

Sweetwater Screaming

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Sweetwater Screaming

by [aghostofmyformerself](#)

Summary

Cheryl Blossom's whole life was a caricature of pain. Something extraordinarily imaginative, and yet incredibly real.

She often found herself at Sweetwater River. A magnetic pull always drew her back to the river. She spent all of her life drowning in it. How can she stop?

OR; Cheryl's life as we know it told by small snippets.

Notes

this is a long one, hold tight, grab some snacks and buckle up. the show has been pretty inconsistent with cheryl's character and tends to gloss over major events, so i *tried* to add some more consistency and depth to cheryl's life. this wasn't supposed to be 14,000 words long, but uhhh, here we are.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

When Cheryl was younger she would occasionally go down to Sweetwater River and scream as loud as she could. She screamed so loud she felt as though her throat would close in on itself if she kept going. The noise of the waves would always drown out her scream. She had always hoped that they'd drown out everything else.

She screamed because she always had to be perfect. She screamed because of how empty her house felt. She screamed because maybe someone would hear and stop what they were doing to rush to her aid. She screamed because she didn't know what else to do.

She ended up outgrowing going down to the river in hopes it would swallow her problems through strained vocal chords. But she never outgrew the need. She never outgrew that river.



Cheryl and her brother had been homeschooled until the third grade. Only ever being around adults who expected them to act more polite than most adults became normal for the two of them. Even around just each other they hardly acted like kids, unsure of what that even meant.

The two were practically robotic in front of guests, acting as the perfect children. They held perfect posture, practiced perfect manners, they maintained a perfect image. Almost.

Teaching a child to behave to so well is an incredibly difficult task. Kids complain and make messes, and that's just to be expected. Lucky for the Blossoms, they were all genetically wired to act perfect. Jason was remarkably talented at appeasing his parents; the attention he garnered from making a mistake was easily redirected into love and approval through a few words and a special smile.

Cheryl, on the other hand, she didn't have the same charm Jason did, nor did she have the luck of being a boy important enough to take on the family business. Despite her overwhelming need to impress her parents, she was simply unable to differentiate the salad fork from the dinner fork from the dessert fork from the oyster fork. She was rendered unable to put on a poker face when eating a food she didn't like. Nor was she able to practice proper manners when speaking to Aunt Janice, who she never quite liked. And not to mention her undying love of the dramatic, or rather, throwing tantrums.

Of course, by the time she reached the third grade she had learned how to act as she was expected due to her mother's less than kind words, and her less than hidden bruises. She was used to the daily life of rarely leaving her large mansion, and being tutored by an old, mildly racist woman. So, she had been taken by surprise when her mother had sadly, and oh-so-kindly told her, "Cheryl, dear, you've really taken the last of my youth away and deepened each and every wrinkle on my face, and so, I've decided to swallow my pride and send you and your brother to mingle with the parasites of society - those who merely feast off of our successes, who, you have to know, you are miles better than - at school. And I know that I am running the risk of you becoming even more of a brat should you be around the insufferable welfare babies for too long, but I truly do not know how much more of you I can take."

“Mother, I just wanted some lunch.”

“God, so needy. You know, when I was your age I would cook every meal for my family, and you know what my father did to me if I didn’t? That’s not important, you’re just a such a little nuisance, you don’t even realize how good you have it.” She scoffed and shook her head. And pointed at the little girl who was seconds away from crying.

“Just go ask the cook, he can make you something.”

At school, Cheryl and Jason were strikingly different. Jason was easily able to fit in with the other kids. He was finally able to act his age without being scolded. It was freeing. Cheryl, though, had the opposite reaction. She expected to be scolded. She couldn’t stand how the loud the kids were. They just wouldn’t shut up. They yelled.

And yelled.

And *yelled*.

It’s too much for her.

Lunch was a disaster. For the first few weeks, Cheryl refused to sit by anyone but her brother. She hated how the kids ate. It made her skin crawl as she looked on with horror at the kids. They ate with their hands. Made messes. Talked with their mouths open. Cheryl felt truly terrible during lunch, fearful of what should happen if she was to sit with the other kids. So, the Blossoms sat alone at their table, Cheryl was easily able to control the kids around her, her wide vocabulary of insults playing a strong part in that. She always took after her mother.

She, of course, wanted to make friends. But she couldn’t. Her entire childhood was defined by her mistreatment, with Jason being the only part that was normal. She lacked any and all social skills, and her mother - her role model - wasn’t the best show of character.

She was doomed.



Cheryl always noticed the ways other kids looked at her. Always noticed the way the parents did too. They would whisper to each other about how the Blossom kids were spoiled rotten. Clifford and Penelope knew not how to raise a child. They lacked disciplinary action. But they didn’t see into the Blossom house. And if they had they would know that lack of discipline isn’t why they held disdain for the Blossoms. It was their money.

They were jealous.

That’s what Cheryl told herself when the other kids’ eyes lingered far too long on her school supplies. On the way, she radiated wealth. It was just jealousy.

She always held onto her beloved brother, for dear life. Always. They stuck by each other through thick and thin. He consoled her when Penelope took things too far. And she consoled him when girls at school wouldn’t date him. But when she was thirteen she found another ride or die.

She found herself swept up in blonde hair and blue eyes that looked at her differently than all the other kids. They spent all their time together. They went to the movies. They went to Pop's. They even had sleepovers every weekend. Always at Heather's.

But then one day, Heather grabbed Cheryl's hand - which always made her heart flutter - and looked at her with pleading eyes, jokingly down on her knees, "Just this one weekend. I barely go to Thornhill. What are you so afraid of?" Cheryl didn't answer the girl's question, just gave in to her plea to have a sleepover at Thornhill.

Something shifted that week. Cheryl knew it. At some point, their hands started to linger far too long on each other. Their faces far too close when they talked. They found themselves looking at the other's lips far too often.

And Cheryl found that when she falls. She falls hard.

And so when they finally decided to go to bed that Saturday night, Heather didn't sleep on the floor. And at some point they found their lips connecting, their arms hung limply at their sides unsure of what to do. And at some point, the door creaked open, but neither of them noticed. Neither of them noticed until Cheryl was being pulled out of the bed by her hair, and they were hearing words being yelled so loudly everything else was muted. They heard words no mother should say to her thirteen-year-old daughter. Her brown eyes burned with a hatred that's unforgettable to a thirteen-year-old.

Heather left, but Cheryl couldn't. And her mother doesn't.

Jason heard everything.

"Deviant."

"Disgusting."

"Shameful."

He always knew something less than platonic was brewing between Heather and Cheryl, twintuition at its finest. So when he saw Heather leave crying, he knew he had to help his sister. His mother's words were ringing in his head despite them not being directed at him. He could hear his sister crying, he could feel her pain. He felt an anger inside of him, burning him up, swallowing him whole. He knew what was happening and he thought of the worst possibilities if he was unable to save his dear sister.

He ran down the hall faster than he ever had. He turned on the door handle, but it was locked. And he tried to kick the door down, but he's nothing but a thirteen-year-old scrawny boy, no matter his adrenaline. He heard Cheryl's cries and he kicked harder and harder. Maybe he could've broken down that door if he had a few more seconds, but he never got those seconds because his father had grabbed him by the shoulders and dragged him to his room.

So Jason left.

“I got you a milkshake.” He sat down on the bed with his crying sister and held out the strawberry milkshake. The strawberry kind was her favorite. He knew she was never allowed to drink them, but she and him had a habit of breaking their parent’s rules. She merely shook her head. He bit his lip unsure of how to act in this particular situation. He was nothing but a thirteen-year-old scrawny boy after all. So he sat the basket of fries down on the bed. And ate one.

And the fact that Jason had climbed up the side of their house and through a window with a milkshake in hand and a basket of fries in his mouth all for Cheryl was so outrageous that she smiled. And she ate one.

He paused, trying to find the proper words fitted for this scenario. “You know I’m there for you.” He grabbed her hand and turned her face towards him. He held back the anger he felt when he saw her bloody lip and bruised cheek. He held back the tears that threatened to spill when Cheryl flinched away from his touch. “Always?” She asked in a measly tone.

“Always.”

After that night when she looked into her classmates' eyes she no longer saw jealousy. She saw hatred. She saw the way her mother looked at her in those kids' eyes. And she realized that those kids were as jealous of her as her mother was. And held just as much hatred. And she wondered if perhaps, there really was something wrong with her.

So she learned to grow a backbone. She stayed defensive, always worried that they knew. They shared her mother’s eyes, and they must share her knowledge and disdain. Everyone hated her. She just knew it. So she grew up. She would never let anyone gain the upper hand in the same way her mother could. Never.



“Cheryl, I have to go.” Cheryl’s heart sank when Jason told her of his plan. He was leaving her. Her always was leaving. “But, why?” And Jason didn’t answer, and for once Cheryl was the one who lacked the understanding. For once she was the one who didn’t get how the other is feeling, what they’re going through. And even though every part of her felt pain more severe than she ever felt at the idea of him leaving, she agreed to his plan. Because Cheryl loved Jason.

She found herself once again screaming at Sweetwater River. She put every ounce of emotion behind her scream because, despite the fact that Jason wasn’t really leaving her, she couldn’t help but feel deserted by the only person who had yet to hurt her.

And when Jason really did die, she couldn’t bring herself to go back to that river. Because it was her fault. She knew it was. Everyone told her it was. None of the students would look her in the eye because it was her fault. Her and the river's fault.

He was *gone*.

And that's all she can think about.



Archie Andrews. God, did he have a heart of gold. She liked him. She really did. She liked the way he always seemed to have a smile on his face. She liked his innocence. She liked his loyalty to his family. She liked the little freckles barely visible on his nose. She liked that he had red hair that shone just as brightly as Jason's. And she liked that maybe he could care for her as much as Jason did.

But more than anything, she liked the way her mother looked when she told her. The way her mother had smiled at her for the first time in forever. How her eyes lost their usual disdain. How her shoulders seemed to loosen, and her arms fell limply at her sides. She finally saw a real mother.

And so maybe that's why she didn't care when her mother bribed Archie to accompany her to the maple syrup tapping. Perhaps that's why when she learned of the bribe her smile grew wide at the thought of her mother caring enough to throw money around for her. She knew it wasn't right to buy someone's love, but it wasn't ever Archie's love she wanted.

But he left too.



Sometimes Cheryl would lay upon her ginormous bed, above her blankets, under a canopy, in a room that's inside a house that costs more than most people will make in a lifetime and just stare at the ceiling. She wouldn't move for hours. She wouldn't cry. Wouldn't blink. Wouldn't breathe. She would feel as though the weight of the world is crushing her. And so she would imagine.

She would imagine a different life, one with a family who loved her more and with friends who stood by her. Jason would be there with Polly, and he'd never leave her. At some point, her dreams would turn into pleas. Pleas that she'll do anything, anything to see Jason again. She would think of everything she'd do to hold him one more time. She'd give away her money. She'd finally stand up to her parents. She'd move out. She'd live on the southside. She'd do the dishes. Get a job. Run a marathon. Walk across burning coals.

Kill someone.

Kill herself.

She'd do anything, *anything* just for that always again, for the stability her brother brought her.

But she wasn't living in a dream. And she would have to learn to scream louder than the current, loud enough where someone would hear her. But she'd lost her voice. And all she could do was hold on to what she had left.

Jason being dead was torture.

The Vixens. Her team. The one thing that she owned. It was hers. And no one could take that from her. Yelling at the other girls on the team to stand straighter, work harder, loosen up, no stiffen up, that was the only constant in her life. The only thing she had control over. It's human nature to throw yourself into your work when your brother's murderer was still walking the streets. The Vixens were her grasp at control.

But Veronica took that. No. They all took that. They voted for Veronica, the daughter of a lying crook, over their leader. They had known Cheryl for years. They had known Veronica for minutes. And Cheryl's only two friends, if they could even count, hadn't even voted. They were even too cowardice to admit their betrayal. She couldn't look any of them in the eyes. Because then she'd see her mother's.

Chuck came to her later. Told her something interesting. Told her of when Betty, Veronica's best friend, *her* ride or die, *her* always, broke down. Went crazy. When she almost killed Chuck. And she knew that this was her chance. No one could embarrass Cheryl in such a way and get away with it. No one could gain the upper hand.

She crashed their party. She brought as many people as she could. But she didn't care about anyone except for Betty, Veronica, and Chuck. It was a ploy of vengeance. She knew that. She wanted Veronica to pay. And she already hated Betty. Who already hated her. She knew this would hurt Betty. But Cheryl Blossom didn't care. Cheryl Blossom had a backbone.

And her plan went great. Until it didn't.

She started the game. Everyone was there. Everyone was listening. Watching. She started with Veronica. Because this was a game of vengeance. Nothing else. "Tell us, Veronica, what's so fresh about defiling Archie Andrews in a closet." Veronica scrunched her eyebrows before reminding Cheryl that, "That was your doing."

"Moving on," her voice raised and filled with spite, "To dear Daddy Lodge. Isn't it true that your father, from prison, illegally purchased the drive-in land? Which makes me wonder..." She paused, the air in the room growing heavy with tension, "What else is he doing from behind bars?"

Veronica almost looked like she might roll her eyes. Might laugh at Cheryl's absurd accusation. Might joke about how wild these small-town hicks' imagination really was. But she didn't. Her face was stony. Ice cold. "Well, I can't speak for my father, but I can think of someone with a very dirty secret." Now it's Cheryl's turn to almost roll her eyes. Almost laugh. But neither of them would back down. Neither would ever admit defeat. "Specifically, Cheryl killing her very own brother."

Veronica made sure to look Cheryl in the eyes. Wanted her to know how serious she was. How greatly she believed that Cheryl had pointed a gun at her brother's head and pulled the trigger. Cheryl glanced away, not because she took offense at the accusation, she already knew that's what everyone thought, but rather at how remarkably familiar Veronica's eyes looked. How incredibly familiar her voice sounded. She looked to the side not in hopes of escape, but in hopes of seeing Jason. Because for the briefest of moments she was thirteen again, and her brother was always there with a basket of fries and a strawberry milkshake. Always.

She reminded Veronica of how much she loved Jason. She remembered Veronica saying that maybe she loved Jason too much. That their relationship was strange, unnatural. No. That *she* was. And those were words she heard far too often.

She didn't remember everything Veronica said after that. She only knew the way she looked at her. And the way everyone else did too.

The game went on. Cheryl stifled her scream.

At one point they uncovered Archie's rendezvous with Ms. Grundy. Cheryl said some things. Some pretty wrong things. None of it mattered.

Then Chuck brought up Betty. Chuck said some things. Cheryl watched with a smile. A cruel, evil smile. A smile that was nothing if not a product of its upbringing. At some point, Jughead punched Chuck. And Chuck punched back. It didn't matter. It was all expected.

Except for Veronica's outburst.

Cheryl was still incredibly confused by Veronica's malice. The way she seemed almost giddy at Cheryl's humiliation. Because as much as Cheryl hated to admit it, she liked Veronica. Liked her because she always chose everyone but herself. She followed Cheryl into the locker room when she broke down. She was the one stood by Cheryl's side even though she had every reason in the world not to. She was the only one who helped Cheryl when she cried. But then, at that moment, she had been the one put the tears in Cheryl's eyes. And Cheryl wondered, once again, if something was truly, deeply, wrong with her.

Veronica returned the River Vixens to Cheryl.

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Polly saw. Polly heard. But she was a Cooper. And in the Cooper house, you keep quiet or face the consequences. And Polly wasn't staying at the Blossom residence to help. She wasn't there to offer advice and sympathy. Not a shoulder to lean on. She was there to find Jason's murderer. The boy she had loved dearly. The boy she planned to run away with. And she just knew a Blossom did it.

She had found him one day. He was crying. He wouldn't stop. And Jason never cried. He always said that he wasn't anyone who should shed tears. That others had it worse. That was one of the reasons she loved him.

She would never forget the look on his face, the eyes of someone broken with guilt and shame when he told her they had to leave. She asked why and he told her that he just couldn't take on the family business and that it would be best for their baby.

She rubbed his back and kissed him tenderly. And they stayed together, both feeling an incomprehensible amount of pressure. She rested her head on his shoulder and promised they'd be alright. Her and him. They would be alright.

They planned. They had an excellent plan. She had never been so excited for anything in her life. To run away. Get away from her parents. Away from the man who almost forced her to have an abortion. From the mother who expected nothing short of perfection. From her house that held too many secrets. It was all perfect. It was all a dream.

She was sent to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy the day she was supposed to leave. And things were hard. She couldn't talk to Jason. To her sister. To anyone. But she always had the hope of seeing Jason again, where they could run away together, where they could be free.

When Betty visited her she was so ecstatic she could cry. She held her hand and hugged her and cried. And she asked about Jason. Because Polly loved Jason. And she wanted nothing more than to see him again. Betty spoke slowly, telling her quietly that Jason was dead. She had never felt so alone.

The way Jason had always spoken of his parents was nothing short of hatred. He never gave her any reason to hate the Blossom parents other than his hate. She still hated them. Hated them for the way they made a boy who could only love-hate. She always wondered what it was that gave him such pure, undefined hatred for his parents. But, now she thought she got it. She got why Jason held such disdain towards his parents.

But she didn't say anything. She was here to find his murderer. Coopers were journalists. And Coopers held secrets. And that was all that Polly really was; she was just another Cooper.



FP killed Jason. Forsythe Pendleton Jones II killed Jason. Tortured him for a week. Shot him. Hid his body. He told no one.

She remembered that once when she was eleven years old Jughead had wanted to play with Jason at the park. And Cheryl didn't want that. And Cheryl couldn't have that. She remembered the rage she felt at the boy who tried to take her brother away from her. The boy who came from nothing wanting to take everything she held dear. Only to play. She pushed him hard. She hit him hard. All for nothing but selfish reasons. She cried and yelled and her hands were shaking. Jason had to pull her off of him.

Afterward, she cried for hours. Because she was her mother. She apologized to Jughead the next day. He didn't forgive her.

She later wished that she hadn't apologized. Because he was his father. And he may have apologized to her, but she didn't forgive him just like he hadn't all those years ago.

She found herself, once again, crying, yelling, and shaking all because of Forsythe Pendleton Jones III.



They were wrong. Of course, they were.

It was uncovered that Clifford Blossom had threatened to kill Jughead if FP didn't confess.

They found that the Blossom Maple Farms was a front for the drug business and Jason had wanted no part in that. And most shockingly, the Blossoms and the Coopers were related, which is why neither family approved of Jason and Polly's relationship.

They found that this is why Clifford had killed his son. FP had hidden the body, that's all.

They found this out because of a Cooper. Because Coopers are journalists. And Coopers keep secrets almost as easily as they reveal them.

Clifford hung himself. Out of guilt or cowardice, no one will ever know. All they knew was that two Blossoms were dead. And one was dying.



Cheryl cleaned her room. And messed it up. And cleaned it again. She rearranged the pictures on the wall. Changed the order she kept her clothes. She vacuumed. She cleaned.

She folded up her River Vixen's HBIC shirt. The shirt that the principal hadn't let her wear during school at first due to the referenced foul language, but gave in when Cheryl slipped an envelope into his hand. She always loved the feeling she got when money was used to her advantage. For her to wear a shirt. For a boy to love her.

She presented Veronica with the shirt and informed her that she could take over the River Vixens. Veronica asked if she was okay. And Cheryl looked her right on the tip of her nose. Never in the eyes. And lied to her.

She found herself apologizing for the second time to Jughead. Apologized for taking things too far. Because Cheryl always took things too far. She handed him her beloved spider brooch.

When people commit suicide they leave a note. A note that tells everyone why they had formed the articulate plan to take their own life. A note that tells people goodbye. Their hearts are left on the page, hearts that had already been shattered.

Cheryl didn't write a note. Didn't need to. Everyone would know why she did it. And who would she need to say goodbye to? No one.

But once Cheryl found herself standing next to the frozen river she realized there was one person she needed to say her goodbyes to. One person who had stood by her despite having every reason in the world not to. One person who had been there to wipe Cheryl's tears, even if she had caused a few of them.

Cheryl texted Veronica. Partly a goodbye, and partly because a bit of her didn't want to die. But she knew that everyone needed to fall at some point. And when Cheryl falls. Cheryl falls hard.

Veronica Lodge, Archie Andrews, Betty Cooper, and Jughead Jones all stood at the bank of a frozen river. Because Veronica had received a goodbye text. And whether it be luck or intuition, their first guess as to where Cheryl would be was the right one.

They had heard Cheryl's scream above the current despite her losing her voice.

Now they see her standing on thin ice.

They could see Cheryl's tears from all the way where they stood. They could all feel the pain she must've felt as she dug her hands into the ice. They all screamed for her to come to the shore. And for a second she smiled.

But then she fell.

And that ice should have broke when the four teenagers ran on it. There should have been five kids swallowed up in that river. But these kids were lucky. And the ice didn't break. They found Cheryl and Archie Andrews beat his hand bloody breaking through that ice to grab her.

When Cheryl falls. Cheryl falls hard. But now she was suspended in air. Because someone had saved her. But she didn't feel like she'd been saved.

She felt like she was still drowning. In the quiet, all she could hear was the rush of the river and her scream muffled by the water, her lungs losing air, her eyes closing for what she thought was the last time. It didn't stop. She couldn't stop drowning. She needed to do something.

Cheryl poured gasoline on a rug made of hundreds of dollars. She walked down the hall pouring gasoline on the expensive maple wood. She flicked a match on. And off. And on. She always found fire so peculiar. So cleansing. She stared at the flame, watched as the fire danced in front of her eyes. She moved her finger quickly through the flame, not enough to burn, just on the edge. She smiled and flicked the match off, settling on using a candlestick instead.

If someone were to ask her later why she burned down Thornhill she'd say "For a fresh start. It held too many bad memories." And while that was part of it, it wasn't the whole story. Really, Cheryl burned down Thornhill in hopes the fire would evaporate the water in her chest, in her veins. She burned down Thornhill because she can't stay suspended in the air forever. She needed to hit the ground.



"You were cruel to me, Mother." Cheryl stood above her mother who was laying in a hospital bed with third-degree burns. The fluorescent lights perfectly illuminated the pure terror in her eyes. Cheryl rested her hand on the tube connected to her mother's oxygen mask. She heard her whimper and she smiled, for the roles are reversed.

“It was abuse, plain and simple.” She looked her dead in the eyes, something she hadn’t done since she was thirteen. She grabbed the tube tightly, constricting her mother’s airflow. “If you breathe, it is because I give you air.” Her eyes were pleading, her breathing was harsh similarly to someone drowning. The power ate away at Cheryl, the ability to hold someone’s life in her hand. “If you drink, it is because I poured your cup myself. And if you move, it is quietly, and with my blessing.” She let go of the tube and her mother gasped for air, just as Cheryl had when Archie pulled her out of the water.

Things were going to be different. Better.

That’s the lie Cheryl told herself.



She sat in the conservatory with her Nana and Mother. They were eating dinner. The only sounds you could hear was the clattering of the cutlery and the chirping of the crickets.

The doorbell rang. Cheryl sat up, eager to get out of the room. She couldn’t hide the grin that was on her face, because she didn’t know who’s at the door, but someone was at the door. Maybe someone wanted to see Cheryl.

It’s Jughead and Betty. Cheryl was elated to see her third cousin at the door. Even if she was with her boyfriend. She hid the smile threatening to form on her lips, reminding herself of how terrible Jughead was. “Hobo. Bride of hobo.” She smiled at them, part of her worried that they’re here because of... the incident at Sweetwater. Or maybe there was something else. Or maybe they just wanted to see her. She invited them in and frowned once they couldn’t see her because they must want something. But maybe they don’t.

Things were different. Better.

“Thank you for sitting down with us.”

“Of course, Betty. You’re family.” She nodded at her and smiled. She really was happy to see the addition to the Blossom family. Family meant something to Cheryl, her family was dying so she would give it her all to grasp at the relatives she had left.

Family is odd. The way it makes you forget your common sense. The way someone you hardly know can mean so much just because you have similar blood. How no matter how terrible they can be, they hold a special place in your heart.

“The reason we’re here...” Cheryl pursed her lips at Jughead’s words. Betty finished his sentence, “FP’s lawyer thinks that if the family of the victim shows mercy-”

“Mercy. That’s why you’re here?” Penelope asked sharply. She could barely make facial expressions due to her burns but anyone could see her anger, hear her blood boiling.

“Well, it’s an appeal for leniency from you... to reduce my dad’s sentence.” That’s why they’re here. To try and sneak the man who covered up a murder out of jail. The man who joined a gang and had most certainly broken the law prior. The man who deserved to go to

jail. And they sat there and told Cheryl that the man who had caused nothing but pain to her, had done nothing but hurt her, deserved her forgiveness in an effort for his freedom.

Cheryl yelled. She said some things. She couldn't believe the proclamation of a living, breathing reminder of the darkest chapter of her life thus far walking the streets of Riverdale. And Betty looked so high and mighty. Reminded her that her father killed Jason, not FP. Acted as though she was a better person than Cheryl because she only cared about who killed Jason, she didn't care about who dumped the body. And Cheryl hated the way Betty looked at her like she was a monster, like she was a complete idiot for wanting to tie up every loose end to the murder of her dear brother.

Cheryl did end up testifying, though. She didn't get to decide if she did or didn't. Betty had come to her later in the girl's locker room and blackmailed her. She said that if Cheryl didn't testify she'd wide release the video of Jason's murder. And so Cheryl falsely told the court that she forgave FP. And she made up some lie regarding her father's blackmail. Because how was she supposed to have closure if her brother's murder became a viral sensation?

She thought it was funny. Funny how Betty thought it was so terrible that Clifford forced FP to say something against his will. How she felt that what FP said didn't mean anything in a court of law because someone forced him to say it. How hypocritical it was to threaten the girl she had watched attempt suicide days before into testifying for a man who contributed to the reason she fell into those icy depths and still think that she was a better person, that her blackmail held no comparison to Clifford's.

It's funny, really. How nothing ever seems to change.



Cheryl held a rose in her hands. She was entranced by it, the vibrant red, the piercing thorns. Something strong, passionate, and loving.

When Cheryl and Jason were younger they used to pick each other flowers in the garden behind Thornhill. Jason would hold a rose behind his back and tell Cheryl he got something for her, and she'd act surprised when she saw the rose. She'd take it and hold it to her nose, sniffing exaggeratedly. She would smile and say it was lovely. And he would grin proudly.

Jason was a saint.

Cheryl would get him a purple lily. It was her favorite type of flower. Normally, she'd keep such a flower for herself, but Jason was an exception. He brought out the good in her. She was selfish, and Jason was a part of herself.

Jason was gone, though. Cheryl had no one but herself. And not even her whole self.

Cheryl hardly stopped crying now. She felt as though the best part of her was gone. She didn't know how to survive without him. She was desperate for someone's love. Whether it be her mother's, or a friend's, or a lover's. Cheryl just wanted someone to love her as much as Jason had.

Her dead brother was torturing her from the afterlife.

She calmly gripped the rose's stem, tightening her fist, the thorns piercing her skin, blood dripping onto the grass.

Cheryl was alone.



Inside a house that costs more than most people will make in a lifetime, there was a room with the lights on at three in the morning because the girl inside was afraid of the dark. She was wide awake. She was terrified. She was terrified of what she'd see when she woke up. Of what she'd see when she fell asleep. So she laid in the bed with the lights on and didn't sleep.

She wished for nothing more than her brother. For him to hold her and tell her everything would be alright. For him to take away all her pain. She needed his protection. She needed his love. She couldn't do this without him.

She found herself in this position night after night. She couldn't sleep for longer than a few hours before she'd wake up in a cold sweat. Constantly feeling helpless, waiting in hopelessness for something that would never happen, but constantly feeling as though it would. It was *torture*.

She'd always wonder when exactly everything went wrong. What point was it that everything fell apart? Some nights she thought it was when she said hello. Others when she took his drink. Occasionally when she woke up that morning. And sometimes when she woke up later that night.

But she always knew who it was that had caused her so much pain.

"Did somebody say party?" Cheryl strutted towards a room full of Pussycats and a boy she didn't recognize. She looked him up and down, and he did the same thing in a way she could only describe as predatory. He radiated confidence and wealth. It was something she could already tell they had in common. There was just something so alluring about him, something that gave her a feeling she wouldn't be able to put a finger on until much later.

"Hi there. I'm Riverdale's resident it-girl, Cheryl Blossom. You must be Veronica's old-school chum I keep hearing about." She said everything with a wide smile on her face, she hoped he would find her just as alluring, as captivating as she found him.

"Nick St. Clair." He reached out his hand for her to shake. His dry, strong hand met her delicate one. "Now that's a name I can get behind," she smiled as she said it, making sure to draw out the words in the most enticing way she could muster. "Ten o'clock you said? I'll be there at eleven."

She considered it intoxicating how perfect every part of his face seemed, his lips, his eyes, all of it. His lips were perfectly suited for speaking, for kissing. She imagined how amazing they would feel on hers. His eyes were a perfect shade of green that she knew would perfectly

compliment her brown eyes. And she adored the way he looked at her with those eyes, that bold look of attraction. She had never seen quite that look before. Not even in Heather.

Her mother would love him.

Cheryl went to Nick's party at the Five Seasons. She danced and took drugs and joked about nothing. At one point in the night, Veronica and Betty had a nasty fight effectively ending the party. None of it mattered, all she wanted was to talk to Nick and she had hardly gotten to.

When Cheryl heard Nick St. Clair would be at the Lodge's open house event she immediately decided she would go despite her underlying hatred for the Lodges. Minus Veronica, of course. She had spent an unreasonable amount of time deciding which dress to wear. She wanted to make sure it was appropriate for the open house but still wanted to impress Nick. Cheryl ultimately decided on a black dress with a bejeweled neckline. She loved the way she looked in that black dress, how the dress hugged her curves just right, how subtle yet so striking it was, how the black stuck out against her red hair and lipstick. It was one of her favorite dresses. So she wore it for the last time at the Lodge's open house event.

He flirted. She flirted back. Cheryl would never be able to tell you what exactly that event was for, or anything that happened at it. All she knew is what happened later that night.

Often when faced with death or tragedy people think of the most bizarre things. They wonder if they had left the oven on when they are laying on the ground taking their last breaths. They'll ask if their fly is down when they're laying in a hospital gown. People remember where they left their keys, remember where that damn remote is. People are strange and Cheryl was no exception.

She'd remember odd things about that night. She'd remember lights flashing so bright she'd wondered if she could go blind. She'd remember worrying about what her mother would say if she broke her heel stumbling up those stairs. Just how mad would she get? She'd remember thinking about a bouquet of flowers with colors that horribly clashed. She'd remember a mole on the back of a neck that most definitely needed to be looked at. Before she fell unconscious she thought of a nature documentary that had explained how some prey would pretend to be dead so predators would avoid them, and as she laid on that bed trying her hardest to run, to move, to scream, to just keep her eyes open, as she just laid there looking as dead as those animals had she had thought, *"Clearly that's a load of bullshit."*

Cheryl awoke to Josie McCoy. For a second she forgot where she was, had wondered why Josie looked so concerned and so angry. But then she remembered everything, all the odd details. She found herself breathing heavy in an absolute panic. She started shaking as Josie held her shoulders because, oh god, what had *happened*? Josie managed to calm her down in her panicked state, a feat that would've been impossible for most people. But Josie wasn't most people.

She learned quickly that the Pussycats had seen her stumbling away with Nick and had followed. They had beaten him bloody, which almost put a smile on her face.

She sat on the bed, mascara running down her face and Josie's arms around her with Veronica by her side. She couldn't wait to get off that bed, but was too scared to move, to do anything



other than stay in Josie's embrace. "I wanna press charges." She spoke softly, but her voice was filled with anger and malice. "I want Nick to pay. To suffer. To burn in Hell." Tears rolled down her face faster now. The rest was a blur.

Veronica brought Cheryl to the Pembroke where the two girls told the Lodge parents what had happened. The girls went down to the station where each made a statement on what had occurred. She hated how the sheriff spoke. Nick was the boy from the respectable family and Cheryl was the young woman from the family of crooks.

It was all so messed up.

"Penelope, thank you for coming." At hearing those words the two girls looked to each other and Cheryl put a finger to her lips, ushering Veronica to be silent. They huddled against the door to hear what the three adults were talking about.

"We called as soon as Cheryl told us."

"I appreciate that. I just wished you'd stopped her from talking to Sheriff Keller. Lord knows what Cheryl did or said to the St. Clair boy to provoke him." Veronica scrunched her eyebrows in confusion, she hadn't expected anything less than sympathy, horror, and anger from Cheryl's mother. Veronica glanced at Cheryl's face which was completely neutral. Scarily void of emotion.

"According to Veronica, nothing." She tried to throw Cheryl a smile in hopes her mother's comment would lighten her a bit, maybe knowing that Veronica and her parents were both on her side would ease her mind, but Cheryl didn't notice.

"Hermione, Hiram, I want this handled discreetly."

"Well, I'm confident that the St. Clairs feel the same way," her father said. Veronica felt almost nauseous at her father's words and the implication of them. Her distrust towards him was no secret, after recently being released from jail she couldn't find it in her to think of him the same way she had before. And now she was forced to hear him stand down. He should've been defending the girl he had seen at her lowest point hours before.

"Then it's settled. I'll talk to that idiot Keller and tell him we won't be pressing charges. After all... nothing really happened to Cheryl."

Cheryl stepped away from the door and reached for her jacket.

"Cheryl, I'm... so sorry." God, Veronica felt terrible. Guilty. It was her fault, wasn't it? She should've known what would happen, he had tried to do the same thing to her and she didn't say anything, she didn't warn Cheryl, she did nothing. She could've stopped it all. It didn't have to happen. They wouldn't be in this mess if she would've just said something. But she said nothing. And now Cheryl would say nothing too. They were both just two nothings.

“Don’t be silly. I’m used to it. And besides, you heard what Mommy said. Nothing really happened to me.” Veronica stood in shock from her lack of reaction, no tears, no frustration, nothing. She couldn’t help but feel as though this was one big joke. Veronica quickly reminded Cheryl of Nick roofieing her and what he tried to do.

“I’m fine. Veronica, everything’s fine,” she said throwing her jacket on, her face emotionless.

“If everything is fine, then why did we just call Sheriff Keller and make a statement?” Her voice had an edge as Veronica was growing frustrated with Cheryl’s unwillingness to just talk. Why wouldn’t she just *talk* to Veronica about everything that’s happened?

“Momentary lapse in sanity. I mean, can you even imagine? Me facing off against Nick St. Clair in a courtroom battle royale? I’d be a laughingstock.” She frowned at the pain hidden behind Cheryl’s words. A laughingstock? She wouldn’t be. Veronica was sure of that. Veronica had faith in people. And no one would do anything but offer Cheryl a shoulder to cry on.

But, then again, even Cheryl could easily be turned into a joke. She already had been. It wasn’t that long ago Cheryl was considered the freak that killed her twin brother after banging him. She was a joke then.

Maybe she wasn’t wrong.

She grabbed her arm, telling her quietly to stop. She had to say something, didn’t she? Nick would do it again. He would do it again and every time it would be Veronica’s fault. She just knew it would be her fault. And eventually her guiltiness would eat her whole and she’d tell someone and they’d look at her with disgust because it was *her fault*.

But perhaps, Cheryl would feel the same. Perhaps, she could tell Cheryl. She’d get it. She’d understand her silence. And maybe the two of them could do something. Could do anything. Just for some closure.

So she told her.

“Did you tell your parents?”

She shook her head.

*Her fault.*

“Yet you were happy to fill them in on my after-dark drama, weren’t you? Well, I won’t be a puppet for your thirst for vengeance. You want justice? You go after Nick in court, Veronica.”

She didn’t.

Just two nothings.

She was later informed of her mother taking hush money from the St. Clairs. A disgusting fact that did nothing but further remind her of her mother's disinterest in her. And even though her mother burned the check once Cheryl begged her to, she didn't press charges. Nick walked the streets, and Cheryl constantly wondered if there was a possibility of him coming back.

He was nothing but an aching feeling that ate at her. She thought of everything that could've happened and had accidentally convinced herself that one night it would.

Cheryl would learn how to sleep again. She would turn off the lights once more. She wouldn't think about what happened every night. And she may have learned to move on, but she'd never forgotten the feeling of total helplessness she felt as she laid on that bed, that feeling of hopelessness when she couldn't press charges. She'd never forget that feeling.

She still moved on, she always does. And besides, nothing really happened anyway.

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Josie. Josie. Josie.

Cheryl adored her. Adored her perfect black curls, and her brown, smooth skin. Adored her perfectly white teeth. And the absolute gorgeousness of her voice.

When Cheryl falls. Cheryl falls hard.

She was deep down the rabbit hole this time. She could lose herself just in the thought of her name alone. The syllables rolled off her tongue so perfectly. Every time she said her name she felt every part of her turn to mush. The name is just so endearing, and Cheryl had the absolute pleasure of speaking it to the girl herself.

Josie. Josie. Josie.

She loved the way the girl cared for her. She saved her from Nick St. Clair. She cared enough to save her. No one had done that since Jason. Cheryl had been rather lacking in terms of affection, but now...

Josie. Josie. Josie.

An object of Cheryl's affection. A way for her to easily grasp on to the love that had been so carelessly sent Cheryl's way. She erupted her every waking thought. She was like a virus that Cheryl couldn't get enough of. Every second she spent thinking about Josie was a second she didn't have to think about everything else. She was nothing but a thing for Cheryl to play within the very corners of her mind.

She had found it impossible to concentrate on anything other than Josie. On her English test, she was unable to focus on the motive behind some meaningless character's meaningless actions. All she could focus on was the girl sitting diagonally from her, offering her the perfect angle to wrap herself in dreams involving her. She studied her every movement.

Watched her pearl white teeth bite down on her perfect lip. Saw the eraser of her pencil trail along her jaw. Everything. Cheryl saw everything.

Josie. Josie. Josie.

She started sending her gifts and notes. A secret admirer that Cheryl had playfully suggested to be the Black Hood, and more seriously suggested to be Chuck. Her infatuation with Josie being a tight-lipped secret of which she hadn't the slightest idea of excited Cheryl to no end. Her sketchbook was filled with drawings of Josie, her pencil traced the lines of the face Cheryl had spent every second thinking about. Lips she had engulfed herself in the idea of kissing. Eyes she had spent the equivalent of years drowning in. Every stroke of the pencil further pushing Cheryl farther and farther into her infatuation. Her obsession.

She couldn't imagine the very idea of Josie leaving her as Jason and Heather had. As everyone had. She was alone outside of Josie. She couldn't lose her. Wouldn't lose her. She organized Josie's singing career. She fell in love with the feeling of Josie relying on her. She wanted the girl to be on her own, not in a band. If she was on her own, she could spend time with Cheryl that she would normally spend with her bandmates. She needed her alone. She needed *her*.

Josie. Josie. Josie.

Josie went on a date with Chuck. *Her* Josie went on a date with some insufferable sleazeball. **Her** Josie. Her dream. Her grasp of feeling love and affection. Her thing in which she could selfishly manipulate into loving her back and spending every second with Cheryl just to feel something *good*.

She went on a date with *Chuck*. It didn't matter who, really. All that mattered was that she went on a date with someone who wasn't Cheryl. She spent time with someone who wasn't Cheryl. Her thoughts were soon transformed into Josie *with* Chuck. Josie *without* her.

Jealousy consumed her.

She felt the sickening feeling eat at her. Her blood boiled throughout her. Her common sense had long been clouded, but now was left shriveled and ignored, replaced by the overwhelming jealousy that had come along with Cheryl's overwhelming obsession.

Cheryl had always been nothing but a slave to her impulses. She had only managed to be led astray from her impulsive, imbecilic actions by her beloved Jason. But Jason was gone. He had left her long ago, thus leaving her to be helplessly pulled along by her outlandish imagination. She would be dragged along wreaking havoc among everything she touched as she made more quick decisions. More impulsive actions.

Her obsession had gone on a date with someone who wasn't her. *Her* object of affection.

Hers. Hers. Hers.

Just outside of town there was a farm that was owned by an old man who would never notice if one of his dear animals went missing. Years and years of the same old days had dwindled

his mind to mush. He would never notice a red-headed girl slip onto his property. He wouldn't notice her sneak into the freezer containing his dead animals. He wouldn't notice when one of his pigs was mysteriously missing its heart.

She gasped at the threatening note and pig's heart. She obviously knew who had left it, but she couldn't let *her* know. She quickly blamed it on a Chuck, determined to ensure that their date the other night was a one-time thing. She would have her all to herself once again. Someone could give her all of their love, the love she so greatly desired.

*Hers. Hers. **Hers.***

With Chuck gone Cheryl was able to crowd into all of her girl's time. She spent every second with her love. She ignored her mother, ignored her teachers, ignored her sort-of-friends, she was too wrapped up in her obsession to care about anything else. Her grades slipped, her mother yelled, but she couldn't find it in herself to care. She still had someone's love and someone's time, so how could she care about anything else?

*Hers. Hers. **Hers.***

However, obsessions rarely last very long. They're short and all-consuming. Cheryl stopped leaving notes, further placing the blame on the boy accused of being Cheryl. She still watched her. Still thought about her. She was still wrapped up in her obsession. But the threats she previously left diminished.

Until the girl Cheryl had given herself to was given the offer to play a show in Cincinnati. Cheryl, of course, felt a sense of pride considering she, herself, was the reason her girl had been given such an invitation. She also, however, felt incredibly hopeless and broken at the proclamation of being left alone for even a week. She would be alone.

Due to her GPA falling below a 4.0, she knew her mother would never allow her to miss a week of school, and Cheryl had no chance of convincing her to stay, as her girl had already proclaimed it a "once in a lifetime opportunity." So Cheryl knew that it was up to her, to prevent her from leaving. She would never be alone again.

*Hers. Hers. **Hers.***

She bought a gun. Not legally, of course. She bought it from Dillon Doiley on the rocks of Sweetwater River. Funny enough, they were the same rocks she had sat on crying, putting on a show of helplessness to convince Dillon that her brother had died.

It was a small revolver, so small she wondered why anyone would own such a thing for any reason other than her's. It seemed far too small to shoot anyone with, it hardly appeared deadly. Though, she reasoned if aimed well, one could kill with it. You'd need to keep them still. Tie them to a chair, perhaps. And point the gun to their head. Pull the trigger. That would be deadly.

She really was her father's daughter.

*Hers. Hers. **Hers.***

“Whoever’s doing this deserves to rot in hell.”

“Amen. What this guy’s doing is sick.”

“God, Cher, I’m just so scared. I just keep thinking about what this person might do next and I just... It’s evil, pure evil. They’re awful.” She started crying. Tears ran down her perfect face, her mascara further ruined. And Cheryl looked at her. Really looked at her, and realized that this was Josie.

This was *Josie*.

She was crying. And it was her fault. She had sent her a threat with a gun attached to ensure she wouldn’t leave her sight, but as Josie’s sobs grew louder and louder she realized Cheryl hadn’t seen Josie in weeks.

She’s awful.

She took Josie into her arms, wishing her upbringing had been more comforting so she would know how to help. Josie went on about how terrified she was, and Cheryl felt an all-consuming guilt. She had caused this. She had caused Josie to cry.

Awful. Awful. Awful.

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It was their first Christmas without Jason. And without money. But, Cheryl needed it to be the exact same as it was before. She needed it to be like Jason was there. He’d be so ashamed if they couldn’t even do Christmas right.

So, she bought a tree with the money they didn’t have. And decorations, and presents, and anything she could to make sure this Christmas was perfect. It had to be. It had to be perfect.

She bought Josie a gift, a really expensive gift. She had felt terrible about what she had done, and though she would never tell Josie that she was her secret admirer, she would try to make it up to her. She had been extra nice to Josie. She had been the perfect friend. She was rather ashamed of her obsession with Josie. She had taken things too far. Luckily, no one knew it was her. Her mother’s wrath would stay upon her young self, and only find itself in Cheryl’s mind.

Nevertheless, Cheryl persisted. Determined not to bring herself down despite her recent mistakes. So Christmas would have to be right since Cheryl was oh-so-wrong.

And it was. The tree was gorgeous. She was happy. Nana Rose was happy. The stockings were up. Perfect. Just how she wanted it. She ignored the pang in her chest at celebrating without Jason. And having to buy herself gifts wasn’t a lovely feeling. But, despite that, it was perfect.

Then, of course, she discovered that her suggesting that her mother get a job had inspired her mother. And she did get a job. Not one Cheryl was expecting, nor happy with. She was a courtesan.

Cheryl was living with a courtesan.

Strange men entered and left her house every night. Every night. It was a nightmare. It was *torture*. Her mother, as always, was a nightmare.

Nothing ever changes.



Southside High was shut down. Drugs or something. Had Cheryl still had her money she would've been able to save the school and her life, but of course, God hath no mercy. She would be forced to have her school be stock full with underachievers. The above-average GPA in Riverdale High was soon to fall, as Cheryl had told the Southsiders. It was frustrating. She couldn't do anything.

Her house was still a nightmare. No longer was she able to escape her mother during sleep, she was ruining her life through all hours. Her home felt less and less like a home, and now school felt less and less like a haven.

So, she did what anyone would do in her situation, she manipulated the ever-loving Archie Andrews. There were many things in Cheryl's life she couldn't control. But she would die before she at least tried.

She knew Archie kissed Betty while he and Veronica were broken up. So, to get him and Veronica on her side in the war against the Southside, she'd simply threaten their relationship. And on top of that, she knew Veronica hadn't told Archie about her almost-scandal with Nick St. Clair, so Cheryl would. Thus, Archie Andrews would retrieve the check from Nick St. Clair for Cheryl, preventing her mother from needing to "work" and Nick would probably get his second beating in three months.

Winning is such a sweet taste.

Granted, Cheryl did feel the slightest pang of guilt at releasing sensitive information regarding Veronica that she of all people knew was not her place to tell. But Veronica wasn't on her side, she wanted the Southsiders to stay at Riverdale High. She played a part in the destruction of Cheryl's life. So what if Cheryl played a part in her's?

"Oh, but Cheryl, why would I stop when I'm having such a good time?" Her mother folded the check, which was now useless as far as Cheryl was concerned, and left. Her mind was racing, there had to be something, anything, she could do to stop this. To turn her life around, but there really wasn't. The Southsiders wouldn't leave, and her mother would keep inviting strangers into her home. She was falling apart and there was nothing she could do.

Absolutely nothing.

Archie told Veronica that Cheryl had told him about Veronica's almost-scandal. Which meant that Cheryl's almost-friend was mad at her. Cheryl had hurt her. She kept hurting people. Heather. Josie. Jason. She was awful. Her mother was right.

She ended up apologizing to Veronica for betraying her confidence. She didn't know what drove her to apologize. Maybe the guilt simply ate at her until she couldn't take it. Maybe having a secret be revealed without your consent hit too close to home on too many occasions. Or maybe it was the fact that she really had no one.



The Southsiders stayed at Riverdale High. Cheryl stopped throwing a fit whenever she saw them and simply avoided them. They were still annoying and, quite frankly, terrible, but she couldn't get them to leave so she found no point in wasting her time on them. Jason wouldn't want that.

Of course, there were mild issues to come as a result of the Southsiders. There was less space in classrooms. The average GPA did drop as a result. But, most notably for Cheryl, she had a *crush*.

A stupid, serpent crush. Cheryl was frustrated that this kept happening. But she couldn't quite get her mind off of bubblegum locks that surely were as soft as they looked. Or skin that looked so incredibly smooth. And she adored the rebellious feeling of lusting for someone wearing a serpent jacket. Her being a serpent was *hot*, but Cheryl knew that she was incredibly off limits due to that jacket. She couldn't stand that this had happened again. She found herself another Heather. Or another Josie. Just another disaster.

And despite the girl's incredible attractiveness, Cheryl found it in herself to merely admire her from afar. She stayed focused on her studies and her cheerleading. She stayed far away from her serpent crush, merely allowing her serpent crush to be explored in the inner reaches of her mind. Cheryl would not make the same mistake once again.

She had, however, found herself lonely one day. Her mother had been in a particularly bad mood that morning. She had found herself left out of a weekend trip with her only friends because it was a "couples only" weekend. So, she did what Cheryl did when she was lonely. She made someone else a little bit lonely to make herself a little bit less by comparison.

"Did you just tell Jughead that Betty and Archie kissed?" Painfully, Cheryl's serpent crush had decided to come into the bathroom and talk to Cheryl. "Yes. So what if I did?" She put her lipstick in her bag, focusing solely on that. She definitely didn't notice her turn away from the mirror and towards Cheryl. Definitely not.

"Did you at least have a reason?" And Cheryl had almost forgotten that she was new here. And a serpent. "Hi, I'm Cheryl Blossom AKA Cheryl Bombshell, which means I need no reason, I simply am... Feel free to tremble."

"I have a better idea... Why don't you tell me what's bothering you because clearly..." She inched closer to Cheryl, which most definitely did not make her breath hitch. And she put a hand on Cheryl's arm, which most definitely did not make her stomach flip. "You're in a lot of pain."

"Get your sapphic, serpent hands off my body!" She slapped her hand down and stormed out of the bathroom. Cheryl couldn't believe she had been mocking her. Making fun of her with



faux pity to make herself appear like the better person. Cheryl hated her. Hated what she represented. And she hated that feeling she gave her that would just not go *away*.



Cheryl's hand brushed the girl next to her's in the popcorn bowl. Her pale skin briefly touching brown. They both flinched and Cheryl sat stiffly in her seat, hoping her serpent crush would forget that she was there. She focused on the movie, but of course, that couldn't help her one bit.

She didn't know why she was there. In a movie theater. In an itchy seat. With some girl. She hated this girl. Or maybe she didn't. Cheryl was sick of hating people. She was sick of being afraid of what others could see in her, could do to her. She was sick of being alone. Perhaps, this girl felt the same. Maybe they could be alone together.

Cheryl told her about Heather. She told the girl she had hated hours ago her biggest secret. Her biggest mistake. And her stupid, serpent crush took her hand and looked in her eyes and Cheryl felt safe. They sat in Pop's Diner on the busiest day of the week, at the busiest time, but that day there was just the two of them.

And Cheryl decided. Right then and there that she was done feeling ashamed. She was done hating her own feelings. She was done hating her mother as though she was the reason Cheryl couldn't live her life. It was easy to stop hating her serpent crush and so, she'd stop hating herself too.



Cheryl spent a lot of time with her. They'd go to Pop's almost every day, they watched the same movies over and over at the Bijou, and Cheryl even went to the Southside. Cheryl really liked her. She even thought that maybe she liked her back. Pretty sure, actually. But Cheryl had never been in a real relationship, nor did she think she could pursue one.

But, maybe she could.

Her mother may have hated her and her serpent crush, but Cheryl didn't want to care what her mother thought anymore. Cheryl wanted to be okay. Cheryl wanted to love herself. And maybe she could do that with someone else.

A sleepover. Cheryl had good luck with those in the past. Or, perhaps bad luck. Her and a few other girls from school, one of which having rosy locks that really were just as soft as Cheryl had thought they would be and with pink lips that she had yet to discover if they were as soft as she imagined.

She laid in the same bed as her serpent crush, exactly like she had with Heather. Both faced each other. They both looked at the other's lips, knowing what to do. They both leaned forward, hearts racing. Weeks of fleeting looks and soft touches all coming to a close with their lips coming together. But before Cheryl got any kiss, a loud crash was heard.

Cheryl's grandmother had fallen down the stairs, though Cheryl was convinced she was pushed by her mother. She was distraught by her possibly dead grandmother, but she wasn't really surprised when her kiss was interrupted before it began. Cheryl would later find it peculiar that she had essentially re-enacted one of the worst moments in her short life. Perhaps for rebellion. Maybe she was trying to make up for the events surrounding her first kiss. Maybe prove she wasn't wrong. Or maybe Cheryl just hadn't quite shaken her self-hatred.

Nothing ever changes.



Cheryl was alone. Again. She sat alone in a room, wearing a horrid uniform, listening to a nun preach about her deviant, perverse ways. She listened. She hated her. This stupid nun. Cheryl didn't believe her. She didn't take anything she said to heart.

She still listened.

But, she knew better now. She knew she wouldn't change. And she thought maybe she could be okay with that. She could be okay with herself. She just had to wait to get out. She'd leave this place when she turned eighteen. Or maybe she'd break out before then. Or maybe they really would fix her.

No, they wouldn't. Cheryl knew they wouldn't because no matter how many drugs they gave her, no matter how much pain they put her in, all she could think about was bubblegum hair and chocolate eyes.

She missed her. She missed her taking pictures of Cheryl even when Cheryl threatened to break her camera. She missed drinking milkshakes with her. She missed her leather jacket and motorcycle. She missed her warm hands and her warmer laugh.

She missed *Toni*.

She missed everyone. She missed Veronica. She missed Josie. Kevin. Moose. Archie. Cousin Betty. She even missed Jughead.

Most of all, she missed ***Toni***.

She recited bible verses so many times she was sure she'd never forget them. Corinthians flowed through her veins. Leviticus was written in her bones. The words were forever etched into her mind.

She was angry.

She was sad.

She was scared.

She was alone.

Her muscles ached from dragging sandbags for hours on end. Her eyes stung from crying, and her lungs hurt from heaving sobs. She had never felt so hopeless.

The only people she talked to were those who hated her. Their words were venomous, sickly, and seeped into the inner reaches of Cheryl's mind like a virus. Their words wouldn't ever leave her. That she knew.

She was told she was everything she couldn't be. She was reminded that her mother hated her like this. She was told she would never be happy if she continued her deviant lifestyle. She wouldn't have kids. She wouldn't have respect. She'd never have anyone.

But she had *Toni*. And Toni always told her how amazing she was. Toni made her feel happy. She was happier than she had ever been when she was with Toni. She didn't care what anyone thought of her because she had Toni. She adored Toni. And she knew Toni felt the same.

She listened to them, but she thought of everything Toni would say if she was there. She'd picture her going on some long - likely political - rant about how nothing the nuns did would work and how they were just spreading lies. She'd picture Toni yelling at them, threatening them, taking Cheryl far away from there where they could hold hands and kiss and be happy.

Toni wasn't there, though. Cheryl was alone.

Penelope slammed the door shut in Toni's face. Toni stood still for a few moments, unsure of what to do. Confused as to what was happening. She debated in her mind whether or not Cheryl was at boarding school.

She would've told her, right? She would've said goodbye, right?

She knew Cheryl had been scared of her mother and uncle recently. She was worried they might try to get rid of her. She was certain they had tried to kill her grandmother. Toni was worried Cheryl might have been right about their intentions. Could Penelope kill her daughter?

Her father killed his son. It surely wasn't out of the question. Cheryl could be *dead*.

Toni didn't know if she could handle another death. She had already experienced too many. She had already seen too many dead bodies. She was scared of what she would feel if she saw another. Or maybe what scared her was what she wouldn't feel. She wouldn't fall apart. She was used to it. She'd be able to handle another death.

She was in a gang for God's sake. She was practically a violence machine. Chaos followed her. People were constantly dying around her. One of these days Toni would die too. She knew that. Her serpent jacket would be drenched with blood before it was dry cleaned and given to a fourteen-year-old girl looking for a family. Her serpent tattoo would turn to dust just like her life had always been.

It was inevitable.

She could handle people dying.

But if it was Cheryl...

Toni tried to push the thought away. She knew she had to be alive. She could feel it. She must just be at boarding school like her mom said. And Cheryl's phone must've died which is why she wasn't responding.

She was *fine*.

Everything was *fine*.

Four days passed and Cheryl still hadn't responded to any of Toni's texts. Her social media was dead, and Toni prayed that was the only thing that was.

Toni couldn't focus. She couldn't focus on school. She couldn't focus on work. She couldn't even focus during the serpent meeting. She was scared.

Cheryl could be *dead*.

Veronica noticed Cheryl's absence from school, it was hard not to, but in all honesty, hadn't thought much of it. Sure, Cheryl didn't miss school much, but flu season was just starting. She easily could've caught a nasty virus.

School was weird without Cheryl. Quiet. It might've been nice not having to hear Cheryl's insults if it weren't for how worried Veronica was starting to get. Four days and no Cheryl.

Vixens practice came and Cheryl still was gone. No one really knew what to do without her. It hadn't been very long since Veronica had tried to seize control of the team, and now she wanted nothing more than Cheryl to walk through the gym doors and run the practice.

And the gym doors opened.

And for a second Veronica expected to hear Cheryl yell at them to get off their lazy asses and practice the routine. She expected Cheryl to tell them she had taken a break from school to stay with her Nana in the hospital. But, Toni walked in instead.

Toni said that she couldn't get ahold of Cheryl either.

Cheryl was missing.

Suddenly, the student election seemed a lot less important.

Veronica had always wanted to talk to Cheryl more. Especially after her attempted suicide.

But she never really did. She was too caught up in her own problems. She was *always* focused on her own problems. She hated that she was. She hated that she was the same self-absorbed, mean girl she always was. But she wouldn't be anymore. She was good to everyone now, Cheryl included.

She had been happy to see Cheryl with Toni. She was a lot freer than she had been before. She was lighter, more open. Veronica didn't see the same pain in Cheryl's eyes she had always had. She regretted that she hadn't done that for Cheryl herself. Cheryl shouldn't have needed to wait for Toni.

But she did. And Veronica knew that she always would.

Veronica would make it up to her. She wouldn't let Cheryl find herself in harm's way again. She still felt guilty about Nick. And really, she should've been there for Cheryl after Jason had died.

Veronica would make it up to her.

Veronica, Toni, and Josie teamed up to find Cheryl. Archie was put on hold for the time being. She didn't worry about her family's business. She didn't worry about her father going back to jail. She didn't worry about her mother leaving with him. Cheryl had already left.

Cheryl could be *dead*.

Josie stormed into Thistlehouse with Veronica and Toni. The three girls determined to find their friend. They would do anything to find her.

The three sat on what was admittedly the most expensive couch Josie thought she'd ever seen. Josie always forgot how lavish Cheryl lived. Cheryl may have looked rich and honestly acted rich, but Josie always found herself forgetting that Cheryl's house was worth millions. Really, Cheryl herself was worth millions. Dead bodies weren't worth anything, though.

Josie stopped herself from thinking about Cheryl too much. She didn't want to think about where Cheryl was or how she was feeling. She didn't think about how she could be alone. She didn't let it cross her mind that she could be kidnapped, tied to a chair in the basement of some musty bar in the southside. She didn't wonder if she was at a hospital somewhere.

She didn't think that Cheryl could be dead.

Josie imagined she took a trip to France without telling anyone. She was eating a croissant at some streetside café under the burning sun. She had taken a boat ride on a river when she dropped her phone while she was applying her sunscreen. That was why she wouldn't text anyone back. Not because she was dead or anything like that. The most pain she would be in was from the sunburn she undoubtedly got.

She'd come back and laugh at them when she heard of all the trouble they went through to find her. She'd show them her new phone, and she'd hand each of them a souvenir. Toni

would get the most thoughtful gift. Veronica, the most expensive. And Josie would get two. Cheryl had given her a lot of gifts lately.

No matter where Cheryl was, she was okay. Cheryl was okay. They were just paranoid.

So they demanded Penelope give them answers. And she did. She gave Josie a drawing Josie knew all too well. She told everyone how obsessed Cheryl was with Josie. Penelope explained that Cheryl was sick. Twisted.

And Josie agreed.

Suddenly, Josie didn't care as much about where Cheryl was. She didn't care if she was okay or not. Suddenly, she didn't care if Cheryl was crying. Because Cheryl had made her cry.

Cheryl sent her the notes. And the pig's heart. And the gun. Cheryl had threatened her. Cheryl had made her feel so helpless. She had made her terrified of everyone around her. She knew what she was doing to Josie. And she didn't care.

She was cruel. Evil. Twisted. She had hurt Josie. So many times.

Cheryl must've got off to seeing Josie in pain.

Josie hated her. *Hated*. Josie had never hated someone so much as she hated Cheryl at that moment. Josie thought Cheryl was her *friend*. She *trusted* her. Cheryl betrayed that. Josie had been talking with the one person she was most afraid of for months.

Cheryl and Josie sang together. Did school projects together. Ate at Pop's together. Cheryl helped Josie with her boy problems. And Josie helped Cheryl when she got too drunk at a party. They were close. But, now all Josie wanted was to be as far away from Cheryl as possible.

Josie had spent so long being afraid. The only people she trusted was her family, the Pussycats, Kevin, and Cheryl. She hadn't ever thought Cheryl could do something like that. Cheryl could be cold at times and at other times borderline psychopathic. But Josie didn't think Cheryl could ever hurt Josie.

But she had.

Cheryl knew what she had done.

Josie *hated* her.

Cheryl could be **dead** for all Josie cared.

Fifteen days.

Cheryl didn't feel like herself. She didn't think she ever would. She felt like she was in a dream. Like she was someone else. She felt like an empty shell. It had only been fifteen days

and Cheryl already was feeling broken.

She was guilty. She wasn't sure what for. She didn't think she was guilty about what she felt for Toni.

She was just guilty.

She was detached.

She was anxious.

She was scared.

She was alone.

When she got out she didn't know what she'd do. She thought she'd like to be with Toni. But she was scared now. She found it hard to imagine Toni. But she also found it hard not to.

She thought that'd she'd marry Archie Andrews. Her mother loved him. And she didn't think Veronica and him would last long. They'd have two kids, and a house in the suburbs. Her mother would visit every other weekend. Her kids would have red hair and brown eyes.

Or maybe she'd marry Moose. She had kissed him before. Which, in hindsight was quite funny that they had kissed. Moose, who had a fling with Kevin, and Cheryl, who was very into girls. They had both been drinking, of course, and had simply made out in the middle of the dance floor.

He'd be fun to marry. He would get her. He'd be easy to be married to, if he'd have her, of course. She could marry Moose.

No, she knew she wouldn't. She wouldn't marry any of them. She knew that. She wouldn't change. And she was trying to be okay with that. But it was getting harder.

Each slap burned red. Each needle drowned her. She was stuck. She was exhausted. Miserable.

She thought of Toni. She thought of what she'd be doing right now. She'd like to think she'd be looking for her. Maybe she'd be threatening her mother, yelling at her. She was waving her switchblade in Penelope's face and she was demanding to bring Cheryl back.

Or maybe she was playing video games with Sweet Pea and Fangs, Cheryl a distant memory. Toni had won at Call of Duty or whatever they were playing, and Sweet Pea had insisted she was cheating, Fangs was laughing and calling him a baby. Sweet Pea would throw a Dorito at him, and Fangs would knock him with a pillow, and Toni would watch in a fit of laughter. She would be happier without Cheryl.

Cheryl and her problems. Cheryl and Jason. Cheryl and Heather. Cheryl and her self-hatred. Cheryl and her sadness. Cheryl was the last person Toni would want to be around. Her mother didn't even want to be around her. Her *mother*.

But Toni wasn't her mother. Cheryl reminded herself that Toni cared. She must. But what if she didn't? What if Toni wanted Cheryl here? What if Toni had been a pawn paid off by her mother to discover whether or not Cheryl was still...

She couldn't even think it anymore.

She thought of bible verses instead.

She thought of Toni's eyes. And her soft touch. And her full lips. She thought of the feeling Toni gave her. She loved it. Relished in it. She didn't understand why someone would ever want to fix something so wonderful.

She hated what the nuns were doing to her. She hurt all over. She hated the needles they kept giving her. The sandbags she kept dragging. She hated the food. She hated when they made her throw it up. She could hardly move without crying. She hated them.

She hated how when she thought of how much she hated them all she could hear was the nuns in her head. She could hear God's words. Holy and all-consuming.

*"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:"*

Cheryl hated herself.

She watched the movie with silent tears rolling down her cheeks. She wanted to reach out and grab the hand of the girl next to her, desperate for someone's touch. Desperate to feel something *good*.

She was tired. She watched the cheerleaders prance around the gym on screen. She could already tell which ones would be conducting in 'deviant, perverse acts.' It wasn't hard to tell who would be chastised this time. She just picked out the ones that looked the most like her and Toni.

God, those cheerleaders reminded her so much of home. She thought of Veronica and Betty, who she admittedly let join the team out of pity. Once she got out of here at least they wouldn't be able to complain about how Cheryl was 'torturing' them during practice. Or at least Cheryl wouldn't pay attention to them. Because this, *this* was torture. Not cheerleading practice. Not courtesans. Not serpents. Not attempted rapes. Not dead brothers.

Cheryl knew what torture was.

Cheryl thought of Toni - gang-member, ass-kicking Toni - becoming a cheerleader. Cheryl had laughed when she first said she wanted to join. Toni being a cheerleader seemed unimaginable. Impossible. Granted, Cheryl being in conversion therapy was also unimaginable at the time.

Cheryl thought of everything she'd do to Toni when she saw her. She'd hold her. She'd grab her hand and take her to the Bijou and watch Grease for the fourth time that week. She'd never let her go. She'd kiss her. She'd kiss every part of her until she gave her last breath.



As her mind wandered farther towards Toni she instinctively checked to see if any nuns were watching, as though they could read her mind. She mentally hit herself for being such a coward. Afraid of even thinking of someone.

Cheryl was sobbing now. All she could think about was how she'd never have her life back. She was broken. She could practically hear Toni calling her name.

And then she did.

She really did.

Suddenly Toni was standing in front of the crappy movie about some lesbian cheerleaders.

Cheryl stood up. And made her way over to Toni, hardly able to register what was going on. She felt as though she was in a trance.

She pulled her into a hug and God, Toni was *here*. She had come for Cheryl. Toni was right here in front of Cheryl. Cheryl wasn't alone.

And they kissed. A passionate kiss filled with fire. A soft kiss filled with care. It made Cheryl feel better than she'd ever felt.

It wasn't like kissing Archie, which was more robotic, almost rehearsed. It wasn't like kissing Moose, which was sloppy and laced with alcohol. It wasn't even really like kissing Heather, which was more innocent, fleeting, and small.

This was something else entirely. This was something amazing.

Some things do change.



Two girls stand at the edge of Sweetwater River. Confessions of love almost unheard from the sound of the river.

Two girls soaking head to toe in Sweetwater River. Laughter drowning underneath the waves.

Two girls kissing at Sweetwater River. Pure bliss radiating from them, a bond formed that few people will ever truly understand.

Two girls hand in hand in Sweetwater River. Screaming as loud as they can. Screaming because of everything wrong in their life. And everything right.

## End Notes

congrats you made it lol. this was pretty fun to write, i was thinking of doing this for another character if y'all would be into that? kudos and comments are much appreciated.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!