proud of the perfume she used.

“It’s how I seduce all the ladies” Victoria responded, cocky. She pressed her face further into Kate’s cheek and growled a long, exaggerated wolfish growl. Kate giggled loudly. Victoria then purred into Kate’s ear, “mmmm, virgin blood.” Victoria could’ve sworn she felt a shiver before a jilted chuckle exited Kate’s throat,

“You’re certainly frisky today.” Kate stated, amused.
“It’s my birthday and you’ve just given me the best gift ever. Of course I am” Victoria retorted. It was fact. Duh.

Both girls quieted as they heard sounds of excited girls tromping down the hall. No doubt, Taylor, Courtney, and Dana, ready to court Victoria out on her birthday debauchery.

However, none of them knew that she was currently hidden within the wrong room hugging the crap out of Kate Marsh. Victoria appreciated the scandalous aspect of the entire situation. Especially because she didn’t want to stop hugging this small piece of awesome within her arms right now.

“Thank you, Katie. That was amazing” Victoria whispered, sincerely, honestly into Kate’s ear.

Kate let go first, patting her hands on Victoria’s shoulders and smoothing out the birthday girl’s sweater, “Have fun tonight, try not to drink too, too much, ok?” then she gestured towards the door, “your friends are waiting for you.” Victoria looked at Kate hard.

She wanted to kiss her.

She wanted to pull that girl into her arms and kiss her like she was meant to be kissed; like she was the Goddess and Victoria was her most devout believer.

She wanted to kiss Kate until the pain of everything anyone, including Victoria herself, ever did to her went away. She wanted her lips to make Kate feel how she saw the beauty of Kate’s soul and cherished it.

She wanted Kate wrapped up in her arms and she wanted to pick her up and push her against the wall and kiss her until Kate understood the magnitude of her passion.

She wanted to kiss Kate because she was now in so, so, so deep that it was the only light at the end of the tunnel that could bring her salvation.

Perhaps she could get away with it if she tried to pass it off as platonic?

Now, don’t get the wrong idea, Victoria kissed her friends all the time when she was feeling particularly affectionate. Taylor had gotten several smooches (she would just wiggle her eyebrows, ‘you sexy beast’ TayTay would always respond) as did Nathan before (to which he would just loudly proclaim disgust, even though she knew he appreciated it)

But Christ, did Victoria yearn to kiss Kate at that moment. No one had ever put in so much thought or effort into giving her something before. Her parents basically gave her the top toys on the market of whatever she plainly and loudly expressed she was interested in at the time.

Victoria would always appreciate how her parents had just tried to give Victoria the best tools that they could give her. That was how they chose to show their love and Victoria would take it. Now, while the act was of love, the present always had felt cold and expensive. Wrapped impeccably, and the card written very sparsely: To Victoria Maribeth Chase, love Mom and Dad xoxo.

Victoria had never, ever felt so much warmth. Whatever Kate had put her hands on, whether it be cookies, cards, simple physical touches and/or musical acts…it radiated with love and endearment.

_I believe that emotions are transferred into creations..._
And just like that, Kate Marsh had somehow reached into Victoria’s chest to where her cold, jaded, fuckered up heart was and touched it. Her fingerprints leaving love and hope…

Also, all that mushy shit aside, Victoria’s internal geek was going ballistic and just wanted to marry Kate Marsh. Get the rings! We’re going to Paris! What? Did you honestly think Victoria was trashy enough to elope in Vegas? Hell no, they were going to have classy, awe-inspiring ceremony in some vineyard outside of Paris in the hills. There would be a full wind-ensemble and…

*Vic, don’t kiss her.* Winona Ryder said.

Victoria smothered her internal geek to silence. She couldn’t kiss Kate Marsh in any capacity because she knew that the other girl would see straight through any pathetic lie and know it wasn’t purely platonic. It would be a bit too gay for Kate, who was just welcoming that side of herself. Plus it was from her.

**Problematic Victoria Chase.**

Even though they had come so far and were getting closer, the mountain of their history constantly cast shadows over their relationship. Sometimes when Victoria would say something just a bit too unjustifiably scathing about someone, she would see Kate look away and twist at her hands. Sometimes Kate still had trouble sleeping and would get days where she just couldn’t talk to Victoria much. Sometimes Victoria would find herself resenting Kate with an unprecedented strength for making her feel so much guilt.

Sometimes Victoria had nightmares of Kate on the roof and of her jumping. Falling, falling, falling---The ear-drum breaking loud CRUNCH would wake her up with a start. She would clutch at her chest where her heart hammered away. For several moments she would wonder where the fuck she was and if Kate Marsh was actually dead.

*Both of you can’t handle a kiss right now* Winona Ryder vocalised

Yeah, considering how loaded all her feelings were for the other girl, a kiss would be a little too gay for Victoria too.

But at the moment, if she were completely honest with herself, Victoria wanted it to be so, so, so, so gay.

(Like, wild gay unicorns, gay.)

Outside she heard Taylor and Courtney pound on the wrong bedroom door and chant her name.

Victoria turned and put her hand on the doorknob, but stopped.

*Vic…* Winona Ryder warned.

Then, impulsively, because she never could really control herself, especially around people she liked, she turned back and launched herself back towards the other girl, pecking Kate ever so quickly on the nose before opening the door and slipping through.
She never got to see Kate drop her violin in shock.

“Bitches! I hear you!” Victoria called out as she shut Kate’s door.

All of the girls outside of Victoria’s actual bedroom door leapt in shock, truly none of them expected that Victoria would come out of the door right behind them. Courtney looked up at Victoria and then back at the door, then back at Victoria.

“I swear this is your room.” Courtney said aloud, in disbelief.

“Calm your tits, I was in Kate’s room.”

There was a bit of a funny look on Courtney’s face, “Kate Marsh’s room?” she asked, just to clarify.

Taylor just looked a bit surprised for a split second, then shrugged, “Ok.” Victoria was keenly aware how Taylor turned her face away not meeting Victoria’s eyes, small smile on her face but Dana arched an eyebrow, suspicious.

“What were you two doing?” she asked. Victoria saw Dana eye Kate’s door, looking as though she wanted to knock on it and talk to Kate directly. Victoria was feeling so high that she didn’t even want to kick Dana in the shin and she ignored Dana’s annoying protectiveness for now.

Victoria rolled her eyes, “making sweet, sweet love” she grumbled as sarcastically as she could muster. She quickly changed subjects, “now come on, where we going? Tonight is going to get lit!”

Quickly, the rest of the girls began to cheer and the rest of the night began. Victoria always helped get the party started. When Victoria was in a good mood, she made sure the party kept going…

Thanks to Kate, Victoria was in a fantastic mood…

So the party got *abso-fucking-lutely* lit.

Until 1:30am when Courtney and Dana had to dump her in front of a toilet where she puked her guts out. Or at least that’s what they had to tell her over text the next day because when Victoria woke up she didn’t remember the last third of the previous night.

She’s in such physical misery that she ditched class the rest of that day.

Late in the afternoon there’s a knock on her door. “Leave.” She loudly commanded, still suffering from the wrathful hangover.

“Vic.” A soft voice commanded back. Victoria forced herself to roll up and lean against the headboard.

“Alright, come in, save me.” Victoria groaned. Kate peeked in, looking fresh as a daisy in opposition to Victoria’s hungover rose that got bashed against the street a couple of times before getting thrown back into a vase of bed covers.

“Vic…you look…”

“If you finish that sentence with anything other than like Kate Bosworth or Charlize Theron I’m going to be unpleased”

“Then you look exactly like Kate Bosworth or Charlize Theron… if they got hit by a cement truck.”
Kate quietly answered, her chin dipped down. Victoria glowered at her but Kate just gave a shy smile in return.

“Rude.” Victoria retorted. Kate lifted up her hand, holding a shopping bag.

“I come bearing gifts...” Kate persuaded. Victoria rolled her eyes,

“My birthday was yesterday, your gift was already the Mount Fuji of awesome. You don’t need to get me anything else.” Victoria winced, “except morphine.”

Kate shrugged, “no drugs here, sorry.”

Victoria let herself fall over onto the mattress with hungover pizazz, “you are useless” she droned, in genuine pain.

“I have hash browns and gatorade, though. That’s the same thing, right?”

Victoria popped open an eye, “...hash browns?”

Kate lifted up the plastic bag once again, wiggling her eyebrows as she said, “Yup and they’re all for you.”

Victoria forced herself to rise. Her alcohol soaked tummy clamoured for alleged fried potatoes “Shut the fuck up, you seriously got me hash browns?”

“I went out to the Two Whales with Max, Chloe and Stella. I figured you may want some.”

Victoria summoned the energy to beckon Kate over, “Well, then, bring them over here, darling.”

Kate heeded her call as she approached the bed, “I also have ketchup and mustard if you need’

Victoria fought the urge to snatch the takeaway box from Kate’s hands like some sort of feral raccoon. “Ew. Who uses mustard with their hash browns?” she asked as she very gracefully accepted the box from Kate.

“My father.”
“Is that a preacher thing?” Victoria asked before all her senses were hit by the glory of perfect, golden shaved, fried potatoes. She cooed in happiness.

“No, it’s just a weird dad thing” Kate answered as she handed her the plastic spork.

Victoria wolfed down the hashbrowns. Greasy carbs… Yes. Nirvana. She was practically orgasming in her mouth. Was there any food out there better than the potato? No. No there was not.

“Thank you Saint Kate.” Victoria groaned, as she took another bite, “God, I just came.” Victoria then took another huge bite, chewing and making loud obnoxious moans within her full mouth as she wolfed down the hashbrowns. If she were any less hungover she’d be appalled by her own manners. But she was already a mess in every sense of the word at that moment, so, c'est la vie!

Kate laughed as she protested, “you’re so inappropriate”

“Excuse me, but I’m in my bed. I can be as inappropriate as I want.”

“Touché” Kate relented as she passed Vic a sports drink. Victoria swallowed and uncapped the sports drink. She greedily sucked down the sugary drink jammed full of electrolytes. Kate sat quietly at the foot of her bed gingerly minding her bag.

“But seriously, this is perfect. Like, this is exactly what the doctor ordered.” Victoria said, feeling absolutely pleased, “you’re the best, mon chou.” Kate gave her a humble smile,

“No, no. I just figured that maybe it would help you.”

“Well ding, ding what made you guess the right answer?” Victoria asked. Kate’s lips pursed for a moment. Her eyes shifted away from Victoria for a second, blank of any emotion. Her shoulders hunched over briefly before she sat up straight again,

“That night when I woke up outside of my room I felt like I was going to die… I went to breakfast and saw these and I just took… a butt ton? Then I ate them all. I was so sick after but I felt so good too…”

What? When did Kate ever wake up outside her room? That was a strange story-- A moment of clarity came over Victoria as her chewing slowed. Oh.

Nathan Prescott dumped her there after the dark room.

Victoria imagined an absolutely blitzed Kate Marsh stumbling to the cafeteria then eating a small mountain of Hash browns. It was a fucking sad scene but at the same time kind of hilarious in a messed up way. She bit on her spork as she struggled with how to respond.

“That’s when I learned I loved hashbrowns.” Kate concluded, a bit absent-minded.

Both girls simultaneously chuckled, both wordlessly agreeing about the dark humor of the situation. There was a pause of silence as both of them settled down, but Kate’s eyes suddenly lit up,

“Also, I brought another friend”
Kate reached into her backpack and brought out the fluffiest thing known to man: a bunny. Alice. Kate offered the cutest thing to grace the planet to her. Victoria felt her face scrunch up and a flood of affection just dumped all over her tired and aching body.

“Are you fucking serious?” Victoria cooed as she held Alice, “you bring me hashbrowns and a bunny while I’m fucked up? Marry me.” Victoria proclaimed in a voice strangled higher-pitch from surprise and gratitude and just sheer affection.

There was a slight pause before Kate answered, “I don’t think my family would appreciate me marrying a girl.”

“I’ll pay them a huge dowry, I don’t care.”

A wry smirk lifted up Kate’s lips, “Are you literally trying to buy me off my parents?”

“It’s worked for thousands of years, I don’t see why that’ll change now. Forty sheep? Ten cows? A Mercedes? Done.”

“And I want the biggest rock you can get” Kate played along, cheerily.

“It’ll be at least 400 carats” Victoria swore as she ran her hand through Alice’s fur, enjoying the softness. She groaned a little at how her brain still slid around her head, roughly bumping into the walls of her skull.

“I told you not to drink so much.” Kate gently chided her,

“It was my birthday, there’s no way I’m not drinking”

“I never said you shouldn’t drink…I just said you shouldn’t drink so, so much” Kate very gently teased as her hand wandered up and brushed the dirty bangs out of Victoria’s forehead. A small bit of comfort within her massive headache. However the tiny bit of physical affection inspired Victoria...

“Get in.” Victoria commanded. Kate cocked her head, not really getting it. Victoria tapped the space besides her, insistent. Kate bit her lip a tiny bit hesitant. Then she hopped in and sat next to her. Victoria tipped over and let her bleary head rest on Kate’s shoulder. She closed her eyes and just enjoyed the soft, sturdy body and let herself slacken against it; blob style. Kate smelled nice. She felt nice. Mmmmmm.

“You should shower.” Kate jested softly.

“Carry me.” Victoria sassed just as softly, “wash my hair, and exfoliate my face, arms and don’t forget my back. You have to shave my legs too.”

Kate chuckled and Victoria enjoyed feeling the joy shake Kate’s body softly. Then there was a gentle, firm pressure of something small and soft compressing against the crown of her head, “you’re too much” Kate whispered, fond ire in her voice.

Victoria’s eyes widened as her impaired brain put together that Kate had just kissed her. Yeah, it wasn’t on the mouth and full of tongue but it was still a kiss.
A tired smile spread across Victoria’s face as she felt Kate’s fingers thread through Alice’s fur and brush against her fingertips. Despite it being a very chaste, totally platonic kiss, whole-hearted adoration began to fill her aching muscles. She knew that to get a kiss, any sort of kiss from Kate you had to be special - even if in just some tiny way.

She, Victoria Chase, was special to Kate Marsh.

There, laying against the woman of her heart and with Alice in her arms, Victoria dozed. She knew from the bottom of her heart that she had a fantastic birthday and this was the best start of her 19th year on Earth she could’ve ever asked for.

Chapter End Notes

Musical Influences

You don’t own me - Son Lux
New Years 2014 on a Beach (Felicity) - PARTY BABY
Listen (Bodega Girls remix) - An Horse

Again, the biggest, biggest BIGGEST shout out to @Heart_Taker because this chapter PLUS last chapter was all originally supposed to be posted as a single chapter... and they had the biggest heart (hahaha see what I did?) to beta these past two chapters like a champion. Again, they’re a fellow ChaseMarsh writer and their fic "Road to Redemption" was one of the things I read that inspired me to write this one, so go on and show it some love!

Also, thanks to @Drew244 for helping me with the French Endearments! They are also a fellow Chasemarsh writer so please head on over and show their fics some love too!

These past two chapters, again, were not originally part of the outline. It's fair to say that the story has flexed it's muscles and deviated a bit so the time between updates will be a bit longer as I accommodate the changes. But don't worry, this baby will get finished, I refuse to abandon this.

Especially since the thirst is about to get turnt up... (finally)
Next Chapter Preview

Not only did Victoria want to kill herself because the gym teacher was a damn Bitch that purposefully wanted to torture them; but because the sweat wasn’t the only thing making her wet and it was really, really, really embarrassing.

No longer relevant. Thirst is still tba
The Romantic

Chapter Summary

Oh, to be a romantic.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Holding you close, and giving you kisses... aren't the only symbols of love. Watching over someone from afar is a kind of love, too." – Setsuna/Sailor Pluto [Sailor Moon]

Victoria quietly parted the bushes, like a ninja, “How’s the bunny burrow?” Victoria asked and felt adolescent satisfaction when she saw Kate hop up in her spot, taken off-guard. Her spot as in specifically one of her several secret places where she chose to hide and draw. Before she had thought Kate only had one of them, which was by the parking lot. However now that Kate was constantly on her mind and she found herself being able to pick her out of a crowd and of the scenery.

She had another spot off the side of the football field, another hidden behind the gym and one off the way of the cafeteria. These were pretty well hidden and even Kate herself remained fairly confident that no one would invade them as she left some small boxes of art supplies and snacks at each one. Heck, in the one by the football field she even had a worn blanket she sat on and left there. Hence Victoria calling them ‘bunny burrows.’ These were only the ones she knew about as well, there was no telling how many little bunny burrows she had.

This one was up on that hill that surrounded the Prescott women’s dormitories, close to the Tobanga. Victoria had, only by accident, managed to spot that infamous mop of hair through the bushes a few days ago.
Usually, she left Kate alone as she could understand the auteur’s need for isolation. However, this time Victoria felt an uncanny need to pester the object of her affections. Kate, ever the champion, took Victoria’s sudden intrusion with a grain of salt. She scooted over and patted the seat next to her where Victoria restrained her own happiness as she coolly sat down next to Kate.

Victoria was constantly impressed with how Kate found and picked these places. They had great vantage points over specific areas and allowed her to sketch and draw without anyone disturbing her nor her disturbing anyone. Through the foliage, there was a perfect vantage point of the entire Prescott dormitory courtyard. She saw the jocks playing with their stupid balls. She saw Brooke and Warren with the drone. That flying robot still unnerved her (Hello, Skynet much?). Despite the weather beginning to have chill in the air, it was nice to see how full and festive the courtyard was.

Victoria’s eyes then shifted from the great beyond to less than a foot away from her. She started from Kate’s cute little ears to line of her jaw, down the flesh of her neck, down to her sketchpad. On the page she witnessed the hard charcoal bring shapes to life… A girl...wearing a hoodie...with dirty ass converses...a polaroid shit box in their hands… Victoria looked back up and followed Kate’s eyeline to where she saw the model in person standing by Stella, chatting.

“Someone’s enjoying the view…” Victoria smoothly said aloud, not hiding her vexation.

“Nice day” Kate muttered absent-mindedly.

“Yeah, nice hipster view” Victoria sneered. Kate immediately blushed up her ears. “Want to put a filter on that? I’m sure Lo-Fi or Hefe would work great”

“She has some nice poses” Kate defended weakly. Victoria huffed,

“Yeah, nice gay poses.”

“Vic.” Kate protested. Victoria debated for a moment whether or not to give Kate more shit on her infatuation with Max.

Victoria swiped her bangs to the left, “Better than drawing the flying drone, I guess” she said flippantly, deciding to spare Kate.

“That thing’s moving too fast anyway” Kate responded, her tone thankful that Victoria decided to drop the elephant in the room. Victoria continued to watch Kate sketch while her mind turned it’s gears.

As much as Victoria sincerely had fallen for Kate and was learning many things about herself and how to let go of her petty insecurities, dealing with Kate’s fat crush on Max Caulfield tested her limits of applicable Buddhism.

Victoria felt as though famous photographer, Dorothea Lange, could capture her depression when she saw Kate look at Max with all that love. No camera could handle her lividness when she saw Max return that look of affection towards Kate.

Every time she saw the two of them together, every time she even thought of the two of them together it felt like someone grabbed her heart, threw it in a washing machine and let it get tumbled around, swishing in all sorts of messy emotions.

It made her want to throw up her hands and blow this entire town away. Fuck everything. However those malicious intentions that erupted within her, Victoria forced herself to chew them into submission and swallow them. It wasn’t right for her to act out any sort of wrath. Why Kate loved Max was entirely reasonable. Why Max loved her back (platonically. Better be fucking platonic) was
entirely reasonable; she was Kate Marsh, who on this Earth didn’t love her?

Despite Max Caulfield being a tasteless, really awkward piece of hipster shit, Victoria had to let her be. At the end of the day, she, Victoria, would always be the monster that put Kate up on the roof. Max Caulfield would always be the hero that brought Kate down to life.

Victoria would simply have to accept that Kate would never return her feelings.

That Kate wanted someone better than her.

This made Victoria wanted to tear her own hair out and scream her agony up to the heavens. Had she been the Victoria of before she would’ve made it her personal mission to make Kate feel terrible about liking Max and she would have destroyed Max for getting that attention that she wanted so badly.

Alas, that was then and this was now. Thanks to everything that had happened she fully acknowledged that there was nothing she could do that would inherently just make Kate give her heart to her. All she could do was watch with longing.

Like a neutered bitch.

C’est la fucking vie.

But she was now more or less officially Kate’s friend. Perhaps even a good friend by now (look, they’ve nerded out and cried and screamed and crashed a car together, what did that make them?) so… it didn’t mean that Victoria couldn’t learn what made Kate’s heart flutter in a gay unicorn way.

Victoria leaned in towards Kate, setting her hook, “So, you look at that wonderful, hipster, queer, stylistically-barren piece of ass…” FUCKING WANNABE SHIT —Holy shit, Victoria was still surprised at her own internal wrath, “…what does she make you feel?”

She also asked because she was genuinely curious. What did Max do to her that she couldn’t? ?

Kate stopped drawing and for a second she stayed silent, biting her lip. At first Victoria thought Kate wasn’t going to answer until Kate’s mouth opened, “I see Max and I feel as though all my worries aren’t there. I feel as though no matter what happens, she’ll be there to support me. I can trust her with my life and it’s…it’s one of the most freeing feelings. I just feel light enough and strong enough to do whatever I want. She just brings out things about me that aren’t normal, like rebelliousness, like forgetting what happened to me, like instead of Ashitaka I can be Princess Mononoke…”

Victoria let out a small chuckle and felt Kate nudge Victoria with her elbow, “that’s the best way I can describe it.”

“No, it’s a great description” Victoria admitted, “just disgustingly cute.” Victoria let out a embellished huff to cover her own self-sorrow, “ugh, all of your feelings are adorable. What else? Please, my heart needs more fluff in my life.”

Encouraged, Kate continued, “And when I think of her I…I, uh…um…I feel…”

Kate trailed off, that bit of insecurity sneaking back and tugging that smile down. Victoria nudged Kate’s shoulder with her own. She had a suspicion of what Kate was going to say, but she wanted Kate to feel comfortable enough with herself to admit it.
Kate bit her lip, before uttering “...want.” Kate’s fingers dug into the grass, as if trying to both rip out and bury her confession.

Victoria nodded. She didn’t have the wish to poke Kate’s pain and make her clarify her desire. Max; Super Max, Mad Max, the Every Day hero, Max ‘the one with a gift’ made Kate feel so strongly that it made her nervous. The bottom of Victoria’s heart whimpered in pain. Was she truly that ugly and insignificant that Kate wouldn’t even bat an eye in her direction? Why couldn’t Victoria ever make people feel that way about herself?

Let it go, Victoria. You did this to yourself you dumb ho.

“Nothing wrong with that.” Victoria answered, looking at the girl who made her feel so strongly that it made her feel nervous. Kate looked at her, a light sheen of hope within her eyes, “I mean it’s healthy, it’s human. People have been wanting each other since us lizards crawled up onto land… or when God made people whatever you believe.”

A tiny giggle came out of Kate’s throat and she rubbed the side of her knee against Victoria, “the bible never specified how long a day was. It could’ve been billions of years just to get to Wednesday. Besides, something pretty magnificent had to be there to help orchestrate the big bang, the universe and evolution, don’t you think?”

Huh. That was an interesting way of viewing things.

“I know you’re right.” Kate sighed, “but you have no idea how much abstinence has been planted into me. Ever since I was a child I was taught that anyone, boy or girl - make no mistake the girls get the much harsher scrutiny - who is found out to be have premarital relations is kind of blacklisted and is judged by God. Your purity is marred forever.”

“Purity is marred? What a crock of shit. The scarlet ‘A’ much?” Victoria quipped, dry as a cracker. Kate nodded,

“If you adapted that into modern day social media - yes, yes and yes.” Kate confirmed. The two girls looked at eachother, quiet for a beat

Simultaneously the both spouted, “Easy A” then both giggled.

“Great movie.” Victoria idly pointed out, “Emma Stone’s breakout I believe.”

There was a brief moment where the two of them relaxed in the silence. Kate looked out towards the courtyard again and Victoria looked up, admiring how the light hit off the leaves. Then, a thought popped, loud and insistent in her skull, she turned back to Kate,

“You can still kiss and makeout right? That’s not sex.”

A gentle blush bloomed across Kate’s cheeks, it warmed Victoria’s heart and like a twelve year old who couldn’t sort out their feelings she continued to prod Kate, “Get that tongue up all in there, luh luh luh lick each other from the head to the toes…” Kate rose her knees and hid her face between them. It encouraged Victoria to continue, her tongue slithering behind her lips, “All that heavy petting and frottage--”

“Vic!” Kate called out, her face bright pink, “what is frottage anyways?”

Victoria grinned, mouth full of teeth, “Technically it’s when two people, at least two people anyway, rub against each other…” Kate’s eyes widened, “It’s an old term. Now the kids say ‘Dry humping-’”
Kate’s hand whapped Victoria’s arm, “VIC.” she squeaked, absolutely scandalized.

Victoria laughed, “hey, I’m just saying you can have plenty of fun without getting married. And I mean plenty...”

Kate put down her sketch pad besides her and then hid her face within her knees, letting out an adorable noise of frustration, “I already have Chloe telling me all the vocabulary that I never wanted to know.” Victoria let out a bark of laughter. If anyone knew stupid euphemisms for sex and dry humping, it had to be Price. Hmmmm, she’d have to ask Chloe to tell her some of them, if only just to torture Kate a bit more.

Kate’s fingers squeezed her kneecaps, “I mean, I know this, I’ve thought of this a lot already.”

Victoria’s ears pricked up. Before she had secretly envied Kate because she probably didn’t ever have to worry about suffering the agony that was ‘unfulfilled desires’. Before, Victoria had envied that miss abstinence android never thought about that primal need. However, like most things she originally thought about Kate, it appeared that she had been mistaken. Now that there was that possibility in the air, Victoria was hooked and listening to every word.

“I’m 18 now, said Kate. “This isn’t the 1940’s where a long and PC courtship is the norm. Now there’s ‘hook up’ culture, social dating apps, more and more acceptance of different sexualities. More and more tolerance for, uh, sexual liberties. People have expectations. People have needs. And I don’t know if I could fulfill them and, um, er,” she quickly added quietly under her breath, “even though I’d like to fulfill those needs, I don’t think I’d be any good” then she coughed, as though that would cover up what she just said, “I’ve never, um, let alone dated before so I don’t know how to navigate those waters of...physicality. I’m just right now...so...” Kate let out a huff of pained exasperation, “confused about this.”

Kate used the heel of her palm pressing it against her temple, “I just don’t...” Kate trailed off again. Usually Victoria was impatient and would not tolerate such stumbling or procrastination of communication. Usually she’d snap and demand that the other person get on with it. But with Kate, right now? She knew that the girl was unearthing something from deep within. Despite it being covered in the mess of feelings, she wanted to present it for Victoria. As a girl who also had her own dark, twisted secrets, it was an honor to be patient for Kate.

That and she was so fucking gay for Kate it wasn’t funny anymore.

“I don’t know who’s going to want to put up with this” Kate murmured. She stared straight ahead, avoiding Victoria’s eyes. However, even at that angle, Victoria could catch the specific torment within Kate’s eyes. The testament of someone who had been torturing themselves of not being good enough. Oh, how Victoria knew that well enough. It wasn’t just envy that made Victoria’s chest squeeze in on itself; but it was also empathy.

Asides from the spontaneous, secret rendezvous and the great sex, the only thing romantic about her and Rachel’s relationship was how devastatingly one-sided the feelings had been.

Even their conversations had seemed a bit one-sided. Don’t get her wrong, Rachel was an intelligent, interesting girl. Certainly an opposing point of view that Victoria never considered. Rachel definitely listened and would talk idly about anything and everything but herself. Pretty soon she had learned that Rachel placated her more than anything and like a toy, she’d play with her a while and seem
super interested before dropping her and going to the next one.

Rachel hadn’t been the first one to be so subtly dismissive of Victoria. Actually, every person that Victoria had ever been seriously interested in had dismissed her. In her darkest most isolated moments Victoria would obsess over why they didn’t return her feelings. Was she not good enough? Did they simply not want to put up with her? Was her issues somehow too much to handle?

But that was in the past.

“Speaking as someone who’s done the deed plenty of times,” Victoria started, “sex is fun and all, but it’s not everything.” Kate looked up at her, a bit surprised,

“Really?”

“Yeah. I mean, if you’re just hooking up then whatever. But even then, you can hook up with someone and not choose to do anything penetrative. I’ve had an absolutely lovely time just making out with people.”

Kate’s eyes widened for a split second, as though her brain had a revelation. Victoria continued, “so, consent is the hottest thing. There’s a huge difference in ‘oh, I’ll let you do that to me’ and ‘oh yeah, I want it’ so if the other person wants to go down under and you don’t, then don’t. You’re under no obligation to give what the other person wants. It’s a team effort. Two to tango, y’know what I mean? Both people need to be having a good time in order for it to be a great time. If someone’s not into it then it’s just ‘meh.’” Kate nodded slowly, as though the pieces were just only being revealed to her now. “Like, I’ve fooled around with a bunch of people but only ‘hooked up’ proper with a few people.”

“Really?” Kate asked, like a curious child. The way Kate looked so sincerely surprised embarrassed Victoria immensely to where she felt her neck become warm.

Victoria felt herself shrink in sheepishness, “yeah. Whatever.” when she had lost her virginity, it had been more of a deal; a ‘let’s get this over with and move on with our lives.’ Then there had been Rachel, who had been her first time with a girl and, well, first time where she really wanted more than an experience with. Of course Rachel had been a train-wreck of an experience. Then there had been a guy at that party in Seattle the summer after where she had sloppily tried to rebound with. Ugh. Rather than make her forget Rachel it had been utterly forgettable. Then the first off-campus party this year there had been that other person where she got too wasted and snuck off in some dark corner with them to do the deed. When the other person put their hands in her pants she started ugly drunk sobbing and like a swerving pinball, she ran off, leaving the other person drunk and concerned.

“Like, I’m just saying that if you don’t want to do something, don’t. If the other person’s cool they’ll get it, if not then they’re just a douchebag that doesn’t deserve your time anyway.”

Kate nodded very slowly. It both relieved Victoria that Kate was taking this in and truly unnerved her that Kate probably never had a discussion about what ‘consent’ was. A part of her shivered, thinking if not for this conversation right now, Kate probably wouldn’t know what consent really was until even later in her life.

“And, like, if you’re not just hooking up and you both are really into eachother...sex isn’t everything
Kate’s eyes bugged out at her. Offended, Victoria smacked at Kate’s arm, “Oh Come on don’t give me that look! This is just common sense! If I met someone that I sincerely liked, if you want a relationship with someone there’s a lot more than just that -- even you know that or did your parents really lock you in some sort of convent?” Kate shrugged, a rather lop-sided smile on her face. She didn’t answer. Victoria, beyond annoyed, huffed, “ugh, fine, since your stupid parents locked you in a damn chastity closet there’s a huge difference between hooking up with someone, dating them and being in a relationship. Hooking up is just all physical, dating them is testing out if you can work out the emotional/mental bits and being a relationship is the whole package. That includes having good conversation; just chilling and relaxing together; able to work shit out through arguing conductively...There’s so much more than just banging and if there isn’t then it isn’t a good relationship.”

“And if there’s no banging at all?” Kate asked, even though looking like she had some spirit back in her body there was a bit of caution in her eyes.

Victoria shrugged, “that’s something you and whoever you date will figure out. And again,” Victoria wiggled her eyebrows, “you both can luh-luh-luh lick each other---” Kate’s hand shot up and gently covered Vic’s mouth,

“Shhhhh” she pleaded. Victoria opened her mouth and let her tongue rebel by slobbering all over Kate’s palm,

Kate yanked her hand back, absolutely shrieking, “VIC!”

Victoria cackled, all her fangs showing,

Kate, a touch horrified stared at her palm, then reached over to rub it on Victoria’s legging, Victoria pushed off Kate’s arm, “Hey! Don’t you wipe that on me!”

“It’s your saliva!”

“Girl, you stuck your hand in my mouth, your damn fault!”

Kate grumbled and surrendered, wiping her hand on her own skirt.

Kate: 0

Victoria: +1

That momentary burst of smug victory fueled Victoria to continue, “So, like physical chemistry is always important. People say looks don’t matter but they do; like they don’t have to be a super model to anyone else but they have to be damn fine to you. However, if you really like them, then you’re going to want the other sides of them, and you’re going to want to relax around them too. Like you don’t have to always be this hot sexy mama all the time…”

“Unless you’re just born that way” Kate quipped.

“Of course, like you say, I have to thank God for that,” a smirk of ire curled Kate’s lips as she rolled her eyes “anyways, you can just be yourself, be cranky, be happy. Like, you actually want to do shit with them, like going to the grocery store would be the coolest thing…”

“The grocery store?”
“It’s just an example! Sheesh, let me finish, so like doing boring crap is fun. Even if it’s not fun that’s just what you want to do. You know you really like someone if you’d ditch a party just to hang out with them and watch Nausicaa and the Valley of the Wind…”

Kate’s grin just became larger and larger as Victoria continued and it was only then that she realized that she was digging herself a deeper and deeper grave.

“If you really like someone sometimes you just want to...walk down the street….holding hands….and whatever.” Victoria answered, her voice becoming a mumble by the end of her sentence.

There was a couple moments of silence as Victoria only heard the leaves and grass gently sway in the cold breeze. Then she felt Kate shift besides her.

“You’re a romantic…” Kate uttered, her voice leaking endeared revelation. Victoria looked away, willing her cheeks to chill out and stop being so damn pink and embarrassed.

“Oh shut up. Whatever, I get it. ‘Victoria’s a slut.’ ‘Victoria wants the D.’ Much to the utter shock of everyone I have a heart just like everyone else, too. And I, just like everyone on this entire planet, would like to be in love with someone who loves me too.”

A rather sentimental look came across Kate’s hazel eyes, “I never thought you didn’t have a heart, Victoria.”

Victoria simply huffed. Feeling her brows furrow as the echo of you’re going to be sorry one day rang in her ears. It made her so pissed off when Kate lied like this. Of course she had thought Victoria was heartless. Victoria thought she, herself, was heartless too. Out of her peripheral she saw Kate observe her, as if thinking about what to say next. If she was going to address how fucking awful Victoria could treat other people at times. How fucking awful Victoria had treated her.

Thankfully, Kate decided to spare Victoria’s feelings and instead she wrapped her hands around Victoria’s bicep.

“I still think it’s rather sweet that you believe in love.” Kate cooed at her, fingers rubbing along her arm in such a way that made Victoria’s heart stand up and swoon.

Externally she just rolled her eyes, “of course, I’m an artist. We live and breath romanticism. It’s our job.”

Kate’s eyes twinkled, “of course.” She said, placating Victoria into believing that her secret gushy heart was still as secret. Victoria both loathed and was a bit happy that Kate had uncovered another secret of hers; she was a die-hard romantic.

There was a reason she loved Studio Ghibli movies; their subtle, unsaid romantic subplots were the stuff that true love was made of. Moulin Rouge was her favorite live-action movie not just because the cinematography, acting and music was phenomenal- but that romance was devastating.

The English Patient was another one of her favorite epics because the love portrayed had been so emotionally complicated, true and messy.

She had silently believed in soulmates until she had been thirteen and asked her mother if she thought
Victoria’s father was her soulmate.

“No. Soulmates is such a silly concept. If you take in the universe and how infinitely large it is, as well as all sorts of multi-universal theories, soulmates don’t make sense. However, right here, right now I love your father and that’s what matters.”

Victoria, disappointed in her mother’s rather sensible answer decided that perhaps soulmates was the wrong term. She settled on ‘true love’ in this universe.

She had crushes and had ‘dated’ back in her previous high-school in Seattle. And while those had been nice and sweet, nothing had quite prepared her for Rachel Amber. She had hated that girl at first, then Rachel wiggled her way into her heart like a parasite. As the infected host Victoria was a goner.

Again, the sex had been great. However Victoria found herself yearning to walk side by side with Rachel holding hands in the daylight. She wanted to stop fooling around long enough to talk about real shit. She wanted to go on tangents for Rachel; like how the gender, societal and sexuality commentary that Sailor Moon had brought up was revolutionary during the late 80s, early nineties. She had wanted to bury her face in Rachel’s neck and take a nap. She wanted to take her out to the stupid functions her parents forced to go to and show her off ‘look, she’s with me.’ She had wanted to take Rachel to meet her parents and have the awkward yet hilarious dinner where they interrogated her. More than anything she wanted to go do boring shit with Rachel, like take her to the import food shop that Victoria always raided.

Fuck. She just wanted to feel disgustingly domestic with her.

Apparently she only did that shit with Chloe though.

Once she was driving past the parking lot of whatever local pesticide filled junk grocery store they had in Arcadia Bay and she nearly crashed the car when she saw Chloe Price and Rachel Amber pushing each other at full sprint around in full shopping carts, looking as though they were having the time of their lives.

Sometimes Rachel would make off-handed comments about having to cook brunch with Chloe or hanging out at her house and bugging her mom. Or how she was going to kick it with Chloe and just chill out. It still embarrassed Victoria how she was more jealous of the two of them hanging out than she was if Rachel had just been banging her.

The closest she ever got to a vulnerable Rachel was when she was in between her naked thighs or that one time they got so stoned that Rachel absent-mindedly revealed that her father and mother beat the shit out of each other from time to time, were incredibly volatile around each other and neglected Rachel during their explosive episodes. Before Victoria could gently pull more out of her; or just hold Rachel protectively in her arms and assure that she was there for her, Rachel sucked at her neck and pushed off Victoria’s shirt and that was the end of that.

In short, Victoria was low-key totally into relationships (part of her was in complete denial about this to her own self). When and if she ever found someone to inspire such feeling from her she’d be down to buy them gifts, cuddle them and spoil them rotten if she could. She had the resources to anyways.

There was a little amused smile on Kate’s face as she looked up at Victoria. It made her both incredibly self-conscious and happy to see how Kate looked relieved. Kate’s shoulders did a little happy wiggle as she said, “I’ll take your word.”
Victoria put her fingers over Kate’s hands on her arm, “Damn straight.”

“No, not at all” Kate answered politely. It took Victoria a split second to catch the joke but when she did both of them erupted into only the goofiest of laughing fits. As both of them caught their breaths Victoria watched Kate’s face lighten enough to grin and shine that smile that could power the sun. As Kate lifted up her hand to brush her wayward bangs out of her face all Victoria wanted to do was to clasp those fingers within her own and kiss the inside of Kate’s wrist. Kiss up her palm to the tips of her fingers in reverence.

God, how she longed to openly express her inner romantic.

She had tried multiple times with multiple people with no success. When she had tried to clasp Rachel’s hand she’d squirm out of it immediately. Like, man, Rachel could bed you, ride you and bring out your best sexual performance but fucking call the police if you tried to hold her hand. It would flit away into her pocket, crossed protectively into her arms or fly up, playing with the feather earring.

Victoria loathed back then how every time she was silently denied it would crush her. After Rachel had disappeared died she had promised herself that she would never feel like that towards anyone else again.

The universe had different ideas because now more than anything Victoria wanted to hold Kate’s hand. It was an even worse craving because, unlike Rachel, she had held Kate’s hand before and if that’s what it felt like platonically, she was dying to know what it felt like to intertwine their fingers in such a way lovers do. Last year Rachel had her chained by the neck and tugged at her feelings like a leash. Now, Victoria figured out that the emotions of that tryst felt muted in comparison to what Kate was making her feel.

Kate, in all her humble unassuming nature, brought out even stronger feelings than Rachel ever could try.

(Yeah. Shove it. Bitch)

((Victoria was still working on the whole ‘forgiveness’ thing, but she’d get there.))

Victoria felt the jade lift off her cold heart as she admitted to herself that Kate deserved to find some happiness with someone. She deserved to find a classy woman who would respect her boundaries and support her as she worked them out. At the very least, Kate deserved to realize that she could find such a lady,

“So, TL;DR, I know you have a lady-boner for Caulfield but you can do so much better.” Victoria declared with the knowledge that she was delivering elite facts to Kate.

“I can’t do anything at all, she’s taken.” Kate replied glumly, her hands sliding off Victoria’s arm and back on her kneecaps.

“Yeah, yeah she and Price are ‘co-captains of a Pirate ship - terrorizing the high-seas forever’ or whatever that crackhead told me, and they seem pretty exclusive. But, look, they’re weirdos. They call themselves pirates! Like a pair of four year old children! Do you really want to be part of that infantilism? I’m saying that you can find someone else who’s at least a little less weird.”
Kate gave a noncommittal grunt, her cheeks puffed out in skepticism. Victoria dared herself to put her hand on top of Kate’s hand and give her knee a shake, trying to get Kate to see reality.

“Max isn’t the only hipster queer girl on this planet and she’s definitely not the only one here. This is a school that supports artists, there’s a bunch of gay girls here and even more that are undercover about it.”

“Undercover lesbians?”

“Like you.”

“Oh.”

“We go to a junior college with a significant amount of artists – of course there’s a lot of gays here. There’s other visual artists, designers, writers and even science gay chicks that would blow your mind.”

Kate stood up, brushing her skirt off, “I don’t know, Victoria.” She said as she picked up her bag, “Sometimes I think God made photographers very special in my life for a reason. For better or for worse.” As she swung the straps around her shoulders, “My class is going to start in ten minutes. I’ll see you later.”

Through her dry mouth and tight throat, Victoria managed to respond, “see you later.”

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She waited until she heard the shutter box click emanate from that antiquated polaroid shit box before she said, “So super Max actually goes out and shoots? I thought the only thing in your repertoire were selfies.”

There was a brief flinch of shock from Max before she blinked, “hey Victoria.” she responded. Victoria bit the inside of her cheek as her first instinct was to KICK THE LITTLE WEIRDO. It infuriated her how Max just looked at her with such...understanding. What the Fuck did that girl know about Victoria? It unnerved her how Max with her deep blue eyes and even deeper gaze seemed to...know her much better than she could.

Vic. Come on. Relax. Winona Ryder reminded her. Victoria fixed her bangs back into the proper position, “However it’s something I need to get on, myself. You have to keep shooting in order to get the image.” she admitted, extending a silent olive branch. She’d much rather extend a peace pipe but this would do.

For a moment Max’s eyes glazed over and she appeared to be looking far away, “Always take the shot” she mumbled. And just for a moment Victoria felt like it was September, back in the photography room, back when she would stare at a bearded tall man with broad shoulders lecture at their class...

Victoria felt a deep chill reverberate through her bones. before she just offered her hand forward. Max looked at her hand, confused.

“Well, come on, let’s see them.”
Max raises some of the polaroids and Victoria mutely took them, bring the small squares up to her eyes so she could scrutinize them.

They’re on point.

How this weirdo had such great instinct astounded her. Victoria wanted to rip them up into tiny shreds just like how she wants to rip up Max’s face. She squeezes the white corner with a malicious envy. Before something scathing can come out of her mouth, a gentleness bloomed behind her eyes.

Instead though, she forces herself to speak the truth, “The composition’s good. However it’s a shame that the colors clash here.” Max steps closer, peering at her own picture. Victoria pointed it out, “see? Everything he’s wearing clashes with the grass. It confuses the eye and your composition gets overlooked” Victoria had to credit Kate for heightening her attention towards color composition. Max nodded her head,

“Unfortunately I can’t control what people wear.”

“If we had a fashion police around you wouldn’t have to.”

“You mean fashion Gestapo?”

“If that’s what it takes from fucking up your photos, then yes, let’s get it.”

Max chuckled out loud. “Anything for the perfect photo.” She rubbed her nose, than said, “thanks Victoria, I always appreciate sharing notes with you. It means a lot when someone who’s really good gives their critique.”

Fluffy, happy feelings spurted out of Victoria’s heart and flew all around inside her chest. Victoria casually responded, “Despite your weirdness, you certainly have a unique eye. Perhaps I’ll let you look at my photos as well.”

“Just let me know when you’re ready and my eyes are yours.”

“I asked for your opinions not your eyeballs, gross.”

Max laughed, then gave her one of those infamous sideways smiles, “See you in Photography, Victoria.”

Victoria walked away, despite having to carry her heavy heart she felt a small smile on her face. No wonder Kate was infatuated with Max. Max was laid-back and wonderful. Like so freaking eccentric and lame, but wonderful in a way that she knew Kate loved. Victoria’s heart yelled obscenities and Victoria had to quell the disappointment within her chest. She was going to have to let this go and feel free from this jealous madness.

Maybe she could actually be friends with Caulfield.

Maybe they’d just have a great time pushing eachother to be better and better skilled at their craft.

Maybe she could just appreciate Max in all her strange glory.

Maybe she could let go that everyone loved Max more than they loved her.
Maybe she could forgive Max for being worthy of Kate’s feelings where she could never be.

Maybe...just maybe she could let Kate go.

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Later on that evening while Victoria was pintresting up some new fashion releases and photoshopping some of the new styles together, experimenting with new, interesting looks. Her ears wiggled, as though someone was distracting her through her trance music. Yep...there was something...

She turned down the volume of the speakers and took a couple of seconds to realize that it was a voice. She further turned down the volume while wondering who was talking so loud. Now, the walls weren’t exactly solid concrete and relatively easy to listen to whatever was happening through the wall, but it sounded like someone was yelling?

When she realized that it was coming through Kate’s wall she turned off the music, her curiosity piqued. Who the Hell was that? Was someone arguing with Kate? At that thought Victoria immediately stood up. Who on earth would be shouting at Kate? How dare they! Did she have to bust through the wall and Jason Statham their ass?

Wait.

Was that Kate shouting?

Almost as soon as it had began, it stopped.

A sudden chill vibrated through Victoria’s skin. What was causing Kate to shout? The only time she ever heard Kate shout was when Kate wrecked her car. It had literally taken a car crash to get Kate to raise her voice to that level.

What had just happened?

Victoria picked up her phone to shoot Kate a text but paused before she could type the first message. She spun the phone around using her fingers before she headed towards the door.

In less than thirty seconds Victoria stood in front of Kate’s door and knocked on the entrance.

Through the cheap barrier she heard another muffled shout “It’s open!” Victoria felt her brow raise in curiosity. Despite the dry-wall in between them, Kate clearly sounded annoyed. Hmmm.
When Victoria opened the door she saw Kate pacing, picking random clothes, folding them. Her back was tense and limbs seemed rigid. She refused to look at Victoria. Victoria closed the door and leaned against the wall, observing Kate.

“So.” Victoria stated out loud.

“So what?” was Kate’s polite and curtly lobbed back response.

“What happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Really.”

“Yes. Really. Nothing has happened and everything is normal.”

“Ok.” Victoria brushed off. Kate may have been nonplussed but Victoria was fearless. She promised she’d be the best friend that Kate never had and as Kate herself had proved to Victoria, sometimes that meant calling them out on their bullshit,

“So, nothing happened, everything is normal, the sun is shining and you decided ‘you know what Jesus, I’m going to be royally pissed off today. Just because.”

Kate stopped what she was doing, squeezing the random sweater in her hands. “Who says I’m pissed off?” she demanded.

Victoria smirked, it was quite clear that Kate was fuming over something. In a way, it was a little cute that Kate was throwing her own version of a bratty tantrum. Victoria wasn’t going to lie, it felt really nice to finally be on the opposite end of the spectrum for once.
She approached the irritated girl, “Katie,” Victoria spoke, dragging the girls name out with a saccharine tone, “it’s obvious that something’s upset you.” she reached out and gently rested her hands on Kate’s shoulders, letting her thumbs stroke the cloth of the cardigan soothingly, “What’s made you angry? Who was it? Tell Mistress Vic their name and she’ll ruin their lives.” Victoria purred into her ear.

“I’m not angry” Kate whined. Despite her defiance Victoria heard the blunt strength of her voice soften and how her shoulders had relaxed ever so slightly within her hands. Victoria’s lips couldn’t help but curve in ire. What was this girl trying to prove?

She spun Kate around to face her, “Girl, you are literally the worst liar on the planet.” Victoria pointed out, again. Seriously, Victoria lied like it was a sport, what made Kate think she could fool anyone, let alone her? Kate simply looked away and stepped out of Victoria’s radius,

“Come on, let me know what’s up. I love good trash talking” Victoria persisted.

Kate’s hands jittered around, jumping at any excuse to punch or pull something. Victoria had been there plenty of times. Part of her was excited. It was twisted but she kind of loved when Kate was angry. It thrilled Victoria to see that storm that brewed underneath her very polite, proper skin.

It thrilled her to know that Kate was letting Victoria see her humanity.

“Nothing’s up. I’m fine.” She muttered, bitterly. Her hands randomly picked up things, searching for anything out of place just so they could move and try to burn whatever excess energy was in them. Victoria knew a far better and pleasurable way to burn off energy…an activity that required at least two people, ahem, but she was going to keep that to herself for now. Victoria leaned on one hand on Kate’s desk, her eyes flicked to the pages below…

The quick pen lines clearly displayed a new rabbit. This time it’s jaw was wide open. Open so wide that the jowls hide the eyes. The mouth showed off it’s few but very large teeth. It was if it were shouting a great big “FUCK YOU” to the viewer.

Victoria looked back at Kate, confident, “Come with me.” Victoria declared,“we’re going out.”

Kate immediately stopped what she was doing and her head whipped back to Victoria, “What?” Kate asked, “where?”

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The Two Whales wasn’t exactly the best place she wanted to take Kate. Paris, Rome, New York, Portland and even her hometown of Seattle were better places with better environments and better restaurants to take the current girl of her heart to and woo her. But they were in Arcadia Bay and for a 6pm on a Wednesday night this would have to do.

Victoria’s ordered some stupid salad in the pretense of being healthy. As if the chef back there knew
what to do with lettuce and raw vegetables other than throw it away to be compost. Kate could probably make something more appetizing with the ingredients for Alice. But the food in question wasn’t what Victoria was after (again, French import shop for that, remember?).

Interestingly enough, Kate ordered the ‘jumbo breakfast for dinner’ special. Seeing that huge plate being put before Kate had alarmed Victoria a touch as Kate wasn’t one that ate very much. At least not in her presence. When Victoria had seen her eat, Kate would nibble. It didn’t matter if it was a burrito, or soup or paella, she would just nibble away, taking her time. Part of Victoria wanted to shake Kate and tell her that she could open her mouth and take a huge bite. That she could just end everything in one chomp and be done with it. But then watching Kate eat was both fascinating and endearing. Adorable.

Kate stared at her food, then looked up at Victoria who simply waved her hand, prompting Kate to start. “Girl, I don’t have anything to say, life’s been going fabulous for me all things considering.” Victoria stated.

Kate unrolled her fork and knife from the napkin and took one in each hand. Her eyes avoided Victoria’s.

She took her fork and stabbed at the bacon. Finally, she stated with a rather frustrated blunt to her voice, “My aunt May’s been calling my mother.” Kate’s knife sawed into the crispy bits of fried pork. “She’s been calling everyone in the community. Talking to everyone that’ll listen to her or isn’t deaf.”

The last bits of flesh tore away and Kate’s knife swept over to the eggs. Victoria was keenly aware of how Kate’s knife sliced through the egg yolk. The cut immediately made it bleed heavily all over the plate.

“That my brief possession by the devil has tainted me. Put a smudge on my purity…”

Then her knife sliced through the ham, tearing at the hot pink flesh with no mercy.

“That my future husband and his family is going to have to be real kind and love some damaged goods. Like, going to a garage sale and finding something you love, but is just a bit broken. It’ll be fine for most men. Not all. But most.” Kate spoke with a factual detachment with just a hint of bitterness. Her fork punctured the stack of pancakes and her knife cut through the fluffiness and deflated them.

Then the fries were then tossed in, smashed and stuck in with the glue that was hardening yolk and egg whites.

It was O.K though. Victoria had already lost her appetite as well.

“So. My mother called. Crying and worrying that I’m becoming even more damaged than I already am.” Kate stopped poking at her mess of a plate, “She begged me, again, to come home and forget about all this. But even if I did go home,” Kate reasoned with a sardonic smile, “it’s already too late, isn’t it?”

Victoria nodded slowly, completely understanding the wide scope of Kate’s statement. “The easy ‘A’” She muttered out loud. If Kate were to go home, she might as well just sewn the scarlet “A” onto all her shirts ahead of time.

Kate twisted her fork within the chaos on her plate, the poor eggs gushing thick gold and clumpy white, ‘no matter how much of a good person I am, no matter how many golden deeds I do…it’ll
never be enough to redeem myself.” There’s a rather ugly scowl on her face for just a moment before it disappears, “as aunt May says, I’m tainted and God will just have to forgive me for it.”

There’s about a good twenty seconds of silence as Victoria processed the fucking absurdity she just heard. What? Kate Marsh tries to live her life like any other teenager, gets taken advantaged of by several sharks in the water and somehow it’s her fault? How could her family still be punishing her for something like this? And how the fuck was she tainted? Kate was certainly damaged but who wasn’t? Also there was no reason that she couldn’t become even stronger and better. No one would care if she had made out with a bunch of people or if she had been a victim. She was an amazing person and her future accomplishments and deeds to the world would solidify her as one of the finest people the earth ever had.

Kate then shrugged, “but that’s that.” She put her fork and knife down, not touching her food.

Nope. Nope, nope, nope. Kate’s entire attitude ticked Victoria off, “what do you mean that’s that? Are you just going to take this?”

Kate looked away, “it’s fine. Story of my life, I’ll get over it.”

“It’s not fine. This is fucking outrageous. I’m so pissed off right now”

Kate hid her hands under the table, still not looking at Victoria, “That’s just you then, I’m O.K”

Victoria felt her eyes bug out before she cawed, “Ok? What? There’s no way you’re peachy girlfriend.”

“Peachy as the peachiest peach.” Kate retorted. If Victoria wasn’t so outraged and confuddled at the moment she would’ve found that answer adorable.

Victoria bit her tongue before she could blurt Pull your head out of your ass, instead she took a silent breath in through her nose and asked, calmly, “How are you not furious?”

“It’s normal.”

“This isn’t-“ Victoria caught herself. Yes, she was a privileged cis, white women that came from money and was brought up in a liberal, well educated area and her experience was actually only a very tiny part of America. “I get it’s probably normal but it’s not right” Victoria continued, “you weren’t possessed, you were drugged! You were entirely innocent. How is it right that someone can punish you for circumstances entirely out of your control? That’s like if ‘Taken’ was about Liam Neeson getting his daughter back and punishing her for getting kidnapped. ”

Victoria caught how Kate’s entire body flinched. She kept going on her tirade because there was no way that she was letting Kate live in this self-flagellating delusion any longer.

“Also, what is up with this purity thing? It’s a lie! It’s some stupid gold, double-standard that was implemented and spread by the patriarchy because weak men hate and are intimidated by the power of female sexuality and needed to find a way to oppress it in order to feel better about themselves! It’s bullshit. I think today we call it ‘slut-shaming’” Victoria winced at her own words. “which you’re not a slut. Totally not. But even if you were, then you’d still be just as fabulous as before…”

“I get it.” Kate mumbled pushing around her artful slop of salty breakfast with her knife, “but I’m pretty chill about this. Nothing’s wrong.”

Ok, so maybe Victoria used a couple of wrong key words there but it was pissing her off how Kate was still brushing her off. “You’ve always keep telling me to talk to you. Just talk to you when I’m
upset or when’s something’s wrong. Practice what you preach, girl.” Victoria called her out.

“There’s nothing to discuss. It’s over.” Kate mumbled more.

Victoria narrowed her eyes. Time to change strategies.

“Say this wasn’t you Kate. Say this was...Max.” Victoria pointed out, purposefully going for the jugular on this one, “what if Max came to you, saying she was going through the exact same thing…Same community shunning her for being a victim. Same cunty Aunt May making her life a living Hell. Same mother trying to save her for something that’s not her fault…” Victoria leaned forward, “would you honestly tell her, ‘that’s that’?”

There’s a tiny frown on Kate’s face, a sizzle of something underneath her skin. Something began to smolder behind those Hazel corneas. There. There it is. Victoria thought and she continued, poking the wound. “I don’t believe you would ever let Max go on thinking for a Damn second that this was normal or that this was just her life. I think you’d recognize that this was completely unjust. I think you’d want to Marvel this shit and make it right. I think you’d find that this was unfair…”

The frown on Kate’s face strengthened to a scowl. Her brow twisting in some sort of ugly emotion. Yes. Keep going. Victoria told herself. Kate needed to vent. Kate needed to let off some steam. Kate needed to admit the fucked up shit going on in her life. Perhaps Kate could never admit it to anyone else. However her and Victoria had been practicing an absolute brutal honesty with the two of them. Despite the agony, Victoria had found that the process had ultimately been rewarding. Kate had done this for her. Kate had put up with her stupid crap for her. Victoria was going to do the same for her.

“You’ve called me on bull shit and I’m doing the same to you. It hurts, I know. Because I think you’d try and shake Max out of whatever masochistic delusion she was setting up for herself. I think you’d try and tell her that whatever belief system that has made her try and shut down her own feelings is bullshit. I think you’d ask her, ‘what are you afraid of?’ ”

“Because I don’t want to be like you.” Kate says with such icy conviction that Victoria feels the blow sink straight into her chest and take her breath away.

Time slowed until everything felt sluggish and the noises around her barely registered as echoes within her ringing eardrums. She stares at Kate within that moment of being physically, emotionally and mentally stunned. Just that image of Kate, her arms crossed, peering at her with such….disgust. The plate of picked at food, angled just so. The cup of weak tea with the string hanging out. The color of her jacket stood out against the booth’s faded red. Her dirty blonde hair making those disdainful eyes pop. It’s a great fucking picture.

Then, the absolute mess of emotions avalanche upon Victoria and it burns.

The rage boils her sinuses.

The sadness drowns her heart.

The conflicting feelings ravage every organ within her body.

That fucking whore, I’m going to murder her.

I’m disgusting.
Fuck it! Get on that roof! Come on!

Everyone hates me

You should’ve jumped you fucking piece of worthless FUCK.

I’m a monster.

GO DIE!

I SHOULD DIE!

Victoria felt the all the volatile sentiment swirl so violently within her blood that she felt sick.

FUCKBITCHGODSORRYHATREDAGONYDEVASTATIONCUNTPLEASEDAMNYOUTOHELL-

Kate laughing with her on her couch after watching Azumanga Daioh

Kate’s little finger hooking around hers as they watched the sunrise

Kate rubbing her back as she cried in the forest.

Kate holding her hand as they sang out in the car.

Kate smiling at her as she held her violin.

How Kate embraced her.

Kate kissing her forehead.

Something bright flashed behind her eyes and Victoria felt her entire body snap upright as the violence, the love, the pain explode out of her, “That isn’t possible!” Victoria’s voice erupting in volume. Kate flinched, not expecting the shout, “you’re not me and you don’t have the same stupid hang ups as I do. So don’t you dare ever compare yourself to me. You think I’m a bitch because I’m bitchy . I’m like this because I hate myself ."

Kate eye’s widened, completely not expecting that admission. But Victoria’s senses surged white hot that she didn’t notice it and kept going like a runaway tank, “Like, angry people don’t always hurt people like I do--- that’s specifically me. Fucking anyone who got anything done was pissed as Hell. Whether that be Mother Theresa or The Rock. They were fucking done with the shit being thrown at them and wanted to do something about it. What is up with labeling everything as though it’s going to careen you down to Hell? I’m Damn certain Jesus felt angry about how people were mistreating each other, which is why he decided to form Christianity! Anyone who says otherwise is a fucking idiot!”

“Girls, is everything alright?”

Victoria’s head whipped towards the offending noise because who the Hell dare interrupt her tirade-
That old waitress, her saggy arms rested on her hips, her lips in a tight frown. Victoria's biceps itched to claw and scratch at the hag.

“Everything’s fine” Victoria hissed so loudly that she accidentally spits fury. The waitress’s eyes furrowed and looked as though she was about to step in further when Kate lifted up her hands,

“Everything’s Ok, Joyce - trust me.”

Victoria bites her tongue so hard that the pain careens her ability to shout expletives. It was only then she realized just how quiet the restaurant had become. She quickly glanced around them. Everyone was staring. Oh who gave a shit about stupid nomadic truckers, drunkards and the few fishermen in this joint. They could listen all they fucking wanted. Victoria bet this was the best entertainment any of them had had in months. She bet her camera that they would still be talking about this for months to come. Worthless peasants.

Joyce apparently does trust Kate because who didn’t trust Kate. She backs off, keeping an eye on the two of them. “Keep it down, if you all wanna scream, do it outside and far away. Others come in here for a peaceful meal. Don’t be disrupting that.” the woman said in that motherly tone that was obviously directed at Victoria. Victoria simply clenches her hands into fists and refuses to give her a response.

Kate nodded, “got it, Joyce.”

Victoria barely waits for her to get to the other side of the room when she hisses again, “Take that dude that always looks constipated and is another wannabe Bansky--”

“Luke?”

“Yeah, that’s one pissed off guy-- but he’s also never picked a fight with anyone. I think he was one of the only people I heard that openly denounced your-” there’s just a brief hitch in her shrill voice, “your video.”

Kate nodded, “yes. That’s true…” there’s some clarity coming through on her face. Kate’s hung out with Luke in the past. Victoria’s seen them talking together either down the hall of on campus. He’s one of the more vocal members of the ‘Kate Protection Squad’ He must be a good guy if they’re friends.

Victoria threw up another hand, “just take fucking Price - that girl is the definition of angry white girl and still that girl has a loyal posse of stoners and hipsters that are fucking ride or die for her.”

Kate nodded yet again, the loathing dissipating from her eyes, the understanding clear within the hazel.

“Kate, to the rest of the world that’s not Jesus H Christ, it’s fine to be angry. It’s human to be pissed off. The only time that you should be worried is if that anger endangers yourself or others or takes something away from your personality. So, if your worry is that being angry is going to somehow make you like me, you’re so fucking delusional that it’s pathetic.”

Kate’s lips closed, pursed. She gave one last slow nod,

“Oh.” She whispered. Victoria squeezed her eyes shut, took a deep breath through her flared nostrils and dragged her hands back from across the table, crossing them over her chest. Victoria felt so burned that she didn’t even care at that moment.
For a few moments Victoria saw how Kate went from stunned clarity to surprised horror at what she had said to Victoria. Kate opened her mouth to try and respond, “Vic, I apologize---”

“Whatever, I get it.” Victoria snarled, incredibly pissed off herself and incredibly hurt. Yeah, she was an awful bitch and deserved a lot of the criticism flung at her. But whenever Kate pointed it out it hurt ten times worse and sent her heart reeling in pain. At that moment she just despised Kate.

For a long minute both girls sat there, silent. Victoria heard the other diners begin to make background noise again and for a moment she wondered if everyone had stopped to listen to the entirety of their drama. However, she didn’t give a fuck about if the other plebians heard them or not. Victoria glared at her food until it lit on fire and she willed it to burn to Hell. Out of her peripherals she saw Kate scratch at herself and look around. Her eyes large and watery. Ashamed.

Good.

She should be.

Bitch.

For a while, that’s how it remained. Victoria stewed and Kate agonized. The ambient noises of the diner couldn’t fill the gaping wound between them.

Kate glanced uneasily at Victoria. The self-proclaimed Queen of Blackwell still stubbornly refused to look at her. Kate opened her mouth then closed it. She opened her mouth again, “When I was little...I got in trouble a lot”

Victoria’s jagged green eyes finally looked at Kate. She immediately sneered, “oh? You let the bunnies escape from a pet store? You take someone’s pen and forget to return it? Oh... let me guess, you didn’t pray one night and daddy caught you.” it’s one of Victoria’s ugliest knee-jerk reactions but at the moment she couldn’t care less about it. She wanted to take a knife and cut anywhere she could at the other girl, anywhere soft and anywhere she could bleed.

Thankfully Kate understood that she deserved the momentary wrath and continued, “no, no, I wish I let the bunnies escape...but actually it was because I asked a lot of questions.”


“When I was in pre-school I was already learning about the bible and I had my favorite passages, verses and stories already. By the time I got into elementary I understood very clearly that we were supposed to live as Jesus would... I thought it was simple. Just follow His commandments and treat others with love and respect. But I was soon able to see the mortal contradictions around me...”
“Boohoo, story of every religion ever.”

Kate continued, brushing off Victoria’s vexation, “There was one boy, David. He was terrible. He was bigger than the others and picked on all the smaller kids. I couldn’t stand it as he was pushing us around, shoving sand in our face and other awful things… It was constantly pushed that if we prayed and repented our sins we would be forgiven by God and thus others should forgive us. However David just kept repeating the same actions… However Jesus said you should forgive when someone sincerely repents their sins. If you go around continuing to do the same actions then you’re not sincerely repenting. You’re just trying to get around being a crappy person.”

Victoria ground her teeth together. Where was Kate even going with this?

“One day at recess I saw him push another kid into the ground and I had enough so I began to shout at him that he was going to Hell because he was being a jerk and he stood for everything that the bible was against. The meek would rise and inherit the earth… pretty soon all the other kids got behind me and someone began to chant ‘Damn him to Hell’ which made all the other kids start chanting… we made him cry pretty bad.”

Victoria’s eyes widened and she bit the inside of her cheek to stop from laughing because, first, that was a fucking hilarious image of a bunch of kids chanting “Damn him to Hell.” And second, again, she wasn’t too sure where the other girl was going with this because if anything, that was a badass story. Third, If Kate was such a brazen crusader back then, why was she so reserved now?

“However, I soon learned why no one could reprimand him because he was the mayor’s son. The teachers investigated and it was learned that I was the ringleader of that event. I took full responsibility, he was a douchebag that needed to be told that he was not following the creed of the bible; to be kind to others. You want to know what happened to me?”

“They gave you the Christian medal of bravery?”

A small snort of humor “No, do you know what a hot hand is?”

Victoria shook her head. Hot hand? Did you spill hot sauce all over it or something?

“A hot hand is when someone takes a ruler and strikes the soft part of your hand. It burns. Then they would make me sit in the corner and call my parents. When I got home my mom would yell at me and give the back of my head a pretty hard smack” Kate unconsciously raised a hand where it rubbed the back of her skull. “So, whenever something like this would come up, I would speak out. I would be given a terrible excuse. I would be defiant. I would be given a hot hand. I would sit in the corner. My mother would yell at me and hit my head. It would happen again and again.” Kate’s head flinched a little as she talked about it. A dry, mirthless chuckle came out of her mouth “my mother used to say Ephesians 6:1

'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘ when I tried to fight back on that I would get smacked again… later on, when I would cry in my room my father would comfort me but tell me that I should listen to my mother because she had given birth to me and was only trying to lead me on the right path.” Kate took a crumpled up napkin and began to tear bits of it away.

“So, after that, I kept quiet and tried to behave.” Kate began to bloom with even more color and texture as she talked. Victoria listened in rapt attention.

“However there was that one time in fifth grade when were were studying the bible, I asked my teacher, ‘where are the dinosaurs?’” Despite the tension infecting the air with a thickness that coated her tongue so sticky she couldn’t even speak, Victoria began to laugh. Because, come on, could you
imagine a adorable 10 year old Kate asking about dinosaurs in the bible? That was the most wholesome image in her mind, ever.

Kate’s lips formed a wobbly smile, glad to see that Victoria’s fangs had been temporarily put away and she continued, “He shouted at me. Told me I was a disgrace for disrupting the class and for making fun of the Lord. But I wasn’t. My sister, who was five at the time got really into dinosaurs - much to my mother’s displeasure, but my father decided that if his daughter was interested, then she could learn, it was just a phase after all as all kids love dinosaurs—and she was learning all this information--- the cretaceous period, the jurassic period, the velociraptors, the stegosauruses...I just wanted to know if I had missed something. If these creatures were created by God or if they weren’t...The teacher was furious, I still remember how spit flew out of his mouth.” she picked at the dry skin on her fingers, “but he made me angry so I kept asking and I wouldn’t back down. I just wanted an answer. Yes, God created dinosaurs but we didn’t find proof until now. No, they’re fake and we don’t believe in them. Even a ‘we’re not sure yet’ would’ve satisfied me then at least we could’ve had a discussion. I mean it was quite clear that dinosaurs were everywhere-- do you know how much it blew my mind when I found out there were entire museums devoted to dinosaurs and evolution??” Victoria’s eyes bulged out of her head, “I’m serious, it blew my mind,” Kate then ran a hand through her bangs, continuing,

“I was given two hot hands, one for each hand, I was sent to the principals office... my mother shouted at me and gave me several hard cuffs to my head.” The gears began to turn within Victoria’s head as she watched Kate continually pick at the dry skin on her fingers, how her eyes roamed everywhere, as if a poor animal dropped in a strange place. Yes, she had heard that traditional areas in the country still allowed a bit of corporal punishment...

Kate was quite a petite girl. She couldn’t even imagine how small she had been when she was a child. She wondered if Kate’s eyes had teared up when she was forced to sit in the corner, holding her burning hands to her chest. She wondered if she had glared at the principal in defiance, or had avoided his gaze in annoyed defeat. There was also a sizzle of wrath within the roots of her teeth. Who the fuck punishes a tiny kid for asking about dinosaurs?

There was a huge show-case of the best projects that get showcased at the end of the year. Oh, if Ms. Marsh was there Victoria was going to smack a ho. See how that woman liked it.

Kate then picked up her fork and idly poked at her cooling food as she continued, “when I decided that I had to become an artist, I researched everything I could on what would make me better. The thing that I kept coming across was ‘live figure drawing’ but everyone wanted me to do something else, or concentrate on being nice to boys” Victoria didn’t miss how Kate stabbed the innocent sausage with her knife particularly hard, “so I found a live drawing class in the next town over. I snuck onto a bus and attended, paid for the class with my saved up allowance...Um...that’s when I learned that it was...um...”

“A gentle smile of awe graced Victoria’s face. She wished she had been there to see the mind-blown Kate, sweaty and staring at the naked models. The awakened protégé surrounded by bored and experienced students. That would’ve been a brilliant shot. Her chin tilted up, cheeks flushed pink with both embarrassment and revelation...
“I loved that class. But one day my cousin David caught me. He’s the eldest son of my Aunt May... Apparently he had been in that plaza for some reason or another,” then she added under her breath, “probably buying pot.”

Victoria already felt the dread rise within her chest and nauseate her. “One day when I got home from school there was an entire family intervention over it. Everyone either was pissed off or was so disappointed in me. My Aunt May accused me of following down the path of deviants such as the homosexuals and the sinners. I remember how she warned my mother that if she didn’t control me now then lust and gluttony would become my biggest problem as all the artists had out-of-wedlock babies and diseases… all I could think of was the teacher I had who I was learning so much from and my classmates, who had only been really nice to me…”Kate jabbed at her food again, “I lost it.” she mumbled, “I shouted at my aunt May and called her an uncultured fascist.” Victoria snorted. That was clever. She’d have to use that one on someone soon, “then my mom slapped me… and was grabbing at me, shaking me and telling me I should be ashamed of falling to evil and letting satan take control.”

Victoria felt her heart chill. So, she may go off on how sucky her own parents were but they had never touched her. They had never grabbed at her, they had never hit her, Hell, they barely hugged her. If anything, they touched her too little. It was one thing to have a fight with your parents, your family, a single friend. But this was in front of Kate’s entire family that was doing an intervention for her. Victoria’s heart palpitated as she tried to register what thirteen year old Kate must’ve felt in the moment. Current, 18 year old Kate paused, her eyes watered for a moment before she swallowed, “I ran out of the house.”

Kate looked out the window and scratched at herself again, “my father ended up finding me in some 24 hour Taco Bell. We had a long talk.” Kate’s neck and chest was beginning to flush a rather irritated red from the constant scratching. “I was so grounded. However, my father still wanted me to pursue art because he could tell that I had such a strong passion for it. He forgave me immediately for lying.” Kate’s eyes watered as she mentioned her father, “However, I was not to take figure drawing and he was ashamed that I would let myself fall to anger. “When angry, do not sin; do not ever let your wrath last until the sun goes down. Leave no room or foothold for the devil’ Ephesians 4:26-27 he was disappointed that I would lash out at my own family like that. Jesus wouldn’t act like that… He didn’t raise me to be like that… So after that night I just stayed quiet and took all this BS.”

Victoria felt her heart cramp in empathy. She knew what it was like to be forced to just shut up and eat shit. She knew what it was like to be forced to shut up and smile and act like the perfect girl. The perfect Chase prodigy.

“It was so strange to go to the live drawing class the first time I came to Blackwell. Like, I was so relieved that I could finally go without cousin David being around… at the same time I almost ditched it. Then It was kind of hard to explain to Ms. Hart why I was so behind almost every other student in the Visual arts department when it came to my anatomy. Like, she couldn’t get why my color, composition and design was good but my anatomy...sucked… But it’s something that all the teachers have told me that I have to catch up on.” Kate shook her head slowly. Then she a bitter chuckle came out of her throat. “How can I tell them that every time I go in, I think my Aunt May is going to humiliate me and I feel like I’m going to get slapped in the face?” her voice dried and died at the end of that sentence.

Victoria really didn’t have anything to say. But her eyes were glued to Kate’s expression and how her body began to fall apart after that admission.

How Kate twitched violently and she bit her lip as though she was trying to restrain her anguish.
Usually, when around strangers Victoria had no time for this shit. She couldn’t handle other people’s emotions. It made her incredibly uncomfortable. Like, keep your damn feels to yourself. The rest of us already have enough of our own shit to deal with. But if you were her friend, and somehow you had gotten through Victoria’s stupid walls. If you were worth it, then she was there. She remembered Taylor crying in her car as they drove to the hospital and she had reached over to hold her hand. When Nathan had being having weird freak out moments she would rub his back and stay close. She would run her hands through his thick hair and patiently wait for some bitchy comment from him. When he was bitchy, it meant he was O.K again. When Courtney had gotten her wisdom teeth removed she took her to get ice cream and pretended to be “the real housewives of squirrelwell” until Courtney couldn’t stop laughing through her pained mouth.

Before she could even contemplate whether or not this was awkward or ‘too much’ she reached across the table and took Kate’s hands. Her thumbs rubbed the back of Kate’s cold hands, trying to convey her empathy and affection, “Kate, your Aunt May is a shit lord.” Victoria said, her own voice surprisingly tender.

“I can’t say that about her.” Kate says, her eyes shining, more and more wet.

“Then I’m going to say it. Your Aunt May is a shit lord and your mother should be ashamed of herself. For not getting her head out of her ass to see that her daughter is truly talented and that she should support her because she’s amazing.”

Kate sucked in her lips. Wetness gathered, plump, in her eyelids. In that moment Victoria finally saw the source of Kate’s gaping wound. She spoke, “Katie. I’m not going to judge you for your feelings. Your anger doesn’t make you an awful person, in fact your feelings are so valid. You should be upset. You should be pissed off. I understand. Everyone you tell this to is going to understand. It’s ok to vent and to gripe. I do it all the time and it feels good,” seeing a tiny smirk of ire on Kate’s heartbroken face gave Victoria the fire to continue, “Looking at naked people doesn’t make you a sinner. Desiring them doesn’t make you one either. If that was the case then everyone whose ever looked at porn is going to Hell...and that isn’t stopping them. Kate, you’re explaining why you don’t like to get angry and hulk out, but really you’ve just told me how you’re brilliant. You’re pointing out people’s bullshit and not being just a mindless drone. People have tried to shut you down, slap you around and guilt you into believing otherwise and still you’ve grown past all that. You’re brilliant Katie...”

Fat tears slide out of Kate’s eyes as her fingers enclose around Victoria’s.

“No I’m not.” She warbled, “I’m terrible.”

For one of the first times in her young life, Victoria felt a complete absence of envy within her body as she gripped at Kate’s hands, “You’re brilliant.” she insisted, full of conviction.

Kate squeezed Victoria’s hands and her eyes scrunched closed. She grimaced as tears spilled out over her cheeks. A heart-breaking whimper came out from her throat as Kate sunk down into herself, hiding her head inbetween her elbows. Her back shook as she sobbed, her cries muffled by the dingy table. For a few moments Victoria could only stare at how her shoulder blades moved in jilted shakes in accordance to her sobs. How she could see the beautiful back of her neck. That led up to her spine. But with every tremor of anguish Kate’s body exhibited, Victoria felt something surge within her, stronger and stronger. This feeling of warmth swelled so thick beneath her skin that it bled through her pores and pushed at the backs of her eyes making her tear ducts sting. Before Victoria could think of the appropriate thing to do she had gotten up, moved and slid besides Kate. Before she can think about how people could see them together and how she never does this -- her arm wrapped around Kate’s back and clasped around her far shoulder, her other arm gently grasping at the closer
“Come on, Katie, get your head up, that table’s skanky as Hell.”

There was a muffled, sad sob that conveyed reluctance.

“No, I’m not letting you eat janky germs, up, up...there we go-- good girl.”

Kate tried to rub away the tears and snot away with her hand and wrist, attempting to hide her face and hold as much dignity as she could. Victoria snatched the tissue dispenser and ripped out half of the napkins, giving them all to Kate.

“I’m sorrrrrry” Kate warbled, tears still pouring out of her eyes, as she attempted to wipe all the evidence of sadness from her face, “I’m so sorrrry I - I said mean things to you”

“Katie. It’s fine. I was pushing you on a touchy subject, you’re allowed to be crabby at me.” Victoria consoled.

“I- I’m sorry I’m I’m Cry- crying now”

“Don’t be. I ugly cried in your arms too, consider it even.”

Kate blew her nose, “at least it wasn’t at ‘The Two Whales’” she responded, depressed.

“Girl, it was after I wrecked my own car in the middle of the woods. Again, even.”

Kate gave a very wet chuckle.

“See? It’s fine. It’s all O.K. Cry it out. ” Victoria comforted as she pulled Kate towards her. Kate resisted, her body pulling away.

Kate started hiccuping, “No, I’m going -HIC- to cry all over your -HIC- your clothes -HIC- ” Kate scrunched her eyes close again and more tears poured out, “and then you’re -HIC- you’re going to -HIC- have to get them dry -HIC- dry cleaned…”

“Oh for Fuck’s sake, that’s fine. I can afford it and even if I couldn’t I’m not letting you cry, alone, in the two whales, come here.” Victoria pulled at Kate again, this time though the miserable girl let herself fall onto the inside of Victoria’s shoulder and she continued to hiccup and cry.

Victoria was prone to detesting public displays of emotion. Fucking kissing, fucking crying, fucking yelling… It was only fun if she got to watch a bit of chaos but if it was right in her way or inconvenient, then ugh, gtfo. Also causing the drama was fun to watch. However if it wasn’t in the least bit entertaining than she couldn’t have hated it more and would either throw something to make it stop or get out. But right then, Victoria knew that seeing Kate cry and hiccup in that much anguish was something that she couldn’t bear. She knew that she would stay, right here and do whatever she could to get this perfect piece of sadness feeling better.

As Victoria continued to rub Kate’s shoulder and arm, she shook her head at herself.

She was in 10,000 leagues deep for this girl.
When Victoria felt her shirt become well damp and warm, she finally heard Kate mumble, “My aunt May is a shitlord.”

Victoria smirked, “see? Doesn’t it feel good to say that?”

Kate gave a wobbly smile, “yeah….” She confessed.

A rather loud CLACK nearly made Victoria jump in her seat, her arms tightening around Kate in a protective bear hug. She met eye to eye with a rather tall glass of thick chocolate milkshake with a glorious mountain of whipped cream. Topped with a nuclear red maraschino cherry.

“I figured a girl as sweet as you would need a milkshake to ease your sorrows, this one’s on the house” Joyce announced, voice both matter-of-fact and tender.

Kate sniffled and wiped her eyes, “Than-HIC-thanks Joyce, you rea-HIC-really HIC didn’t have to-HIC”

Then Joyce turned to Victoria, her eyes stern, “and I’ll have you know that I make sure these tables are the cleanest in Arcadia Bay, I would’ve have lasted as long as I have if I didn’t make sure of that.”

Victoria shrunk back, feeling her ears burn at the scolding, “O.k, I get it. Sorry”

Joyce smiled at Kate, “enjoy sweetie.” Then to Victoria, “despite your crappy attitude, thank you for taking care of Kate here, she’s honestly one of the best girls around and her influence on Chloe has been splendid.”

Kate laughed a loud and it echoed through the diner. There was a melancholic beauty to how the full lunged sounds rang through her sorrowful tears. Despite Victoria grumbling, she could hardly fight the warmth that rose in her heart as she felt Kate’s giggles against her torso. Soon Joyce left them be and Kate leaned into Victoria, “share this with me.” She said into her collarbone, “I can’t finish this.”

Victoria took a moment to debate whether or not to reject the milkshake. After all, she’s not the one crying in the booth of the Two Whales diner. Also, milkshakes made you fat. There was only so much puking she wanted to do to keep trim and that was usually only when alcohol was involved. However, she decided it was ultimately the best thing was to take a sip.

“Damn, that’s delicious.” Victoria admitted after smacking her lips, “not sure you need this anymore…” she said as she began to slide the milkshake away from Kate,

“no.” Kate quietly contested, gently wrapping her fingers around the other side of the glass, her fingers, dewy with the glass perspiration slide over Victoria’s fingers. That tiny ‘no’ reminded Victoria of a cute, depressed child that just got some hope injected back into their soul.

Of course, Kate had been literally sobbing so Victoria tried to restrain whatever laughter that was erupting from her throat, but she wasn’t very successful, so Victoria ended up sniggering like a dork.

Kate hiccupped at the same time she giggled and the strange, imperfect perfect human noise made Victoria’s heart melt. Kate blinked, as though she was surprised that she made that noise herself. Then they both laughed outloud, triumphant (again.)

As they passed the milkshake back and forth, taking turns sipping, their fingers touch and slide along skin.
For the most part they were quiet. Victoria revelled in how the silence of Kate could feel so...freeing.

Rachel Amber always knew the right thing to say, always knew how to keep a conversation going. In fact, silences that lasted too long tended to unnerve her. Well, Victoria didn’t know if Rachel had felt comfortable enough with Chloe, Frank or Mr. Jefferson enough to find refuge in the quiet. She just knew that Rachel did not like it when there was periods muteness between the two of them. Maybe she was worried that Victoria would’ve caught on that Rachel was using her? Whatever, she didn’t know and wasn’t going to waste her time dwelling upon it.

With Kate, there was this mutual understanding that the silence didn’t equal animosity brewing. It didn’t mean that awkwardness had poisoned the air. Silence wasn’t veiled disdain.

With Kate, silence meant trust.

The only other person she had ever been able to achieve this level of comfort with was Nathan…

Near the end of their thick, sweet treat, “I just need to take you to every restaurant I want to go to. We’ll get free shit all the time.” Victoria proclaimed.

“Victoria, no.” Kate whined. Even when emotionally exhausted, Kate’s good morals never rested.

“You say that now, but wait until you get a full Michelin star five course meal for free and you’ll be with me crying at every single restaurant, trust me.”

Victoria felt Kate’s giggles vibrate through her ribcage and into her heart.

They stay like that for the rest of their time in the diner. Side by side, their arms stayed glued together. When Kate would occasionally let her exhausted head rest on Victoria’s shoulder, Victoria felt a rush of gratitude that Kate would let herself be so vulnerable around her despite everything that had happened before.

As Victoria let herself turn her head and bury her nose into that thick mess of hair, she vowed that Kate would always be able to find a safe haven to lay her heart, however much she may want to give of it to Victoria.

She pressed her lips into the crown of Kate’s head as a signature of her silent promise.

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When Victoria drove them back to campus, she tried to stay quiet but there was something that irritated her so much that she just had to bring it up, “did your mom hit you all the time?”

“My mom was upset at me a lot but she’d only get that angry when I was bad enough that the community found out about it. Like if I got in trouble at school or when my Aunt May found out that I doing something that she didn’t approve of that’s when it would happen.”

“Did your mom hit your sisters too?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Unlike me, they’re good Christian girls and stay out of trouble. Also I helped cover for them if they made mistakes.”

“Why?”
“They’re my baby sisters. I will always protect them. I love them”

Victoria bit the inside of her cheek. She was an only child and had no idea what that was like. Having other people that shared your blood and DNA that you inherently felt connection to. Seeing these people and just knowing you had to protect them… nope. Not in her lifetime. She stared back at the road, her fingers drumming against the wheel. Ok, she was trying to exercise this whole, ‘understand and not judge where people came from’ but this was absurd! Kate’s mom smacked her around and was there any ounce of guilt? Like, did she even feel bad for giving her first born (and her best) daughter major issues?! At the next red light it became too much and Victoria whacked the wheel, “what the Fuck makes your mom think it’s OK to smack her daughter?” she demanded, furious.

“Because her father beat her with a belt.” Kate stated, her voice devoid of any emotion.

A block of ice instantaneously formed in Victoria’s throat. Welp. That shut her up.

Kate continued, “If she was bad he would make her bend over and would beat her so bad that she wouldn’t be able to sit for a week. Sometimes he would make her show her forearms and whip them until she couldn’t even hold a pen. He was an alcoholic so he would beat her and aunt May all the time, telling them that Jesus hated them. Sometimes he wouldn’t know when to stop. At least she’s never done that to me.”

“Fuck.” Victoria whispered.

“I’m from a small town. Things like that happen a lot.” Kate muttered. Emotionless facts.

The cat goes meow. The dog goes woof. The cow goes moo. People beat the shit out of their children and leave them to grow up and try to break the cycle of abuse.
Fuck.

Before, Kate jumping off that roof had seemed completely unprecedented. Like, why would such a nice girl go up to the roof? Before, to everyone, Kate seemed like a naive little bunny that was finally unleashed into the real world full of wolves and was so shocked by the evil that she couldn’t handle it.

Now Victoria realized that was completely false. The inverse of that situation had been correct. She was the rabbit who had been bitten and shaken for years, those scars and wounds hidden under fresh fur...and the wolves of Mr. Jefferson, Victoria and Nathan were the final bites that pushed her up the stairs.

As she drove into the parking lot, Victoria wanted to reach out and embrace Kate. She wanted to pull Kate back into her body until Kate just...felt better. Victoria wanted to kiss her face and tell her that her stupid parents were stupid and that Victoria’s affections could make all that bullshit go away. To be fair Victoria just wanted to kiss Kate until Kate felt as happy in her presence as Victoria felt in hers.

But when she parked the car, Kate thanked her for the ride, said she would see her later then exited the vehicle. Victoria would sit in there and wait about ten minutes before she got out herself.

Because they had a silent agreement.

They would not be seen hanging out together on campus. Unless they had a project together or other extreme circumstances.

Again, they both never discussed it. It was just the rules between them.

Despite her sitting in a parked car, Victoria’s mind raced as she watched Kate’s body step out of the last street lamp lights and disappear into the black of the night.
Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, did I say thirst? I meant ANGST.

Again, thank you all so much for the patience for this chapter, it was a hard one to crank out as Kate still needed to unload some of her issues on Victoria before the fun could start. Plus it hurts so good to put these two through the pain gauntlet and watch them wriggle out, together.

Now, I promise the thirst is coming,

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW

*God, to be under Kate and letting her do just whatever the Hell she wanted made Victoria want to curl up and whimper with arousal.*

*But that’s the masochistic part of her talking.*
Doesn’t everyone at some point in their life want to be a model?” - Someone

"Yeah, as long as it’s consensual" - Probably Kate Marsh.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I don’t get tired, I get results”

- Pearl [Steven Universe]

Victoria lay wide awake within her bed staring at the curtains. She was never an early sleeper to begin with as she usually dicked around on her laptop until 2 to 3AM in the morning, watching anime, reading fanfiction or lurking on tumblr or 4chan. Tonight though, after holding Kate in her arms at the Two Whales she couldn’t concentrate on anything. She couldn’t passively consume images and words on the interwebs. She wasn’t able to focus, let alone zone out as her mind kept replaying the steady bubbling up of Kate’s pure anguish. How she had squeezed her hands. How she cried against a dirty diner table because she was that ashamed of herself. How Kate’s tears had slowly seeped through her sweater and shirt until Victoria’s pores drank them in. Victoria could still feel how Kate’s small body, hot with misery, trembled against her torso.

It was one of the few moments where Victoria felt her heart crack and didn’t try to deny how much another person could affect her.

At least she couldn’t deny how much Kate affected her.

Along with all the visceral memories, her brain was turning over all the new information that she learned about Kate Marsh. How Kate’s tenacious spirit had taken a beating from her religiously fanatical community (yes, she was being judgey and unopen to sympathizing with their closed-minded views but you try watching Kate Marsh cry and not fucking wishing Hellfire on whoever
was responsible for her pain.) The truly sad part was that Kate Marsh’s art, the passion and method of executing her dreams, had suffered as well.

She learned that Kate Marsh hated herself.

Just like Victoria Chase did.

Victoria was envious, jealous, wrathful and probably a good mix of all the other sins but one of the few good traits that shone through that web of problems was her drive. When she realized that she wanted to be a photographer, she poured her heart and soul into learning the craft. When she had learned that Mark Jefferson, one of her photography idols, was teaching at Blackwell she did everything in her power to get accepted and keep her grades high enough to get into his class senior year. When she wanted someone to suffer she made sure they suffered.

Ok, Victoria knew that her incredible persistence and dog-headedness had been really really inexcusably misused the past couple of years.

Ok, maybe several years but whatever the past was the past.

But not today.

She, Victoria, could hate herself with all her might but she refused to let Kate hate herself. That, Victoria promised herself, would be something that she would help stop. Victoria was going to find a way to help Kate. Yeah, maybe Caulfield, Price and the rest of the weirdo squad was on the way to doing that but Victoria was going to roll up her sleeves and lift that girl up in a way no one else could.

And as everyone already knew, for better or for worse, when Victoria made a decision she went all out and nothing was going to stop her.

…

But what was she going to do??

That was the single question that kept derailing and stalling her mission. What could she do that would help Kate? They were in two different specializations and were two very different artists.
Victoria didn’t really know what the Hell went into drawing other than pencil on paper. She knew a bit about design, but that was her own interest and as far as she knew Kate’s color sense and design was pretty good (why that girl couldn’t put together an outfit to save her life baffled her). On top of that they were in completely different social groups and couldn’t really be seen ‘hanging out’ together.

So.

What could she do?

Victoria spent a couple of sleepless nights and restless days mentally working at this question like working firm sculpting clay within her fingers. Constantly reworking this stiff, pliable material until it hopefully became something vaguely aesthetic. Her father, Victor Chase, as well as being a photographer and art gallery owner was a hobbyist sculptor. When she was young, she used to like to swipe some of the clay and play with it for hours. Her father, of course, forced her to stop and would be irritated every time he found some of his clay missing and when he asked her about it Victoria lied, of course.

This question felt very much like the result of the constant turning and stretching and squeezing and figuring out. Dirty, sticky and a mess. Gray shit stuck underneath her fingernails for days on end.

Friday evening there was a low-key Vortex Club party at American Rust. There was a bonfire, laughter, pot, cheap beer, someone’s adderall, someone’s ritalin...

The same stupid shit.

Victoria stood along the edge of the party, her expression neutral. Physically present but mindfully not. Even as the addictive, toxic inebriated feeling flowed underneath her skin, her mind kept seeing Kate’s nails scratch at her chest and neck over and over again. How Kate had felt both solid and so fragile within her arms. Even as the laughter and conversation reached the height of volume and rancor, Victoria stewed. Unsatisfied with her lack of results.

The great injustice was that Kate didn’t just have to bear the issues that her parents had given her (#shittymothersclub) but her art had suffered. Was her anatomy that bad? Victoria already couldn’t handle it if she was any less than the best (which is why Max Caulfield drove her fucking nuts) but she couldn’t imagine what she would do if a teacher came up to her asking why she was so far behind her peers in a certain area…
What could help her?

Someone passed her the bong and she lit it, inhaling and taking a large pull. She passed it left.

As she exhaled the smoke from her nose, someone laughed out loud and yelled “Victoria the dragon!” She paid them no heed, so deep in her thoughts that no one could pull her out.

She fixed her bangs again and cracked open another beer despite having only half finished her previous one.

*Sometimes, the best way to get a better answer is to ask better questions.* She heard her father’s advice whisper in her mind. Her tongue twisted and slid across her teeth. *How can I help Kate?*

How *did* one become better at anatomy? Practice, of course. It seemed like Kate just needed to draw more people. Like, you needed like 10,000 hours to mastery or some shit like that, right? She gulped her beer to ease her cotton-mouth. This pot sucked. Literally the one and only instance where she missed Frank.

Ok, then it wasn’t a matter of skill that Kate was suffering from. It was simply lack of exposure. She just didn’t have the time under her belt or...what was that term? Kate literally just told her this… “Eh, Corbin.” Victoria called one of the new Vortex club members, he was the one and only illustrations major. Literally the one and only illustrations major with a six pack that was on the waterpolo team. Oh, come on, why else do you think he was in the Vortex club? It certainly wasn’t his micro-pen collection that was for sure.

However she once peeked at him doodling in the Vortex Club circle and was pretty damn certain she saw him drawing Steven Universe fanart. She was going to steal that fucking notebook and ogle every single one of those doodles. Maybe anonymously commission him for SOUR BERRY PANIC fanart. Hmmm.

“Uh, yeah?” he responded, a bit surprised and shy that the one and only Victoria was speaking to him,

“What’s that saying, where artists need to draw a fuck ton in order to get good?”

He raised an eyebrow, “um, mileage. Like your pen needs to draw a ton of lines, so artists measure that in miles. So, like, your drawing needs to get mileage---”


“Anytime” he answered, both grateful and confused.

Victoria took a sip of her beer and felt the cool piss glide down her throat. Well, if Kate wanted to get better at figure drawing. Then she’d have to draw more people. Simple.

Victoria swallowed.
The carbonation fizzed in her belly.

Hmmm …

Someone passed her the bong again. As she took the long glass by the neck she heard someone shout ‘Victoria the Dragon’ again. She fiddled with the lighter in her hand, trying to light it. Victoria the Dragon. Victoria the Dragon. Victoria the Dragon. Somewhere behind her intense focus she registered that several dudes were chanting that nickname at her. Yet it was the sparking of the lighter that held her attention. Someone briefly tried to take it from her and she shook them away, absolutely determined to get it to flame. A split-second, tiny FWOOOM, and the flame, bright and strong saluted her. When you’re high, time tends to become lazy and drag long in your perception. It felt like long minutes as she stared at the glorious pinch of light. Finally, she released the trigger on the lighter, the glaring shine vanishing but stained blotchy blue on her corneas. She raised up the bong high to the sky,

“I have an idea!” she declared. There was a few exchanged words amongst her audience and Victoria waited until they quieted. Evidence of their attention.

She began, voice strong and a bit slurred but with power, “The Vortex Club is glorious and has been for 30 plus years. We are the best of the best in Arcadia Bay.” Various hoots and hollers of affirmation, “And yes, people should bow and stare at our glory. But rather than just stand around as the trophies we are, we need to do something. We need to help these poor losers that surround us.”

Various degrees of silence and more silence.

Just the crackling of the bonfire to fill out any awkwardness. Through bleary eyes Victoria saw how several people exchanged looks, perplexed. “Oh, come on! Don’t look at me like a bunch of hamsters, this isn’t fucking time travel. Do I need to speak slower? WE SHOULD DO SOMETHING GOOD. SOMETHING THAT WILL BOTH BENEFIT OUR REPUTATION AND OUR FUNDING.”

A bunch of stupefied hamsters stared at her.

Victoria stamped her foot, beyond frustrated, “Ideas, people! Come on!”

“So…like a sexy car wash?” Logan asked. Ugh, even stoned Victoria couldn’t believe how stupid this guy sounded.
“Nah, not something stupid like a sexy car wash or something. No one goes to fucking carwashes. So don’t even open your stupid fucking mouth Logan, and I’m not feeding soup to homeless people, they’re on their own. Millennials have our own shit to deal with and the government clearly isn’t helping us out.”

“Er...baking?” someone blindly answered.

“Does it look like I know the muffin man?” Victoria shot back,

“Yes, I know the muffin man” someone giggled,

“-- No you fucking don’t, Craig! Shut your pie hole.” Victoria interrupted, shutting down that fucking joke before it took away the thunder of her monologue.

“Well what do you propose, Chase?” Juliet sneered. Victoria rolled her eyes. Ok, so the whole ‘Zack sexting Victoria’ thing she could admit was a mistake. It was Juliet’s fault that by writing that slander piece had tried to fuck with her. Also if was Juliet's fault that she was too easy to mess with. Like, she knew that Juliet would go ape-shit when she said that it was Dana who was sexting her boyfriend. She couldn’t have predicted that Juliet would lock Dana in her room and try to quarantine her to death. That, regardless of whatever anyone said, was hilarious.

It was all dirt off her shoulder. Juliet should take the same attitude. Psh.

Victoria smoothed out her jacket, “Look at us,” she waved out her hand at everyone, “we're literally the hottest people in this entire town. Why don’t we put it to good use? We can fulfill that stupid charity/volunteer shit that prevents us from getting any school funds”

“But, we, like get that from the Prescotts and other alumni” Hayden interjected.

“Well ever since their rich boy got arrested I don’t think they’ll be contributing much anymore.” Victoria spat out. She momentarily bit her tongue to stave off any feelings of heartbreak. If Nathan were here he’d be sitting by her. Next to her. A loyal ally in a land of drunken teenagers. She continued before any feelings could catch up with her, “and also, when has more money been an issue?” Victoria immediately countered. “But the money isn’t exactly the point. It’s getting our reputation back. Being the hottest bitches in this shithole is great and all, but back when the Vortex Club started it was renown and everyone wanted to get in. Now it’s like pulling out nails to get anyone to even consider joining. Does anyone remember trying to recruit…” Victoria snapped her fingers at the guy. Ugh, the one she was talking to earlier. What was his--

“Corbin.” Taylor coughed behind her hand,

“Corbin!” Victoria picked up without hitch, “he’s hot shit, but it took like….three--”
“Five.” Corbin very politely interjected,

“--Fucking SEVEN of us to convince him to join. What was your reasons, Charlie?”

Corbin, now a bit shy under all the attention began to speak, voice a bit low, “Well...all you guys do is party and, uh, sit in a circle in the main courtyard? Like, that’s awesome! But, uh, I’m already part of water-polo and stuff, so like we mainly sit around the pool and like, they get me into parties and I wasn’t sure why I should be in the Vortex Club, not, that, uh - I don’t regret it but--”

“Exactly!” Victoria cut him off, “ we don’t do shit outside of our schoolwork and shit.” thankfully the substances took off any sort of insecure panicking she would have had and she just let the ideas float out of her mouth, “The art majors only have live drawing like...once or twice a month if they’re lucky? Isn’t anatomy and mastering the human figure one of the foundations of becoming a great artist? What if they want to get better? Why not have a little system where they can get access to models? We’re all fine ass specimens and we’re available.”

There was a few beats of quiet. Everyone exchanged looks, processing what Victoria was proposing.

Corbin raised his hands, “I. Fucking. Love. This. Idea!” he shouted.

Dana laughed, “yeah, who doesn’t want to be a model at some point in their lives?” She nodded, “this is actually pretty cool.”

Hayden stepped forward again, lifting up his long arms and hands to stop the gravy train from starting, “Yo, yo, someone has to be a guinea pig.” he said, surprisingly logically despite all the basically illegal substances in his system.

Corbin jumped up, ready to holler, “not vortex club.” Hayden interjected. Corbin visibly deflated. “Like, we’re cool...I get that. But after October,” hayden trailed off.

“People don’t exactly look forward to our events anymore” Juliet concluded.

“Yeah, especially the weirdo squad.” Courtney pointed out. She wasn’t being mean, she was being honest. The wierdos were especially anti-vortex after October (understandably.) Interestingly enough, the weirdo squad had their own power. If they were against something, it could influence the rest of the students (stupid sheeple) to hide. Dana simply flipped her ponytail off her shoulder and said nothing. Even though in the Vortex club, she was also in the weirdo squad.

Traitor.

“Who we gonna get?” Zack asked out loud, speaking for his drunken, high populace of shitty, pretty teenagers.
Thankfully the Pot had chilled out her anxiety and enabled her to just *not give a fuck*. So, Victoria spoke with clear authority, “Kate Marsh.”

Everyone snapped their heads up and back at Victoria. The one hot button that put everyone on guard. Dana’s eyes widened to pinkish plates. Zack’s jaw dropped on his feet and Juliet actually fell over off his lap.

“Girl, are you nuts?” Hayden blurted.

“Not nuts. Stoned,” Victoria let out a stereotypical stupid chuckle before getting a hold of herself, “but I’m not crazy. I mean it. We’re going to get Kate Marsh, she’s going to do this and we’re going to help her.” she said, exasperated by how much resistance she was getting. People were sheep; easy to manipulate, scare and do what you want. So why did these sheep have to be so incredibly annoying right now?

Hayden’s mouth closed and he stared at Victoria. Yes, there was disbelief written on his face but Victoria saw that there was something mixing and turning behind his eyes. Suddenly she wanted to pull back or punch him in the face because she could tell that he saw something and now Victoria felt exposed for some reason.

“Didn’t we…like…already do all this?” someone else, apparently also stoned, interjected. “Like…didn’t we already…deal with her? She’s back, she’s fine. Why are we…even doing this?”

Even pumped full of relaxation inducing THC couldn’t prevent Victoria’s blood from boiling right the fuck over and she immediately snapped, “Deal with her? What the fuck-- *Deal* with her. Is she your fucking phone bill? Pay her off enough so you don’t have to think about it? Because I didn’t see you fork over any cash on her hospital bed. *Deal with what?* ” Victoria snarled as she took one stomp towards the asshole, “What the fuck did you do to deal with her? You don’t even talk to her, you can’t even look her in the face--- is she some sort of fucking mommy issue you write in your diary about so you can *deal* with? Because sorry, everyone here can see Oedipus Rex all over you. That’s something you need to fucking *deal* with. Kate Marsh is not something you just *deal with*. She’s a fucking person that we fucked around with. Yeah, that’s right, that we *all* fucked around with.” Victoria waved her arm around, savage in her honesty, “Yeah, we all said sorry, we wrote her a nice card, bought her flowers, balloons and did that whole shebang. Fuck, we even toasted to her when she went to the hospital, I was there, I remember. But have any of us actually, I don’t know, *helped* her?” Victoria said, taking another pull from her beer to soothe her irritated throat, “so why don’t we actually do something to prove that we’re not all shitty teenagers? Let’s actually *do* something for once and help other artists like us. ”

“Or scientists” someone else blurted.
“No fucking shit scientists!” Victoria barked, causing a good third of the Vortex club to flinch. She then waved up her hands in a completely sarcastic manner, “No, no, no, I was completely excluding half of the entire Blackwell Academy population, for fucks sake you know what I meant, needle-dick!” Victoria threw her beer can against the ground completely vexed that someone ruined her absolutely beautiful tangent. “Now, who’s with me?” Victoria demanded.

Victoria was greeted with a literal cricket chirps.

“Seriously?!” Victoria balked. She blinked, not really understanding what was going on. Her eyes were dry. Ah. That was just irritating times a thousand. “Damn it, anyone have eyedrops?” she demanded, rubbing her desert eyes.

“I got you” Courtney interjected, rummaging through her purse and putting it into Victoria’s hand.

As Victoria squeezed fat droplets of soothing liquid into her eye she heard Taylor speak, “I think she’s a great choice.” Taylor stepped in, backing her up. Victoria blinked rapidly and wiped the fake tears off her cheek as Taylor turned to her, promising, “let’s do this.”

Corbin nodded, “yeah, she’s super nice. We have color and design together. She’s chill.”

Some asshole--- Was that Craig? Oh it was that douchebag, Craig. He opened his mouth, “I think--”

“That this is awesome.” Hayden interrupted, clapping Craig on the shoulder, “yeah, this may be less fun than making parties but it’s one hell of an idea. What’s the harm in just standing there, looking good? We already do that -- and if it helps our fellow student body, then why the Hell not?” Hayden looked around, Michael B. Jordan smile beaming from his mouth, “I’m in.” If Victoria had to be honest, the one who always had the largest sway over the group was Hayden. Rather than rule by fear, he was extremely charming and well-liked by pretty much everyone. Victoria saw how the various teenagers postures change from apprehension to one of excitement.

Victoria then stared at the black boy, for probably the first time, truly looking at him. Besides Nathan, Hayden had been the only other male Vortex club member to both stand up to her and stand up for her. Hayden had always been one of the most forgiving of Victoria’s nature. When bitches were talking behind her back Hayden would constantly excuse Victoria’s viciousness, ‘she’s really funny when drunk’ ‘that’s just who she is, man.’ ‘just ignore her when she’s like that.’ Only now, when Victoria was both high enough to be floating and drunk enough to be rolling on the ground did she realize, even though he was a pain in the butt right now, that perhaps Hayden had truly been a potential friend that she just blatantly ignored.
“For Kate!” Zack hooted, pumping his fist. You know, Victoria could see why Juliet was attached to Zack. Even though he was an absolute **lunk head**. He was one of the few people who was genuinely remorseful about what had happened to Kate. He had been sincerely distressed and wanted to get Kate another bunny. As in, like, he **bought** the bunny and was prepared to give it to her but Juliet and Dana convinced him to return it. A ‘I’m sorry’ bunny wasn’t going to fix the video or all the shit they had done. If anything, it looked like he was trying to bribe Kate for her forgiveness.

Hayden grinned at Victoria, genuinely impressed with her, “alright then, how we gonna convince her to do it?” he asked her.

Victoria briefly scanned the crowd, looking for a very **specific** someone. Finally, she stared at Dana, “You. You’re her friend aren’t you? Her **good** friend?” ok, so that last bit came out with a bit of malice, but Victoria’s intent was there so, totally forgivable.

Dana nodded slowly, “yeah. I’ll talk to her.” she answered softly. Victoria hated the hesitation in her voice. As though Dana wanted to protect Kate from the schemes of Victoria and the Vortex club. Well fuck her, she couldn’t protect anyone worth shit and she could delude herself all she wanted but Victoria was going to help out Kate -- with the full force of the vortex club and Dana Whore-d wasn’t going to back out now.

“Ok, so after Kate. Then what? Is this going to be, like, a thing?” Someone asked with slurred words. “Like, it’s, kinda….cool? But uh….doesn’t there need to be like….admin stuff? Xcel sheets and google docs and whatever?”

“Don’t overthink this” Victoria stated. One, because she just really wanted to do this for Kate and two, she was too crossfaded to deal with any logistics, ‘we just need to make a system for this, a trial one, for like - a week? Easy.” Victoria rubbed her eyes again, “on Monday.” Victoria stressed.

“On it!” another girl proclaimed. Um. What was her name again? Victoria could never remember.

“Alright then, it’s settled?” Victoria called out and she once-more. She was met with nods and excited eyes. Dana lifted up her hands in surrender and smiled before cupping her hands around her mouth,

“Fuck yeah, let’s do it!” she hollered.

“Fuck yeah!” Victoria exclaimed, lighting up the bong and taking a very, very long drag. Everyone began to hoot and shout, pumped up. As she exhaled great white puffs of smoke from her nose, Victoria felt like a triumphant, powerful dragon.
“Seriously, who came up with this idea?” Kate asked. Victoria learned that Kate’s voice only rose in volume when she was feeling particularly excited or nervous. Through the bathroom mirror she could see Kate’s body jittery with gratitude.

About a week after the party, that new girl, Meghan? Sarah? Some generic white girl name? Well she came up with a pretty good system:

Basically the Vortex Club members could be rentable models for any illustrations or photography students. However, during the session at least two other vortex club members had to be present in order to ensure that no one made each other feel uncomfortable and no shenanigans occurred. There was a sign up form and request, as well as explanations of what the project was going to occur. The artist, the model(s) and a Vortex Club representative would have to sign off on the project. There was a pretty clear consent and liability contract as well that had been completely backed by the Principal.

She had to hand it to that generic white girl; she got shit done.

So, as soon as everything was ready to rock Dana let Kate know about what was going on and how she was the trial guinea pig to see if this could work. Apparently she had thought Dana was joking until she realized that she wasn’t.

Now here they were in the girl’s bathroom. Victoria wanting to do some touchups to her makeup before the first session started. Kate and Taylor were waiting for her. Well, Taylor was patiently waiting and Kate was badgering her.

“Again, I don’t know, I was pretty stoned” Victoria sighed, seeming to be bored with the topic. In reality, it took all her energy to contain her giddiness. Kate seemed genuinely excited and flabbergasted that all of this was going down. As much as Victoria wanted to gloat about what she had done, she didn’t want to come off as too…

Ah.

She wasn’t sure how to describe it, other than it made her chest ache to think that Kate may be uncomfortable with Victoria trying so hard for her. Besides, Kate wouldn’t want these actions from her. She’d prefer them from Caulfield. Or Dana. Or someone else who was nice and good-of-heart and beautiful. Victoria swallowed her daily pill of bitterness as she internally acknowledged that she wasn’t worthy of Kate’s romantic feelings. So she’d ache within the friendzone for all eternity. She’d just have to deal with that.

Kate shook her head, still dubious, “but someone had to get all of vortex club to agree. I know you guys are this exclusive smaller group but there’s still a fair number of you. Did this person corall the entirety of the Vortex club while high?”
Victoria shrugged again, feigning gentle apathy, “yeah, whatever. It happens.”

In the mirror, Victoria saw Kate’s lips tighten and her brows furrow. Her nostril twitched, clearly not satisfied with anything coming out of Victoria’s mouth, “is this how you guys collectively make decisions? Get intoxicated and see what everyone wants to do next?”

“It’s still democratic.” Taylor quipped, “and fun.” Kate shot her a bemused look, to which Taylor shrugged, “That’s, like, how the constitution was written.” Kate’s eyebrows shot up her hairline and Taylor nodded, “for reals, girl.”

Victoria paused her touch-up routine to add, “look, it’s happening anyway, why bother with ‘why’? Calm your tits and enjoy the opportunity.”

Kate quietly covered her chest, concerned, before she got the saying. She shook her head and quietly grumbled, “I just want to know who, that’s all…”

In the mirror Victoria saw how Taylor waited a moment before silently leaning over into Kate’s infamous mop of hair and whispering into her ear. How Kate’s eyes visibly popped wide open with surprise as Taylor’s lips moved, barely brushing against the pink cartilage. Victoria saw Kate’s stunned hazel orbs flick towards Victoria’s reflection.

Taylor’s hand came up and gently grasped at Kate’s arm, her lips movie quickly, silently. Kate froze, contemplating whether or not to listen to this whisperer. After a couple of moments she nodded, her eyes still fixed on Victoria. Hazel moistening with a mute amazement. It made Victoria’s heart squeeze on itself and her head automatically glanced down the sink, hoping all this emotion would pour out of her mouth and disappear down the drain forever.

When Victoria forced herself to look back in the mirror, she saw Kate bite her lip, “I’ll see you guys soon.” Kate said politely before making a hasty exit from the restroom. Victoria’s eyes narrowed watching Kate escape.

Taylor soon approached her side, taking out a tube of mascara from her bag. Victoria huffed, “You’re no fun.” Taylor simply leaned forward, reapplying the mascara,

“She deserves to know who’s looking out for her.” Taylor said back, super casual, as she was apparently so chill these days when talking to Victoria. Victoria rolled her eyes, feeling her heart cringe a little. This was nothing compared to Caulfield getting on that roof. This was nothing compared to Alyssa and Luke’s outright refusal to watch the video. This was nothing compared to David Madsen arresting Nathan and Mark Jefferson.
There was nothing Victoria could do that could ever amount to that.

As Taylor handed Victoria the Mascara tube, she spoke again, her tone firm with fact but pillowed with a gentle affection that didn’t make Victoria feel uncomfortable, “you deserve to let her know what you’re doing for her.” Victoria felt her forearms tense as her hands turned into fists on top that cold white enamel. All her defenses shot up, wide awake and back arched as the first thought of rage heated the insides of her nostrils. Who the Fuck is the girl and where the Fuck did she get this conclusion about me. Her jaw clenched, ready for battle as her eyes flicked up and met Taylor’s sky-blue eyes. Any urge to verbally make Taylor eat her God damn words immediately was struck down by the sheer honesty within her friend’s eyes.

So instead Victoria turned away and didn’t answer as she applied more mascara on herself, making sure to get as many eyelashes as she could.

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Meghan, Sara, Jennifer whatever generic white girl name had put the logistics together; Hayden got the approval from the principal; Juliet was doing the write-up in “The Blackwell Totem”; Courtney and Taylor had gotten the certain locations blocked off for the respective times during the week; Dana of course got Kate’s participation and Victoria’s the assigned photographer for this event. Well, more like self-assigned photographer.

Truthfully Victoria hated live-event photography. She found it to be the monkey work of the photography industry. Good money, sure, but the photographer was basically a glorified drone, taking photos of what the clients wanted to be shown and nothing else. Take good pictures of him! Of her! Of that person doing something meaningless! Victoria though bit the bullet and took it upon herself to take the pictures needed for both the Vortex club social media and for the Blackwell Totem.

Even though Victoria was proud of herself and confident that this was all going to go splendidly, she was also anxious about it all going splendidly without her being always present. She was also obsessive over how Kate would be during the sessions. Would anyone make her feel uncomfortable? Would she try and run? Was someone going to bring up the video incident? WAS ANYONE GOING TO TRY AND HIT ON HER!? FUCK THAT NOISE.

Victoria knew this was a touch on the protective side but Kate wasn’t going to be around just any group of people. Kate was going to be around Vortex Club members. Ever since Kate had entered Blackwell last year the Vortex club had been antagonizing her. Ripping up and vandalizing her abstinence club posters. Littering her desk with packets of condoms. Using the lord’s name in vain loudly behind her back. Countless accounts of obnoxious bullying. That was all in the past and she was certain that no one would dare try anything after October, but insecurity scuttled within her chest, anxious about Kate’s feelings. Even though they were her clique, Victoria didn’t necessarily
trust any of them to not try and cause Hell for Kate again. This time she had to be there. A pack of wolves needed the biggest, baddest alpha to keep them in check.

Victoria was hyper-aware that It would look strange to everyone if she had tried to assign herself as one of the Vortex Club emissaries for every single session. So, this was the best method of being able to attend all of Kate’s live-drawing sessions and not look like a stalker. However, now tasked with using the camera within her hands to take hundreds of photos of Kate just sitting there and drawing, Victoria realized the irony of that thought. Whatever, at least she would take some great shots of her. That and she knew just how to cast a better looking light on the spiralling vortex club reputation.

First on up was Zack. He had emphatically insisted that he should be first. It took place on the football field at 4:30pm, after practice. When Victoria arrived, everyone was already there. Taylor and Dana were the official appointed emissaries but nearly all the Vortex club showed up, wanting to see this experiment in action. Others, not vortex, also peppered the bleachers wanting to see if any chaos would occur. The football players stared off to the side, curious as to what their Quarterback was doing. The cheerleaders were off on the otherside, practicing but were distracted, watching the action go down.

In the bleachers, on the grass, around the fence students stared. In the center stood Kate, armed with a drawing stool and easel, the center of everyone’s attention. If it bothered her, she refused to show it.

For a while, it was very quiet. Just Kate explaining that Zack had to change poses every ten minutes. She started the timer. Even as noises of side-talk and whispers permeated the air, Kate remained stoic, concentrating on the task at hand.

Part of Victoria just wanted to police everyone, bark at them to shut up and get out. That Kate wasn’t some zoo animal who you paid to ogle at and judge. However, she knew that would cause suspicion and whispers about herself. That fear struck her deep within the marrow and permeated through her body like an illness. All Victoria did was squeeze her canon camera with a vice. She forced herself to breathe. Do your job, Victoria. She lifted the device to her eye. She moved around to hide her nervous pacing.

Take the shot. And she did. It felt just as pointless as shaking a dead tree and trying to get fruit to fall down. Nothing was good. Nothing was interesting. Live-events fucking sucked. This sucked. Why was this so awkward?

After thirty minutes of humid anxiety, Zack, at a loss of what to do next, scratched his head.

“So, uh, what do you want me to do?”
“Whatever makes you feel comfortable.”

“Uh...I just want to help you.”

Kate drummed her fingers against the edges of her sketchpad, “so, when I’m drawing you - I want to draw you. When you pose and move, it’s a part of who you are. When you stand there, it’s different from how anyone else stands. I want to capture a bit of you Zack. That’s why I can’t tell you what to do.”

“Huh...alright.” Zack nodded. He ran a hand through his hair, bicep flexing as he turned over this information. Kate looked at him, her fingers pressing against the edges of her notepad, waiting. The people in the background leaning against the fence, contributing to the insufferable atmosphere.

Victoria felt her legs scream at her to run in, do something, do anything to stop this cringe-worthy event. Instead she held her breath and lifted the camera to her eye.

*Push the shutter, bitch.*

Right then, Zack pulling a ‘Fuck-it’ move whipped off his shirt. Kate sat up and back, her eyes widening in sheer, unadulterated, ‘what the actual Fuck’ the people behind her expressions morphing— In that split second Victoria’s body moved faster than her own surprise—

*NOW!*

Victoria smashed her finger down so hard that the shutter burst

CLICKCLICKCLICKCLICK

Everyone paused in that moment of uncertainty as Zack threw his shirt to the side, his skin suddenly bare in the golden hour.

CLICKCLICKCLICK
Juliet and several girls jumping in the air and cheering and wolf-whistling in the background. Their forms fuzzy personified bits of excitement behind Kate’s genuine, uncontrollable open mouthed grin.

CLICKCLICKCLICKCLICKCLICK

As Zack stretch his arms and turned his back to her, a wannabe Schwarzenegger and he flexed. Kate stuck her fist out, flicking her thumb up. A nod of approval.

CLICK.

After the timer went off for that pose, Kate smiled a rather childish and sheepish grin, “drawing your muscles is a lot of fun.” she confessed out loud. Zack then flexed his pectorals, making his chest wiggle. That broke all pretense of professional artist Kate as she exploded in a fit of giggles.

And just like that, laughter cracked through the dam and almost instantaneously let the awkward rush away.

Victoria found herself smirking just a touch as she snapped more photos. She can’t deny, damn that boy has a nice body.

If Zack’s session had started it off with a bang, then the rest of the week went along with absolute flying colors. Each model brought some of their own personalities to their poses. Whether it be Taylor lounging on the steps by the Prescott dormitories or Juliet in the journalist room. Each session was coming out really interesting and unique. Most importantly though, if Kate’s laughter and smiles were any proof, she was having a great time at each one.

Hayden comes wearing a shirt, pants and a bowtie. Kate smiled and said it wasn’t necessary to come so dressed up. Hayden, ever the smooth one, commented that his mother taught him to always dress up for a good occasion and this was a good occasion. A beautiful smile of gratitude filled Kate’s face and then she proceeded to draw him. Hayden just winked, happy that he could get Kate to be chipper.

To be completely honest, Victoria was having fun too. Alright, she had always loved fashion photography any studio photography to be honest. On that set, the photographer was Lord and everyone had to obey their every command. Their creative view was law and perhaps producers could argue but Victoria could argue back better so that wasn’t an issue. Yet that wasn’t the case during Kate’s live-drawing events. She couldn’t intervene. She couldn’t demand Kate or her subject to just do something.
When Kate was drawing Juliet. Before, Victoria had been dreading the time. Juliet Watson was such a tightass. Seriously, that girl had a flagpole stuck up her butt. How anyone could tolerate her was beyond Victoria’s comprehension. She was dogheaded and annoying.

But Juliet had only been gracious, quieter and open to communicating with Kate what she needed. The only sauce that Victoria was used to was, of course, reserved for her in the silent glares Juliet would throw her way when Victoria ever came too close.

As Victoria observed, at a safe distance (She had zoom lenses, bitch) it occurred to her something incredible about the artist.

People relaxed around Kate. People just acted like their own unique selves. A rather simple, but powerful realization that smacked Victoria in the face when she saw how strangers, previous antagonizers would suddenly just open up to her… people physically revealed unique secrets about themselves that Victoria never saw before. Whatever walls or persona's that they had perfected would be temporarily laid to rest in front of her.

Like when Kate occasionally would stick her hand in front of her face, upright, slanted like a knife and peer at her subject. Victoria really didn’t know wtf she was doing, but that expression of focus and technique was perfect. Or how Juliet, when her brow wasn't furrowed with annoyance actually had a great smile. Her large forehead portraying how her usually busy brain could have moments of serenity. Or how Taylor had long arms that were quite flexible in how she chose to move them and use them to support her body. How Hayden, with his chest spread open and chin thrown up seemed much more sensitive then he put on. Or how Courtney actually had a bounce to her step, like a cat, when she wasn't around anyone. As she focused more and more of capturing these moments, Victoria found herself pushing back her hair by her temples, damp with vigor. Overcome by her own thrill of snatching these beautiful, beautiful moments in time.

Click. Click. Click.

Yes, she wasn’t the center of attention but forcing herself to step back had been surprisingly liberating.

Corbin got on one knee, looking up ever so expectantly at Kate who tilted her head just so. Like a humble princess seeing someone bow in her radius for the first time.

Click.

Perhaps Max’s tendency to step back and watch everyone like a creep had it’s purpose. She could just capture people as they were, not as they were manufactured.
In a way, she was still Lord of her image just no one could talk to her or validate her decision. She had to watch with an eagle eye and capture that single moment of perfection. *I am a camera* she heard Max’s voice flit within her mind. Sometimes it was best not to interfere.

…

Well, if it was a fashion or advertisement shoot then by all means she’s still going to man that production with an iron fist. But this type of photography? This quiet passiveness worked just well too.

Click!

The only time that Victoria felt a sincere ugliness rise was when Dana agreed to help as well. And, in the privacy of the gymnasium, all the participants women, that girl left on her cheerleading uniform. Her first pose was to turn away from Kate, bend over, perk that booty up and stare over her shoulder, lips puckered as if blowing a kiss. The way Kate’s eyes bulged and how she squeezed that sketch pad so tightly, face pink...and how Dana just sauntered over to her, lifting up that leg with astronomical flexibility, joking that she would strike *any pose* for Kate.

Kate immediately pulled her sketch pad over her eyes, “Dana!” she squeaked, loudly. Dana laughed a long, *beautiful* laugh,

“*We’re both girls, Kate*” Dana reasoned, all good humor.

“I don’t think girls do this for other girls” Kate protested. Dana bent over, showcasing her notorious cleavage.

“Oh, baby, let me prove you wrong.” she answered, liberally delivering the sultry through her tone.

Kate couldn’t hold herself together as she sputtered, “Oh dog... I can’t even draw right now.” she surrendered. Everyone burst out laughing pretty hard. Dana’s beautiful jaw opened up and her breasts jiggling with her giggles.

Victoria fucking **hated** her.

Oh, Victoria felt her skin sizzle at how flirtatious Dana was and how...shyly receptive Kate was.

Victoria wanted to punch Dana in the head and scream “Hey! Remember how you left Kate to fend for herself at that party and ditched her to suck Trevor’s dick? Does anyone remember that?” Victoria grabbed that wrathful beast and kept it back because ultimately, if Victoria and Dana were to have a “Who was the biggest cunt to Kate” contest, Victoria would still win by a landslide.

At one point when the timer went off Dana skipped over to Kate and draped herself around Kate’s back and shoulders. “Dana. I can’t draw you like this.” Kate squeaked.
“Oh, this isn’t a pose. I just wanted to hug you is all” Dana cooed. Kate’s usually peach skin flushed cherry. Victoria didn’t need her keen 20/20 vision to see how Dana’s notorious breasts pressed up against Kate’s back. How her cheek nuzzled against Kate’s in such affection.

Victoria gripped her camera with a vice, more than tempted to put her tool nicely away then go over there and rip Dana off of Kate and scratch up Dana’s smug face.

_Bitch. Take the shot._

Victoria bit the inside of her cheek and squeezed that shutter button down. The click of the camera ringing violent slaps within her eardrums.

When Victoria took a begrudging swig of water, trying to wash down her bitter feelings she barely noticed her good friend sneak up besides her. “Hey girl, what’s up?” Victoria knew that voice from anywhere. Taylor Christenson.

She swallowed before she answered, “Just performing my duty of being a photo monkey. Why are you disturbing my work?”

Thankfully Taylor was one of the very few people who knew when not to take Victoria’s abrasiveness to heart. “Forgive my interruption” she began, humorlessly giving a teasing curtsy, “But you look kinda pissed. Thought I would see what’s up with my favorite biyotch” Taylor asked, casually.


“Got it.”

A couple moments of silence.

“Dana’s just such a huge whore.” Victoria blurted, “I fucking hate whores.”

“Yeah. She’s such a skank.” Taylor agreed, nodding. Victoria knew her friend was just placating her. That just irked her even more. When Taylor placated her like this that meant that she was being _courteous_ of Victoria’s real feelings. However, what exactly Taylor thought her real feelings were bugged Victoria. Taylor couldn’t know what exactly was going on with her. She _shouldn’t ever_ know what was really going on in her head.

Victoria felt herself scowl when Dana wiggled her shoulders, overtly suggestive, causing Kate to again flush bright tomato and hide her face in her sketch pad, erupting the room around them in laughter once again. Victoria rose the camera to her face and lowered it, frustrated that she couldn’t seem to _see_ anything worthy through this idiotic scene of stupid flirtation because Dana shouldn’t
even be flirting because wasn’t she already bouncing up and down on some skater boy’s dick. What the fuck was she doing?

“Kate totally has better taste, y’know?” Taylor interjected, interrupting Victoria’s fuming. Victoria glanced over at her close friend, taking note of her relaxed posture and how Taylor was acting so cool.

Victoria felt some warning trill within her body, “what are you even talking about? Abstinence abbey is straight as a ruler and can’t even think about heterosexual sex without being damned to Hell. That’s why Dana flashing her lady bits and acting like a whore isn’t exactly appropriate.”

Taylor didn’t look at Victoria, her gaze keeping on Kate as she continued, eerily calm, “You’re right.”

A couple more moments of silence. Victoria forced herself to pound down on that stupid shutter button.

Click click click.

“But, just, like, if she weren’t. I feel as though she’d go for someone else, y’know? Like, she’d pick a classy bitch.” Taylor said, as if this topic was anything other than a fucking active minefield for Victoria.

Victoria held her tongue hostage between sharp teeth. What the Fuck was Taylor getting at? All her alarm bells rang like crazy. Also, like the frozen mammoth, her protectiveness came out from it’s slumber. Kate was still incredibly shy and working through her homosexuality. At this point in time, the less people who knew about it the better for her. Plus…

It was a secret that her and Victoria shared.

Victoria loved secrets. Loved the exclusivity of them.

And this was between her and someone she liked.

It was one of the things about their relationship that…well…felt like a relationship

And Victoria refused to give that up to anyone.
“Naw. If Kate liked the fish tacos she’d go after Max or someone else in the weirdo squad. I mean would you just look at what she’s wearing.”

Taylor nodded, “she has been getting better though...” She commented. Ok, that was completely true as Victoria had taken it upon herself to make Kate style guides and show her how to pair her clothing in such a way that she’d stop looking like a pilgrim and more like the cutie that she was.

“I guess,” she answered, sounding bored because really, Taylor, end the conversation. End this now. Victoria walked away from her friend, lifting her camera back up, looking for good shots as her stomach churned round and round and round with hopelessness.

---

The last session had been Meghan, Sarah, Jennifer - whatever generic white girl name --

“Thanks Allison,” Kate said, shaking Allison’s hand.

Allison! So THAT was her name! Aha! Thank God for Kate!

Allison grinned, “thanks for letting me be your model. It was fun. Don’t worry about this, we’ll be cleaning it up.”

Victoria stood off near the back of the room as everyone cleared out and Allison checked over the paperwork one last time. Victoria glanced down through her camera, flipping through the dozens of photo’s she took - mentally marking which one’s she liked, deleting atrocious ones that just weren’t good enough, seriously what made her take that shot--?

She’s interrupted by a warm hand on her arm, “Vic,” Kate said to her, quietly.

“Yes, Katie?” Victoria responded immediately. She internally winced at her own use of ‘Katie’ and her eyes flicked side to side, wondering if anyone had seen her. This thing, these nicknames shared between them, ‘Vic’ and ‘Katie’ was something that Victoria ashamedly felt really vulnerable about. She had only allowed those closest to her in her life to call her ‘Vic’.

Her father, Nathan, her previous best friend back in Seattle that she lost touch with and now…
Kate.

Also Victoria herself was not one for nicknames. Seriously, your parents gave you a proper name so why try and butcher it with asinine cuteness? Again, her using nicknames had been reserved for only people most important to her. Taylor was ‘Tay’ or ‘Taytay’ Nathan had been ‘Nate’. She barely tolerated calling Maxine ‘Max’ but respected her enough to honor her wishes.

Interestingly enough, Rachel Amber had only ever been ‘Amber’ to Victoria. Most likely due to how much torture her heart went through she didn’t have the affection left in her heart to ever come up with one.

But now there was Katie.

Who wanted her attention.

“So, um. I wanted to ask you for a favor” Kate spoke slowly again. Victoria nodded, her face opening up in concern. Kate was glancing up at her, as though nervous about something. Victoria stared at her, full attention, ready to murder whatever had even dared bother her (unrequited) sweetheart.

“Of course, what’s wrong?”

“Oh, nothing’s wrong! Don’t worry. I just…” Kate brushed a lock of hair behind her ear as a small sheepish grin curved her lips, “I just wanted to see if you could possibly…” her hand twirled, able to move faster than her speaking, “…be my model.”

Victoria blinked at her, raising an eyebrow. Kate continued, breaking eye contact with Victoria, “well, you know for live-drawing. It was nice to get to draw the other Vortex club members,” Kate then peered up at Victoria, a crooked smile of ire as she concluded, “but what would I do if I wasn’t able to get the Queen, herself?”

Victoria felt her inner ego trill in delight and she smirked. Out of the corner of her eye she felt someone watching them. Whoever it was stood just out of earshot so they couldn’t have heard what they were talking about. But just their presence soured Victoria’s ego boost. She spared them a side glance and her smugness dissolved into a snarl.
“Sure, I’ll get Taylor or Courtney to be the watchdogs.” Victoria stated the last part loudly, directly glaring at Dana. Even after all she was doing Kate, Dana was still acting like the world’s worst secret service agent, scrutinizing her every move when Victoria even just so much as breathed the same air as Kate.

“They won’t be necessary,” Kate blurted. Victoria flat out did a double-take.

“What did you say?” She urged sharply, having not completely understood what Kate’s choice in English words meant.

There was a tiny flush of pink that came across Kate’s cheek, “well, um, I wasn’t thinking this would be part of all…” Kate waved her hand to the dispersing vortex club members, “this…” she then waved her hands, “not that I didn’t have fun or that I didn’t appreciate all of this. It was wonderful. Lovely. It helped me so much, but,” she then rubbed her neck before continuing, “I just…I just would very much like to draw you, with your permission of course, and…” Kate took a moment to sniff a rather determined huff of air through her nose and answered with much more confidence, “keep this as something private and between us.”

Victoria stood there, dumb as a wall. Dumbfounded. (Dumbwalled?) Kate looked up at her with stubborn conviction, even as her ears began to flush a deeper rouge. “I trust you, Victoria.” She stated.

Victoria’s mind blipped out. 404, no reaction or thought found. “Said no one ever.” Victoria blurted, her mind resorting back to dark humor seeing as there was nothing logical or coherent she could muster up anyway.

It took a split second for Kate to understand the joke. A loud “pfffft” exploded out of Kate’s lips, Victoria also joined in the laughter. Kate rubbed away a stray tear, “I know, I know but I guess I’m the first”

“Kate, I have a camera in my hands right now, you’re a Goddamn idiot.” Victoria spat out, doing her best to hide how nervous she was at the moment.

Even more peels of demented laughter erupted from the both of them. “Do I never learn?” Kate cackled at herself. A few people that were left glanced over to the two girls, very confused as to why they were snorting and doubled over in laughter. When they managed to collect themselves, all Kate could do was shrug, “I’m serious, though. I would very much like for you to be my model.”
“If you ever need a model” Rachel said, “you know where to find me.” she concluded with a wink. Victoria’s throat tightened. Rachel offered everyone to be her model. She hated how she felt both as though she were bestowed a golden opportunity and as though Victoria was just like everyone else; a starving client in the long, long queue.

Victoria’s throat tightened once more “well,” she began, putting on a pompous haughty huff to hide her true feelings, “I’m surprised you didn’t come to me sooner,”

Kate responded sly like a fox, “Before I didn’t think I would have access to such a gorgeous model”

Victoria’s ego wiggled in sheer giddiness. Kate rarely let go of all her compassionate, empathetic, Christian values and just complimented her in such a shallow way. It was so debased of Kate and it made Victoria feel sexy. God, and Kate said she was gorgeous. She had never cheapened Victoria’s character to just that before. But if she was saying it and was honest than, bitches, Christmas came M u t h a f u c k i n early! In reality, Victoria retorted, smooth as ice, “you’ve always had access, you just never asked”

“Before I didn’t think you’d be open to the idea.”

“Girl. You’re literally asking me to lay there and be hot. Of course I’d be down. Even if I thought you were a jesus freak.” Victoria quickly added, “which I mistaken about. You’re cool. Cool for Jesus.”

Kate shrugged it off, her reputation dirt off her shoulder, “Someone has to twerk for God.”

Victoria sniggered, then “alright, I’m available tomorrow at around 4pm, I would prefer to be in my room but you can place me anywhere you want.” she couldn’t help but purr the last bit out. Kate simply gave a small smile,

“I’ll knock on your door at 4:15. I’ll just place you on your bed.”

“Bold and to the point.” Victoria drawled. Kate’s eyes widened slightly, taken off-guard. Victoria smirked, “Confidence is sexy, Katie.” she stated, her voice lowered at the words ‘sexy’ and ‘katie’
Kate simply looked down, hiding an embarrassed smile, “I’ll keep that in mind.” she muttered before her head popped up again, whatever virgin scandal gone from her expression, “I’ll see you then.”

Victoria watched Kate skirt off, going to Dana and talking to her a bit before disappearing. Victoria herself felt herself walk away, going to get dinner with Taylor and Courtney. The entire evening she was in another trance. Kate having put her in yet another hypnotic state. There was...something different about that exchange. She had tried to push out the suspicion as she worked on sorting and editing the photos. However, the constant image of Kate further scratched this itch.

It ate away at her stomach and at the corners of her mind.

Kate was different today.

How?

She seemed...shy.

Even when Kate first approached Victoria she had been reserved, quiet...but her knocking on the door and coming into Victoria’s room to give a box of cookies was anything but shy. It had been ballsy. Now, after hours of watching animation, doing homework, talking, screaming, yelling, going on impromptu road trips, crying, crashing cars, singing and more crying, Kate was even less shy than before. Kate called her out on her shit, Kate shared her tiny moments of sass, Kate shared her internal struggles, Kate was open with Victoria.

But this time she seemed so… hesitant in asking Victoria to be her model. Not scared. No. Victoria would like to think that Kate wasn’t scared of her anymore. But she seemed so...cute… Like, *bashful*.

And why did she want it to be private?

It could be that she trusted Victoria much more. She did say that much at least. But…

Maybe...
No...

Yes...?

No way...

Yes way...?

Victoria drummed her fingers against the desk, knowing that concentrating on the photos was a lost cause. She then squeezed her temples. She tried to quell this tiny...suspicion within her. Whenever Victoria suspected something, whenever she had just an inkling of something interesting... Ugh. This wasn’t good. Victoria recognized this feeling within her. It happened when she first became interested in Rachel and believed that she had a shot of ensnaring her. It happened again when she was in Mark Jefferson’s class and thought there was a just an outside chance of seducing him. It happened every time Victoria looked through an art galleries itinerary and history and believed that she should submit, even if the chances were astronomically small. She felt it spark within herself whenever she believed there was a opportunity to get away with breaking the rules, no matter what the consequences.

This….This was fucking dangerous and Victoria had been burnt to a crisp more than enough times to know that she had to stop.

But it was back again. Like a junkie she sat and scratched at herself, trying to talk herself out. No. Leave it alone. That thought was impossible. The...the chances of her being right were .0001%

There. Time to edit the fucking photos and move on. Find another bitch she’d actually have a shot with.

…

Like a kitten who had a death wish, her mind inflated a thousand balloons of the single idea ‘But there’s still a chance.....’

OH FOR FUCKS SAKE VIC. WHY DON’T YOU EVER LEARN.
Too late.

Curiosity set in and that little kitten was hooked.

And she was going to get to the bottom of this.

After all, cats had nine lives.

...She probably used up 12 of them but that hadn’t stopped this cat yet.

---

“I know. I just lay there and be fabulous. Roll around. Be fabulous. Got it.” Victoria feigned boredom as she, using her middle finger, adjusted her bangs to the side. They were in her room, Kate having just arrived and giving her the same brief as she had to all her other models before, despite Victoria having been at every single other live-drawing that Kate had been doing that past week. She wore simple things, a nice shirt, a skirt, thigh-high socks. Simple and glamorous.

Kate chuckled, “you got it.” she quickly set up the easel in front of one of the chairs off the side of the room. Victoria waited, every nerve strumming with determined jitters. She had spent the majority of the previous night coming up with every single plan a creative mind could devise to get to the bottom of this...this question. The one she ultimately had decided on carrying out was simple but was the riskiest. One of two things would happen:

A) Kate would be a thick-headed idiot and not understand what Victoria was doing.

B) Kate would freak out.

Victoria had sweated through all of last night and this day not to back out because she was fighting for option C). That small, small, small chance of the unknown answer to her question.

“Alright, I’m ready when you are.” Kate said, relaxed. Victoria kept her expression completely neutral and turned away from Kate, showing just her back. “Really?” Kate asked, “not what I expected, but Ok” she started the timer and Victoria listened to that familiar scratching of charcoal. The plan had started and there was a very, very frightened part of Victoria begging herself to back
out. Don’t do it. Don’t.

Pffft. As if Victoria ever listened to any advice of self-preservation.

As her front was hidden, Victoria’s hand quietly snuck up to her collar and began to silently unbutton her shirt. Her fingers felt the hard plastic press into her soft fingertips as slowly, one by one, her buttons released the confines of her body. She felt her skin radiate hot steam, trying to release the nervousness out of her body.

As the timer went off, Kate turned off the obnoxious chirping, “alright, next pose.” she called out, as if everything was normal.

Victoria violently jerked up her shoulder and shucked half of her shirt and let it slide down her arm where it found rest at her elbow.

Even though she couldn’t see Kate, she could feel Kate’s eyebrow raise through her back. Kate probably shrugged and continued to draw, unawares that anything strange was happening. Kate knew that Victoria, at least to everyone else, was confident with her body. Enough to post pictures of herself in bikini’s and other not modest clothing on social media websites. Kate knew that Victoria was skinny and damn well made sure of it. Kate knew that Victoria wasn’t ashamed of her budding sexuality. So, Kate continued on as if everything was normal.

In those ten minutes, Victoria’s entire body thrummed with anticipation. Kate was going to figure out that nothing about today was normal.

The timer ringed and Kate turned it off, waiting for her model. Victoria just shucked her shirt off her other shoulder, letting the shirt dip low along her back. There was a pause before Victoria heard the signature slides and scratches of the charcoal against the page. Kate perhaps just got a sniff that Victoria may be up to something, but not enough for her to say anything.

DING DING DING!

Kate turned it off and waited.

Victoria sucked breath of air through her nostrils and held her breath as she shifted the side of her thigh and knee up onto the mattress, turning her torso towards Kate. She kept her chin down and looked at Kate from beneath a few bangs that had slid back down her forehead... it had been like every move and look she had done to try and bait Rachel, Mark, the other stupid assholes from those parties. However this time she chose to restrain herself. No over the top sultry lip-licking or wiggling
eyebrows. Just the suggestion of...interest. Not predatory, not demanding, not creepy and certainly not desperate.

In this pose, in this dark gaze, Victoria was making it known that there was a mature, darker attraction present for Kate to either accept or deny. Victoria had agonized over whether or not Kate had seen enough T.V and movies or consumed enough media at all to understand what Victoria was doing. Either she would, or she wouldn’t.

However, Kate immediately froze. Not a single involuntary twitch emitted from her body. Her eyes made no micro-movements. A statue of the precise moment that Kate Beverly Marsh saw Victoria’s desire in person.

Then, in a glorious moment of silent transformation, Kate took a quiet, long breath through her nose. Her back straightening, her chin lowering and her eyes suddenly igniting something quite serious. Then before Victoria could understand what was happening behind Kate’s hazel orbs, Kate blinked and got to work. Everytime Victoria saw Kate’s gaze flick back towards her she felt a rush of tension hum through her nerves.

The timer went off and Victoria fully removed her shirt, letting her brassiere be fully exposed. She shifted her waist further, one knee and thigh fully on the mattress, the other hanging off at an awkward angle. She leaned on one hand, fingers gripping at the covers beneath her palm.

The way Kate watched her though was different than when anyone else she was with before. In spite of her petite and unassuming demeanor, her gaze was abso-fucking-lutely intense...like Kate was gripping at her entire body with her eyes and leaving no part unseen. Like, she was really, really looking. Part of Victoria wants to put her clothes on. This is kind of out of this world and it scared her a bit. Another part of Victoria wants to slide everything off and be under Kate’s scrutiny. To just lie back, belly up and be under the mercy of that dark observation.

When the timer chimed, Victoria stood up and momentarily shook her legs of the stiffness. Kate waited quietly, patiently, her eyes stuck on Victoria. Before Kate could think she was standing, Victoria reached down,

The “zip” sound cracked open the tense silence like the tiniest whip in existence. Victoria let her skirt fall to the ground.

The gentle ‘whump’ of cloth hitting the group boomed like thunder within the room. As Victoria turned back towards Kate, she saw the other girl, again so still that she almost blended into the background. Observant and unblinking. Her lips together. No amusement or fear on her face. Grave.

As Victoria got on the bed she used her two hands to arched her back, curving her spine. then
scooted her knees up onto the covers. She twisted her body, her cleavage full frontal. Perhaps not as...obvious as Dana’s but the drama of the pose was far more striking than Dana ever did before.

A long moment. Then Kate rolled her shoulders back and continued.

Ding.

Finally Victoria moved to where she fully faced Kate. She sat, her legs in a ‘w’ position, just adorning thigh-high charcoal socks. She lay the back of her hands besides her thighs, and lifted her chin up, exposing her neck, like a worshipper opening themselves to their deity and awaiting their judgement.

Kate’s lips pursed.

Victoria stopped breathing when she felt Kate’s eyes flick down and then inch by inch climb up her body. It wasn’t a leer. There was nothing as crass or disrespectful. But still, Victoria felt every faint hair on her body erect, as though feeling the strong touch of Kate’s gaze.

Kate continued. As she drew, Victoria observed a gentle sheen of sweat form on Kate’s brow. Despite her lack of clothing, Victoria also felt the humidity rise within the room.

Seeing Kate work, the black smudges along her fingers and wrists. The bunches of wayward hair that glowed from in the sunlight coming in from the window. Part of her wished she could take a picture and immortalize that moment. However she didn’t dare move and instead burned that image into her brain.

When the timer dinged Victoria brought her legs in front of her and as she peeled one long sock down and off her leg she caught a fat, juicy bead of sweat race down Kate’s neck.

However, both annoyingly and impressively she never saw Kate’s gaze dissolve into perversion. If anything, the more and more she removed her clothing, the more intense her eyes became. Less like a simple artist and more and more like a warrior. Ready.

It reminds her when she stupidly sexted Zack. How she wrote to him that she wore her pearls and nothing else…

Even though she had been attracted to him and sexting him in hopes of luring him away from Juliet by causing pointless drama… She had gotten a bit of a thrill out of it.

No, not by his lame-ass responses. Those had been outrageously bad. Her, Taytay and CW had shared peels of laughter from rereading his awful writing (now knowing Courtney’s literary prowess, she understood why she had been literally in tears after reading his texts).

The thrill had come from being able to indulge in expressing her desires. She had always wanted to try that, just take everything off in front of someone until all that was left on her was her pearl
necklace. Take her sweet, sweet time and make the other person watch. Make them wait, unable to touch. To see how every layer of their self-control and politeness, like her clothes, get stripped away until they had no choice but to cave into their desires.

If this continued with Kate, Victoria was becoming certain that fantasy would no longer be something out of her imagination.

DING!

Sure enough, Victoria removed her other sock and felt the sudden draftiness expand upon her entire body. She lay onto her side, on the bicep of one arm, the other arm she stretched up and over her head, lengthening her ribcage. The bones of her pelvis stuck out, creating a mock v-line inbetween her legs.

Kate ever, ever so slightly leaned forward. However, she might as well have been Odysseus tied to the mast in the presence of the sirens with how she didn’t crack. She kept drawing.

Come on closer. Victoria mentally begged. Stand up from that sketchpad. Put down that charcoal and come to me. Please. Stop using your hands to take my image down and put your hands on my body to take me down. Victoria wanted those hands to trail over her breasts and down her ribcage, leaving dark evidence of Kate’s fingers on her skin. She wanted Kate to lean in so close to her, staring at her with that all consuming gaze and just consume Victoria with her mouth instead. Victoria wanted Kate to bite her hard and make her feel the full strength of that creativity and concentration that burned within Kate’s heart.

Victoria enjoyed the storm of butterflies within her stomach from not only being nearly naked in Kate’s presence, but being so turned on.

Blame it on hormones or innate sexuality or otherwise Victoria loved physical intimacy. She really liked hooking up, whatever that may entail. However, Victoria did not like the whole ‘exposure of oneself.’ There was a reason why, even though uncomfortable, Victoria preferred that she’d fool around with other people in very dark, very cramped spaces where neither one could exactly see any details but could still, albeit by pawing at each other with enough fury, get the job done.

After that sloppy first time with Rachel during the sunrise by the lighthouse, Victoria didn’t have to wait long until their friskiness became a regular thing. Unfortunately Rachel didn’t just want to wait until they were drunk and in somewhere very dark and/or very uncomfortable…

Rachel forced her to slow down. She liked to take her time to remove the clothing, to slowly run her hands up the skin. To explore and touch every single inch. Victoria had laid back, forcing the anxiety somewhere deep and away. She remembered clutching at the sheets as Rachel peeled away her under garments and ran her palm from her neck, in between her breasts, down, down a straight line, stopping around her pubis to run her fingers through the hair there.

Victoria fought the urge to twitch and to shrink away because she had been so scared, but the knowledge that Rachel was choosing her and was paying attention to her was worth more to her than anything.

Again, being in her sights had been the most addictive drug she had ever felt. But, like all good
drugs, nothing had been as revolutionary as that first time. After, she had just been led on a mad
goosechase to feel that special again. After every climax her heart fell lower and lower into despair.
To Rachel, she was just another body, someone to help bide her time before she took off for Los
Angeles. At least Price had been someone near and dear to her.

Now, with her 20/20 hindsight she hated that she let the other girl have such power over her. Yeah,
sex was just sex but it was called physical intimacy for a reason and fuck, she had just wanted to be
treated as though she was special. And just as every other person had fucking proved to her, she
wasn’t.

But now, she can bet her mother’s life that she wasn’t just anyone to Kate. That Kate respected both
her soul and her body and that meant everything. There was this other thrill that she could give her
complete trust that Kate would never take this moment for granted. That Kate understood Victoria’s
hatred of her own vulnerability. Under Kate’s small but steady fingers, Victoria knew that she was
safe. Heh. Who knew safety could make her... moist.

God, to be under Kate and letting her do just whatever the Hell she wanted made Victoria want to
curl up and whimper with arousal.

But that’s the masochistic part of her talking.

DING.

For a split second Victoria reached back and very, very seriously considered pinching the latch and
letting her bra fall off her chest when Kate piped up, voice cracking,

“Well that’s more than enough! Thank you!”

Victoria drew her hand back down her back. Watching Kate’s every move. The other girl’s energy
like a snapped telephone wire, left sparking on the ground.

“Thank you so much Victoria.” Kate continued again speaking just as quickly as packed up her
pencils and charcoal. As Victoria slid her legs straight and wiggled some feeling back in them she
noticed how Kate kept dropping her things onto the floor. Her fingers spazzing out. Victoria stood
up, nose wrinkling as she watched her object of affections. Kate was acting so weird.

“Well, let me see Leonardo—“ Victoria said, bounding over to the sketchpad. Kate shut it in her
face,

“next time.” Kate sprinted out her words. Victoria felt both a bit irked and her curiosity piqued,

Kate wasn’t looking her in the eye. Victoria leaned over, trying to see Kate’s face but as Kate shifted
around, all she could see clearly was Kate’s shiny pink ears. Observing how there was an obvious
shine to Kate’s neck and jawline. Sweat. Also, she was distracted by all the art supplies getting knocked to the ground.

Kate, just by habit, was a neat person. Victoria could relate as she may have certain things that lay around, but she didn’t like messes. Even though she herself was very used to having the cleaning lady straighten her things, Victoria herself was more than capable of keeping her shit in order as it drove her fucking crazy to be in any slovenly place. That was another reason why Price’s stupid truck gave her the heebie jeebies --- there may very well be ticks and anything else that lived in that filth.

Now knowing that the majority of her peers were gross and perfectly content in living in pigstys of their own filth, it gave Victoria a simple pleasure to watch Kate put things away. How she would absent-mindedly pick things up and make sure the space was at a minimum, neat. Victoria liked to see Kate take her sweet time to take each pen, each piece of charcoal, each little tool and put it back in it’s place.

But right now in Kate’s haste, things were slipping out of her hands, falling to the floor, rolling away.

“Aw crud.” Kate mumbled to herself as she desperately tried to gather everything up.

Victoria’s eyebrows arched up, truly a bit offput. She had never witnessed Kate so…scattered?

However, Kate’s sketchpad had fallen open and Victoria leaned down to see what was on the page. Lo’ and behold Victoria stared back at herself… This was the pose where her shirt of was off and she was leaning on her hand. It looked…. really good... She loved how Kate used simple smudges of her finger to express the shadows on Victoria’s body. It was simple, but suggested the real features creatively. However there was a particular attention to detail at the lips and the column of the throat...And…how her lacy brassiere hugged at her breasts…“I look hot.” Victoria whistled, her ego thoroughly fluffed. Kate snatched the sketchpad and flipped it shut so hard that it clapped.

Kate cleared her throat, “of course you do.” she mumbled, “you always look hot.” Victoria leaned over her, crocodile smile on her face,

“I know I’m hot, but you draw me like a Sex God.” Victoria said, heat thick on her tongue. Kate visibly twitched and looked back at Victoria, shooting her a rather peeved and mortified look. Victoria simply smirked, absolutely smug. “I like it. How about I commission you to do all my official portraits? They’d be the sexiest ones in the entire Chase family.”

“Only if you wear more clothes” Kate grumbled, looking away.

“It’s my portrait. I want to be nude. Come on, Kate, draw me like one of your french girls--”

Kate whapped Victoria’s arm, “Vic!” Kate sputtered, scandalized. Victoria simply grinned, absolutely wolfish in confidence.
Victoria reached out, her still very bare arm reaching around Kate’s back, “Well, now that’s all good and done with, let’s watch some anime. You absolutely must see--”

Kate flinched, “I actually have to go soon. I promised to meet up with Max and Chloe. “

Victoria’s eyes narrowed, “When?”

Kate checked her watch, “in ten minutes.”

“Stay. Stay.” Victoria urged, “I need your eyes.”

“Why do you need my eyes?” Kate asked, momentarily perturbed. Victoria rolled her own eyes, “not physically, I just need you to look at me…”

Kate arched an eyebrow, “I just looked at you for an hour.”

“Please, you were looking at me for your own pleasure,” Victoria huffed, noticing Kate look away, biting her lip, “but now I need you to look at me critically. I have to drive out to an event tonight - another remote art gallery opening that requires the Chase presence, but I want you to see if my outfit looks good.”

“You’re constantly saying I have no style.” Kate pointed out and Victoria scoffed.

“Not for yourself, but we’re working on it and you have improved slowly but surely,” that earned a small smirk from Kate, “but you have a keen eye and appreciation for aesthetics. Just sit and give me a moment, please.”

And with that, Victoria twirled and headed towards her closet, taking out the pieces of clothes she wanted to wear.

Victoria kept a keen look on the mirror, watching Kate in the reflection. Kate looked away, but her eyes flicked over occasionally. Victoria’s used to the looks of hunger from boys, the sly looks of lust from women…
But Kate’s eyes are different.

Her eyes darken considerably….critical focus. It reminded her of an assassin, tracking a target, taking in everything. Committing every detail to memory. It was akin to watching a tiger pace back and forth through glass.

And as soon as Victoria put on all the articles of clothing, she twirls around, modeling it. God, she’s so into how Kate looks at her. The sheer acuteness of her inspection. There’s something incredibly heavy about it…. Like one of those old cast iron stoves. Unmoving. Internally smoldering.

But Kate blinks and that dark “It looks very nice, Vic.” Kate offered, polite, soft. As soon as Victoria see’s Kate’s hand bracing the mattress, ready to get up she interrupts her,

“I know it’s nice, but I was also thinking that may be a bit too red carpet and not enough casual, you know. What about this?”

And just as quickly she takes her dress off, staring at the section of the mirror where Kate occupied. She’s a bit charmed when she saw Kate whip her head to the side when Victoria’s clothes slide off her skin. When she see’s those hazel eyes skirt over back to her, a mixture of curiosity and…and something that she never thought would exist within Kate.

It felt as though every time she glanced at Victoria, Kate was turning a key, winding Victoria up more and more and more.

But Victoria reeled in all impulse and energy. She kept her calm despite how her nerves were literally clawing at her muscles in desire. Victoria summoned all her strength and enforced patience upon her impulse. She spun around, modeling her new outfit.

She makes some off-handed fashion comments and scrutinizes Kate for her response. Her reaction. Kate, cute as always, shyly answers, amused “this looks just as lovely as the other one.”

“Come on, tell me your honest opinion. I think we’ve been through enough together where your politeness can be thrown out the window.”

A genuine appreciation comes out of Kate’s pupils as she says, again, “you look lovely in everything,” calculated and perfectly measured niceness.

Victoria scoffed, “you wouldn’t say that if I were wearing a potato sack.”
“I’m pretty sure you could march on the runway in a cardboard box and everyone would still applaud.”

“Well it’d be the hottest piece of cardboard on the planet.”

They both share a small laugh. It ends too soon and Victoria feels her tongue thicken in how muggy the room felt.

Then, proclaiming loudly that she’s still unsatisfied, Victoria whipped her clothes off yet again. Kate uttered so quietly that Victoria almost didn’t hear her, “you should put some clothes on now.” Victoria froze. There’s something in her tone… A sort of guilt. But it sounded more like Kate was berating herself rather than Victoria.

Victoria turned around, greeted with a Kate staring intently at the ground off to the side, neck pink. Something about this image made Victoria wish she could freeze time, grab her camera and take this shot. How Kate had turned to hide her face but left the side of her neck, stretched and exposed. Was she vulnerable? No, Victoria had seen her at her most vulnerable and that ignited a protective, compassionate urge within her. But that wasn’t what Victoria was feeling at the moment.

Something dark, but not wrathful slipped through her conscience fences and stretched, finally free.

It filled her senses with unprecedented confidence and as though she had somehow just won something...

She sauntered over to Kate, “This is my room.” Victoria dictated slowly.

There was a small sheepish smile on Kate’s face, her eyes still stubbornly looking away at the far corner of the room. “Touche” she murmured. Victoria feeling ludicrously self-assured despite her own lack of clothing let her forearms rest on Kate’s shoulders. Seeing Kate’s eyes dart to the right as a small wobbly smile came across her face made somewhere low and deep within her core heat.

“You,” Victoria began, taking a stray bit of dusty blonde hair and twirling it around her finger, “should take your clothes off.” Victoria proposed.

Kate let out only a tiny defeated sigh, “I can’t, Vic.” There. That guilt again. Victoria felt her claws flex and she poked at it, spot on.
“It’s not hard” Victoria pressed again, so gentle that her usual sharp tone to her voice was nowhere to be found. She tucked the stray lock behind Kate’s small but cutest ear, now ruby from the close proximity of Victoria. Even within her underwear, Victoria felt powerful as Kate silently closed her eyes for a moment, her chin tilted up ever so slightly. The diligent crusader, finally displaying a moment of surrender.

Victoria’s finger, while barely brushing against that damp skin, trailed down her neck to Kate’s collar, “See? Just like this…” Victoria’s fingers popped open the first button. Kate’s eyes remained closed and she remained so silent. Victoria, now way too deep to back out now, worked the button below that one, freeing it from it’s confines. Victoria should stop. She should back off.

But Victoria did love to push people’s buttons. Or in this case, pop them open.

It thrilled her to feel the heat coming off of Kate’s skin from just behind her shirt. She absorbed it within her pores. On the third button Victoria was stalled when she felt a small hand suddenly grab at hers, stopping her from proceeding.

“Vic.” Kate stated.

Both girls locked eye contact. Fear wasn’t what passed between them. Jest wasn’t what passed between them. Apprehension wasn’t what passed between them.

… Caution was one of the emotions that passed between the two of them.

It was hard to put into exact words but Victoria knew this tone very well. When she decided to go to her first party when she was thirteen back in Seattle, her two friends said this to her when they got into the car.

It was as if Kate was reminding her what they were doing.

It was as if Kate was making sure Victoria knew what she was doing.

Victoria stopped breathing as the epiphany filled her blood stream and she felt her eyelids widen in surprise as she realized--

BADUNUHNU
Kate’s phone. Currently blaring the “Gravity Falls” theme song on full blast as it rang and rang.

Kate picked up her phone, dropped it, then picked it up again, “hello? Yes. Yes. I’m coming, just uh, give me a couple of minutes.” She hung up and began to gather everything into her noncompliant arms. She mumbled something about the gay pirates having arrived and waiting for her.

Victoria, still in her skivvies stared at Kate feeling as though the wind had been knocked out of her. Finally she managed to get a bit of hair in her lungs then, “Have fun.” Victoria uttered.

“See you later” Kate mumbled as she whisked out the door, without looking back.

As soon as the door shut and she was truly alone again, Victoria’s entire body and mind buzzed. Thrumming with some sobering feeling that Victoria couldn’t describe too well.

It stayed with her well through the long car ride to the function. It stayed with her through the entire event, making it easy to be the prop ‘model daughter’ easily enough. It stayed with her well through the long drive back to Blackwell.

The nearly visceral vibrations kept her up all night.

Victoria wasn’t stupid. Victoria may be inexperienced and naïve about a few things (again, a few things, just a few).

But if there was one thing that Victoria did know it was lust. Scratch that, she knew attraction. She knew how stupid boys, like the bumbling mutts they were, would openly gape and drool. She knew how stupid girls would stare and thinking they were subtle, openly yearn, like puppies kept outside the bedroom. She knew how older men would leer at her, unashamed of their blatant creepiness. She knew the smolder of which confident older woman would throw her way, as to try and lure her in. She knew how the real subtle people would actually subtly look at her. They were the rarest types of people. Practically the human equivalent of the Siberian tigers; well admired and classy but extremely hard to find.

Every tiny action and every look afforded had tells of attraction that even super-humans couldn’t hide.

Attraction was primal and humans obeyed their need to express their desires, consciously or not.

She had spent a bit over an hour truly being in Kate’s eye. During that period Victoria felt as though she had been under the artistic sun, the rays of her gaze that of a most dedicated artist. But she had noticed tiny, tiny things. How sometimes Kate’s hazel orbs would emit flashes of something raw.
How through the mirror, Victoria burned into her memory the cautious glances that Kate snuck at her as she put on and took off her clothing.

Before, when Victoria finally admitted to herself that she had feelings for Kate (and more and more as the days went on) she had bitterly accepted that this would be a one-sided affair. In a way, it was the perfect punishment for her. Falling for the girl she tortured, only for the girl to torture her back.

But that afternoon had confirmed her suspicions. In the middle of the dark, a dangerous thought incubated and grew stronger and stronger.

*Kate Marsh finds me attractive.*

And it filled her with a most exhilarating hope.

*Chapter End Notes*

Sorry for the MAASSIIIIVEEE delay, as you all know real life doesn't go as planned. This get chaotic, work picks up, you get disappointed, guests come to visit, you get emotionally crushed, you get sick. Blah blah de fucking blah.

However, I did take my time to make sure that this chapter was updated. I swear I will try and make the next chapter come out quicker.

Also, if you can't tell by the subtext, it's been a really rough couple of months for me and I wanted to personally thank every single person who commented, left kudos and kept coming back to the story to see if I'd updated.

It truly means and lot and helped keep pushing me forward when it was really difficult to try and string this puppy together.

But, don't worry, I won't be giving up on this story. It will be completed! There's far too
few Chasemarsh stories and our ship fandom is far too small for me to ever give up on this.

But thanks for your immense patience...

BECAUSE FINALLY. THE THIRST HAS ARRIVED.
It's not me, it's you.

Chapter Summary

Bible: "... The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

Victoria: Bullshit! Even if we speak the same language we still don't understand each other!

Chapter Notes

The most gratitude to my beta's for this chapter:
Heart_Takers
Asmadasthehatters

You take my word vomit and help me throw away all the chunks that make no sense. You both also deal with me badgering you with drunk texts and shenanigans when you both really are too busy for my shit. You guys are da best.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference.”

- Eeyore [Winnie the pooh]
The way Kate had her arms wrapped around the wayward artistic supplies reminded Victoria of those old westerns where the bandits tried to steady the loads of money and jewels before their great escape. Kate, like a thief knowing the cops were coming, fled Victoria’s room. As soon as her door shut, Victoria was left alone, standing in her room. Just in her brassier and panties. She didn’t move. A statue of a wannabe Victoria’s Secret Angel.

She floated to the edge of her bed and sat in the exact spot that Kate sat in just barely a minute before. Victoria lifted up her neck in silent reverence to the universe.

Kate finds me attractive.

Kate wants me.

Fuck.

Victoria closed her eyes and took a breath through her nose. Slowly, she felt tingles run from her toes, her shins, her thighs to her arms where she felt her own hands cover her face.

Fuck yes.

A lightning bolt of pure, innocent *excitement* filled up her entire body and she laughed out into the empty room. That untainted, bright elation that fills up children when they realize that they’re going to the park with their parents. The rush of euphoric victory that ignited within your blood when you pressed the shutter button down, capturing the precise moment of perfection. Oh, Victoria hadn’t felt that in so long.

Kate desired her back.

Her skin was clear, her crops were flourishing, her grades were up, unicorns existed and redemption was possible! Life could be good!

That entire night Victoria lay awake, thinking and plotting the infinite different ways their future days could go. How would they progress things along? Perhaps it would be a cute scenario:
They would both agree to have Victoria pick up Kate again from the church she volunteered at. Hopefully this time would somehow make up for the previous disaster of screaming at each other and crashing Victoria’s car.

Victoria would wait outside that church, outside the radius of the house of those rather hypocritical ‘nice’ people that Kate chose to sacrifice her time to. She would be dressed to kill and be wearing her stacked booties just to add to the effect of her being a powerful, artistic woman that anyone would kill to be with. Kate would come out, a bit taken aback by Victoria’s chivalry, but happy to see her nonetheless.

Once they got into the car they would play some tunes and sing. She would put on “Same Love” by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. “True Affection” by The Blow. “I Kissed A Girl” by Katy Perry. It would make embarrass Kate. It would be cute. Yet rather than go back to Blackwell Victoria would take a detour...

To somewhere nice.

A hidden hole in the wall, called “Visione chiara” about an hour away from Arcadia Bay, specializing in Italian food and somehow getting featured in Food and Wine magazine without anyone ever knowing.

Kate would be shy, but giddy with her sincere surprise. Victoria would be the smoothest bitch on the west coast, sparking fantastic conversation and very slight double entendres, further drawing Kate under her spell.

They would have a lovely dinner. Victoria’s foot would brush against Kate’s ankle. Kate’s foot would slowly, over the course of their main course come to meet Victoria’s beneath the table. A game of footsie would commence as they shared tartufo in candle light.

Then she would take them to the beach. Where they would take a very romantic walk. She would offer Kate her elbow. Kate would take it.

They would kiss. Oh!

They would kiss again
SQUEE.

Ugh. Her heart exploded in fuzzies just at the thought.

But

Perhaps it would be a bit less Nora Ephron and a bit more…

They would be doing some homework together and Victoria would offer to put something on. Some anime, maybe Puella Magica Mahou Madoka, maybe some Lupin III...Kate would sit next to her, unable to keep her eyes off the Chase protege, until---

‘I don’t want to watch anything.’ Kate would blurt out. Victoria would glance over, seemingly unaffected by Kate’s large eyes, blown out with desire. Contrary to her cool attitude, she would know exactly what Kate wanted. What she needed.

Playing coy, she would bat her eyes at Kate before asking, in a sultry voice, ‘Then whatever is it that you want to do?’ Victoria would lean towards Kate...

Then Kate would then leap upon her, unable to hold back her desire any longer. Victoria’s hands would struggle to contain Kate’s hot body and trying to satisfy her. Her left hand gripping at Kate's back and her left sliding between her inner thighs, pushing Kate's panties to the side to tease Kate's low wetness with her fingers.

Victoria could barely imagine how Kate would sound when hot and needy. Just hearing Kate openly begging for her. Well, Vic was sure if she ever had that one wish fulfilled of Kate breathing into her ear and pleading in a low voice “fuck me, Victoria ” she would come on the spot. Like a fountain. Exploding.

They would fuck on her sofa and ruin the fabric before rolling off that onto the floor where Kate would ride her face until Victoria nearly suffocated down there. When Victoria's face was covered in Kate's slick lust, Victoria would carry her off to bed and they would fuck again.

‘That was phenomenal,’ Kate would pant out. Her fair neck blotchy with hickies. Those breasts
and hips peppered with lovemarks.

‘I know,’ Victoria would purr, naked, covered in scratches and bites.

‘Victoria Chase you’ve blown my mind and my virginity. I don’t know how anyone could ever be better than that. Ever.’ Kate would confess while Victoria peppered kisses along her shoulder and collarbone. Victoria would say something smooth and modest.

‘You’re a Sex Goddess. Fuck me again’ Kate would say as she grabbed Victoria’s face again and stuck her tongue in her mouth. Then Kate would choke her as Victoria slipped three fingers into Kate’s cunt and fingered her as hard as she could until Victoria passed out or Kate came or both.

Ugh. Like a fountain. Exploding.

Me gusta Me gusta Me gusta

Victoria, hopelessly indulgent, let her fantasies travel everywhere from those two extremes to anywhere in between and beyond.

Whenever she closed her eyes she could see how the pearls of sweat glittered off Kate’s neck.

Oh how that moment of Kate grabbing her hand “Vic.” remained crisp in her mind and whenever she recalled it the emotions just rang out like a fist striking the gong of excitement.

It vibrated through her body.

Kate was attracted to her.

Kate found her physically appealing.

Kate liked her naked body.
LADIES, GENTLEMEN AND NONBINARY FOLK SIT THE FUCK ON DOWN BECAUSE VICTORIA CHASE HAD A CHANCE!

In the safety of the privacy underneath her covers she let herself grin like a doofus. For the first time in a long time it wasn’t anxiety or self loathing that was keeping her awake.

It was the first time in such a long long time where she genuinely looked forward to tomorrow.

Tomorrow came!

And Kate went silent.

As in Kate didn’t practice the violin that morning.

As in Kate didn’t regard her at all during the day.

Um.

What?

As in Kate wasn’t texting her.

Ok….

Victoria texted her.

Kate took her sweet time to respond and with one worded, very strangely polite answers.

What?
Victoria attempted to make eye contact with her in the hallways.

No secret looks across the space, eyes twinkling with mischief and camaraderie.

Kate didn’t even look at her at all.

Kate didn’t even acknowledge her.

…

Two days passed with this unusually aloof behavior on repeat.

Finally just done with it, Victoria banged her fist on their shared wall one evening.

She waited about thirty seconds.

Knock Knock. Two concise, polite knocks on the wall back.

Victoria stomped her way next door and refrained from punching Kate’s door. Instead she gave two strong knocks.

“Hey Victoria.” Kate said, demure and pleasing. Victoria’s eyes narrowed. She had heard that tone in the various business art parties and functions her parents dragged her to. When women wanted to be nice and sip champagne while making eye contact with the person they were talking to. When they wanted to seem like the supportive wife or partner even though they longed for a shot of Jager and would rather die than be at that party. Also, ever since they got closer, when it was just the two of them Kate usually called her ‘Vic.’

For the sake of reconnaissance, Victoria played along - pretending to be dumb and nicely suggested they watch something. Kate very politely declined. Now, under normal circumstances Victoria would’ve totally pressured Kate. Goaded her. Guilted her. Victoria pretty much knew the procedures needed to get Kate to surrender and watch things with her.
But these weren’t normal circumstances.

Kate, even though always a woman of manners, showcased her affection and familiarity for a person by dropping the armor of formality. She was wearing it again though.

Victoria went back to her room and paced, her nerves too tense for her to sniff.

… What was going on?

Oh...

That dumbass little bitch-- Kate was IGNORING HER! Victoria was literally a few frothing seconds away from going into Kate’s room, wrecking her shit and spray-painting **GOD IS WATCHING YOU BE A BITCH** all over her stupid Jesus pictures.

Victoria, *breathe.*

Before Victoria never took a moment to breathe because that’s when feelings of genuine hurt would arise.

What did I do wrong?

Was I too extra? Was I too intense? Was I too needy? Does she not like me at all?

Victoria used her rage to drown out her insecurities and then took a few more breaths. Ok, Kate was being a whore and it really sucked. Now, for the most important question,

Why was Kate ignoring her?

Kate was the one who asked *Victoria* to privately model. Kate was the one who seemed really into secretly looking at Victoria’s nearly nude body. Kate didn’t object when Victoria was stripping. Kate was the thirsty bitch. Like, she couldn’t even hide her damn thirst. Also Kate may have no dating
experience whatsoever but she wasn’t dumb. Victoria was certain that Kate knew that Victoria desired her back. Kate knew what Victoria was doing when she slowly but surely took off every article of clothing in front of her and posed in increasingly enticing ways.

Victoria knew from the utter intensity within Kate’s eyes that Kate knew what Victoria was doing.

So why, after very deliberately showcasing her own desire did Kate then decide to back out and crawl back to Jesus? Kate should be going for it! If their places were reversed Victoria would be casting that die across the Rubicon and making romance happen. If she were Kate, the modelling incident would be the impetus to stop all this tip-toeing around each other! It was time to rip each other’s clothes off!

**IT’S TIME TO BE GAY, KATE.**

Why couldn’t Kate get this into her brain!? The irritation racked over Victoria’s brain down her chest to jab into her heart.

She felt the rejection plague her like a cyst that grew under her skin, ugly and solid.

What was Kate doing?

It drove Victoria mad until finally the next day, outside of the Prescott dormitories, Victoria tried to take her mind off it all. She sat outside with her Vortex club friends on the steps of the Prescott dormitory. A lioness surveying its territory. She felt the cool air on her skin but it did little to chill her frustration.

Her, Taylor and Courtney were taking the last few days they could chill on the steps before it got too cold. Yet, today Taylor wasn’t there and it was just Victoria and Courtney. This was a bit unusual as Victoria wasn’t alone with Courtney very often. Usually it was always Taylor and Courtney. Or Courtney plus other various members of the Vortex club. But Courtney by herself? Minus that excruciating editing event, this wasn’t often. Well so far there wasn’t any drama or anything. Nothing awkward. No gossip either. It was quite peaceful, actually.

Wow, there really were a lot of squirrels. That weirdo janitor trained them good. Victoria wondered how many other woodland creatures did he train? Hmmm, could you train squirrels to do a dance routine, like the Single Ladies dance or Gangnam Style?
WAIT.

Only then was Victoria suddenly aware of the silence. Usually when Taylor wasn’t there, Courtney would either be active listening to Victoria’s tangents or she’d be dictating off all the latest gossip from the halls of Blackwell. However, today Courtney was practically mute besides her. Victoria turned over and saw Courtney staring at her knees, writing in one of her notebooks. She was writing. Victoria let herself watch Courtney scribble away.

Courtney was ignoring her.

Courtney NEVER ignored Victoria!

HOW DARE SHE---

“What are you writing?” Victoria snapped, a touch peeved that Courtney would rather be paying attention to some stupid blank pieces of paper than Victoria, herself. Courtney flinched, eyes wide at her. For a moment, Victoria felt a sick sense of pleasure that now Courtney was paying attention...then she mentally slapped herself. Oh. She had never asked Courtney what she was writing before. Of course. God, why was she such a fucking bitch all the time?

Better now than never, Winona Ryder said again.

“Well, usually I write editorials, reviews and the such...but today...”

“Today you’re writing erotica?” Victoria stated, curt and quick, “whips and chains and pony play?”

Courtney laughed, a light blush coating her cheeks, “I wish.” then she blinked, “what’s pony play?”

“Google it.”
“Do I want to?”

“Yes”

Courtney laughed but continued, “It’s just some fiction. You know.”

“About…?”

Courtney’s fingers gripped at the edge of her notebook and her shoulders hunched over, “Nothing really, just figuring it out.”

Victoria felt both endeared that she had to coax out the answer out and aggravated that Courtney couldn’t answer a simple fucking question. Victoria’s heart cringed again. Courtney wants your approval so badly that she won’t say anything that may not be up to your standard.

Victoria tried something new. “Well what are you figuring out? Come on, I let you see my pictures all the time” she said, going for the ‘encouraging’ friend route.

“But your pictures are gorgeous”

“And I know for a fact that your writing is on point. Now tell me.”

Victoria felt herself become intrigued as she continued to stare at her friend. She had never seen such a bashful Courtney. It’s cute, really, that there’s this side of her Victoria never saw.

There was a faint pink blush on Courtney’s cheeks as she brushed back her bangs, “Yeah, a bunch of delusional rich kids in high school. Mean Girls with some Heathers with some ‘The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter’ Just the next great American novel” Courtney replied laying her self-deprecation thick with sarcasm. You know. Victoria actually really wanted to read some of Courtney’s writing. Really see what went on in her head. How did she see the world? How did she choose to express the great universal emotions?, “however now really thinking about it, highschool is more Hunger games --”

“Battle Royale.”
“Battle Royal what?”

Victoria felt her cheeks flare in heat. Her weeaboo ass just had to bust out of the closet at the worst times, “Japanese Hunger Games written back in 1996.” she responded coolly, as though she wasn’t internally freaking out, “You should read it, a writer like you can appreciate it’s timeless quality.” When it came to reading about teenagers killing each other, Koushun Takami certainly made it an artform.

“There was a Japanese hunger games?”

“Courtney. Continue.”

“Uh, alright, highschool is like the hunger games with mandatory class time where we aren’t allowed to kill each other or a Battle Royal Hunger Games without the actual weapons. Hell, sometimes with the actual weapons. Got to thank Columbine and Sandy Hook for that. Anyways, just all these different kids who make all different kinds of bad decisions—”

Victoria was going to murder Courtney if she dared mis-say “Battle Royale” one more time, but another thought shoved it’s way in front of all other concerns, “Wait.” Victoria interrupted.

“Yes, Tori?”

“So like, you’re writing different characters right?”

Courtney nodded. Yes, Victoria, this is writing fiction 101

“They are all different from you.”

Courtney nodded, slow and deliberate. Yes, Victoria, writing. That is writing.

“So, like, how do you get in their head? How do you understand someone who is so radically different from you?” Victoria continued, beginning to think she was oh-so-clever, “You’re socially-
savvy. Got the looks and pay attention to fashion, art, pop-culture, you know - important things. But when you’re trying to write someone who’s - let’s just say - is a weirdo. Like, a reserved person who likes to do charities, has no idea how to put an outfit together, prays to God several times a day—”

“Religious?” Courtney piped in, “Because, like, people can pray but not necessarily be religious. Or is that just something they do when they panic?”

“Religious.” Victoria answered, not really prepared for the barrage of questions from Courtney, “Yeah, but you get what I mean.”

Courtney tapped her pen against her notebook a few times before speaking, “Well initially it can be a bit challenging. Especially if they care about things you don’t care about but usually you have to start with what motivates them”

Victoria scoffed, “Do-gooders just want to do good. It’s boring. Who cares?”

“They care.” Courtney inserted immediately, getting a bit lost in her own thinking. Victoria stared at her friend. Courtney never dared...correct her before. “That’s the challenge of it. Why does this person choose to do what they do? What makes someone react in such different ways? Sometimes it’s frustrating AF because it’s not always apparent.”

Victoria let out a rather haughty scoff, “It’d help if people just acted logically. Like, it’s not hard to see that if you do A, then B must follow. If you want the D you have to let the C out—”

“Tori, the whole ‘rational choice theory’ is like, a complete fallacy. People are like, super illogical. Recently behavioral economists and writers for centuries, thank you, know that the way people act makes absofuckinglutely no sense. People are, like, super flawed and messed up and act accordingly.”

Um. There was a warning trill within Victoria as the realization of Courtney’s really fucking smart and why don’t I know anything about behavioral economists? Her insecurity began to whimper, loudly. And thus, all of her defenses reared up and attacked.

Victoria sneered, “Oh? Like how even though you’re not bad looking you still spend almost two hours to do your makeup? Watch all those youtube tutorials and sometimes you still look like a ho? Or how you only eat salads and zero carbs we still hear you upchuck after dinner? You judge the rest of the ‘forever alone’ losers but you’re still a virgin...Unless there’s a hookup you haven’t told me
about?” with a perfected passive-aggressive vicious conclusion, “You’re right. None of that makes any sense. ”

Courtney flinched, her lips tightened and her eyes widened. As if she had felt every metaphorical nail that scratched at her face. She opened her mouth then closed it. There was a long moment of complete silence as if even God was speechless. As soon as Victoria saw those blue eyes moisten, Courtney looked away. The edge of her hair cut like a knife slicing across her jugular, “Yeah. Exactly.” she answered quietly.

Before, Victoria would’ve felt the same satisfaction one got when they smashed a spider with a book. When one smacked a dog for making a mess out of things. Good. Slave should know her place.

But now, when Victoria saw the sheer hurt that flashed on Courtney’s face before she turned away it just reminded her of Kate in the diner. Or when Kate was in any type of emotional agony. Now, Victoria felt her heart scream in horror,

WHY DID SHE JUST DO THAT!??

Victoria fought against internally self-flagellating herself for her outrageous wrathful behavior. That would come later, she had to do something right then! I can’t say sorry. Was another terrifying realization. Courtney knew Victoria according to her bad behavior - and wouldn’t believe the sorry even if Victoria said it. What could she do? What? Her mind froze.

And only when her mind froze, her heart pushed up against her voice box and her mouth opened,

Victoria shrugged, “Whatever, it’s no big deal. My therapist has already forwarded me to several counselors that could help with my own bulimia, but, like why stop a method that works? I know I’m fabulous but at the same time I have to overcompensate with everything. ‘Louis Daguerre was a french painter who created ‘Daguerreotypes’-- what a lame gimmick. Like, Jeffershit was a man more than twice my age, really wasn’t interested and I still threw myself at him. #slutgoals right?” she readjusted her bangs, “Here I am, one of the one percent in every aspect of life and still I do the dumbest shit imaginable. You’re right. We’re all just fucked.”

When Victoria flicked her green eyes over to her friend, she saw Courtney peering at her with inquisitive eyes. She knew how Courtney hungered for anything that Victoria would give her. At most it was usually just scraps of affection, faux-camaraderie and no gratitude whatsoever. This time though, Victoria peeled back her bullshit and exposed some of her wounds. Courtney was staring in awe that she had finally, finally been let in a bit.
“Yeah.” Courtney let out a small laugh that came out more like a cough, “Even Mother Theresa and MLK Junior had their fair share of bullshit.” both of them chuckled,

“I bet you even President Obama has a load of bullshit”

Both of them laughed.

“So, how does everyone being messed up help you figure out your characters?”

“Well, then from there it’s figuring out what their anxieties and motivations are. That helps justify whatever fucked up behavior they choose to do. You know, are they insecure that they feel too dumb or aren’t pretty enough? Do they want money or material things?”

Victoria thought quietly. Kate was relatively poor and never seemed to mind much. Other than her bible and sketchbooks, she didn’t have much and her violin or computer may have been the most valuable things she owned. What motivated Kate to do good? Probably had something to do with Jesus. Victoria’s brain ticked off things; Kate was anxious about being a good person, trying to be in artist in a world that didn’t appreciate them, blah blah--

“But can’t people be anxious about the same things? We all want to succeed. We all want to look good.”

“Ain’t a fear if it’s happening.” Courtney quipped

“Preach it, sistah”

Courtney got right back on track, “You’re right, but that’s when individual character comes in - how we respond to our anxieties is sometimes purely an innate thing- like some people are able to just rise to the occasion better and others self-destruct or some people run for fifteen miles and others eat pints of icecream and watch Jersey Shore but that’s a long discussion that I don’t feel like getting into--”

Victoria gave a small nod. Ugh. This is why she didn’t write, it was so unnecessarily complicated.
“But another thing that can help you understand where they come from is not only what their fears are….​” Courtney drummed her nails along the stone step, clack clack - “but what makes them feel guilty.”

Ping!

Something about that word

Guilt

Rang sharp and loud within Victoria’s gray matter,

“Guilty?” Victoria said aloud to herself.

“Oh yeah, guilt and shame make people do a lot of shit, or don’t do a lot of shit.”

DING DING DING DING DING!!

The epiphany exploded within Victoria’s frontal lobe.

KATE WAS ASHAMED THAT SHE’S ATTRACTED TO ME. KATE FEELS GUILTY ABOUT OGLING MY (fine) BODY. KATE IS GUILTY ABOUT BEING RAGING LESBIAN IN A STUPID CULTURE THAT DOESN’T CELEBRATE HER. KATE IS A GUILTY BABY LESBIAN. KATE IS ASHAMED OF HER BIG LESBIAN BONER FOR ME.

Victoria remembered how Kate had looked away as she changed. Kate had not looked embarrassed, as one would if they saw their crush in barely enough clothing. She had been looking off at the ground, as though it had pained her.

“You,” Victoria began, taking a stray bit of dusty blonde hair and twirling it around her finger, “should take your clothes off.” Victoria proposed.

Kate let out only a tiny defeated sigh, “I can’t, Vic.” There. That guilt again.

When Kate had scooped up all her things she hadn’t been able to look Victoria in the eye. She hadn’t
been able to since the event had happened. Not because she had been disgusted or repulsed or angry but because she felt guilty. Kate probably felt responsible that their sexy tension even happened.

Ugh! But Kate shouldn’t feel guilty! She should feel awesome! She was attracted to Victoria Chase - - who, in case you were blind to all the signals she was displaying throughout, was attracted to her back! That. Is. Literally. The. Best. Case. Scenario. What was the deal?

Other than years of external homophobia that probably resulted in a lot of internalized homophobia.

Fuck.

Ok.

Well Kate needed to be reassured that this was a good thing! She wasn’t a monster. Desiring other people was fine, even if they happened to identify as the same gender as you.

Wait.

Didn’t she just do this? You know, in her room when she first pinged out that Kate was attracted to women? When she was in her bunny burrow, drawing Caulfield like a gay puppy? Also at the diner with the Two Whales where Kate cried her eyes out? Why wasn’t anyone else helping drag her ass out of the closet?

Victoria. She doesn’t talk to anyone else about this.

Victoria felt her back straighten at that epiphany.

Lesbihonest, Kate didn’t talk to anyone else about desire and gay culture.

Kate only talked to her.

Victoria was the only one Kate ever opened the door of her deep closet to. Only Victoria was allowed to peek in and talk to the baby gay that was hiding in there. Thus, Victoria was one of the only few who could gently coax her out and wipe her internalized homophobic tears away.
How many times was she going to have to do this though?

*As many times as you have to.*

“Um. Tori? Are you alright?”

“Yes, fabulous, why?”

“Just you got really quiet and your eyes got really big—”

“I’m great. Courtney you’re wonderful. Thanks!” Victoria waved her off as she got her phone out to text the one and only Kate Marsh. Yes, that cutie pie could run back into her closet of guilt but Victoria was going to be there to open the door and let her, ever so tentatively, come see the light. The very rainbow light.

She promised herself already that she was going to be the best friend Kate never had.

Reassuring her that being gay wasn’t a punishment from God and was in fact something to be proud of and celebrated, as well as acting upon her destiny to make out with Victoria’s face, well, that just happened to be in the job description.

She flipped open her messaging app and began to type a message to Kate.

Victoria: Hey kt…

Victoria paused and thought how to accurately do this.

Victoria: Hey Kt, I know you have a big lesbian crush on me—hahaha me too! Let’s meet up and do lesbians things—

Victoria smirked as she deleted that. Maybe one day she could send something that ridiculous and
straight forward to Kate, but today wasn’t that day. Ok, so, how should she put this--

“Oh? Who’s that?” Taylor quipped, leaning in towards Victoria. Before she could even think about how to #chill at her nosy friend, Victoria’s knee-jerk reaction of *fucking nearly jumping a foot into the air and protecting her phone like it was her new born baby* totally happened. She glanced up at her friend, her phone screen held tight against her chest. She hadn’t even noticed Taylor had arrived and sat at her dutiful place to Victoria’s right.

“It’s my mom.” Victoria hissed. “You want to talk to her so fucking bad? I’ll give you her number.”

Taylor didn’t even need to respond. The tiniest of smiles on her face. Victoria felt her ears sizzle with the third-degree burn of being absolutely exposed and *embarrassed.*

“I was just curious, that’s all Tori” Taylor responded, *so #chill.* She leaned back, not looking at Victoria anymore. Victoria narrowed her eyes before going back to the text. What couldn’t Kate resist? *Victoria’s naked body ayoooo* Not cartoons, Kate said no to those all the time. Gossip? No, Kate shied away from that and tended to go silent when people began to gossip. Fashion? Even though Kate would let Victoria purge and resurrect her wardrobe, it wasn’t exactly Kate’s fun time. Drugs and alcohol? Haha, very funny, thought Victoria. Did Kate do anything that was fun at all or have any vices that weren’t cute and adorable and actually---

Aha!

Victoria: Hey Katie, HW is a suuuuuuch a bitch. None of the nerds will help me through it.

HAH! Kate could never resist helping someone! She was motivated by Jesus and probably her dad to always help those in need! She said over and over again that helping others was actually selfish because ‘it made her feel really good’ so it wasn’t really selfless, which COME ON that was like a humble brag if anyone heard of one. Or it sounded like a strange version of masturbation. Speaking of, did Kate masturbate? She should. If she did, what did she think about? Me! Me! Me! Ok, getting distracted, one step at a time, girl.

At that moment though, Victoria self-fived herself within her brain because, *"Come to me, all you who are gay and ashamed, and I will give you confidence and my body."* - Victoria mentally bastardised Kate’s favorite bible quote.

Victoria smirked at her own genius.
Victoria: I’d really like to get it on with you

Victoria: I’d really appreciate it if we could do it together--

“Awfully happy to be texting your mom” Taylor quietly slipped that out loud into the open. Victoria’s ears rang and her jaw dropped, absolutely stunned.

Oh that bitch.

Since when did she get so...so... bold!!?

“And you know exactly when I’m so happy and pleased?” Victoria sneered at her.

“You’re right. I was making assumptions. Oh no.” Taylor replied, her response as dry as a cracker. Victoria felt her lips purse as she internally fumed at Taylor. How. How dare she just look so God damn smug.

Courtney eye-balled the two of them, suspicious, before her face lit up in excitement

“Oh my God, who is that??”

“Totally her mom” Taylor answered, cool as the frost in your fridge. Her unaffected facade cracked as her jaw shook as she sniggered right after she completed that sentence.

“It’s my mother!” Victoria screeched, which failed to inspire the fear she wanted when Taylor just busted out laughing. Courtney’s knees jittered, excited,

“Who is it?” Courtney whined, her curiosity itching her entire body.

Victoria exploded, “Oh, fuck you two skanks!”
Of course, even while Victoria stubbornly glowered at her two laughing friends, she had to bite her tongue to keep from smiling. When was the last time the three of them just laughed it all out like dorks?

Ugh. The weirdo squad was getting to her.

---

Of course Kate had come over to her room at 4:30 pm sharp because she fell for Victoria’s text hook, line and sinker. Victoria’s ego purred when she realized that she was truly getting to know the enigma that was Kate Marsh. And of course Victoria made sure to be on her most charming and well-mannered behavior. Unfortunately nothing seemed to help the rather blase mood within the room. Now, don’t get her wrong, Kate was helping her a lot with this homework. Victoria was certain that without Kate, she’d have to copy it off someone else last minute.

To be perfectly honest, Kate was helping her too much. There was no dry wit. No gentle teasing. Just pure business.

Before Kate had come over Victoria had mentally agonized about what to say to Kate. How could she subtly bring up the fact that Kate had been avoiding her and acting weird since the modeling day? Yet Kate’s polite front couldn’t disguise just how chilly she had become. Forty-five minutes into their study-session and Victoria debated putting on another sweater because Damn, Kate was cold. An icicle wearing a ridiculous bunned wig.

This felt too similar to the first time they decided to work together. Even though it had been a little over a month ago, it felt like it had been an eternity since that skin-crawling afternoon of awkward before they had that break-through. She didn’t want to go back there again, not ever again.

On another more frustrating note, as they quietly did their work together, Kate would let out a quiet sigh through her nose. Everytime Victoria heard the literal sound of “:/” it would make Victoria want to throw a damn chair out the window and chuck Kate out.

THIS IS SO FRUSTRATING. Victoria screamed for the bazillionth time within her mind.

_I swear to fucking God_
If Kate

Sighs

One more time...

Kate let out a small sigh—

“Kate. Why have you been avoiding me?” Victoria snapped. Kate looked at Victoria, eyes widening, surprised. However it wasn’t sincere surprise as in ‘oh my, I had no idea what is going on.’

It was the surprise that was ‘oh shit you brought this up.’

Well mandatory update, sweetheart, Queen Vic is going to call you the fuck out.

“Victoria-” Kate began and the sheer formality in Kate’s tone agitated Victoria’s frustration to anger,

“Don’t give me your bullshit, Kate. After I modelled for you you’ve been acting weird and not wanting to hang out with me. So, what did I do?”

Kate bristled and took a moment, “Just because I have a few days where I don’t interact with you, simply means I’ve been busy. You don’t have authority over my time and my communication” she responded, coolly.

Victoria never took accusation well. It always felt like a good slap to her and the heat of indignation clogged her senses and like whiplash she came back, aggressive.

“Don’t you dare play victim here. I’m not your master and you’re not my dog here. You’re my friend. I can see when you’re sincerely busy - which again, is totally fine with me because I have my own life, girl. You think I just sit around and wait for you to text me” ok, that was ‘truthy’ at best, she did wait, like an anxious little girl waiting for her parents to come back and do that cool thing with
her that they promised, anyways, “but I’m not stupid, so stop treating me like I am.”

Kate remained silent, she looked at the paper, ignoring her. As annoying as that was, Victoria knew she was striking some nerve in the other girl because Kate wasn’t responding. She usually remained silent when:

1. She had nothing nice to say
2. She didn’t know what to say
3. SHE WAS A GUILTY WHORE!!!!

Ok, this wasn’t working. Kate did not react well to aggression as it caused her to double down on her defenses rather than lose it. Victoria, this is Kate - what gets her to loosen up? Victoria gripped her wrath within her shaky hand of rationale and tried again,

“Look, we’ve had ‘constructive discussions’ before,” Victoria explained.

*Constructive discussions was Kate’s polite term for ‘calling you out on your bullshit’,*

“And when we were ‘misbehaving.’” Victoria continue.

*Misbehaving was Kate’s pc term for ‘you’re being an asshole, stop.*

“This isn’t different from the time you called me Hitler--”

“I apologized for that-” Kate protested.

“--Or everytime you say I’m too mean or I need to be more conscientious of people’s feelings. And even though it annoys me, it’s good. It’s good that you do that for me. Also someone has to call you out when you’re being delusional and shoving your feelings into a box and letting them ferment until it explodes. Yes, it’s so annoying and difficult but it’s good.”

Kate crossed her arms and remained mute, having nothing to retort. A glimmer of pride fizzed through Victoria’s frustration. *Yessssssss, keep going*
Now knowing full well she had the upper hand, Victoria’s posture relaxed. She rested her chin in the palm on one hand, “So, Katie.” Victoria drawled, “What. Is. Up?”

Kate’s eyes flicked to the table, “Nothing’s up.” Kate mumbled while fidgeting. She scratched at her neck.

**YUP. OPTION KATE IS A GUILTY WHORE IT IS.**

Victoria bit her tongue and forced herself to remain calm. Instead, she gave Kate a long, pointed look. “Pinocchio your nose is legit 8 feet long.” Victoria pointed to the window, “as in, it’s taller than Lebron and Yao Ming combined. If you can dribble the ball, then you could slam dunk on anyone.”

That got out a dark snigger from Kate as well as a self deprecating smirk. Kate already knew she was terrible at lying, she didn’t need Victoria to slay her on that fact. Victoria waited with a patience that only Kate could summon from her.

“Victoria.” Kate began, her tone even and volume rigidly neutral. It put Victoria on edge. She had been around enough adults who used hyper formality to either hide bad news or the fact that they wanted to murder you.

“I really do appreciate you...spending time with me. I also really do appreciate you talking about...things of romantic, sexual and homosexual in nature. It may be at times TMI, but it helps me a lot, truly.”

“Helps you get off or what?” Victoria interjected, her patience having just peaced out. Kate’s cheeks flushed and she glared at Victoria before continuing,

“You don’t have to hang out with me. You don’t have to help me all the time. You’ve done more than enough.”

Victoria felt her eyes widen, appalled. What was that even--!?! Victoria was about to slam her hands on the table, stand up and fucking scream at this bitch because was this some Black Mirror episode where suddenly nothing made any sense?!?
Victoria looked hard at Kate and saw how she looked more sad than anything. As though she were sinking into herself. Victoria recognized that posture. She recognized that expression. It was when Kate was hating herself and feeling isolated. Victoria remembered the last time Kate wasn’t sleeping, how she also dove into herself and avoided Victoria.

Oh. Kate didn’t push others out necessarily because she was pissed at them. She pushed others away when she was feeling bad about herself.

This wasn’t about Victoria. This was about Kate.

Ok then. Kate was pushing Victoria away because she was distraught. Was it because Victoria was a girl? Probably a factor but definitely not the entire thing. If Kate had Max or Dana all to herself she doubted the same sort of insecurity was coming out. Ok then. What was different about Victoria?

“This is your way of trying to let me know you don’t want to hang out with me?” Victoria snapped, her temper wriggling through for the moment, “Because it’s absurd, just say it--”

“No,” Kate jumped back, tone like an arctic wind that whipped at your cheeks, “look, I’m not your vortex club or anything. I know you don’t think I’m cool enough for you.”

Huh?

“What?” Victoria blurted out, her mind taking an extra moment to try and decipher what Kate just said.

“I know you feel...guilty about what happened to me in October” Kate said, her voice very slow, choosing her words very very carefully, “however you know I already have forgiven you and it’s all in the past. If there are other people you would rather spend your time with, then please,” Kate gestured towards the door, “do.”

The utter indignation slapped Victoria and she felt wanted to bark at Kate, “Are you out of your fucking mind?” or “What the actual fuck are you saying?” and then probably, “how dare you think that I’m pitying you does it look like I ever fucking pity anyone like do you even realize how thirsty I am for you? I was seriously this close to just taking off your clothes and just doing some really gay things to you and if you wanted me to do it now I’d still do you anyway even though I’m so angry--..”
Victoria blinked, suddenly everything clearing and brightening into focus

!

Vic, it’s not about you. She’s insecure that you’re just trying to be a good person and that you’re only hanging out with her because you’re obligated to.

!!!

KATE THOUGHT SHE WASN’T COOL ENOUGH FOR VICTORIA TO WANT HER.

OH!!!!

“You’re such a busy girl.” Victoria sneered. Her initial jab of wrath helped ease the sting of her wronged heart.

“Yes. Yes I am.” Rachel stated back. Each word clear and low. Rachel was pretty casual and laid-back around Victoria but this was one of the instances of warning. Do not bug Rachel on her life. She did what she wanted. If she didn’t want you then that was that. Victoria let the indignance burn away the self-hatred long until Rachel left and only when she was alone and everything was silent did she acknowledge that Rachel just didn’t fucking care.

And it hurt.

Victoria breathed in a quiet lungful of much needed peace and took a moment to deliberate what she was going to say. As much as she wanted to grab Kate and shake the foolishness out of her, Victoria knew Kate wouldn’t absorb the message so well that way. Victoria let out that breath, loud and a bit sad,

“Yeah, it started out with guilt, you’re right about that.” Victoria confessed. Her heart cringed when she saw Kate’s shoulders slump, but Victoria continued, putting her hand on Kate’s, “but Katie… we don’t just sit around playing nice and secretly wishing to kill ourselves—” Victoria winced at her own words. Why couldn’t she just have a portable mouth filter to make sure that that stupidity never came out? She continued albeit a bit awkward as she tried to recover from that, “we…watch cartoons.”
Kate’s lips thinned. “Yes. your studio Jiggly,”

“Ghibli, Kate. Duolingo Japanese, I’m serious - anyway - yes.”

“Evan and Luke have their own Saturday morning cartoon thing, I can go to that--”

“Kate!” Victoria interrupted her again, her frustration plowing through her carefulness, “I don’t just watch cartoons with anyone, ok? I don’t watch cartoons with the vortex club, I don’t geek out with Taylor and Courtney, I don’t even watch anime with my damn parents. This is something I do with you.”

“Well we can do that, but you don’t have to pretend that you want to do anything else with me--”

“Kate! I’m not pretending!” Victoria seethed, her pitch razor and cutting Kate to silence. It took a moment for the red to fade and for Victoria to see how stunned Kate was. “Katie, you give me far too much credit. I’m not like you, or Caulfield or Price or...that....that weird nerd guy that you sometimes hang out with and who’s absolutely in love with Caulfield even though she’s gayer than Tegan and Sara combined--”

“Warren.”

“Yeah, him. Anyways, I’m not like you guys. I’m selfish. I want what I want. No one can make me do anything, I refuse to waste my precious time on stupid people and their stupid shit.”

Kate nodded, begrudgingly. One of the first things she had ever observed and learned about Victoria’s character was that Victoria truly commanded her own time with an iron fist.

“That includes you, Kate.” Victoria pressed on, “If I didn’t want to spend time with you, if I didn’t have...fun with you. I wouldn’t be doing this. Guilt or not.” Victoria leaned forward once again, taking Kate’s other hand into her own, “Also you’re fucking cool. Don’t let any bitches tell you otherwise. Including me. Also, since when did you care? I mean you certainly ran that abstinence club even after we blew up all those condom balloons and flooded your meeting room with them. Twice.”
A wry smirk came up on Kate’s lips, “That was actually really funny.” Again, Kate’s resilient dry humor surprised Victoria, “I rather wish you guys would have made animals though.”

“Next time we’ll use Trojan Magnums, those should be able to make giraffes”

Both of them sniggered. Victoria felt her shoulders and back shake the loosened tension away and she felt as though she could finally ask the question, “Katie, I want to spend time with you. Why did you ever think otherwise?”

Kate visibly loosened up, however she was still cautious. She looked down before answering,

“I don’t know. Some days you have good days, some days you are crushed by how worthless you are.”

“Katie.” Victoria pushed but Kate stopped her by pulling her hands out of Victoria’s and giving a slight motion that silenced Victoria.

“Even I wonder if what I’m doing is worth it at all. What I knew as being a good Christian woman is evolving to what I’m learning makes me...me. And logically I know that what I choose to do and what makes me love God can not exactly be prescribed to a book that was written thousands of years ago by flawed misogynist men and supported by a community that doesn’t understand any sort of deviance but still.”

Victoria felt the urge to jump in and stop Kate so strongly that it edged on desperation. Victoria held her own hands, miming the compassionate friend. *Listen. Listen. Listen, you dumb ho*. Winona Ryder chanted in her head.

“And even though there’s a handful of people I’m so grateful for helping me to further evolve and... unearth... things about myself. What, um, kind of amazes me and also, uh...scares me a bit is that one of these people is you.”

Victoria felt her back straighten up considerably, “Excuse me?” Victoria balked.

Kate scratched at her neck as she continued, “To be honest, when I reached out to you, you know, when I gave you the cookies... At most I was hoping for some way for us to bury what had happened and move on. Clean, without attachment. I wasn’t sure we’d ever actually, you know, go
beyond that.” Victoria felt that sentence slap her in the face, silently taking her breath away.

“You didn’t think we’d become friends.” Victoria uttered.

“Did you?” Kate asked back. Victoria blinked. Touche. She shrugged, covering up how it stung that Kate didn’t believe in their possible friendship before. Kate further explained, “I mean if we could both be around one another and not feel...weighed down by everything before then I’d consider that a success. But after the project, the cartoons and, um, everything else...We’ve just been spending a lot of time together and...it kind of still blows my mind that we are even at this…” Kate clenched and unclenched her fingers, “This point.” Victoria leaned towards Kate, every part of her internally screaming at all the things left unsaid. “Sometimes I don’t know why you’ve continued. Hanging out. With...me” Kate finished, each proclamation shaky and awkward in her mouth as if they were loose marbles she had to speak through.

*She doesn’t know if I’m attracted to her. She’s scared that I don’t want her.*

*She wasn’t avoiding me and pulling away because she was mad. It was because she’s scared.*

And just like that, all of Victoria’s hostile vexation dissipated. She got it. And now, Victoria knew exactly what to do when she cawed, “Kate! Has it ever occurred to you that sometimes I feel the same way about you?”

Kate’s jaw dropped, “Are you serious? Why on earth would I not want to hang out with you?”

Victoria let out a self-deprecating laugh, “For all the obvious reasons and more.”

“That’s ridiculous! We have great conversations, constantly learn new things and yes, we argue, but I like how you challenge me and continually push me out of my comfort zone. Also we laugh more than we disagree--- Aren’t these all great indicators of how much I’ve enjoyed myself around you?”

Victoria rose a single eyebrow, a smug smirk tugging up the left corner of her lip, “Now do you understand how silly you sound?”

Kate’s expression was like that of someone taking molly for the first time. Her eyes widened. Her pupils dilated.

Victoria leaned towards Kate’s face, smugness beaming from her pores, “You know, for someone whose so smart and intuned with humanity or whatever, you can be incredibly dumb.” she teased. Kate laughed out loud, her chin tipping up.

“I can’t be perfect.” Kate admitted, “I’m not a mindreader.” however now Kate wore a wide embarrassed grin on her face.

Victoria let her hand drift up to Kate’s elbow and grasp at it gently, “Well you don’t have to read my mind. What’s that thing you keep telling me? Something about communicating with each other?”

Both of them laughed out loud, “Ok, ok, ok. You got me.” Kate surrendered.

Feeling now much more confident, Victoria decided say something else out loud,“Have you ever considered…” she began, a sly slant on her voice. Oh, Victoria had to tread very lightly here. But at the same time she needed to let Kate know her intentions without freaking her out. Given how skittish Kate was around her own homosexuality, it was going to be a challenge.

...

At the same time

Fuck it.

Victoria softly let her hand rest on Kate’s knee,”...that we’re continuing with this for the same reason?” she finished, well aware of the tinge of ‘suggestion’ she emphasized at the end.

Kate’s lips tighten and eyelids hid themselves simultaneously as her entire body froze. From the bottom of her neck to her hairline, Kate’s skin bloomed a rich rose pink and deepened to ketchup red. The reaction so cartoonish and adorable that Victoria wanted to pull Kate into her arms and snuggle her until she suffocated but at the same time Victoria wanted to leap up onto her feet, point at her and shriek “I FUCKING CALLED IT!”
Instead, Victoria felt her lips curve into a long, vainglorious smirk. Kate then immediately looked away from her and that caused Victoria to cackle out loud. “Vic,” Kate protested. Victoria grasped at Kate’s fingers, lifting them up.

“Repeat after me, class,” Victoria announced with the faux authority of a pompous teacher, “Victoria hangs out with Kate because she likes her and thinks she’s cool.”

“Victoria hangs out with Kate because she likes her and thinks she’s cool” Kate repeated with the same nature someone who lost a basketball game did when they had to shake the winner’s hand.

“So Kate needs to unplug her butt and relax”

“HEY!” Kate declared, squeezing Victoria’s fingers

“Class. Repeat after me.”

“No!” Kate protested, trying to take her hands back but Victoria held on, resilient.

“Doesn’t your Lord and Savior demand your obedience?”

“God gave us freewill because true love is voluntary not obligated under tyranny” Kate shot back in her quiet, witty way.

“You want to know what else is blasphemy? You thinking I don’t want to hang out with you and acting like a basic bitch to me.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted.” Victoria answered easily. Kate looked at their hands, still bashful, now thinking.
“See? I believe in forgiveness and redemption too #praisethelord.”

They both shared a quick laugh but when Kate looked at her again, this time with eyes full of a quiet affection, Victoria felt her heart spray warm fuzzies into the wind.

This tiny closed off moment between the two of them. However the swell of her heart quickly became uncomfortable and Victoria slipped her hands out of Kate’s. “Now the curtain’s closed on the drama-- let’s watch something” Victoria stated, getting up and going towards her fabulous Blu Ray collection. She wiped the mist of sweat on her palms off on her skirt.

“Ok.” Kate admitted defeated, sinking back into Victoria’s couch.

“Good girl” Victoria couldn’t help but purr as her fingers dragged along the spines, looking for the best picture.

As the show began to play and Kate settled in, staring at the screen Victoria felt confident and assured in her own body.

Feeling rather bold she let her arm drape along the back of the sofa. Letting her fingers rest gently against Kate’s shoulder.

She felt Kate’s head rest against her shoulder, begrudgingly. Stubbornness admitting defeat.

However as the show continued Victoria felt Kate relax, whatever anxiety dissipating within the air. “You surprise me, Victoria.” Kate said.

“Oh?”

“Yeah.” She felt Kate’s head shift along her shoulder, probably looking at her as she continued, “I mean, even back when we weren’t friends. I knew you were a…. Not nice all the time. But I could tell there was a lot more under the surface.”

Victoria let a disgruntled noise come out from the back of her throat,
Kate continued, her voice full of sincerity, “But I never knew you could be so… mature.”

Victoria briefly sank her nails into Kate’s shoulders, “Rude.” Victoria snipped.

Kate squeaked, but then continued, “But really, I was acting a bit childish and you just…helped me get my head out of my butt.” In response, Victoria sniggered, raising an eyebrow in ire. “And I’m learning that whenever I see something new within you...” Kate then smiled that smile that just snared you with love. It made Max bow her head, shy like a child. It magnetized Dana and made her cling to Kate’s side. It invigorated Chloe to shower Kate with affection. It affected Victoria as well. That smile took her breath away and made Victoria believe she was the person she wanted to be, “I’m surprised in the best way possible.” Kate finished, burying her chin into Victoria’s shoulder.

Victoria smirked at Kate and turned back to face the screen, knowing full well that if she didn’t, she’d kiss Kate.

But Kate just wasn’t ready for that yet.

As long as they got to spend time together and whatever - this - was got stronger, Victoria was more than happy to wait for her.
Musical Influences:

YO! My saint - Karen O and Michael Kiwanuka

Wow, six months? Thank you guys so much for your patience! Originally this chapter was supposed to be super easy to crank out...but as per usual Victoria and Kate derailed it for me and rather than it be sinful thirstville...it became character growth? Trust me, I'm trying to push them to be as gay as possible but of course -- Kate and Victoria need their time.

So, I'm not going to overload y'all with excuses of why this chapter was egregiously late. However...

Duckies. You all have NO idea how much your reviews invigorated me to keep on going! Like, I was already one determined mofo -- but with every review it just filled me with that much more energy to keep pressing on until Chapter ten formed. You all are the fucking best. I mean it!

Now, THE GREAT NEWS IS - the next chapter won't be nearly as long! Because the original outline for this chapter was eighty pages!

Heart_Takers: For the Love of Pizza and Kittens you have to shorten chapter ten to something reasonable.
Tiger_With_Spots: What? Why?
Heart_Takers: ...TIGER!

So, the next chapter will come out much sooner, guaranteed!

Again, thank you all so so so so SO much for being incredibly patient with me and sticking with this! I never knew there were other people who loved ChaseMarsh like I did! It means so much to me and continually motivates me to write Chasemarsh some justice!

My duckies, keep your seatbelt on because the gay is getting turnt. Ever so slowly...it's getting turnt.

Next chapter preview:

Thus, Victoria only made a strange strangled noise as an answer.

Chloe’s mouth opened in an ever so excited ‘O’ like a monkey having gotten the banana, “OOOOOOHH SHIT I KNOW THEM WHO IS IT?”
This time Victoria just bit her tongue and lit up another cigarette, willing the street to
open up and suck her in. She had to get out of here, like ASAP, like as in five minutes
ago before this all went to Hell!
I HAVE A POINT (part one)

Chapter Summary

Much thanks to the following for being beta-readers and helping smooth things out in this chapter:

Asmadasthehatters
Heart_Takers
LuciferneverLies

You guys are all champions because I know I'm a headache and a half and I write too much but this wouldn't have gotten done without you guys and you're all the best.

--

"People are, like, super flawed and act accordingly" Courtney said.

"Oh shut the fuck up, Courtney you're being way too real right now and honestly I feel attacked right now." said every other emotional lesbian in Arcadia Bay.

--

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Sorry I don't treat you like a goddess
Is that what you want me to do?
Sorry I don't treat you like you're perfect
Like all your little loyal subjects do.
Sorry I'm not made of sugar
Am I not sweet enough for you?

Well... I'm just your problem "
“How are her boobs bigger than her head?” Kate asked aloud, “She would need a back brace in order to sustain those and still do those acrobatics.”

They were still lounging on Victoria’s sofa, watching something obscure but culturally relevant for Kate’s young artist mind. ALA ‘A woman called Fujiko Mine’ Victoria’s shoulder had numbed to bearing the weight of Kate’s head. Victoria took the prickling feelings as a sign of victory. Bitches could complain but did they have the woman of their affections practically draped on their sides? No. They did not.

“It’s just the design. Concentrate on the story and the character.” Victoria urged Kate, once again, “This is Fujiko’s backstory - how she became a badass con woman and thief. She’s bisexual, smart and kicks ass; the true embodiment of a woman; pay attention.”

“A bisexual, hyper-intelligent, beautiful criminal.” Kate mused out loud, “I don’t see why you would like her.” Kate teased. Victoria pinched Kate’s shoulder again,

“Someone had her dinner with extra sauce in it.” Victoria taunted, “and I don’t just like her, I identify with her a lot. She’s my spirit animal.” Victoria clarified with a professional air. Despite her reputation as the most extra bougie bitch on the planet, Victoria’s inner nerd would always wiggle out and defend itself.

“Ah.” Kate clucked, “you two are very different actually”

“Well, she is a brunette and Japanese - but, like, I’m basically a American Waspy version--”

“No, no, no.” Kate clucked, “there’s a key difference.”

“What?”

Kate, without taking her eyes off the screen pointed at Fujiko, then gestured back to Victoria’s chest. She shook her head as she tsked out loud, “Not even close”
Victoria turned and saw Kate glancing at her, those hazel eyes full of faux-innocence.

“Those are soccer balls hanging from her chest. You just can’t compete.”

Victoria, beyond shooketh both wanted to laugh hysterically, because Kate just made a boob joke and was deeply offended because did Kate just insinuate that her breasts were too small?!?

“You!” Victoria hissed loudly, her arms raising up. Kate’s eyes widened and her mouth broke into a shit-eating grin as she attempted to scamper away. But, Victoria was quick and she grabbed at Kate’s ribs. Kate howled in laughter, clutching at Victoria’s shoulders “Who taught you manners?” Victoria growled with no real threat as she continued to tickle Kate. Kate squirmed as she laughed,

“I’m just saying that it’s not realistic!”

“My boobs are 100% au natural, you ho!”

As Victoria let the weight of her body compress down on Kate, she relished every feeling of the other girl against her. Even Kate’s nails sinking into her sweater felt good,

“No you! The socc-- the soccer balls!” Kate eked out, holding back her squeals of laughter.

Victoria snorted and rejoiced in feeling Kate’s giggles rumble against her body. As much as Victoria wanted to continue the physical exchange she showed mercy and let Kate go.

As they continued to lounge there in her room Victoria relished the thickening stew of emotions between them. Cooking and ever so slowly becoming juicier and juicier until her mouth watered. Her molars ached to sink her teeth into it. Just take whatever this was between them and get ON with it.

Or get it ON.

(bweehehehehe, the twelve year old in her giggled)
Oh Victoria, you bad, bad girl.

Despite the absolute lascivious urges that bounced around Victoria’s head and how Victoria knew she could wrap her arms arounds around Kate and pull her in… Victoria kept her hands to herself.

Victoria was used to just taking advantage of raging teenage hormones and her own forwardness to get what she wanted. Whether that be through sexting, blackmail, threatening, seduction, coercion or outright foul play. Look, she refused to feel bad about her own underhanded methods when every other girl did exactly the same thing. Rachel fucking Amber practically slept through half the town. Stella thirsted just as hard after Jeffershit but backed off. Not slut-shaming or anything but if Victoria wanted a hot body to warm her bed she was going to go and get it and everyone else had the right to do so too.

But with Kate, Victoria felt completely at ease with just…relaxing and letting Kate take the lead. Tonight, that meant Kate just wanted to snuggle against her and have Victoria’s fingers gently rest against her shoulder then everything was peaches and cream. When Kate eventually wanted to leave, Victoria held no objections and they promised to see each other soon.

“I would hug you but I now know to be aware of those fingers.” Kate remarked as Victoria had opened the door for her. Now, of course this was very typical of Kate’s humor but before Victoria could even think she quipped,

“If only you knew what these fingers could do.” For a moment it seemed as though earth screeched to a halt and internally Victoria felt a bit of sheer terror rip through all her veins. Why did she do that? WHY DID THE INNUENDO COME OUT?

A couple of eternal seconds ticked by while Victoria didn’t breathe. Victoria saw Kate’s eyes glance to Victoria’s right hand holding the door open. Right then Kate’s tongue peeked out to wet her lips before she answered, coolly, “I don’t doubt you. Goodnight, Vic.”

“Goodnight, Katie.” Victoria replied with as much geniality as she could as she fought every fiber of her being from grabbing Kate and dragging her back into her lair so she could show her what her fingers could do--GAH STOP! STOP! STOP!

Yes. Even Victoria herself was surprised at her own #chill at this situation.

As Victoria curled underneath her covers and dicked around on her phone; searching for good spank
material; she realized just how differently she was treating Kate in this new situation.

Say, if last year Victoria somehow magically were in this same situation of totally thirsting after Kate Marsh (she knew this would be realistically near impossible, but bear with her little thought hypothesis, ok?) she would have been annoyed and impatient. Her pores would’ve emanated toxic entitlement like radiation. She would’ve lashed out at Kate for denying her the physical actions she longed for. Victoria would have, as always, never cared about the consequences of her wrathful behavior.

But now?

To be honest, Victoria, for the first time in her life, truly understood that Kate needed to be able to go at the pace she needed to. Victoria would let her be patient. Whenever she got angsty she’d just login to her NSFW tumblr, search the tags ‘cunninlingus’ and ‘eating pussy’ and depending on her mood, ‘lesbian lovemaking’ or ‘lesbian fuck’ and let her right hand calm herself down. Just like now. Oooooh, ‘lesbian’ ‘sensual’ and ‘choking’ was totally hitting all the right marks.

Ahem.

Despite all this progress she was making she was only human. A human with very human, normal kinks.

In conclusion, Victoria would be patient with Kate. What will happen will happen on it’s own schedule...

--

Victoria’s eyes fluttered opened, soft music waking her up. She blinked, her conscious taking it’s time to piece together reality and stir her coherence. As soon as Victoria recognised that she was in bed and was woken up by sound she went to check her phone. Huh, well, she woke up twenty minutes before her alarm. Why the Hell was that? There was music playing...but Victoria’s alarm was ‘PrimaDonna Girl’ by Marina and the diamonds. This was… violin. Victoria stretched and rolled over as she came to know that it was just Kate practicing her violin. Ok, well, nothing new, right? Victoria began to drift away for a short nap before her real alarm went off. As she snuggled back into her pillow, her ears processed the notes…
Victoria shot up from her prostate position upright on her bed. Victoria, now wide-awake with her heart hammering hard as her mind blared in alarm.

The tune! Without a doubt because Victoria was obsessed with this song and had memorized it by heart--- ‘Ashitaka and San’ from the amazing (and now Kate’s favorite) animated film, "Princess Mononoke."

Victoria had played this soundtrack hundreds of times! She knew every single song off that OST and this, ‘Ashitaka and San’ was the signature of their powerful connection. It was played to signify the unsaid but obvious love the two had for each other…

Victoria clutched at her chest, thrumming with adrenaline. Kate had never played that song before. She had never played a song with romantic overtures before. Never. So… why now? Now, of course this could just be coincidence.

Victoria got up, aggravated because precious minutes of sleep had been taken away from her but as she got ready for the upcoming day her aggravation morphed into a strange, nervous excitement? She would keep her chill

When she exited her room she gave Kate’s door the customary two knocks as she passed, heading towards the end of the hall where she, Taylor and Courtney met up before heading to the cafeteria for breakfast.

Things were different now. Kate was doing something purposefully different. Things had drastically shifted but, but…

Victoria had to be sure! Assume nothing!

Later on during Chemistry class Victoria decided to send a discreet text, where the question would be hidden in plain sight.

Victoria: Nice song this morning Miyazaki would approve :) 

Victoria: Got love on the brain ;)?’
Kate: Was in a romantic mood :) 


WHAT.

“Yes, Victoria?” Mrs Grant called out. Victoria whipped her head up towards the front of the classroom.

“Yes, Ms. Grant?” Victoria answered politely even though her brain felt as though it was tumbling down a hill due to how shook she was reading Kate’s newest text messages.

“Well, you banged the your desk so loud that you interrupted our discussion. Perhaps you have some strong opinions on avogadro’s number?”

Victoria, at first was utterly bewildered at what the heck Ms. Grant was referring to until the glass let out a universal chuckle and a light heat rose up her neck to her cheeks. She glanced next to her, Hayden was her desk neighbor and his eyebrow was raised. His eyes flicked downwards and when Victoria followed his eyeline she observed her left hand still lay flat against the desk. Apparently she had unconsciously hit the desk as soon as she read ‘was in a romantic mood :)’

Oh fuck herself with a pineapple. If Victoria had #zerochill then she deserved all the humiliation and more.

Yet Victoria held her head high and chose to brush off the giggles, “I’m sorry, I saw an ant and couldn’t allow it to live.”

“So you beat the shit out of it?” Hayden asked.

“They’re evil and I don’t want them in my clothes” Victoria snapped. The entire class burst out in laughter much to Victoria’s relief. That comment would distract everyone and Ms. Grant as to why she had hit the desk. As Ms. Grant calmed the class down and resumed her lecture, Victoria resumed her conversation with a certain someone...
Victoria: Ooooh, who were you trying to serenade? ;)

Kate: Just a lucky someone who would hear it, I guess, haha

That actually caused Victoria’s brain to momentarily crash and she felt the blush rise up to her ears. Was this? No. That…

That was forward.

Victoria’s eyes flicked up as she looked around, making sure no one was looking at her. Not that anyone would know who she was texting but she was trying to keep herself from blushing and could feel her lips twist as she fought not to smile.

Victoria bit her lip as she thought of something clever to say. As she thought of something flirty to say. As she thought of something polite to say. As she thought of anything to say back. Ugh. Her stupid heart was speeding up and why did she feel so sweaty?

Oh God, she heard every anon on 4chan chanting ‘spaghetti’ in her brain.

For once, she decided not to play coy and just be straight with Kate. Just using the metaphor, not literally because, God, did Victoria just want to be gay with Kate.

Victoria: The walls are thin yknow - I think every girl hears you play.

No answer. Ok. What did that mean if she didn’t answer? A few minutes passed. The anxiety and questions was all too much so Victoria pushed. Gently. Gently...

Victoria: You poly? Is Jesus ok with that? I mean, I thought it was a mormon thing but whatever floats your boat, right?

Kate: haha no, I just needed one person to hear it.
Victoria: who was that?

Kate: A lady does not serenade and tell

Victoria: Fine fine youre no fun.

Victoria: But did she hear it tho?!?

Kate: ;)

Victoria felt her skin blaze in heat and her eyes widen.

That was a winky face.

**KATE JUST USED A WINKY FACE! AHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!**

“Miss Chase?”

Victoria blinked and her brain returned to the classroom, “...it was another ant.”

Mrs Graham tried to hide her tired sigh by exhaling it out her nose, “I’ll call Samuel in here after class.” as Mrs. Graham continued her lecture, Victoria looked back at her phone and re-read the conversation over and over and over again -- hitting that emotional high every time she saw Kate’s ‘ ;) ’

That was the emoji equivalent of throwing yourself on a bed and shouting ‘take me now’

*I’d take her now, hehehe*

Victoria internally cursed herself, ‘Oh my God, Vic, can you stop being thirsty trash for ONE second?’
Her brain just cackled in response and broadcasted a very enticing fantasy of picking Kate up, draping her over the desk and doing mega lesbian things to her.

“Victoria Chase.”

The fantasy image of her dragging Kate’s skirt off with her teeth froze and glitched as she glanced up to the front of the room.

“Since you seem to be in such a smiling mood, would you care to answer the question for the class?”

“Yes, Ms. Grant, To convert molecules to moles, you divide the numbers of molecules by avogadro’s number.”

Ms. Grant paused, her lips still held together as her eyes lit up in mild surprise, “excellent, miss Chase, now Jordan can you convert CH3I to moles for us?”

Suck it, she actually did her work. All those studying sessions with Kate were paying off, despite how the majority of the time was spent doing anything other than studying.

At moments like this she was so glad that she was a born girl. Thankfully no one could ever tell if she was unintentionally aroused. Unfortunately she didn’t bring a spare pair of underwear with her.

Typically Victoria and Kate didn’t speak much to each other during class time. When everyone else could see them. It wasn’t that people were unaware that Kate and Victoria had an olive branch between them, but people didn’t know just how close the two had become. It was a strange relief that the two of them mutually wanted to keep their budding...connection to themselves. Like, they both wanted to protect it from as many variables as possible. So, usually they didn’t interact much during the day.

But ever since that morning, after Kate declared that she had been in a ‘romantic mood’...

Victoria’s crush and infatuation rattled the cage of caution and she took any little excuse to extend their time together during the day outside of their isolated evenings. Whatever tiny, plausible reason she could take to throw some words at Kate during their school hours.
Like inbetween classes Victoria saw Kate talking to Alyssa and without even thinking twice Victoria swooped by to talk to her, “Marsh,” she said. Kate twirled around and immediately her grin brightened, she reached out, resting her fingertips against Victoria’s arm for just a split second before pulling it away again.

“Chase.”

“What chapters are we going over today in history?” Victoria asked, not giving a shit about that class.

“Give me a second” Kate said, pulling up her daily planner. As she flipped through the pages, Victoria leaned over, her nose barely brushing against the wayward strands of hair around Kate’s crown. Behind them, she saw the normally bored expression of Alyssa wriggle a bit, as though perplexed but it quickly morphed back to boredom. It was known that since Kate and Victoria did that (amazeballs) project together they were both now on good terms. So, nothing strange, right?

Now, usually the odd quirks in people’s eyebrows or at best curious, at worst judgey looks would be more than enough to stop Victoria from approaching Kate. However if Victoria felt at all shy, Kate’s sudden boldness certainly shook that right out of her.

In the early afternoon Victoria was talking with Taylor and Courtney as they sat in English before class started. In the middle of discussing the updates on the beef between Nicki Minaj and Taylor Swift Victoria was interrupted by a gentle tug of her sleeve.

“Hey Victoria, sorry to bug you-” said the sweetest voice. When Victoria turned around she was greeted with Kate’s bright hazel eyes and lovely half-opened smile. In the moment of pure surprise Victoria bit down on the side of her cheek to keep from gaping. Kate had just strolled right into the middle of the room, in the middle of everyone, into the middle of a conversation-- to talk to Victoria.

In a way, Victoria chastised herself for being so surprised at Kate’s cavalier attitude. In Kate’s defense, she was never a shy person. Kate Marsh was reserved and private but she had always been quite social, open, friendly and was a natural leader. She did start an entire meals on wheels chapter, an abstinence club, a religious studies club, violin, take care of a bunny --

Back at the Two Whales Diner the remains of Kate’s chocolate milkshake had thinned to a cool chocolate milk. Kate remained glued to Victoria’s side, as though sunken into her body as she explained her story, “And even though Dana made a convenient excuse to go, I had actually
wanted to attend that vortex club party.” Victoria blinked, even though she hadn’t cried she had felt equally as exhausted as her cheek smothered down Kate’s hair on top of her head.

“Why?” Victoria asked.

“To be honest, I just really thought it would be a good opportunity to meet new people and expand my social circle.”

“Huh.” Victoria then rubbed her cheek a little into Kate’s hair as she said, “naive and ballsy of you.”

“Yes.” Kate answered, tired.

Being forward was absolutely one of Kate’s strong suits. Again, not confrontational, not loud, but politely present. Kate had only isolated herself when everyone had abandoned her and she felt unsafe.

That conclusion had relieved Victoria of some shame she had been feeling. If Kate felt safe around her now, compared to before then that must had meant that Victoria, even if just a little bit, was further along on her “redemption arc’ and finally be worthy of Kate’s feelings. Finally be worthy of Kate’s amorous affections-- (VICTORIA MARIBETH CHASE STOP)

“Never, what’s up, cherie?” Victoria asked, turning her entire body towards Kate. As Kate placed her hand on the table to allow herself to lean in close to Victoria’s face, Victoria felt Kate’s body heat warm her skin as she said,

“Well, for that new Vortex Club live-drawing thing- a couple of my friends have some questions…” as Kate explained her question Victoria could see Kate fighting back a smile. A flutter of petty pride inflated her chest just a bit.

The guise of big, broad questions relating to school or extracurriculars were their primary go-to excuses. But Victoria could see how Kate stood closer to her when they spoke, whatever previous radius of caution now ignored. Victoria loved how she could see the speckles of brown and how, like ink in milk, the blues and greens mixed together in which a way that looked like a galaxy. Victoria had paid just enough attention to Kate’s B.S question to answer ‘It’s this Wednesday, Contact Sara to make reservations-- we’re having it go straight through her for efficiency.”
“Thanks, Vic.” Kate breathed out. Her hand immediately going to grasp lightly at Victoria’s elbow, her thumb pressing into the soft tissue just on the bend. Victoria was hyper-aware how Kate’s fingers lingered there for just a couple seconds too long before she let go, twirled on her toes and skipped away. Ugh Kate was so cute that Victoria wanted to squeeze her and squeeze her butt--

Woah there.

Victoria silently realized that her only two moods around Kate now were either ‘awww, I adore you’ or ‘sit on my face’ and that was just her life now. Ok, time to forget how cute Katie is and get back to--

“Kate’s a little cutie.” Taylor remarked, a suspicious smile on her face.

Victoria bristled and a mix of utter indignant anger and fear washed over her. Yet she quickly grabbed the first instinct to attack by the scruff of the neck and hesitate for two seconds. Ultimately Victoria decided not to answer Taylor’s little observation and instead she thought of something to change the subject with...

“Yeah, she’s so pretty, shame she’s not VC material” Courtney, ever the elitist, sighed.

“No one’s ever VC material” Taylor groaned.

“What? We’re exclusive! That’s the point!” Courtney complained. Even Victoria had to laugh, thankful for judgey Courtney for steering the conversation away from Kate.

Unfortunately not too far into that conversation A fire alarm blared off. There was a few loud gasps and shrieks as the loud noises took everyone off guard. Soon though, everyone, filed out of the classroom, disgruntled. Victoria was amongst those peeved. These fire drills were the biggest offense to her time and her eardrums. And people bumping up and rubbing against her shoulders and back - ew, just gross and people need to stop. Victoria tried to hold in her irritation but there was one particular shoulder bump that just seemed to purposefully try and ruin her day. Victoria’s arm bent up at the elbow, her hand getting ready to whack the stupid kid---

When she turned to lock her eyes on the target she was greeted by bright, mischievous hazel eyes and a small smile. Kate again?? What??
Oh yeah, Kate had history when she had English and that was only a room over… Which meant that Kate had gone to search for Victoria when the fire alarm went off. Even though Victoria’s heart burst in warm fuzzies she remained vigilant and looked around them. Taylor and Courtney were caught up with some Vortex club members ahead of them. No one of any interest was around them.

Kate bumped shoulders with Victoria once more, as though waiting for Victoria to respond. Victoria shook her head, trying to seem disinterested and returned the physical favor. When Victoria felt Kate’s shoulder rub against hers again she tried to roll her eyes, but her lips betrayed a smile. Invisible in the mass of teenagers, they continued rubbing up against each other. Finally, Victoria pinched at Kate’s ribs, causing her to squeak and when Kate attempted to retaliate, Vic hopped to the left and speed walked away, weaving through the bodies as Kate tried to not-so-obviously give chase.

As soon as they burst out the front doors, Still moving Victoria whipped around and, like a viper, her hands shot out and snatched T Kate’s, shoving them down below their waists. Both moved along with the crowd, never breaking the simultaneous movement, their hands gripping each other. To anyone else it would look like they were standing close to one another, but nothing more. Victoria felt Kate’s will to tickle her soften until her hands became loose, her fingers gingerly rubbing at Victoria’s iron grip. With caution, Victoria let up her vice until her own fingers, tentative at Kate’s surrender.

Both broke apart immediately, getting into their class lines for the world’s stupidest and most useless fire drill. Welcome to America, folks. As they stood in their lines and waited to be dismissed, Victoria checked her phone and smirked when she saw new notifications from Kate Marsh.

Kate: You’re going down Chase.

Victoria: Sure but let me buy you dinner first.

Kate: VIC THAT’S NOT WHAT I MEANT >/////<

Victoria: let a lady woo you before that just sayin

Kate: VIC. STAHP.

Victoria: U r so demanding
Kate: OK. YOU WIN.

Victoria: ;) I like you demanding

Kate: I demand you to stop!!!!!! U R MEAN!!

Victoria: know your worth gurl. Make me work for it ;D

Kate: Jesus save me now

Kate:....Actually….

Kate: Can you cook me dinner?

Victoria: OMG gurl let me take you out

Kate: Can you cook me dinner? :)

Victoria: K8. FANCY 5 STAR YELP REVIEW DINING EXPERIENCE.

Kate: :) So home-cooked meal?

Victoria: U R THE WORST.

Kate: Chef Chase?

Victoria: YOU RUIN EVERYTHING.

Ugh, Victoria lived for these messages. Not only were they genuinely fun but Victoria learned that
this was Kate’s version of playing hard to get. It was clever banter, dry humor and finding ways to both encourage Victoria while also letting her know when she felt Victoria was being a bit too...bold. Again, Victoria greatly appreciated Kate’s subtle ways of telling her and was thrilled that Kate was happy to engage in Victoria’s more sensual flirtations.

However this further developed Victoria’s two modes to evolve into “Squee” and “Raw Me, Kate.”

As Victoria looked around, searching for Kate, she spotted her infamous hair bun a few lines over. Victoria felt herself grin as she watched Kate texting on her phone. Ooooh, she was probably replying to Victoria’s text! Yet Victoria’s excitement was careened off course when she saw a tall, athletic girl jump up behind Kate and wrap her arms around those small shoulders. Victoria’s grin deflated into a stone, cold scowl as jealousy chilled her mood.

Dana.

Fucking.

Ward.

Recently, she just wouldn’t shut up about Kate. To be fair, Dana was working with Kate on helping the Vortex Club tie in a fundraiser for homecoming this year. So far they had sold more tickets this year than the previous three years and Dana was excited. She wasn’t on the cheer squad for nothing. But now in the Vortex Club group chats it was selfies of Kate and Dana working together in her room. Kate, shy, holding Dana’s pompoms. And everyone kept commenting on how cute the two of them were together.

Victoria saw them working together and felt the heat rise beneath her collar whenever Dana threw her arm around Kate’s shoulders, pulling her in. Legit, her homicidal urges surged every time she saw Dana give Kate a mischievous grin.

Didn’t baby-momma like men? Didn’t baby-momma have a boyfriend that wasn’t baby-daddy? Keep your heterosexual hands off of her, Dana!!!!

A couple hours after that fire drill when Victoria, Taylor and Courtney were in study hall Dana was in the midst of sending another flux of genuinely cute photos of Kate wearing Dana’s letterman jacket, and Dana wearing Kate’s trademark black cardigan. Yet when Victoria saw a picture of Kate perched on Dana’s lap, sheepish smile on her face while Dana grinned at the camera -- Victoria
nearly got up to find Dana and just SMACK A HO.

Victoria forced herself to take a breath and blink the red out of her eyes. Take the high-road. Come on, Vic, don’t be so jealous… She didn’t own Kate. Kate had friends and had every right to hang out with those friends. Besides...they weren’t...anything. Victoria just had a stupid crush! This wasn’t anything. So, Victoria decided to try typing something...ugh....nice.

Victoria: You two look so cute together that you guys should date xoxo.

The only comforting fact was that Dana had heterosexual hands. Even if she was annoyingly flirty and touchy she wouldn’t actually make a move on Kate-

Dana: Oh I def would if I wasn’t with Trevor ;)

Victoria rolled her eyes and grimaced. What was up with straight girls always claiming they’d date cute girls when they weren’t serious about it? It was, quite frankly, annoying. Victoria typed back out of spite because of the gall of her to use the ‘winky face’ was just an insult to the queers.

Victoria Chase: Heterosexuality strikes again

Dana: No. I’m bi.

Victoria spat out her coconut water. Taylor gently patted her back as Victoria coughed, the refreshing liquid sputtering out of her nostrils.

“What?” She squawked.

A couple of loud snaps made all three girls look the the left. The disgruntled librarian stared back at them, frowning. “Ladies.” she stated, “keep it down.”

Taylor, Courtney and Victoria simultaneously rolled their eyes and turned back to their phones.

Dana: So heterosexuality strikes 50% to 60% of the time?
Victoria’s phone vibrated quickly as responses began to flood in.

Zack Riggins: Wait, woah, really?

Dana: Yeah.

Juliet: Really? I thought I was your bff you never told me :( </3

Dana: Why did everyone just assume I was straight?

Courtney: Compulsory heteronormativity strikes again.

Dana: :( 

Taylor: :(( bi erasure

Dana: ;( 

Hayden: well good for you for being bi, Dana! You’re just that much more sexy! lolz

Victoria wiped her mouth with a napkin and rapidly typed

Victoria: @Dana, you bi since when? >_<

Dana: Well...since forever, right? But I didn’t realize it until middle-school when I first started cheerleading.

Craig: Hold up, the cheerleaders made you gay?
Dana: fyeah the cheerleaders made me gay :)

Dana: Its not just the boys who like the short skirts :)

Taylor: awwww yis, git it gurl.

Hayden: Have you dated other girls? Do we know them?


Dana: TBH I dunno :(  I haven’t dated any girls yet.

Taylor: You want to?

Dana: Well, I wouldn’t mind, y’know? It’s just that I’m now very happy with Trevor

Hayden: Huh. Good for you.

Dana: In another life, K8 ;(

Victoria: Maybe you should date girls, they can’t get you pregnant

There was several seconds of the motioning ellipses.

Dana: You’re right. I would definitely save some money on birth control and abortions :) :) <3

Internally Victoria frothed at the mouth. How dare Dana take the higher road and be funny.
“Tori,” Taylor interrupted her internal broil, “rude, much?”

“Oh whatever, I’m right” Victoria snipped, self-righteous and bitter all at once.

“Well, technically two girls can’t get each other pregnant, right?” Courtney entered the conversation, trying to keep anything from escalating

“Not all women have vaginas.” Victoria and Taylor snipped simultaneously.

SNAP SNAP! “Ladies” the librarian hissed, “this is a library.”

“And this is a discussion” Victoria hissed back. The librarian narrowed her eyes at them from behind her cheap glasses.

“Final warning,” she said, her tone as unpleasing as her outfit. How dare she not even try to be the sexy librarian of the town.

All three of them rolled their eyes and turned back to each other again.


Before that conversation could escalate any further all of their phones vibrated again

Zack: Dude, I, like read that girls don’t give each other std’s and stuff.

Zack: Man, no babies. No herpes. That’s awesome.

Zack: I’d totally be lez if I had the chance. Also, lezzies are hot.

The three girls exchanged looks. Ok, technically lesbians were the one group that transmitted STDs the least amongst each other. [“However, do be aware of thrush and BV” her gynecologist told her]
But the fact that Zack hadn’t immediately gone to drooling and objectifying Dana’s SURPRISE sexuality dumbfounded everyone. Victoria couldn’t tell if Zack was a good guy stuck with a very dumb brain, or a very dumb guy stuck with a good brain.

Zack: @Juliet if I was lezzy, I’d still think you are super hot

Juliet: @Zack Damn straight ;) you would be the hottest lesbian around

Hayden: Dunno bout hottest, but definitely thiccest

From there it descended into cute, wholesome, funny lesbian memes and Victoria wanted to smash her phone, “the vortex club is so fucking stupid.” Victoria vented, tone hot with agitation.

“Isn’t this a good thing, though? More out queer people like yourself--” Taylor interjected as Victoria stood up,

“Where are you going?” Courtney squeaked as Victoria marched away,

“Bathroom!”

Snap Snap! “Oh calm yourself, I’m leaving already!” Victoria erupted as she passed by that very unpleasant librarian.

Fuck Dana. She was out and proud before it was cool.

It seemed a bit contradictory, considering how Victoria had been pressed with the immense expectations of her jet-setting parents. Yet, it seemed as though them being titans in the art world made them encourage particular unique expression. Pretty much everyone within her parents inner circle was gay, eccentric, extremely talented, very well connected and very wealthy.

What? Peasants were normal. The artistic royalty were eclectic and proud of it.

It had also helped that she had been surrounded by these eclectic individuals who more often than
not entertained Victoria by conversing with her about their experiences. The stranger and more
outlandish the better. As a result, Victoria didn’t believe that any of these ‘deviances’ were strange. If
she was ever caught being boring and purely straight, someone shoot her.

So, even though completely lacking in emotional and moral support, Victoria’s parents had been
very liberal and knowledgeable individuals. Imparting practical advice to their child. One such
category was sexual education. Whomever Victoria decided to love and have sex with was
completely fine with her parents as long as Victoria liked them, and more importantly, they were
worthy of Victoria (and the Chase family).

In a lot of ways the Chase’s were surprisingly ‘woke.’ One of the first thing the Chase Space did was
hold exhibitions that featured artists of minority or disabled backgrounds. They were also very
supportive of female artists and tended to vote for the most liberal politicians in office. Like, to be
clear here, Victoria’s parents used gender neutral pronouns with almost everyone unless stated
otherwise. Something about how it was just a learned thing after spending time with the best and
strangest of artists.

Of course, Victoria’s parents were still bougie as fuck and as chilly as their offshore swiss bank
accounts but Victoria was trying to look on the bright side. At least that’s what her therapist keeps
suggesting to her.

After she had stormed off to the bathroom Victoria was washing her hands when Kate came out of
the last stall. Much to Victoria’s frustration, Kate smiled that brilliant smile as she bounced over to
the sink, washing her hands besides her.

“Hi Vic, do you want to do Chem together tonight?”

“Why?” Victoria asked, as she shook the excess water off her hands.

“Well, I saw the amount of homework we got yesterday and I thought to myself ‘hmmm what would
distract me and recommend some fantastic cartoon to watch instead and get none of this done’...”
Kate continued, her voice as always soft but heavy with cheekiness. It made Victoria’s heart swell,
but her jealousy threw a bunch of dirty gravel, popping the warm fuzzies in her chest and ruining her
mood.

“Aren’t you busy?” she threw back at her, feeling the coolness of her tone trace her tongue.
“...with what?” Kate asked before she looked up at the ceiling, as though looking for what she could be busy, “Religious study group only meets on Thursdays, meals on wheels isn’t until Sunday...I’m going to dinner with Alyssa and Stella tomorrow.” Kate then smirked at Victoria, “which, leaves this evening ripe for the taking.”

Victoria felt a tiny bit of heat purr somewhere deep in her core. It tingled up her neck; many things could be ripe and ready to be taken.

Kate levels up and uses ‘suggestive suggestions’.

It’s super effective.

Victoria uses BITCHY JEALOUSY to counter Kate’s ‘suggestive suggestions.’

“You’re working so closely with Dana, don’t want to tear you away from her.” Victoria sighed, as though bored, “She’s bi, you know?”

“What?” Kate asked, genuinely confused, “Dana’s bi?” Kate’s eyes widened, “bi as in bisexual or bi--uh, something?”

“Bisexual. She just confirmed today. You could totally seduce her. Play homewrecker. Trevor will get over it.” Victoria continued, being as unaffected as she could manage. She channeled her mother’s energy whenever she had to talk to someone she hated.

Out of the reflection of the mirror she saw Kate’s lips curve into a smirk and her eyes do a half-hearted eye-roll. Then Kate sidled up next to her,

“Vic.” Kate said,

“Kate.” Victoria responded, mimicking Kate’s tone. Despite her cool facade, a growing excitement bubbled within her chest. This. Whatever the Hell Kate was doing. This.

This was flirtatious.
“What Dana and I are doing is fundraising. Now, even though I enjoy volunteering and doing charitable work…it’s still work.” As Kate talked, Victoria was aware of Kate’s body edging nearer to her own and how Kate’s hazel eyes glittered with this confidence. It was so fucking attractive that Victoria held onto being angry because it just wasn’t fair how attracted Victoria was to her at this moment, “And I know she played...a role in my realization that I am a ‘unicorn’ but... what I do with you...it’s not work, it’s fun.”

“And yet you want to do homework.” Victoria shot back. God, her anger was so stubborn at times.

“Even that with you is fun.” Kate lobbed back, quickly. Her tone so innocent but Victoria’s ear tingled at the undertone of playfulness.

“Oh, really?” Victoria replied, smirk on her face, “What else do you find ‘fun’ with me?” Victoria asked, purposefully making her voice lower and huskier. She knew that she needed to rear down her own wanton banter. But God, even just a slightly coquettish Kate made Victoria’s resolve drop to its knees. Her yearning, having been left with no control, was able to prowl her person of affection uninhibited.

“Screaming at each other is pretty fun.” Kate answered. Well, Victoria was tempted to take out her hand lotion because Kate’s humor was dry. But as Victoria bit her tongue to prevent herself from laughing out loud, she instead flicked a few droplets of water at Kate’s face, causing that cute little nose to scrunch up.

“Oh, it didn’t occur to me that this was a favorite past-time of yours.” Victoria said as she shrugged, “Is that what you actually do during abstinence club? Scream the sexy feelings away? Actually I would scream too if I had to go.” Kate lifted up her hands to flick back her own droplets of water at Victoria, “I already disbanded abstinence club” Kate defended herself quietly, momentarily breaking this aura of courtship, “There were no other members and Principal Wells forced me to shut it down” Kate grumbled under her breath, but she turned her attention back to Victoria, “and to let you know, I don’t scream with Dana. I don’t scream with Max or Alyssa or Stella...just you.” Kate shot back, still just as dry, “I think you’re the only person I’ve ever just screamed and chilled with, you know?”

Victoria laughed out loud, both pleased and peeved to see the look of satisfaction beaming from Kate’s dimpled smile. “My, my, you certainly know how to make a lady feel special.” Victoria suggested. Now, she could be reading into things too much, but the dark part of Victoria was fixating on Kate’s very probable ‘netflix and chill’ reference.
“Like you said, you bring it out in me.”

ME GUSTA.

Internally, Victoria’s soul had ascended and she was left all but breathless.

Someone grab her a knife because this sexual tension is thick.

Victoria’s soul then came back and solidified into bold confidence.

Victoria leaned down, her nose alarmingly close to bumping into Kate’s, “Who knew you could make a lady feel so good.” she purred.

A gentle blush bloomed across Kate’s cheeks and she looked down for a moment,

“I’m still abstinent.”

“I know,” Victoria continued, “but if you’re able to make someone feel like this without even touching them, imagine what you could do” she turned ever so slightly towards Kate’s ear and concluded in a lower, raspier voice, “if you did.”

Kate’s eyes flicked up and connected with Victoria’s. A shock of electric chemistry buzzed within Victoria’s corneas but she refused to look away. Victoria didn’t even blink. The space between her and Kate grew taut with pressure as if their bodies had become magnets. Who would fall towards the other first?

Kate reached up, ever so gently, using her thumb and index finger she barely grasped at either sides of Victoria’s nose, pulling back her hand, her fingers brushed against the skin there quickly. Victoria blinked, a touch confused at the action. Her nose tingled, pleasant, at the gentle touch.

Kate took that moment to slip away and walk towards the exit of the bathroom, “4:30?” she called back over her shoulder. Victoria turned around to face Kate’s retreating figure,

“Don’t keep me waiting.” she said, forcing herself to be as casual as possible. But as soon as Kate
turned around to shoot her a smile, the left corner tweaked with deviousness but her teeth only baring affection and understanding…

Victoria felt her own face crack open with her own grin. Kate waved as she exited the bathroom. As soon as the door closed, Victoria waited a second before her throat and mouth opened up, letting out a long, high-pitched, trill.

Bam! The door opened and Victoria closed her mouth shutting up the noise, smothering it to a rather ungraceful grunt. She aggressively washed her hands again as Juliet looked around, a bit perplexed as her ears caught the end of some sort of...whistle? Kazoo? Vuvuzela? However her eyes narrowed as she saw Victoria dry her hands.

“Victoria.” Juliet stated.

“Juliet.” Victoria stated back as she brushed past her, exiting. Yet she had to fight the urge to skip down the halls in excitement.

Kate Marsh wasn’t flirting with Slutmama, Kate Marsh wasn’t flirting with any of those boys who stared after her with salivating yearning. Kate Marsh wasn’t flirting with any of the other gay girls or ‘straight’ girls that she knew of.

Kate Marsh was flirting with her, Victoria Chase.

When Victoria and her friends left the library she was still floating on cloud nine. Unfortunately her euphoria was abruptly axed when she saw Max and Kate sitting next to each other on the fountain edge. Both so close that their thighs touched and Kate’s hands were loosely wrapped around one of Max’s biceps. Both of them smiling and talking quietly.

Victoria felt her heart plummet down her chest and hit her pelvis like a rock colliding against concrete as she saw them, the perfect picture of smol adorable homosexual activity.

She turned and walked away, trying to salvage whatever dignity she could grasp-- but it left her faster than her steps could keep up.

All that warmth and velvet that filled had her veins was ripped away by a the sharp jaws of jealousy. Internally she felt it bark with an uncalled for rage.
Maxine Caulfield.

Oh. Max, sorry, Max Caulfield was perfect. The one with the gift. The everyday hero. How genetics gifted her that inch or so height over Kate (#heightdifference). How her face was dusted with freckles. Those deep blue eyes that only conveyed empathy. Everyone was so obsessed with Max.

“She’s a wierdo, but she’s cool” Taylor told her on more than one occasion

“I love Max!” Dana had said.

“Max is my guardian angel” Kate would literally sigh out like some enamoured princess.

Max was perfect for Kate Marsh. They were so perfect for eachother. Even their fucking aesthetic matched perfectly. Casual hipster against soft femininity. That brown hair and galaxy of freckles against Kate’s beach sandy mop and peachy skin.

Victoria wasn’t perfect. She was the smashed screen on a brand new smartphone. She may try and hug people but they all pulled away, as though her affection was the roughness of concrete. Even though she did everything to look perfect no one would look at her like…

Like how Rachel looked at Mark Jefferson.

Like how Nathan would look at Rachel

Like how Chloe and Max looked at eachother

Like how Kate looked at Max…

How one looked at something that was perfect.

Now, if it was just Kate that would already be damning enough. But Victoria already had noticed Max far before Kate came on her radar. She had noticed how spaced out she seemed to be in class. She had noticed how stupid she sounded everytime she answered a fucking question in class.
Victoria noticed how good Max’s photography was. Victoria noticed how slowly as the year progressed everyone seemed more concerned and more in awe about the every day hero. The fact that Max had always been Kate’s friend, even before Victoria paid Kate any attention at all.

Kate’s favoritism towards Maxine Caulfield was the twist of the knife within the wound, rendering her unable to heal and move on.

That night back in Victoria’s room, she couldn’t find relaxation as her brain kept ruminating about Max Caulfield.

Interestingly enough her mind kept going back to Chloe Price. That punk may had been a drop-out and two steps away from becoming a junkie but Chloe wasn’t dumb. Their brief encounters at Blackwell before Chloe had left had proved that (as if she’d ever admit it though). Chloe HAD to know and see what was going on with Max and Kate. How could Chloe be cool with it? If she had a girlfriend and that girlfriend was that

Emotionally

Intimate

With someone else?

Oh ho ho, A BITCH WAS GONNA GET CUT.

There was absolutely no way that Chloe was ok with just how openly fucking gay Kate and Max were for eachother.

‘Come on, Vic’ she told herself, ‘this isn’t any of your concern.’ Victoria tried to empty her mind of Max. She loathed that she kept comparing herself to Max so often. She loathed that Max was so talented. She loathed that Max was so likable. She loathed that Max was fucking cute. Mostly though, she hated how Max just kept...coming back into her life. Reminding her of everything that Victoria struggled so hard to attain.

But there was...something else that refused to leave Victoria. Something more to the situation than just Max and Kate are gay together that was driving her crazy. What was it? What? Usually when she thought about Max there was just a severe frustration that led her to her own mental self-
mutilation of herself.

Yet this time Victoria felt a genuine anger at Max and even a little at Kate. But why?

What was it about Max that was making some sort of self-righteous wrath brew within her heart? What was making her feel as though she was losing her mind?

Come on, Victoria. She told herself. Take the high-road. Be stronger. Be better. Don’t let that stupid waif get to you.

But like a splinter, Max stayed in her thoughts. Painful. Irritating. Maddening.

And no matter how many layers of skin and flesh she dug through, she couldn’t get her out.

That sleepless night was spent visualizing all the reasons how and why Max was better than her while simultaneously stressing over why she felt strangely justified in her vindictive feelings. Yet, even though physically exhausted her anger fueled her body to get up out of bed and go to class.

That day Victoria was well-aware that she was feeling on edge and acting crankier than usual. So, when the afternoon rolls around and she invades one of Kate’s bunny burrows to see her and try to relax and instead she has to listen to this girl she’s so into tell her some stupid inane adventure she went on with the wonder twins Chloe Price and Mad Max …Oooooh Victoria feels that monster deep under the surface rise and rise closer to the surface.

Either Kate is oblivious or ignoring Victoria’s souring silence as she continues to babble on, “I’m not sure why I’m always invited. I mean, I’m just the third wheel and I feel like i’m constantly interrupting uh, some makeout session or whatever, but there I am--”

Victoria’s already at zero patience when that stupid story started and as soon as she heard that sentence she lets the razors fly from between her teeth.

“Kate, Max doesn’t give a shit about your presence there. She’s a wannabe waif that invites you out for the attention and Price is too devoted to ever say no to her. She probably gets off on Price’s blue balls. Just say don’t go and spare yourself the awkward. Let Max bang Chloe and have her leech off some other idiot for attention.”
Oh, the sick feeling of retribution is addictive. There’s nothing quite like clawing someone in the face and smelling their blood in the air. Having their skin underneath your nails. There’s a demented thrill to hurting someone. To experience that power of destruction.

And Victoria loves destroying things.

Kate’s head snaps towards Victoria. The sudden movement makes Victoria flinch. In her experience, Kate Marsh wasn’t one for quick flits of action. She was subtle. A gentle narrowing of her eyes. A tiny quirk of the brow. Her lips twitching into a smirk. Even her voice almost never left the airy softness with the texture of clouds. Her humor dry and understated.

But today Kate’s hazel eyes ignited with that intensity that she kept buried in the 4th circle of her internal Hell, “Victoria.” she stated, her voice low and quiet. “Why are you saying this?”

Victoria felt her defenses shoot straight up, guilty, indignant and irritated all at once, “I’m saying it because Max is a bitch. Consider this your lasik, you should see it by now.”

“I think I’m well aware of how to spot if someone’s a bitch, Victoria.”

The way Kate says her name with such a coldness. The silent accusation stung and Victoria feels her fangs lengthen, “I think you have shitty taste in hipsters.”

“What has she done to deserve your nastiness? What wrong has my best friend done to you that makes it OK to talk like this behind her back?”

“Kate, get your head out of your ass, how is she your best friend? What has she done to earn that spot?”

Kate blinked, her hazel eyes igniting in offensive heat, “other than sticking with me when no one else would, you tell me.”

Being on the opposite side of Kate’s anger was like inhaling a lot of prescriptions at once. You took the handful of pills and swallowed before fear or conscience could stop you. How you felt them settle uncomfortably in your stomach, becoming a strange sludge…
The feelings are both physical dread, a rising feeling of pure ill and how your senses fuzzed out…

Yet Victoria’s anger fueled her to push through and dig her heels, “she’s not the only one that stuck by you. She’s not the only one who would’ve gone up on that roof for you -- so why are you placing all of your affection tokens to Max? What about your other friends? Allison? Sarah?”

“Alyssa and Stella! Why can you never remember any people’s names? If they’re not rich or influential then you just don’t care?”

“Don’t you dare make me answer that! This isn’t even about that, don’t change the fucking subject!”

Victoria’s ears rang with such anger that the next couple of minutes, other than the smell of burning flesh filling up her nose, she can’t recall much of the details of the literal conversation. There are a few outbursts that burned themselves in her memory banks.

“I’m not talking about me, I’m talking about Caulfield!” Victoria stressed. Someone they were now both standing up.

“Well I’m talking about you now!” Kate fired back, her voice now consistently at a volume that was unprecetended.

“Oh when you don’t like what someone says you just change the subject? Attack the speaker? Fantastic debate skills, Kate, where did you learn them? The church?”

“Victoria!”

“I have a point!” Victoria proclaimed, her voice rising louder than she was aware of. Kate’s eyes were wide and her cheeks were pink with agitation.

“That you’re better than her? What makes you so much better than her?”

Victoria’s frustration burned at her frontal lobe. No! That wasn’t what she was trying to say! Instead, out of Victoria’s mouth came, “Besides almost fucking everything, why don’t you tell me why I’m worse than her?”
“First off she doesn’t try to hurt people because of- of some reason” Kate seethed, “she doesn’t try and wreck anyone in her path”

“I’m just saying the truth!” Victoria feels the words slice her throat on the way out, “the truth hurts! Maxine Caulfield is a piece of shit and your devotion to her is stupid.”

“She saved my life.”

“Did she?” Victoria spat, “have you ever wondered that maybe it was luck that made her there on that roof? Maybe if Dana got on that roof, or that asshole Madsen got there first—”

“Don’t you dare compare Max to Mr. Madsen”

Victoria wasn’t breathing. At some point Kate was walking away and Victoria was chasing her, still arguing with her.

“You worship the ground she fucking walks on! It’s pathetic!” Victoria spat.

“That’s better than trying to spit on anything she has ever even shared the same air with!” Kate fought back, her voice lower but no less weaponized.

Stop, stop, stop! Winona Ryder chanted within her brain. This was getting way out of control! Come on, Victoria, be the better person don’t just fall into vindictive behavior--

“This is so fucking typical, you just like praying to things, don’t you? Pray to God, pray to jesus, praise mother Mary-- oh hail Maxine Caulfield.”

Too late. Victoria logically knew what it she had to do in order to have a very long, drawn out, extensive conversation about this-- But Victoria was 19 years old with a raging hot temper, a large ego, a fragile confidence and a unwarranted sense of entitlement. As Courtney told her,

“People are, like, super flawed and messed up and act accordingly.”
And Victoria acted accordingly.

To the point of where her already high, basic voice was trilling with unrestrained rage.

“Yeah, walk away when you don’t like hearing something. Just walk away from facts! Run back to Jesus! At least he’ll take your bullshit!” Victoria mocked loudly with as much cruelty as she could muster.

Kate turned around, her eyes wide and flaring an inferno. She opened her mouth to shout something but caught herself before, cutting herself off with a weird noise. She sniffed in air through her nose before telling Victoria in a voice low but like a stove, smoldering,

“This has nothing to do with Jesus, Victoria. This only has to do with the fact that you are an asshole.” And with that, Kate turned and walked away quickly. Victoria was rendered dumb and staring, mouth wide open at Kate’s back.

WHAT.

WHAT THE ACTUAL!??

DID SHE JUST???!

LIKE.

WHAT!??!

All at once, all of Victoria’s senses and feelings exploded, “Go fuck yourself, Kate!” Victoria shouted. That didn’t stop Kate as she continued to storm off onto the quad area. Kate’s blatant non-action stung all of Victoria’s sinuses, livid. How dare she just walk away!

Victoria took a couple steps forward -- this fight was not fucking over! She was about to shout at that fucking cowardly bitch again when her pride suddenly jumped out from her unconscious and made her bite down on her own tongue.
Her pride yanked up the emergency brake within her brain, shutting down all motor skills and preventing her from chasing after Kate and continuing this fight.

Everyone was hanging out there.

No matter what happened Victoria couldn’t go after her.

Because of their cardinal rule.

No one can see them intimate with one another.

No one could see them care.

But also...Everyone had just stopped watching to see if Victoria was going to try and bully Kate. Everyone had just calmed down about the whole ordeal. She couldn’t go running out there screaming at Kate. Her already cracked reputation would be dust.

There was no way she could chase after Kate Marsh.

The only thing Victoria could do was watch Katie walk away from her.

Victoria kicked a tuft a grass and let out a strangled grunt of hysterical outrage.

From there she stormed off engulfed in the fires of her own indignant anger. Victoria was never good at hiding whenever she was irritated about it but she was a tornado of absolute terror as she stomped her way to the girl’s dorms. Anyone who saw her quickly leaped for cover.

Victoria may have ripped several posters off the bulletin boards and she may have kicked trash cans over, whatever, who cared?

Who the fuck did Kate think she was? She was a fucking loser who never even deserved a minute of
Victoria’s attention! She didn’t deserve anything at all! What a self-righteous, entitled slut!

Victoria stormed up the stairs to the third floor of the Prescott dormitory. Dana was chilling outside of her room, talking with Juliet. “Hey Victoria--”

“Fuck off, baby momma”

She heard Juliet audibly gasp.

“What the Hell, Victoria!” Dana called after her,

Still not stopping, “No one cares about your feelings!” Victoria retorted, her mouth full of barbed wire.

“You’re a bitch!” Juliet shouted from down the hall.

“So’s your mom” Victoria seethed as she yanked open her door and slammed it shut. The bang the door made was so loud that it drowned out any responses and rang in her ears.

Her only safe, quiet place quickly ---- as she paced the room. Like a caged tiger, anxious, restless and so so so so so pissed off and ready to rip some skulls off.

She picked up a coffee mug and chucked it against the wall, letting out another shriek of frustration rip through her throat and whistle in- between her clenched teeth.

She didn’t remember a time she was so pissed off--- FUCKING SOPHOMORE YEAR when she actually was interested in Drama and they were putting on ‘The Tempest’ and she was supposed to play Prospera because stupid Amber got suspended and yet she passed out for 3 hours because someone spiked her tea with barbitutes and Rachel Amber ended up playing Prospera even though she had already been the one supposed to do it, what an asshole!!!!

VICTORIA WOULD’VE BEEN A GREAT PROSPERA GOD FUCKING DAMN IT.

RACHEL DAWN AMBER WAS EVIL.
Victoria stamped into her room and screamed into her pillow.

FUCK KATE AND HER FUCKING HOLIER THAN THOU PIECE OF SHIT FUCKINGBULLSHITFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCK

She continued screaming into her pillow.

BITCH BITCH BITCH BITCH FUCKING BITCH

AND WHY THE FUCK DID SHE HOOK UP WITH RACHEL AFTER THAT????

She continued screaming, smothering herself.

SHE WAS GOING TO FUCK HER UP HOW DARE SHE FUCKING JUST WALK AWAY LIKE THAT FUCK HER FUCK HER SHE WAS GOING TO MAKE KATE FUCKING PAY FOR JUST WALKING AWAY AND LEAVING HER FUCK HER FUCK HER

She screamed so hard she felt the tendons in her neck strain from the lack of air and the intense force she was putting herself through

FUCKING KATE MARSH AND HER MORAL SUPERIORITY AND HER STUPID PINING AFTER MAX CAULFIELD SHE WAS A FUCKING PIECE OF SHIT THEY ALL WERE FUCKING NOTHING FUCK THEM

Her head became light and she felt her grip on the pillows loosen. She lifted herself up off the pillow. Absolutely woozy, Victoria placed her hands on the bed, trying to steady herself as she breathed in big gasps of air.

God, she was so upset.

Victoria slumped over on the mattress.
God, she was so alone.

She breathed, feeling the sweat become sticky on her neck, her bangs stick to her forehead… She ached all over. She closed her eyes.

*Kate holding her hand*

*Kate rubbing her back*

*Kate wrapping her arms around her and holding her close*

*Crying in Kate’s neck.*

*Kate fixing her bangs for her.*

*Resting on Kate’s big mop of hair.*

*Kate’s pinky finger wrapping around her own.*

Victoria squeezed her eyes shut and felt them sting with a shameful sorrow.

All she wanted right now was Kate.

Victoria fucking hated Katel right now and yet all she wanted right now was Kate to be with her.

Victoria breathed some more. The tiniest bit of exhaustion diffuse her rage just a touch--

A couple of tear drops squeezed out from in between her eyes and slid onto her covers.
Why did she say that about Caulfield? She already knew that Kate adored that stupid girl. She already knew they were very close. Why couldn’t Victoria keep her mouth shut? What was it about Max that had compelled Victoria to come in and just wreck everything she and Kate had built?

Because Kate was spending too much time following around Max like a puppy! It was pathetic! Kate was wasting her time and was just torturing herself for no good reason! Max did not deserve her!

But why did Max not deserve her? What was the reason? Why was Victoria obsessing over this one thing?

More importantly than that, Victoria already knew that Kate didn’t respond to brutal honesty very well. Victoria already knew that she had to tread carefully and be sensitive and all that crap in order to get Kate to be receptive to reality.

But it was Kate’s fault for being stupid!!! If she wanted to be a pathetic, miserable virgin her entire life then so be it! She was a dumb whore!!

But Victoria didn’t want Kate to be miserable. She liked Kate better when she was happy and willing to explore her desires.

...Why couldn’t Kate just be happy exploring her desires with Victoria?

*Because she’s fucking in love with Max.*

Because Max is perfect. Max actually deserves her.

*Does she though?*

Ugh. No matter how much she wanted, no matter how much she physically found herself yearning for Kate, Victoria could not force Kate to just want her back.

But still.
Another hot ball of dread slid down her spine as another realization came to surface,

She told Kate to go fuck herself.

But Kate called her an asshole!

Because Victoria was being an asshole.

Victoria crawled up on her bed. Even though she tried to summon her anger back it had burned all away and all that was left was sorrow. She curled up into a fetal position, trying to block out the world and failing. She fell asleep that night, some hot tears slipping through from between her eyelids. As she fell into uneasy unconscious she heard Nathan’s voice echo back something he used to say a lot,

*Another shitty day.*

---

The first thing that Victoria noticed was how quiet it was the next morning. There was no violins. No serenading for her, obviously. There was no text notifications. There were no pictures. When Victoria walked down the hall she had to withdraw her hand from rapping on Kate’s door.

Fuck. When did that become a morning routine for her?

Kate was avoiding her. However she’s wasn’t doing it in that way where it’s avoidance due to fear. Like how you see people hide from zombies in the walking dead. THis is brazen. Kate was out and about, doing her thing but was deliberate in not looking at Victoria. Her casual apathy a sharp weapon in this war of silence.

Damn. This was straight up Real Housewives tactics she was using.

Victoria didn’t know if she was more upset that Kate would stoop to being so *basic* or if she was
more upset at herself because Victoria felt genuinely hurt by this.

That day Victoria did her best to distract herself. Shit-talking with the Vortex Club members. Forcing herself to pay attention in class. Making new pintrest boards for winter fashion, she wanted to stay away from L.L Bean boots because everyone had them and they weren’t fresh but they were warm...

But sure enough, just minutes into any activity either she would get bored and want to bug Kate or something intriguing would pop up and she would want to tell Kate or something that she knew Kate would like or find interesting would come across her and Victoria would want to tell her.

Her heart would then whimper, denied of being able to express anything to Kate.

Victoria tried to smother it.

Then her heart would yowl, trying to beckon Kate Marsh.

Katie, come back!!!!!

Before, Victoria would’ve been perfectly fine with just loathing Kate for the rest of her life. Just like every other person who had ever wronged her, Victoria would’ve just let the disappointment ferment into a long-standing abhorrence. Where this would perfectly justify her petty, immature, resentful actions against the other person.

But.. For the first time in her life, Victoria didn’t want that to happen. Victoria didn’t want to hate Kate. She didn’t want Kate to hate her. More than anything she just wanted whatever they had back. Even though nothing had even technically happened those feelings she had shared with Kate had been…

Some of the most sincere feelings of happiness she had ever felt.

Was it really all gone?

Any time Kate was in the vicinity she could feel the bitter rays of her detestment. Victoria tried to do
her usual thing, keep her back straight, close those iron gates and give the outside world nothing. A Chase does not show weakness to the public. The public are voyeurs for your vulnerability.

“Hey, Vic, have you been checking the VC group?”

Vic was shaken out of her introspection by Taylor Christenson. “Yeah, of course, why?”

“Well… then what time do you want to go to the ice cream thing?”

“Ice cream? Why the Hell are we getting ice cream?”

Taylor and Courtney looked at her, a bit pensive.

“Um. There’s this charity thing happening” Courtney answered, absent-minded as she continued writing in her notebook, “we’ve been talking about it since, like, yesterday.”

Victoria silently cursed herself. Had she really been that obsessed with Kate Marsh to ignore all of the VC messages?

“So…what do you guys talk about?” Kate asked, peering curiously at Victoria’s phone as Victoria texted away.

“Honestly? Mostly memes and shit.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh.” Kate uttered, surprised at her own disappointment.

To be fair, 90% of all conversations of the Vortex Club could be ignored.
“It’s Kate Marsh’s fundraiser” Taylor butted in, for some reason wanting to clarify to Victoria what exactly was going on. Yet just hearing Taylor mention Kate’s name made her heart lurch in her chest, “It’s being held at ‘the Cat’s Cream’ that small gelato place that’s around the corner from the Two Whales? It’s for her thing…that…dinners on the go?”

“Meals on Wheels.” Victoria corrected, her voice peppered with the graviels of bitterness.

“Yeah. That. 15% of all the profits go to that.” Taylor scrutinized her, “so the entire vortex club is going to go and support her.” Taylor concluded. There was a moment of quiet when Victoria noticed that Taylor was still staring at her, as though quietly waiting for her response.

This grated Victoria’s nerves and she clenched her teeth not wanting to answer. Why did Taylor want her to talk about this? Why did Taylor care? More importantly, she knew Taylor was up to something. What of? Who knew. Whatever the Hell it was, she didn’t like it one bit.

“Good for her. The meals on wheels helps a lot of people in this shit hole.” Victoria answered, political and curt. Before Taylor could say anything in response Courtney’s loud, bored sigh interrupted.

“Why ice cream? Who do they think we are, kids? Homecoming is coming up and I don’t feel like getting fat—ow!” Courtney’s whinge was stopped abruptly. Victoria looked up from her phone, seeing Courtney’s confused and peevled expression. That was when Victoria noticed Taylor’s shoe skirt away from Courtney’s ankle. Victoria saw out of her peripheral Taylor lift her up chin at Courtney, as if silently urging her to say something. Courtney’s expression morphed, a bit awkward as she spoke,

“Oh yeah. I haven’t had ice cream in forever. It’s going to be awesome. I hope they have a good, um, mocha flavor.” Courtney answered, as though that wasn’t super suspicious at all.

Victoria grunted, really trying to shove this conversation elsewhere. Whatever these two bitches were up to, Victoria wanted none of it. It made her sick.

“They have mint chip…” Taylor offered, as though Victoria were a toddler.

“Of course they have mint chip, that’s a foundational flavor” Victoria interrupted, irritated. How did Taylor even know that mint chip was her favorite flavor anyways? After a moment, Victoria asked,
“when’s this fundraiser shindig?”

“It’s tomorrow evening.”

Welp. Victoria had about 30 hours to decide how to ditch that fundraiser or figure out the perfect way to get Kate Marsh to talk to her again and hopefully continue their...their...

*Thing.*

Ugh, forget it. Kate hated Victoria and that was just how it was. She’ll stay home, get super high and watch cartoons.

But….It had been a while since she had good mint chip.

---

Alas, no matter how hard she had tried to keep Kate out of her sights, her eyes kept finding her in class, down the hall, in her bunny burrows, in her thoughts…Now she just felt claustrophobic.

It had been only a day? Maybe two? Since their fight and yet the feelings of animosity and grief was strangling her and Victoria couldn’t even function. She was over it. She needed out. As soon as 3:30pm hit and classes here over Victoria grabbed her keys and marched to the parking lot.

As she crossed the black pavement she saw Courtney standing off on the sidewalk. When Courtney saw her, she called out, “Hey Tori! Where are you going?”

“Your mom’s house, why do you care?” Victoria waved off Courtney, not in the mood for anyone who would even try to keep her on this stupid campus for one second longer than she had to. As she pulled out of the parking space and slowly made her way to the exit. She felt Winona Ryder staring daggers into her temple. Victoria sighed and drove up to where Courtney was still standing. She rolled down her window and honked the horn, causing Courtney to jump.

“Ah!”
“Court! I’m sorry I snapped at you.” Victoria stated, “You don’t deserve it. I just really need some time alone so don’t bother me for a bit, ok?”

“Oh, ok Tori, whatever you want.” Courtney placated too quickly. Whatever, Victoria put her foot to the gas and sped out of the parking lot with irresponsible abandon. As soon as she turned right and drove down two blocks her blood chilled for a second.

Where would she even go?

As soon as she stopped at the red light she let out a roar of frustration. That was the problem with Arcadia Bay. It was a small shitty town in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by miles more of trees and nowhere until you somehow hit portland in a few hours. Right now she was trying to escape hipsters and self-righteous bitches not go to a city populated almost SOLEY by those two types of people.

Someone honked at her to move and she jumped up in her seat and out of reflex honked back. “Fuck off, asshole!”

Later after several more shriek sessions at red lights Victoria came back into her body and panicked as she realised that she had been driving for a good twenty minutes and had absolutely no idea where she was…

Until her hands turned down a dirt path just off the road did she figure out where her body had led her. In a clearing she pulled off to the side and parallel parked just so where the sun came through the trees in beautiful splotches. A natural Jackson Pollack.

She cranked her seat as far back as it would lean back and opened up her glove box, taking out her weed box and her piece. She rolled up all the windows and proceeded the time-old ritual of hotboxing her car.

Ugh, this pot was terrible. Oh, what the hell, it may have ripped on the way down and scratched the way out but the pleasant buzzed feeling was the nicest feeling she had in days. She gazed out the window, lazy and dazed. She first found out about this secluded alcove thanks to the one and only Rachel Dawn Amber.

She remembered how she had snipped at Rachel, threatening that if she was taking her to some
Rachel had just laughed at her, saying that it was a great thing she brought her goggles then.

She and Rachel used to come here to smoke and fool around. They’d talk shit about Arcadia Bay, about Blackwell - and sometimes, if Victoria got too baked and felt too comfortable, she’d attempt to say why Sailor Moon was one of the greatest commentaries on Japanese gender and sexuality ever and Rachel would even pretend to entertain her. Not that she’d ever remember anything Victoria said after the fact.

Yet the strangest, most frustrating and hurtful thing that happened was that after Rachel had her fill of fun, she would just up and get out of the car. Then walk away. When it first happened, Victoria was so confused and at first didn’t believe that it happened since she was so high. But then she got out of the car and called after Rachel.

“I’m going somewhere”

“You’re high!”

“Yeah, that too.”

“Get back in the car!”

“I’ll see you later, Victoria!”

Sometimes Rachel would just have Victoria drop her off here. But Rachel never told her when it was just a drop off or when she wanted to fool around a bit. If Victoria was lucky, Rachel would unbuckle her seat belt and crawl over and onto her. If she was unlucky, Rachel would thank her and get out.

The first few times Victoria would demand to know where the fuck she was going.

“Don’t worry, I know where I need to go!”

Rachel never let Victoria come with her. Rachel never told her where she went. To be fair Rachel
didn’t tell her much of anything with substance but she especially never told anyone where she ran off to. She just left Victoria there, answerless. In the end, Rachel ended up leaving everyone with no answers about any of her previous behavior.

Oh well, c’est la vie, Victoria thought as she packed another bowl. As she lit it up, her brain mused, ‘where could she have gone? Was she meeting someone else? Was it just an excuse to get away from her? But then how did she get back to Blackwell?’

She inhaled and exhaled, trying to calm down her brain. She’s dead. Who cares. She probably ran off to suck some dick, knowing her.

She tried to listen to a new indie pop duo...Come on, chill out. She left blackwell Academy to chill out. To get away from everything.

Pot was the chill drug.

Just chilllll.

...

But really, there was nothing out here. Was there some secret cabin in the woods where teenagers ran to and had orgies?

She closed her eyes and let the music faze out all her inane thoughts.

She was just in the middle of the bum-fuck Northwest, hotboxing her very, very comfortable nice car. Just chilling in the car. No need to get out. Now the only thing that would be nice would maybe be a hot girl next to her enjoying this too. Not even just to have sex with but to like, just cuddle and shit.

Man, she would’ve loved to have brought Kate here. Victoria had a feeling that Kate would be fantastic at cuddling-- NOPE! None of that mattered anyway because she was dead and whatever she did was irrelevant.
She was but a human sack of organs and bone, enjoying the moment.

....

It took Victoria two tries to slam the door shut as her muscles, relaxed by the THC refused to cooperate the first time. She pressed the button on her car fob, locking the car. Oh. The sound was mimicking trumpets. How did she never notice that before?

She took in a deep breath of the crisp air. The shards of winter grazing the insides of her throat. She looked around, combing her memory banks of watching Rachel’s retreating form.

Fuck it. She thought as she willed her legs to move in the direction of Rachel’s ghost.

Where did Rachel go?

She staggered over some of the nature and began to follow the girl’s foot steps. Even if she didn’t find anything she had brought her camera with her. Might as well get some good nature shots anyways. As soon as she broke through the initial brush and trees, swearing all the way, she immediately found the train tracks. So, Victoria followed the train tracks to start.

It was gorgeous actually. Quiet and meditative. She could see why Rachel liked the walk. It was a lovely way to get away on your own private adventure.

But, seriously, where the Hell did this girl go? Did she hop on the train for a joyride or what? Time, affected by cannabis, slummed along for Victoria as she simultaneously enjoyed the beautiful nature and was annoyed by the aimlessness of it all. This was stupid. Rachel couldn’t have gone anywhere. Take a diagonal there. Make a u-turn back there. Make a right here.

So why the Hell was Victoria just following the train tracks? That was the most stupidly simple thing. Follow the train-tracks. Rachel wasn’t that simple. Rachel was--

Her thoughts were immediately interrupted by a HUGE ASS SOMETHING ALIVE THAT LEAPED RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER. The thing landing so close to her that the dirt flew up and hit her legs and waist. Victoria shrieked, jumping back, taken in complete surprise. She fell over onto her ass. She looked up, breathless as she scooted back, wondering what the fuck was this thing—
A deer??!??!!!

The deer looked at her, point blank. For a moment Victoria froze. Those big hazel eyes freezing any emotion she had in her body.

Before any rational thought could formulate the deer took off.

When Victoria could breathe again she gasped as she clutched at her palpitating heart and swore out loud, “fucking deer!”

She tried to calm herself down. What the Hell? That thing nearly mauled her to death --

Victoria got up and brushed off her pants and coat. She cursed again. That stupid animal made her ruin her damn clothes. These threads were fucking expensive, God damn it! Come hunting season Victoria was going to get a rifle and that thing better watch it’s damn back because Victoria was going to make that stupid thing pay! She looked after where it ran off--

Huh. The deer ran off on another path? Victoria shook some adrenaline out of her legs and headed towards the path. Had the deer not nearly pummeled into her she would’ve never noticed. Now she had no idea why she was going down this path or if Rachel had ever gone down there. Victoria was no detective but sometimes the obvious thing was to follow the obvious thing.

As Victoria followed the pathway she was immediately met with a large fenced off area teeming with huge piles of trash and abandoned cars. Where the fuck was she? She moved her head around, wondering what world did she just walk into. Of course Rachel would love this area. It was strange, dirty and unfit for any normal human being.

Oh...The junkyard? She looked around and saw on the fence the advertisement of “American Rust”

Victoria walked around, quietly, cautiously. She had been here a couple of times at night for some ratchet parties but she had never ventured here during the day. Movement out of the corner of her eyes caused her to freeze and back pedal behind someone’s boat (wait a minute, there was a fucking boat here? Who the fuck left a boat here?)

She observed, silent. The person was tall. Boots. Beanie. Sweatshirt underneath a leather jacket. Very thin, was carrying something across the lot to...a truck? By the way the person walked was
very feminine. It was a female, definitely. A very familiar beanie covering their hair and ears...

Was that…

“Price?” Victoria called out. As soon as the name left her lips she saw Chloe’s lanky body whip around towards her. Those eyes widened at her an emotion she never saw within Chloe’s face: Pure, unadulterated surprise.

Chloe’s cigarette fell from her lips as she called back, “Victoria?” equally as flabbergasted “what the Hell are you doing here?”

Chapter End Notes

Song influences:

Shut me down - Haute

Before the storm OST

Blood type - Cautious Clay

Funeral Singers - Sylvan Esso

Holy shit. You all have been the most absolute, ludicrous, insanely amazing readers on the planet. This past eight months have been some of the craziest in my entire life and the fact that all of you waited patiently, came back to check in, came back to re-read this means the world to me.

SO ORIGINALLY this chapter was a doozy. It was re-written two times and ballooned out to sixty pages without ending - so I had to divide it into two. The second part should come up quicker than the previous update.

And trust me, I really, really want Victoria and Kate to be as gay as possible but cheese and crackers, these two have so many issues.
But also trust me, it's coming...

Thanks again and please leave your comments, it makes me happy and continues to fuel me with the strength needed to get this story done.

Also, no matter what. This story is getting done. There is a beginning, we're in the middle and you will read the end of this story one day.

Thanks again and stay tuned for next time!

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW:

TaystaTay: Wanna go together?
VicTORIous: busy.
TaystaTay: kk
TaystaTay: I just think kt will like it if we showed up
VicTORIous: I know!!!!! I’m going!
TaystaTay: kk, jst sayin
TaystaTay: shell be sad if we aren’t there
TaystaTay: especially you
VicTORIous: I AM GOING BITCH.
TaystaTay: Dont wanna make kt go :( 
TaystaTay: shell be all :(((((
VicTORIous: I’M GOING I SWEAR I WILL CUT A BITCH
TaystaTay: ;) good girl
VicTORIous: bitch
TastaTay: luv u <3 <3

End Notes

Don't worry, things are just going to get more deliciously emotionally complicated. That's mainly why I love Kate Marsh and Victoria Chase together; the emotional and interpersonal conflict potential is fucking amazing.
Chapter one preview

Victoria stood in her room, alone. Then she sat down, rubbing her temple, “this is so stupid” she said to herself. It then just occurred to her that even incensed, Kate had politely and quietly closed the door. No slamming or stamping or tantrums. She was all silent rage. Victoria was impressed at the other girl’s composure, envious of how that childishness didn’t seem to exist within Kate, uncomfortable at having that type of simmering anger directed at her and most surprisingly…

It was attractive.

---

Musical Influences

Mal Blum - New Year’s Eve

Works inspired by this one The Setting Eclipse by CodyTheLion

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!