

Blossom Vs. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/16722441) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/16722441>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Multi
Fandom:	Riverdale (TV 2017)
Relationships:	Cheryl Blossom/Toni Topaz , Kevin Keller/Moose Mason
Characters:	Cheryl Blossom , Toni Topaz , Archie Andrews , Veronica Lodge , Kevin Keller , Moose Mason , Betty Cooper , Jughead Jones , Josie McCoy , Reggie Mantle , Penelope Blossom , Sierra McCoy , Polly Cooper , Alice Cooper , Sister Woodhouse (Riverdale)
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort , Cheryl Blossom Needs a Hug , Mentions of conversion therapy , mentions of abuse , Homophobia , Internalized Homophobia , Internal Conflict , Trauma , Overcoming Trauma , Coming Out , dude idk how to tag , why is moose like That , take a shot everytime i mention football , ugh toni is the best , toni is very supportive , cheryl's pretty sad but it's not that bad , uff-da , choni is chillin , they're livin life , i said before toni doesn't get a heavy storyline but things changed , give sister woodhouse a first name 2k18
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2018-11-26 Updated: 2019-02-20 Words: 35,806 Chapters: 7/?

Blossom Vs. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy

by [aghostofmyformerself](#)

Summary

After having endured many traumas from the Sisters of Quiet Mercy and struggled quietly with only the soft words of Toni Topaz to comfort her, Cheryl decides to shut the Sisters of Quiet Mercy down once and for all, freeing her from her past and saving others from the horror story that is the Sisters.

Notes

alright, this is a rather odd fic, so bear with me. it'll be pretty short, probably with only eight or nine chapters. it follows the canon picking up at the beginning of season three (there's no gryphons and gargoyles bc i think that's stupid) the entire fic pretty much revolves around the court case and how it affects everyone in riverdale, meaning just about every character is utilized. kevin and moose (koose? mevin?) were not a ship i expected to ever write for, but given i felt their relationship aligns well with the plot they'll be given a pretty hefty spotlight at times, though, remember this is centered around cheryl's trial so she and choni will be in every chapter obv. i also am realistically in no way eligible for writing this kind of fic, i tried my best to learn how this type of accusation would go, but inaccuracies are very likely and i would greatly appreciate if you could point any glaring ones out to me so i can correct them, anyways hope you enjoy! also lots of mentions of conversion therapy, homophobia, etc. if that kind of thing triggers you, this prob isn't the best fic for you.

Chapter 1

Red shoes sit on the beach being covered in sand, discarded by their owner. Her heels are planted in the water, toes pointing toward the blue sky. Red hair cascades down her back in waves while pale fingers trace through the pink hair of the girl's head resting in her lap.

Silence only is disturbed by the rush of the river and the birds singing. She stares down at the girl looking up at her, a smile forming on her red lips at the sight. She holds her thumb to the girl's lips, softly tracing the shape of them.

"I love you," she says quietly and the girl grins up at her, adoration gleaming in her eyes. She reaches up to caress her pale cheek, causing the other's lips to curl up even more.

"Do you love me?" The girl sits up carefully, grains of sand falling off of her back. She lifts her hand up to the girl's cheek, caressing it delicately and tenderly. Full lips are brought gently to her forehead to plant a soft kiss and then another kiss is brought down to her nose. She holds the redheaded girl's face in her hands and she can see forever shining ever so brightly in her eyes. She brings her lips to the other girl's, meeting for a gentle kiss. She pulls back and intertwines the other girl's pale fingers within her own. Tracing circles on the back of her hand she smiles and says sweetly, "Of course not."

Her red lips curl into a frown, confused by her response. "What?" She asks warily, the other girl smiles, caressing the frowning girl's face. "You're only supposed to say 'I love you' if you mean it. And how could I possibly mean it?"

The girl's mouth opens and closes, searching for what to say. A strong wave rolls onto the shore and up her legs, sending a chill up her body. A brown hand finds itself on her thigh, it's thumb moving carefully along her skin. "You don't mean it either. You couldn't possibly love anyone. Not since Jason."

"That's not true." She lifts her knees up to her chest, the girl's hand falling to her side. She closes her eyes hard, willing herself not to cry. The birds go silent, the waves stop roaring, and she no longer feels the cool breeze.

She opens her eyes and she's no longer on the beach. She sits on the floor next to a bed made of nails. Concrete walls surround her, all four completely void of anything recognizable. Nothing but a small trace of blood on one of them. The room is tiny and there's no door. She frowns, trying to work out exactly where she is.

She stands slowly. There's a small window with metal bars in it to her left. She grabs the bars and tries to pull her head up to see outside. She jumps up, but there's nothing outside. The window only leads to emptiness, void of any light.

She realizes suddenly that she's trapped. She's alone. Her eyes frantically search the room. She needs to get out.

*She **needs** to get out.*

She knows if she stays here something bad will happen. She doesn't know what, but the way her hair stands up on the back of her neck and the way her palms start to sweat let her know that something will happen. She runs her hand upon the wall looking for something, anything to get out. There's nothing. She drops to the floor looking to see if there's anything under the bed. There's nothing.

*She **needs** to get out.*

She starts breathing heavy, her heart racing. She hears a girl scream somewhere far away and footsteps echo in the distance. Her hands are shaking and her knees feel like they might buckle at any moment.

She jumps up to the window again. Nothing. She traces her hand on the wall again. Nothing. She looks under the bed again. Nothing.

God, these perfectly white walls are so ominous, so terrifying. The blinking light on the ceiling seems to be laughing at her, perfectly in sync with her rapid heartbeat.

She hears the scream again. Louder. Longer. It isn't stopping. She isn't stopping. Her screaming is shredding her ears. There are footsteps right outside the wall. They're so loud. Why are they so loud?

The girl is still screaming. Why won't she stop?

The window. Nothing. The wall. Nothing. The bed. Nothing.

*She **needs** to get out.*

There are more people screaming now. She can't hear anything but them. She puts her hands to her ears desperately. She drops to her knees, pressing harder into her ears. The footsteps are back, barely audible above the screams. They're close.

*They're **coming** .*

She screams as loud as she can. Her throat is sore, her ears feel like they're being torn apart. She screams louder. She quickly jumps up and starts banging against the wall desperately.

Her fists are starting to bleed but she can't stop.

*She **needs** to get out.*

Everything goes quiet. The voices stop. The footsteps are gone. She stops screaming and stops hitting the wall to listen. Her breathing is still heavy, her hands are still shaking, but it's silent.

*It's calm. She leans against the wall in a feeble effort to steady herself. She's okay. It's okay. It's **silent**.*

She turns around and there are two people in her room. She knows them. They're going to hurt her. She knows it. She frantically looks for something to help her, but there's nothing. She

tenses up and starts rubbing her earlobe in an effort to calm herself. She closes her eyes desperately as though that would stop whatever's about to come next.

They're yelling at her. She can't understand them. They're yelling and yelling and yelling. The sound is deafening, their words like daggers in her skin, vibrating among the room, shaking the walls. She can tell they're getting closer, and she's backed up in the corner. She tries to scream, but she can't make a sound.

*They hate her. They **hate** her. Oh God, they're gonna **hurt** her.*

*She **needs** to get out.*

One grabs her roughly and pulls her face towards him, her eyes instinctively open to see an unshaven face with unkempt hair and yellow, crooked teeth. "You're disgusting. You'll never be happy living like this. You must follow the light of the Lord." She shakes her head, tears streaming down her face. She looks at the ground as he shakes her harder. He pushes her against the wall and she cries out in pain. "You need to wake up! Cheryl, you need to wake up!" She braces herself for what's about to come next. She closes her eyes and tries to scream but no sound comes out. She's shaking hard, she can't breathe.

*"You need to **wake up**!"*

She screams and this time she can hear herself. Her eyes are still shut. Arms are wrapped around her.

Oh God, they're gonna *hurt* her.

She desperately tries to leave their hold. Something bad is going to happen. She's shaking so intensely she may as well be having a seizure, but she needs to get away. There are words being spoken in her ear, but she can't hear what they're saying because she can't fucking breathe. She keeps screaming, growing louder with each stroke down her back, and there's snot running down her face. There are still arms around her and she swears they're suffocating her. She kicks and desperately tries to wriggle out of their grip.

"Sweetheart, you're alright, okay? Shh, you're okay." She opens her eyes and sees her girlfriend worriedly staring at her, arms around her comfortingly rubbing her back. She's not there anymore. She's on a bed, somewhere else. Thistlehouse. She's home.

"In and out, Cher. With me. One big breath in, and one out." She follows Toni's instructions, breathing with her.

In for four. Hold for seven. Out for eight.

In for four. Hold for seven. Out for eight.

She grabs Toni tight and buries her head into her neck while Toni continues whispering sweet nothings into her ear, occasionally kissing her sweat-covered forehead.

She's okay. She's with Toni. No one can hurt her. Toni is here. She's on *her* bed in *her* home. She can leave if she wants to. The door is open. She can see a light on in the hallway. The light is on because Toni is afraid of the dark. And Toni is afraid of the dark because when she was younger someone broke into her trailer and shot her dad. Toni lives with her now.

She's *home* .

She can leave if she wants to.

She's *fine* .

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“So, Veronica, how are things with Archie?” Cheryl asks from inside a booth in Pop's. Cheryl has started spending more time with her friends. She finds their company much more enjoyable than she had previously thought they would be.

“Weird.” She pauses briefly to take a sip of her milkshake. “He's in *juvie* . What do you expect?”

“I suppose it would be rather weird dating a prison rat.” Veronica laughs, though there's a hint of sadness in her eyes.

“Enough about me and my prisoner beau, how are you and Toni doing?” Cheryl smiles brightly. She adores talking about Toni, which just about everyone in town knows. Cheryl constantly talks about Toni, from the silly face she made while they were playing Monopoly to the way she kicked some Ghoulie's ass. At first, her excessive gushing was her trying to desperately fake her pride despite her painful lack of it.

Now, it was simply because she utterly cherishes Toni. Cheryl practically worships Toni, just about kisses the very ground she walks on. Toni is just so heavenly, the perfect example of purity and sacredness, she's simply the very definition of divinity.

“Toni and I are doing wonderfully. She's... absolutely spectacular. She makes me feel so many things. Just so *happy* .” She pauses, thinking carefully about her next words, “It's like, I look at her and nothing else matters. It's like time stops and the only thing I think about is her. Her pretty smile and prettier eyes. And she's so passionate about everything, even the mundane. And so fiercely loyal and caring. She's just... I just... I think I'm in love with her, Ronnie.”

Her proclamation of love is said quietly and quickly. Her vulnerability obvious in her worrisome eyes and tense posture. Veronica eyes her carefully, grinning widely. She is clearly delighted to see the redhead admit her love for her girlfriend. Veronica has and always will be the number one choni shipper, as she proudly tells everyone.

“That’s the least shocking thing I’ve heard in weeks,” she says, giggling. Cheryl rolls her eyes at her amusing response. Veronica regains her posture, growing serious. “Have you told her yet?”

Cheryl frowns. She and Toni have been dating for almost three months, and Cheryl’s been sure she loves her for about half of that time. She just isn’t quite sure when the proper time is to tell someone those words. She’s never been in a relationship, and Google just tells her to trust her gut, which to Cheryl is ridiculous as her gut is completely baseless and often irrational.

“I have not. I’ve been wanting to for a while, but I’m just worried she won’t feel the same way, and I don’t want things to be like you and the ginger stooge.” She dips a fry into her milkshake and takes a bite.

“Oh, spare me the self-deprecation. Antoinette Topaz is madly in love with you, Cher. Anyone can see that.” Cheryl smiles at the thought. She really hopes Veronica is right because she doesn’t know how much longer she can keep it in.

“Either way, I’ve been super stressed lately. I don’t want to accidentally profess my love to Toni too early. I don’t want her to think I have an obsession of sorts.” The last thing Cheryl needs is a repeat of the Josie incident. She’d rather die than go through the guilt associated with that mess again. “Loving someone is far from obsession, Cheryl.”

Sher rolls her eyes, “I, of all people, am quite aware of what defines obsession, Veronica.” She takes another sip of her milkshake. Veronica shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

The two sit like that for a few moments, before Cheryl breaks the silence, “Lately, I’ve been thinking a lot about the Sisters of Quiet Mercy and my mother.” Cheryl leans back in her seat, while Veronica leans forward, frowning.

“What do you mean by ‘thinking’? Because if you think that loving Toni is wrong then I am going to have to-”

“No, you buffoon. I am perfectly content with my same-sex attraction. I am offended, however, that you would assume such a thing despite me being in a relationship with Toni for months *and* confessing my love for her mere seconds ago,” she interrupts annoyed by Veronica’s assumption.

“I was just making sure, okay?” Veronica says, putting her hands up innocently. “Anyway, what I was trying to say is that I went through *years* of listening to my mother berate me and was sent to a ghoulish nunnery all for *loving* someone.” She sighs dramatically. She can easily see the compassion in Veronica’s eyes forming from her statement.

“And now, I’ve lost everyone in my family, except for cousin Betty, respectively. And, I don’t know, it’d be impossible for me not to feel some way about that.” She takes another sip of her strawberry milkshake, relishing in the flavor, rather than the look of pity and concern in Veronica’s eyes. Veronica stays silent, waiting for Cheryl to continue.

“It just feels as though I’ve lost, somehow. And from that, it’s caused me to reflect on the Sisters of Quiet Mercy and the cruel happenings there, and... I want to shut them down. I don’t want other kids to go through the same thing I have, and I think it could bring me some closure, perhaps.” Veronica’s eyes widen in surprise, not at all expecting the conversation to take that turn.

“I think that’s a great idea, Cheryl.”

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There are three things Moose loves: his family, his friends, and football. He loves running on the open field, the feel of the ball in his hands, people cheering loud as he scores a touchdown. He *loves* it.

Football courses through Moose’s veins. The game provides a team, a family. The bond Moose has with his teammates is one only football players understand. They’re loyal to each other. They know everything about each other, all the ins and outs. They need to be able to tell whether someone is going to turn right or left, and exactly when they’re going to speed up. They practically have to read each other’s minds.

Football isn’t just a game, it’s a *life*.

It’s hours spent on the couch yelling for your team. It’s pantsing the freshman in the locker room. It’s getting a free dinner from the local diner for being the town heroes. If you play football, you have to be all in.

And Moose is. He spends all of his time playing football, watching football, and hanging with his teammates.

Well, when he’s not with Kevin.

Moose has an admittedly weird relationship with Kevin. They first started their *thing* at the beginning of sophomore year. Moose and Kevin had found themselves alone at Sweetwater River - a position they’d find themselves in many times in the future - when Kevin kept brushing against his arm and Moose kept staring at his lips and then they made out. They started meeting there more often, having casual makeout sessions by the river’s edge.

Moose hated it. He really hated how he felt for Kevin. It wasn’t how he was supposed to feel. For fuck’s sake, he was a football player. And gay guys are just so different from Moose. He’s all-American and they’re just so *girly*. Moose just couldn’t be grouped with them, he’s got a reputation to uphold, a future, a dream. Kevin gets in the way of that.

And so, Moose dated Midge for a while. It wasn’t uncommon for Kevin to accuse him of faking his relationship to stay in the closet, and it wouldn’t be a total lie to say he wasn’t. Their first date did stem from Moose needing a girlfriend to remind himself of who he is. Or

rather, who he wants to be. And maybe he didn't like her much at first, but that was only the beginning. He did really like Midge after a few weeks. He cherished her actually.

They went on weekly dates to Pop's and Midge would come over to his house after and watch stupid movies on Netflix. She did this thing with her nose when she was annoyed that Moose absolutely savored. She always talked about musicals. She constantly made him watch them even when he refused. He ended up growing to love them.

The two would sing and dance to the Grease soundtrack and he'd spin her around and she'd smile in this way that made his stomach do flips. He'd always make her swear to never to tell the boys he liked musicals and she'd pinky promise before he'd take her hands and kiss her lips softly.

He doesn't like them now.

When Midge died Moose had never felt so much pain. Every time he so much as breathed it felt like his heart would burst out of his chest. For so long, he'd go to his room and just sob into his pillow. Sometimes, his dad would knock on his door and try to cheer him up in the way dads do. The number of times he'd been called 'sport' that month was uncountable.

He couldn't get the image of her out of his head. He'd think about a date at the Bijou and then he'd see her up on that stage dead. All those knives, God there was so much *blood*. Midge's ghost haunts him, she's just always there.

But, yet, Moose is still ever so alone.

That's why Moose went back to Kevin. He just needed someone, anyone, to keep him on Earth. To get Midge out of his head. He needed a shoulder to cry on and lips that sometimes felt like Midge's. And Kevin knew that he was a rebound and - bless his heart - still didn't care.

Now it's been four months. Midge doesn't stare ominously at Moose when he's trying to take a math test, and Kevin doesn't feel like a distraction anymore. In fact, now, not having Kevin around is a distraction. Moose thinks he may have fallen for him in the last few months.

Moose really likes Kevin. He *really* does. He likes everything about him. He likes how it feels to kiss him. He likes how he feels in his arms. He likes his hair and his eyes. He even likes his nerdy action figures and obsession with Dungeons and Dragons.

Kevin has been trying to get Moose to come out, and Moose doesn't have the heart to fight with him, but he can't let their relationship be anything but a secret yet. Moose can't stand the idea of his friends thinking of him differently, of them not trusting him as much as they did when Moose was dating Midge. Trust is the most important part of football after all.

Football isn't just a game, it's a *life* and the last thing Moose wants is Kevin ruining that for him.

He's not scared of whether or not his friends will support him (he's pretty sure they will to some extent), he's scared of the small things. He's scared of locker room talk excluding gay

jokes when he's around or his friends watching their tongue. When Moose walks into the locker room he doesn't want his teammates to stop talking about who bangs what chick or trying to decide who the hottest girl in Riverdale is or betting on who could get a threesome with Cheryl and Toni.

He doesn't want things to change.

He wants to be out and proud with Kevin. He wants everyone to know how much he likes him. He wants to go to parties with Reggie and Josie without Reggie trying to find him a girl to "get down and dirty with." He wants the guys to tease him just as much as they would if he was head-over-heels for a girl. He wants everyone to ignore the fact that he fell for a *boy*.

Kevin and Moose sit at a Burger King table that's two towns over from Riverdale. They each are eating a burger hungrily after having an eventful afternoon in Kevin's bedroom.

Kevin sets his food down warily and takes a deep breath.

"Moose, I don't know how much longer I can keep this a secret." He grimaces at those words. He's pretty sure that Kevin wouldn't break up with him, but he also knows how much their arrangement hurts him. He knows that what Kevin wants more than anything is to flaunt their relationship. He knows that he wants to brag to Betty about how his boyfriend is hotter than hers. Kevin wants to walk down the hallway arms linked and heads high. Fuck, Moose wants that too.

But he just *can't*.

"I know, Kev, and I will... but I just need some more time--"

"That's what you *always* say, but I can't keep this a secret for much longer. Please understand that I need to be able to talk to you at school, and I need to be able to complain to someone about you when you do something wrong. I can't be your dirty little secret forever."

Moose feels as though he's being ripped in half, his fear of judgment and his need for happiness are pulling him apart. "Look, I'm just scared, okay? I don't know how my parents will react and I don't want my teammates to think I'm some gay freak"

"But you are! They're going to think you're some gay freak because you just had your tongue down my throat five minutes ago!" Kevin shouts, drawing attention to their table. Moose frantically searches the joint to make sure no one he knows is there before he says anything.

"That's the problem, Kev. I just want shit to be the same as when I was dating Midge." He tries to keep his voice down, hoping Kevin will follow suit. The last thing he needs is for Kevin to shout more embarrassing things.

"It's not going to be that way, Moose. You need to learn to put your happiness over people's opinions of you." Moose sighs, unable to respond. Oh, how Moose wishes he could just *be*. He just can't stop thinking about what people will think, what people will say. "Kev, can we just focus on right now, us together," he says brightly and reaches across the table for Kevin's

hand. He tries to cast Kevin a smile in an effort to lighten the mood. Kevin doesn't respond, merely interlocks their fingers and eats a fry with disappointment dancing in his eyes.

He does want to be with Kevin, but everyone else wants different things. His dad has his whole future essentially planned out. His teammates, his family, everyone, they all want him to be someone else. They want him to play football and date girls. But that's not what he's doing right now.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

this update was a little later than I wanted it to be lol, i've been super busy lately. anyways the next update might be on the later side too, as my schedule this week is pretty packed, but i'll try to get it out as quickly as possible! thanks for all the support for my last chapter and i hope you enjoy this one as well!

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

The Sisters of Quiet Mercy. An old, renowned center in Riverdale. The Sisters house orphans and offer discipline to troubled teens. They're respected and honorable, holding a deep history in Riverdale. Run by the Catholic church and managed by devout nuns, the Sisters of Quiet Mercy has been helping families of Riverdale for over hundreds of years. Almost everyone knows someone who's been there.

To say that people were shocked by the child abuse accusation set forth by Cheryl Blossom would be a hideous understatement. The news of the scandal spread quickly and with urgency. Every mouth in Riverdale had something to say, whispers churned through the system, cutting the calm of Riverdale in half.

There were those who were revolted by the idea of abuse at the most esteemed center in Riverdale. Feeling betrayed by the convent they had held in such high regards. That morning, they looked differently at their aunt who had been there as a child and had never quite been the same afterward. Their aunt and many others read the newspaper with a lack of surprise, moving swiftly onto the crosswords at the back but not before breathing a sigh of relief at the words written on the page.

Then there were those who were revolted by the accusation, but for an entirely different reason. The idea of the Sisters of Quiet Mercy - a group of nuns working to improve the lives of children, taking in orphans and helping Riverdale civilians remain Holy in the eyes of the Lord - being a much greater evil was blasphemy. Why hasn't one other person said something in over the hundred years the Sisters have been running? And for God's sake, wasn't this the same girl with the dead twin brother and murderous father? Would it be that surprising if this was a mere lie constructed in a quest for attention needed by a girl who's lost her family?

Nonetheless, word spread quickly and ever so harshly.

Cheryl's fingers are held tightly on to the ones interlocked with her own as she keeps her head held high and walks the hallways of Riverdale High. She only allows her jaw to clench just slightly when someone looks at her with a face of disapproval or disgust, and her eyes only roll the tiniest bit when she sees eyes stare at her with sympathy.

Cheryl craves attention, every drop of it makes her mouth water and her hands shake in envy. But this is different.

This is like when Jason was killed. She doesn't like this kind of attention. The way she's become a victim, the way people debate over the logistics of the claims she makes. She feels like a bullet point in a seventh grader's debate speech, a facet of an argument rather than the one leading the charge.

Cheryl stops at her locker, Toni releases her hand and leans against the locker next to her's. As Cheryl's putting her things away Reggie strides over with a few other jocks beside him and asks, "Did it work?" A few of the boys behind him snicker as Cheryl scrunches her eyebrows in confusion. "Did what work, you neanderthal?"

"The conversion therapy," He jokes, choking on a laugh. Chuck gives him a subtle high five and Moose pats him on the back. Cheryl's got a reply just on the tip of her tongue when Toni steps forward in a reign of fury. "Back off, Reggie. Don't you have some freshman to scrutinize?" She scoffs, narrowing her eyes in disgust. He laughs a little more, and Toni clenches her fists even tighter, her lips curled into a snarl.

The serpent tattoo on her ribs may as well be pulsating.

"It's just a joke, no harm," he remarks, a smile playing at his lips, though his eyes betray him, casting a certain level of fear.

"Leave, Reggie," she hisses, glaring at him. They stare silently at one another for a few moments before Reggie gives in and walks off. The boys right at his heels laughing carelessly at him.

Toni turns back to Cheryl, immediately softening when she sees Cheryl pursing her lips and her hands grabbing onto the end of her skirt. She takes her hand, opening it softly while Cheryl releases a small breath. "He's just an asshole, babe. Don't let him get into your head," she says, watching her face carefully, unsure of whether she was going to rip Reggie's face off or break down into tears.

"I should've said something," she mumbles, closing her locker door. "You didn't have to. I have your back, always." She smiles gaily in an effort to console the upset girl. "And besides, this serpent jacket comes in handy sometimes."

"You shouldn't fight my battles," she blurts out quickly. In an effort to soften the blow, she moves her hand up the serpent's arm, fingertips scratching lightly at the brown skin. "I was just helping, Cher," she replies defensively.

Cheryl's mind is buzzing. She's so very frustrated at her own unwillingness to stand up for herself. She's Cheryl Blossom, her words are venomous and sickly, they bite deeply into those who oppose her. And then, at that moment, they were just gone.

This isn't even the first time this has happened. Over the last few months, she's slowly been losing her bite, her grit. She'll hear of someone spreading some meaningless gossip about her and she won't even *care*. It's so freeing, but God, she can't even tell off Reggie anymore.

She could only stand up to her mother because she knows that she's got a fear of fire, or more specifically Cheryl *with* fire.

It's like she's not even herself anymore. She's so mellow. And she can't tell what's caused that. Some days she thinks it's all the deaths that have occurred in Riverdale, her very own brother being shot. Some days it's her mother. But, a lot of the time it's the Sisters of Quiet Mercy.

Their sharp needles and harsh words dug so very deeply into Cheryl. Sister Woodhouse's voice scolding Cheryl at even her happiest moments. She hates that it just won't go away. She wants to be happy. And she feels so guilty, she has a seemingly endless amount of baggage that Toni has to help her carry. And to think that some of that baggage makes her feel like loving Toni is wrong. And Toni *knows* that.

Cheryl can't stop thinking about how terrible that must make Toni feel. How demeaning it is, and how absurdly selfish it is of her not to reassure Toni every second of every day how much she means to Cheryl. She should kiss her and play with her hair and rub her back forever, never stopping to do so much as take a breath. She should tell her she *loves* her. She doesn't deserve Toni in the slightest.

She hates how cowardly she is. Sometimes, she can just see how much she hurts Toni when she cries a little too much during Love, Simon. Or when she'll kiss Toni harder than normal with tears building in her eyes and Toni will notice and she'll look at her in that way that makes Cheryl want to spill everything on her mind. Or when Toni convinced her to give blood and Toni was brought to tears because Cheryl couldn't calm down and just kept on crying and shaking despite everything Toni did.

Toni can't always help Cheryl and she *hates* that. And even worse, Cheryl can't always help herself.

Cheryl feels like she'll never be okay again, it's as though she'll forever be falling and Toni has chosen to drop with her, leaping off a cliff to follow her down towards the emptiness below them. The girl that had stolen her heart seems to have the world at her fingertips, yet chooses to run them through Cheryl's hair when tears cascade down her face in the thousands.

Toni deserves so much better than Cheryl, sometimes she wonders if Toni is only doing this because she pities her. Cheryl is given so much from Toni and she feels like she gives so little back. She's just so *selfish*.

Toni is Cheryl's antidotes most days, taking even her darkest thoughts and leaving them shriveled and forgotten. Sometimes, though, Cheryl feels like she's lost something, or maybe that she's lost, like she's just some piece on a game board that just can't catch a break. Something's wrong, and she just can't quite place what it is or how to fix it.

"I know, I just need to be able to do things on my own, I suppose."

"You already do, babe," she assures her. Cheryl sighs, and Toni stands up on her tiptoes and places a small kiss to her forehead. Her lips stay attached to her for an extra second or two

before Toni pulls back with a soft smile, reaching for her hand she guides Cheryl once more towards the chaos of Riverdale High.

How divine.



“Right this way, Miss Blossom.”

Heels clicking loudly, echoing throughout the bleak empty halls, hands holding onto a leather purse with a vice-like grip. and lips unable to suppress a grin. She’s so excited, her body is practically whirring, each step garnering more and more anxiety but even more pleasure.

It’s just been so *long*. And she can’t believe she even has to do this, but she’s more than happy to nonetheless.

The man motions for her to sit down and she does so, crossing her pale legs and folding her hands on her thigh. There are a few loud sounds of metal moving and creaking before-

“Cheryl?”

“Archie!”

She nearly leaps out of her chair to give him a long hug but just manages to hold herself back under the watchful eye of the guard who let her in. He smiles brightly as he sits down and laughs, “God, I can’t believe you’re here,” she leans forward and rolls her eyes, “I could say the same for you.”

She’s still honestly in shock Archie managed to wind up in trouble with the law. He must be so miserable being here with people so unlike him, in this dreary environment. His golden heart must be taking a beating, but Cheryl couldn’t imagine it’d stop shining.

It’s so unfair that Archie has to be here. God, this was the same boy who had saved her *life* and though she had been ungrateful at the time, now...

Now, she really does have a life to live, and she’s so appreciative for being able to live how she wants and be happy. If Archie hadn’t saved her she wouldn’t have met Toni, wouldn’t have been emancipated and given the opportunity to live without her mother’s stranglehold on her life. God, she’d been so unhappy and these days she lives out her life blissfully in comparison.

All because of Archie.

She loves Archie dearly, he always saw the good in her, believed in her and continues to do so. It’s insane that the same Archie who walked bravely into the Blossom manor in an effort

to help Cheryl, who broke his very own hand to pull Cheryl out of an icy river, who would do anything to help his friends was now sitting in jail after being convicted of murder.

Falsely convicted of murder, that is.

It makes her head hurt and her stomach churn at just how *wrong* it is.

“How are the jail rats treating you?” She asks examining his face for any cuts, bruises, or simply a sign of distress. “Alright. How are you holding up?” He responds curiously.

“I’m okay, but it’s awfully strange without you. We all miss you tremendously.”

“I miss you guys too.” They both smile at each other and Cheryl just can’t believe she’s finally seeing Archie. Veronica and Betty had been visiting all the time, and Cheryl had stepped back to allow the three all the time they needed. But, God, it’s been months since Cheryl’s even seen the redheaded boy in front of her. She and Toni had naively assumed Archie would be found not guilty and hadn’t realized that the day before they left on their road trip would be one of the last times they’d see him free for two years.

Cheryl’s just so happy to see him.

“Has Veronica been doing okay?” He asks timidly. Cheryl raises an eyebrow in confusion considering Archie and Veronica see each other just about every week, but she supposes Veronica must only focus on Archie during their visits.

“She’s been... surviving. You being here has affected her, but you’ll be pleased to hear it hasn’t brought her down,” she assures him, giving him a kind smile. His shoulders loosen and he’s clearly relieved with her answer.

“Anything new in Cheryl Blossom’s world?” He asks curiously. She glances towards the guards for a split second, wondering briefly how Veronica manages to talk to Archie so often with all of these people eavesdropping.

“Well, if you must know, I have taken it upon myself to press charges against the Sisters of Quiet Mercy, or more specifically Lisa Woodhouse,” she says at a level just above a whisper. His jaw drops in shock before curling upwards and laughing.

“That’s awesome! Sierra’s your lawyer I’m guessing?” He asks excitedly. She quickly shushes him, not wanting the guards to hear, though not having a particular reason why.

“Yes, and she’s been wonderful.” Sierra McCoy had been the first person Cheryl had asked, and Sierra had been eager to take on the case. Cheryl had always seen Sierra as sort of a second mother, considering her own was rotten to the core and Josie had always been her best friend. Sierra is a fantastic lawyer and one of the nicest adults Cheryl’s ever met, so it’s no surprise Cheryl had gone straight to her.

“How’s the case going?”

“Swimmingly so far, but it’s only just started. Sheriff Minetta and his goons are searching the Sisters as we speak, in fact,” Cheryl says happily. She’s so ecstatic to finally shut the Sisters

down, in fact, she's shocked she hadn't thought of doing it earlier. There are a few hiccups regarding the trial, mostly involving how public it is and the fact that Cheryl has to essentially relive her trauma to prevent others from experiencing it, but in general she feels like a weight has been lifted off of her shoulders, it's a freeing experience knowing something that's caused her so much pain will be gone in a matter of weeks.

She's feeling an incomprehensible amount of things. She's terrified of having to tell just about everyone in Riverdale exactly what she's endured, but she's feeling powerful from knowing that she basically holds Lisa Woodhouse's future in her hands. She's also anxious from having her mind filled with her memories of conversion therapy for the last week and a half. But that's all going to be gone soon.

Because how could a place like that still be allowed to continue operation?

She and Archie chat for a while longer before she says her goodbye and tells him she'll visit again soon. She also manages to give him a sly kiss on the cheek before they take him away. The guard leads her through the empty hallway once more with her heels clicking in the silence just as loudly as they did the first time, but this time she feels much more at ease.

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Run.

One foot in front of the other. Each step growing in length and speed. The cheers from the crowd accentuated by the cold air and dark sky.

Thirty yards left.

Just keep going. Just a few more strides and it'll be over.

Twenty.

Ten.

Five.

Touchdown. The crowd explodes with delight as Moose throws the ball down and lets out a shrill war cry. His teammates leap over to him, hugging him with delight and yells of appreciation. The score on the scoreboard changes to 27-24 with only twenty seconds left. They're going to *win*.

The coach lets out a scream of celebration and throws his hat on the ground. Once again, Moose roars as he runs towards the stands and hits his chest like a gorilla. Every drop of blood, every ounce of sweat, every sore muscle, pained leg, bruised arm, it's all for this. He takes his helmet off as the crowd yells even louder.

An arrogant smile lights his face as he blows a kiss in the direction of the cheerleaders with a subtle wink. He runs back to his teammates as the coach on the other team yells for a timeout.

They all continue congratulating Moose and he reminds them that Reggie was the one to throw the pass and Reggie holds his head high and claims that the *whole* team was the reason for the win, but adds that it was mostly him. They laugh and rejoice, patting each other on the backs.

The coach reminds them that the game isn't over and that they need to focus, but his smile is wide with excitement. They've finally beat Greendale, their biggest rivals. And Moose was the one to score the winning touchdown.

He feels like a king, like a God. He can do anything.

They finally won.



After changing in the locker room, Moose heads back out into the empty field in order to find his parents on the bleachers. A few kids run up to congratulate him and take Snapchat selfies for all their friends.

Right before he can spot his parents he sees Kevin trying to catch his attention at the sides of the bleachers. He's making motions for Moose to come over, and he does so confidently. He makes his way past the exiting crowd and when he reaches where Kevin was a strong arm pulls him under the stands.

He laughs, "Hey-" before he's cut off by Kevin's lips on his. He quickly returns the kiss, his eyes fluttering shut and hands coming to rest on Kevin's hips. God, Moose could get used to this. He takes in Kevin's usual taste of vanilla chapstick and something purely Kevin. The feeling of Kevin's hands on his neck and fingertips running through his hair.

To think that Kevin came to Moose's football game even though he hates football, even though he's only given sly embraces under bleachers and blown kisses towards cheerleaders that he can pretend were for him makes Moose light up and break their kiss with a smile.

"You did great, and let me say, even though you were wearing a helmet, you were totally hot," Kevin breathes out sliding his hands down his arms. Moose lets out a chuckle and kisses his cheek, "Thanks for coming, Kev."

"That's what boyfriends are for, babe," Kevin says, cheekily leaning forward until their lips are only inches apart. Moose's smile grows wider at the term of endearment. He'll never tire of the recent boyfriend title they'd secretly granted each other.

He leans forward and kisses Kevin, wrapping his arms around him and skating his fingertips under his shirt and moving them along his back. He slips his tongue into Kevin's mouth,

greedy for even more of him and pushes their bodies even closer together, the friction between them causing Moose to bite back a moan.

This feeling completes Moose, makes him forget about everything bad and focus only on the smell of Kevin's shampoo. It's so freeing kissing Kevin, so satisfying and just so *good*.

He pushes his hips forward, his body heating up in the chilled air. His tongue dances throughout Kevin's mouth, savoring in the absolutely delectable meal that is Kevin Keller. Their lips speed up in a want for more of each other, his hands travel down towards Kevin's waistband ignoring the fact that there's a surplus of their classmates just on the other side of those bleachers.

Then Moose hears what sounds like someone running up towards him, footsteps crunching through the grass.

His mind reaches towards every possibility, he pictures the linebacker on his team coming to a standstill when they see him smacking lips with Kevin. He sees his parents looking on with disappointment and disgust at his hands exploring every inch of the boy he holds so dearly. He can hear his mom crying when her hopes and dreams for him are shattered.

But, maybe he doesn't care anymore.

He does want to come out.

But there's a difference between coming out and being found out.

So, he quickly pulls away from Kevin and looks towards the source of the noise fearfully, taking a step away from Kevin and letting out a sigh of relief when he sees that it's only a squirrel. He turns back to his boyfriend and seeing the hurt riddling his face makes his heart break in half.

He tries to think of an excuse that covers the fact that Moose pulled away because he's so ashamed of Kevin he jumps at the mere thought of being found out. But he doesn't think there's any use as Moose has already used just about every excuse in the book at this point.

But there is one thing he hasn't done.

And he *is* feeling rather confident tonight.

He takes a deep breath and looks towards the boy in front of him, trying desperately to keep his composure, "Kevin, I'm going to come out. I'm ready." Kevin narrows his eyes, not trusting his response, "Really?"

"Yeah, being with you is *amazing*, and I want everyone to know. I'll tell my parents this weekend, and you can introduce me as your boyfriend to your friends and I'll talk to the boys," he trails off grinning. Once he's started talking, he realizes maybe he could come out.

God, it'd be so wonderful to be out. To be true to himself and embrace the boy he cares for without a care of who could be watching. His happiness continues as he thinks about being able to go on lame double dates and show actual PDA in Riverdale.

“Moose, are you serious?”

“Deadly.”

Kevin smiles brightly and just about yelps with joy, pulling Moose in for a passionate kiss.

“This will be so great, Moose!”

## Chapter End Notes

just so ya know, if you're not a fan of kevin x moose they won't be in the next few chapters lol. anyway, comments and kudos are appreciated, have a nice day!

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

ohhh boy things are starting to heat up. just wanna quick preface this with nothing any character says or does reflects my own views or opinions. tw for homophobia and lots of talk about conversion therapy.

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

Cheryl's eyes open slowly, heavy with exhaustion, the morning light seeping through the windows burning her eyes. Toni's back is curled into Cheryl's front, with one of Cheryl's arms resting on top of her side.

She lets her eyes wander downwards at her bare back, perfectly smooth with the exception of a small scar located on her right shoulder blade. One that Toni had explained to Cheryl was a result of a Ghoulie's knife, and it was the exact reason Cheryl had refused to let Toni out of her sight for over a week.

She runs her fingers down her back sending electricity up her fingers at the contact, and she traces the small imperfection, though Cheryl supposes it just makes Toni all the more perfect. The ability to endure such pain and come out on the other side with nothing but a mark is surely incredible.

She scoots a little closer and pulls Toni's hair out of her face, staring blissfully at the gorgeous girl in front of her. The light from the curtains is making Toni look impossibly beautiful, her brown skin seems to glow in the light, her pink hair shining so brightly and cascading so elegantly down her back Cheryl could simply drown in it. Her makeup-free face is completely sumptuous and utterly appealing, making Cheryl feel an unquenchable desire to kiss every inch of it.

Cheryl grins contentedly, basking in the warmth of her girlfriend and snuggling further up against her bare body, sighing at the skin-to-skin contact. Her fingers reach up to play with the tips of Toni's pink hair.

She presses a delicate kiss to her jawline and moves her lips towards her bare shoulder leaving a trail of wet marks down her neck. Toni releases a serene hum and turns towards her, "Morning, Cher," she says with exhaustion lacing her voice. She reaches a hand up to Cheryl's cheek and gives her a lazy kiss. "Good morning," Cheryl whispers against her girlfriend's lips.

They lay there for a few moments merely admiring the other before Toni breaks the silence, "We should probably get up." Cheryl whines and pulls Toni tighter against her, "Just a while longer," she pleads, prompting a sigh against her, "Only a few minutes, though."

The last few weeks had been grueling for the two of them, particularly Cheryl. There was an intense investigation into the Sisters of Quiet Mercy leading the FBI and Riverdale's sheriff department searching the place for any signs of abuse or neglect. The investigation had found a lack of hard evidence against any physical abuse, leaving Cheryl fuming at their incompetence. Though, they did discover that the basement where conversion therapy was held was breaking some serious health codes which sparked a debate on whether or not that could point to a clear apathy towards the kids staying there.

Finding other victims who were willing to testify was nearly impossible, Sierra McCoy had spent almost every hour of every day talking to possible witnesses and honing in on the facts of the case. Meanwhile, the defense was doing the exact same thing, primarily finding kids who had "graduated" from their program or were currently enrolled in it and had managed to pass a psych evaluation, along with current and former workers.

Cheryl and Sierra held countless meetings discussing their strategy, argument, and any possible hiccups they could encounter within the case. Sierra nearly had a heart attack when Cheryl told her she burned down her house, calmed down when she learned only two other people knew that she had committed arson, and panicked when she learned Penelope Blossom was one of those people.

Cheryl Blossom and Lisa Woodhouse were both asked to take a polygraph test, both passing with flying colors. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy had been temporarily shut down with the exception of the orphanage which will continue to run unless the prosecutor is able to prove their guilt.

Finally, a preliminary hearing was held. Each side had argued intensely and the ability to use any and all evidence to support their claim made for a chaotic hearing. There were contradictory claims being made, attacks on Cheryl Blossom's character in which the defense attorney subtly reminded the judge of the accusation that Cheryl had made against Nick St. Clair before revoking the claim after a mere few days later (a clear sign of attention-seeking), there was plenty of yelling, and many tears of anguish and remembrance from the victims.

And that wasn't even the trial.

The judge had concluded there was probable cause to believe Lisa Woodhouse was guilty of child abuse, thus a trial had been scheduled.

And Riverdale was absolutely in flames. Actually, Riverdale and any town within the state was in flames given the news of the trial had spread over the internet.

There is a constant debate over whether or not the Sisters of Quiet Mercy was guilty. People have been showing their support for Cheryl through social media and wished her good luck on the streets. Others have been furious, sending hate and claiming shutting down the Sisters of Quiet Mercy was an attack on their first amendment right.

The insane publicity had forced a change of venue and the Serpents had taken it upon themselves to escort Cheryl everywhere, just in case some bible-thumper tried anything, and there was a police officer stationed at Thistlehouse requested by Sierra McCoy at all times. This was Riverdale after all.

And now, the jury had been selected and the Blossom Vs. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy case was starting the trial today.

Cheryl was mentally exhausted. The case had seemed to force her back into the mental state of when she had first left the re-education camp. Her PDA with Toni was at an all-time low, and her nightmares had been coming back just as intense as before. She was miserable.

She'd decided that this one of the hardest things she'd ever done. Every time she looks at Sister Woodhouse her head starts to hurt, and she just feels a mix of anger, sadness, and fear. It's been so long, and she's still so afraid. It's thoroughly draining.

She just can't wrap her head around how many people are so *against* her. She's been reminding herself that she's doing the right thing, but Jesus Christ, this shouldn't be this difficult. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy was wrong, they were terrible, awful people, so why the fuck is shutting them down so *hard*?

Cheryl needs this to turn out. The thought of so many kids enduring what she's gone through, and America's legal system considering that *okay* was debilitating to Cheryl.

She assures herself that realistically they'll win this case, no rational jury would allow such a place to continue operation. She has to win this.

"Baby, we've seriously got to get up," Toni mumbles before sitting up with Cheryl begrudgingly following suit. "You're the worst," she says rubbing her eyes.

"You're the one who wanted to have breakfast with Josie before we left," Toni reminds her and stands up to put on her clothes.

"Whatever," she says with a roll of her eyes. Standing up she groans and throws on a nightgown. Striding over to Toni she wraps her arms around her, "Toni, are you sure you want to come to the trial?" She asks warily.

"Of course I do," Toni assures her, smiling.

Cheryl sighs and smiles back. She wants Toni at the trial, but she's worried about how Toni would take it. It wouldn't be unlike Toni to lash out at Sister Woodhouse to try and protect Cheryl, or something of the sorts.

Cheryl can trust Toni, though. She knows she wouldn't do anything like that unless Cheryl asked her to. Really, Cheryl's just scared of Toni pitying her or thinking of her differently. She had never told Toni in detail the happenings of the Sisters of Quiet Mercy.

Cheryl nods her head, "Okay," she says back to Toni.

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“Josie! Hey!” Cheryl waves to her best friend who’s already seated in a booth. She quickly strides over to her dragging Toni by the hand with her. Josie squeals and leaps to her feet excitedly.

“It feels like it’s been so long since we’ve hung out!” Josie exclaims wrapping Cheryl in a hug which Cheryl gladly returns.

Cheryl and Toni slide into the booth across from Josie, Toni instinctively wrapping an arm around Cheryl. “How have you been?” Cheryl asks, grinning. She really has no idea what’s been happening in Josie’s life, what with the case, the town still reeling from the Black Hood, and Archie being sentenced to jail, the two hadn’t had much time together.

“I’ve been great, and I *may* have found myself a serpent lover,” she says teasingly and Cheryl arches an eyebrow, “Mmm, copying me, I see?” she jests with Toni rolling her eyes playfully next to her.

“Very funny, Cheryl. Who is it?” Toni asks, her previous comment earning a joking slap on the arm from Cheryl and Toni lets out a giggle in response. “You guys can’t tell anyone, swear?” Josie says leaning forward. Toni gives a little salute and Cheryl puts her hand on her heart, “We swear we won’t tell anyone,” they both promise in unison.

“It’s-”

“Good morning, ladies! What would you like to drink today?” Pop asks, unknowingly interrupting Josie and earning a sigh of disappointment from Cheryl.

Toni turns towards Pop, “A vanilla milkshake with no whipped cream, a strawberry milkshake with extra whipped cream and-” she pauses briefly trying to remember what Josie orders, “Another strawberry milkshake?”

She turns back to Cheryl and Josie, “Did I get it right?” They both nod and Toni grins proudly.

“Alright, I’ll be back in a bit,” Pop says returning to the counter.

Cheryl quickly perks up, leaning closer to Josie, “If I remember correctly you were about to tell us something?” she asks. Josie smiles and in a voice just above a whisper responds, “It’s Sweet Pea.” The two girls’ mouths drop open in shock, their eyes widening in surprise.

Cheryl briefly wonders if Josie’s joking. Sweet Pea is one of Toni’s best friends, the two are practically family, and he and Cheryl had gotten closer in the time she’s been dating Toni, there’s no way he could’ve been shacking up with Josie without either Cheryl or Toni knowing about it.

“Are you serious?” Toni exclaims, mouth still agape. “Yes! We started hanging out a lot this summer, and I don’t know, we really started to like each other,” she says wistfully.

“I am going to have a serious chat with Sweet Pea later,” Toni asserts in mock anger.

“Josie, your mom’s gonna be so mad,” Cheryl says laughing.

Josie rolls her eyes and chuckles, “Can’t get as mad as Penelope.”

“Don’t remind me, we are not here to talk about *that*, this is about *you*,” Cheryl responds.

Cheryl did not want to talk about anything related to trials, hearings, abuse, or conversion therapy for the rest of her life. This breakfast is really the calm before the storm, knowing the hell she’s about to endure for the next week.



Cheryl stops dead in her tracks at the steps of the courthouse staring eerily before her. She unconsciously laces her fingers together with Toni’s and she gives her hand a light squeeze. She feels like she might puke looking at the place.

She finds her mind wandering towards the trial, nerves eating at her. Reporters are starting to line up near the front doors and she even sees Alice Cooper holding a notepad and pencil. Everyone is going to hear what’s happened to Cheryl.

God, there’s so much, too. She’s gone over what she’ll say during her testimony hundreds of times, but she feels her mouth go dry and tears threaten to form in her eyes at the thought of it. She’ll have to tell everyone in Riverdale. She could barely even tell Toni the horrors of that place, and now each and every soul will know what’s happened.

Lisa Woodhouse is being escorted into the courtroom, reporters hounding on her asking questions while cameras are pointed at her for the local news. In her pondering, she almost doesn’t notice her. Almost. Her eyes wander over to the vile woman and her heart drops at the sight of her. She’s dressed just as she was in the Sisters of Quiet Mercy, playing the perfect role of a holy, devout follower of God.

Cheryl feels her throat clench up and Toni must have noticed her too because she’s wrapped her arm around Cheryl and is turning them away. She says something to Cheryl but her ears are ringing so loud she can’t hear because all she can think about is that Lisa Woodhouse is walking free despite the torture she put Cheryl through.

And she’s still a fucking nun.

She starts to think about the isolation and loneliness, the pure helplessness she felt there. Needles start to cloud her mind and she finds herself forgetting that Toni’s right next to her. She thinks about their burning slaps and kneeling on bags of rice to recite bible verses.

The scar on her back from when one of the workers pushed her against a nail sticking out of a wall starts to ache. Tears well in her eyes and Sister Woodhouse’s words ring in her head.

Deviant. Sinful. Disgusting.

She’s making a mistake, she’s *wrong*, she can’t-

“Cher?” Toni asks timidly reaching up to wipe a tear streaking down her cheek. She looks down at Toni’s worry-stricken face, her eyes filled with concern, and Cheryl lets out a small smile. She grabs onto Toni a little tighter, looking at her and only her, erasing all thoughts of evil nuns and loneliness from her mind.

“This is all... just a lot, Toni, it’s all so *much*,” she says trying her hardest to keep her voice from cracking, but another tear falls down her cheek, and Toni responds by wrapping her in a tight hug, “I know, baby, I know,” she whispers into her ear.

Cheryl closes her eyes and digs her head into Toni’s neck trying her hardest not to cry. She was here to shut Sister Woodhouse down, she was here to win. She wouldn’t let her have the satisfaction of seeing Cheryl cry before the trial even started, before she was even in the courtroom.

She hates how put-together Sister Woodhouse looks, it’s almost as if this has hardly affected her. She looks so smug and so stoic. God, Cheryl hates her. When she looks at her she just feels this burning sense of dread and she hates that. She doesn’t think she’s ever hated anyone as much as she hates Sister Woodhouse, and she *hates* that she still calls her Sister Woodhouse.

She can’t stand that she still has this sort of effect on Cheryl, that even months after conversion therapy, even while Cheryl knows she’ll be in jail in a week far away from her, even in the arms of the girl she *loves*, Cheryl’s still so broken.

Cheryl pulls back from Toni and looks to Sister Woodhouse answering Alice Cooper’s questions while the local news has a camera shoved in her face and a reporter trying to get her attention, and Cheryl feels somehow even more determined to win this case.

“I can go beat her ass for you if you want me too,” Toni jokes with a smile, though there seems to be a hint of seriousness to her voice and Cheryl notices a flash of sheer anger shining in her eyes when she glances towards the nun Cheryl had told her all too much about.

“As lovely as that sounds, I’d prefer if you’d stay as far from this as you can,” Cheryl says brushing a hand through Toni’s hair, still trying to prevent tears from falling down her face. “I don’t know, babe, Sister Bitchhouse has a seriously punchable face,” Toni says with her lips curled up in a smile casting a soft look of care towards Cheryl despite her threat towards the Catholic nun.

“Toni, I’m serious, promise me you won’t needlessly involve yourself in this trial,” Cheryl tells her. The backlash Cheryl has been getting online is competing with the attention she had received following Jason’s murder and Toni has been getting some for being plastered all over Cheryl’s social media, but Cheryl doesn’t want Toni to receive anything near the hate she’s getting.

And Cheryl wants to win this the right way, without Toni’s help.

“I won’t, Cheryl, I promise,” Toni assures her quietly. Cheryl grins at the statement and takes Toni’s hand to lead her towards the courthouse.



“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Calling the case of Cheryl Blossom versus the Sisters of Quiet Mercy. Are both sides ready?” The judge calls out. The judge is an old looking man, with white hair and wrinkled skin, he’s crazy thin making the robes he’s wearing seem three sizes too large.

“Ready for the defense, Your Honor,” the lawyer on the other side responds. He’s also older looking, maybe in his fifties. Sierra had told Cheryl that he’s one of the best lawyers in the state, which makes her wonder where a Catholic nun got the money to afford him.

“Ready for the prosecution, Your Honor.” Sierra sits back down in her chair next to Cheryl and offers a warm smile.

“Will the clerk please swear in the jury?” A man stands up and begins talking, but Cheryl’s tuning him out. Going over everything she has to say. She runs through her testimony before turning around to find Toni in the crowd. The pink-haired girl gives her a thumbs-up and smiles. God, she’s so cute. Cheryl focuses her attention back to the judge and she rubs her earlobe nervously in an effort to calm herself.

The jury rings out an, “I do,” before sitting back down.

“Mrs. Woodhouse, you are being charged on the account of child abuse and child neglect over your time leading the Sisters of Quiet Mercy, this charge was brought forth by Cheryl Blossom, a previous disciple of yours. Mrs. Woodhouse, how do you plead, guilty or not guilty?”

Some man Cheryl doesn’t know stands and says, “The accused pleads not guilty, Your Honor.”

“Very well, you may now give your opening statements,” the judge’s voice booms throughout the courtroom. Cheryl can hear camera’s clicking in the background.

Sierra gives Cheryl’s hand a light squeeze before standing before the court, “Your Honor and ladies and gentlemen of the jury: the defendant has been charged with the crime of child abuse and neglect. You will be hearing testimonies from the victims of her crimes showing the torturous ways of the Sisters of Quiet Mercy. There will be pictures shown to you of the poor condition of the area at which the children were staying at, and a lack of proper care for the children’s wellbeing. The evidence I present will prove to you that the defendant is guilty as charged.”

Sierra sits back down and grabs Cheryl’s hand once again.

The lawyer on the other side rises and gives his opening statement, “Your Honor and ladies and gentlemen of the jury: I will remind you all that under the law my client is presumed

innocent until proven guilty. Throughout this trial, you will hear no real evidence against my client. You will come to know the truth: that Lisa is a devout Christian woman who has dedicated her entire life to raising and helping young people, and cares very deeply for our youth. The claims of the prosecution are wild and unfounded and thus shutting down the Sisters of Quiet Mercy is a breach of the first amendment. And so, my client is not guilty.” He sits back down while Cheryl holds tighter onto Sierra’s hand as though the two are reaching the top of a hill on a rollercoaster.

“Is the prosecution ready to call its first witness?” Sierra rises and approaches the stand. “Yes, thank you, Your Honor. The prosecution calls Cheryl Blossom to the stand.” Cheryl rises slowly, walking on shaky legs towards the witness stand, taking a seat.

“Please stand,” the clerk orders, she obliges and stands in front of the court. “Raise your right hand. Do you promise that the testimony you shall give in the case before this court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” he asks in a monotone voice.

“I do.”

“Please state your first and last name.”

“Cheryl Blossom.” A few pictures are taken of her and Alice is frantically writing down notes, even though Cheryl hasn’t even said anything yet.

“You may be seated.”

Cheryl sits down, chewing on her bottom lip. “Cheryl, what exactly happened to you during your time in the Sisters of Quiet Mercy?” Sierra asks carefully.

Cheryl takes a deep breath nervously looking around the court. Toni smiles a little in her direction, but Cheryl can tell she’s just as anxious as she is. She sees her mother, who’s a witness, Sierra said mostly for character evaluation and considering who her mother is, that isn’t very good for Cheryl.

She sees Moose in the audience which makes her frown a bit, she hadn’t expected anyone from school to be here except for Toni, since it’s a weekday in December and the courtroom was three towns over from Riverdale.

She lets her eyes drift slightly to the right and that’s when she makes eye contact with Sister Woodhouse, her breath hitches in her throat at the sight. She’s casting Cheryl this glare to intimidate Cheryl, and she tries to send one right back, but it can’t be nearly as intimidating considering how much her hands are shaking.

She reminds herself that she can’t hurt her here. And that this is her chance to take her down. “Cheryl? Can you answer the question?” Sierra asks her softly.

Cheryl nods her head and straightens her shoulders, thinking over the speech she had prepared. “When I arrived at the Sisters for conversion therapy, I was immediately given my own room and a uniform to change into. The nu- um, workers were very aggressive-”

“What were they doing that was aggressive?” Sierra asks, interrupting her.

“They were pushing us around - the disciples - and were very stern I suppose, just sort of forcing us everywhere. Anyway, once I was settled in my room, Sist- Mrs. Woodhouse entered pushing a cart. On it was an array of drugs and needles. She told me that I was,” she pauses briefly, Sierra gives her an encouraging look and Cheryl continues, “She said that I was sick and wrong and that I needed to be fixed-”

“Could you clarify for the court what Mrs. Woodhouse was referring to?” Sierra asks.

Cheryl frowned and cleared her throat, “Um, my homosexuality,” she says hesitantly, ignoring the looks from the crowd, mostly Toni’s.

“After that, she stuck me with a needle about three-four inches long, I’d say. I don’t know what it did really, it felt like it fogged my mind. A lot of my memories are hazy,” she says. Her memories range from incredibly vivid to feeling like dreams.

“Just tell us what you remember,” Sierra says, edging her on.

“All the days were really similar. The workers would constantly tell me how wrong and disgusting I was. Once, I tried to stand up for myself and this man pushed me hard against the wall right against a nail and he yelled about-about how um, my life didn’t matter and how I-I was this huge mistake. I still have a scar from when my back hit the nail.” Cheryl squeezes her eyes shut, trying her hardest not to cry.

Everything hurts so bad, it’s all so painful. She grips onto the bottom of her dress to try and stop her hands from shaking. She opens her eyes and she can see Sierra giving her an awfully sympathetic and encouraging look.

She takes a deep breath and continues, “I had one-on-one therapy with Mrs. Woodhouse every day where we worked to find the root of um, my same-sex attraction. If I was to speak out I was given a slap on the cheek or physical therapy.”

Cheryl thinks back to the sessions with Mrs. Woodhouse, them talking about her brother and his influence on her. Or how Toni and Heather both took advantage of her. She lightly pinches her arm to get her to focus on the trial.

Her eyes wander towards Toni and her heart fills with guilt at the sight. Toni already looks so sad for Cheryl, but still trying to give her this look of encouragement, and yet her eyes almost look like they could fill with tears at any second.

Cheryl makes a mental note to comfort Toni when they get home, she’ll make lasagna for dinner too, that’s Toni’s favorite.

“What did you do during physical therapy?” Sierra asks, butting into Cheryl’s thoughts about Toni.

“They would have me drag heavy sandbags corner to corner around a room and I couldn’t eat or drink until they thought I had done enough, which was usually for a few hours,” she

responds, admittedly physical therapy sounds relatively tame, but in practice was utterly exhausting, making Cheryl's muscles ache with every step.

"What are some other examples of therapy you were given?"

Cheryl tries to focus on her speech, just the words and not the memories behind them, but she finds her mind drifting back to the wretched place. Every slap, every drug, every awful thing said. She can practically hear Sister Woodhouse's voice in her head, can feel numbness coursing through her body from a mysteriously filled needle, and her cheek starts to sting from something she'd done wrong.

She closes her eyes and tries to fight out the thoughts.

"There was revulsion therapy, which is where during my meal, I'd be given a pill that would make me throw up, and afterward, they'd, um, play videos with two girls uh, yeah. And I'd be throwing up during it."

"What exactly would play during those videos?"

"It was um," Cheryl lowers her voice ever so slightly, cheeks reddening with embarrassment, "Lesbian porn." Cheryl glances down awkwardly at the memory.

"They also had me kneel on bags of rice and recite bible verses, mostly the ones chastising homosexuality, but there were other ones too. If I made a mistake or paused for too long, a man would kick me or hit the back of my head," she cringes at the memory and fights to hold back the tears threatening to fall. She refuses to give all these people the satisfaction.

"We also did a lot of praying, like in an effort to rid my same-sex attraction. We had movie night twice a week also, which was just where they played videos condemning gay people"

"When you weren't with the workers undergoing therapy sessions what did you do?" Sierra asks. Cheryl thinks back to the hours she spent sitting on the cramped, abhorrent bed they had in her room, simply staring at the wall for hours on end. Every so now and then she'd release a sob and then she wouldn't be able to stop.

She'd just cry and cry until it felt like every tear she had ever held was lying on the cold, concrete floor of the convent. "I sat alone in my room, sometimes I read the Bible, other times I just cried," she says trying to keep her voice strong and hoping she's maintaining her composure because honestly, she doesn't even feel like she's real anymore. There's white noise ringing through her ears and she feels as though she's in a dream.

"Did you ever have suicidal thoughts during your time at the Sisters of Quiet Mercy?" Sierra asks with a gentle voice that still manages to hold strong in the room.

Cheryl clears her throat and looks down in shame when she answers, "Yes."

"Cheryl, did you feel safe at the Sisters of Quiet Mercy?"

Cheryl pauses. She never really felt like she was going to die, she supposes, but no, she most definitely did not feel safe there.

“No.”

“That’s all, Your Honor,” Sierra says returning to your seat.

“Does the defense wish to cross-examine the witness?”

“Yes, Your Honor.” The lawyer stands and makes his strides over towards the witness box.

“Miss Blossom, when you arrived at the Sisters of Quiet Mercy, what was the very first thing you were asked to do?” He asks in such a smug voice Cheryl feels the urge to slap him.

“I was asked to change into my uniform.”

“No, no before that. You walk up the steps of the Sisters with your mother and what do you do?”

The realization dawns on Cheryl as she realizes what he’s trying to get her to admit. “I had to sign a written consent form,” she admits, “But that doesn’t mean I consented to anything they did to me,” she adds quickly after seeing reporters frantically writing, and the conflicted faces of the jury.

“I actually have a copy of your signature and the form you signed.” He walks up to the desk with a sheet of paper he grabbed off of the desk. He places it in front of Cheryl who instantly recognizes the document.

“Miss Blossom, would you say this is your signature?”

“Yes.”

“Your Honor, the defense would ask that this is marked as the next exhibit,” he says calmly.

“Very well,” the judge responds.

A man marks the document as ‘Exhibit A’, but leaves the paper in front of Cheryl.

“Miss Blossom, could you read from here-” he points to one section of the document, “to here?” he asks, pointing at a lower part of the paper.

Cheryl nods, clearing her throat and looks down at the paper worriedly, ““The Sisters of Quiet Mercy’s conversion therapy program is a dedicated experience where the children will stay on campus until they graduate and will pray, develop healthy relationships with their peers, and find a greater connection with God. The disciples will search inside themselves to rid their um, deviant thoughts through healthy, constructive activities ranging from sing-alongs to movie-sessions. We hope you have an enjoyable time rediscovering yourself.””

She finds herself growing red from embarrassment after reading such a thing, and the way he’s looking at her as though she’s some sort of liar, it makes her head spin in anger.

“Nowhere on there does it mention any of the claims you made earlier?”

“Well, I mentioned we prayed a lot,” she says hesitantly.

“Besides that?”

“No, not really,” she says sighing. She almost yells out that this stupid sheet of paper doesn’t mean anything, the nuns could still do as they pleased, but she holds back remembering Sierra telling her to stay calm and professional as best she could.

“Miss Blossom, the Sisters of Quiet Mercy is a center founded on Christianity, yes?”

Cheryl frowns at such a clear question. “Yes, it is, obviously.”

“During your time there, were you taught that Christianity condemns homosexuality?”

Cheryl rolls her eyes at hearing the lawyer ask another such clear answer, “Obviously.”

“And is that information accurate?”

Oh.

Cheryl scrunches her eyebrows and purses her lips in thought. Considering she’s read the Bible itself all too many times, the answer seems obvious. But, at the same time, she considers that Veronica is very Catholic and is one of the most accepting people she knows.

Then again, he’s not asking what Veronica thinks, he’s asking what Christians as a whole think. And she vowed to tell the whole truth.

“Yes,” as she answers the question her voice cracks and she looks down in shame not wanting to see the looks on her everyone’s face, but she can still hear a few dramatic gasps in the audience. She brings her red-manicured fingers up and rubs at her earlobe, a nervous habit of hers.

The lawyer doesn’t smile, but the way his eyes light up and his shoulders straighten a little Cheryl can tell he’s ecstatic with her answer.

God, she can’t believe she said that. And Toni’s in the audience too. A tear runs down her cheek as she starts thinking about how that must’ve made Toni feel. She basically heard her own girlfriend admit being with her was a sin. That must’ve been awful to hear.

And besides Toni, the fact she admitted her very own being a sin. She feels rotten just saying that. Not to mention the amount of times she’s been reminded that it’s not a sin almost contends with the number of times she’s been told it *is*.

Well, technically *Cheryl* doesn’t think it is. She just thinks Christians think it is. Because just about every Christian she’s met thinks it is.

She’s okay with herself now. She’s been embracing that part of her for the last few months. She loves loving girls.

This case is really messing with her head.

“So, would you say the Sisters were exercising their first amendment right to the freedom of religion with the use of conversion therapy?”

Still feeling guilty about her previous answer she quickly blurts out, “No!”

The lawyer pauses looking at her funny, “Can you elaborate on that?” He asks.

She pauses trying to think of a way to explain her answer, while also pondering whether or not he’s even allowed to ask such a question. “Well, the bible doesn’t *encourage* conversion therapy, and there are plenty of things it condemns without, like, um, trying to change them, I guess.”

Cheryl mentally hits herself for sounding so stupid, she didn’t think she’d have to answer anything like that. She sounded so frantic, like a total unprepared idiot.

“That’s all, Your Honor.”

Chapter End Notes

hey! comments and kudos are appreciated and criticism is welcome as always. have a nice day!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

total toni chapter, get ready. don't worry, other characters will be coming in soon, rn it's all choni (not that that'll change much lol). tbh this isn't the best chapter, a little lame, but things will reeeaaally get going in the next one. once again LOTS of homophobia and conversion therapy talk, so if that sort of thing bothers you, this isn't the best fic.

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

“Those were the longest six hours of my life,” Toni says following Cheryl into the back seat of Sierra’s car.

Cheryl only nods her head, buckling her seatbelt and leaning back against the seat. Sierra jumps into the front seat, shutting the door behind her and turning her key into the ignition.

“How did you two enjoy the first day of the trial?”

“It was boring,” Toni responds quickly, not even bothering to think over her answer.

To Toni, the trial was possibly the most boring and aggravating experience she’d ever had. Even though she’s heard of other serpents being in trials, she had never gone to one, no one close enough to her had been accused of a crime where she would be able to get out of school. And thank God for that.

She spent the entire morning session on the verge of falling asleep, with the exception of when Cheryl took the stand where she had been filled with all kinds of emotions and none of them even edged on boredom.

“It was long... and heavy,” Cheryl says exasperatedly. Toni holds back a laugh in response, ‘that’s what she said’ is on the tip of her tongue, though Toni guesses that now isn’t the best time.

Cheryl lets out a small sigh, and Toni grabs her hand, giving it a small squeeze. Cheryl glances at their intertwined hands and then stares up at Toni with a look on her face that Toni doesn’t quite register, before smiling and kissing Toni on the cheek. She leans her head onto Toni’s shoulder while Toni wraps an arm around her in response.

Toni doesn’t really know what to talk to Cheryl about when they get home. She wants to talk about everything, but she doesn’t think that’s the best idea. She knows Cheryl’s under a lot of pressure and Toni doesn’t want to add to that in any way. Any hour spent outside of the courtroom will be them just doing their normal thing, unless, of course, Cheryl wants to talk about it.

Toni wants to make damn sure she's helping Cheryl the best she can.

Toni's angry as hell at Lisa Woodhouse. Toni had heard that story before, but never in such detail. Cheryl had told her briefly about all that occurred, but Toni had never pushed her to say more. It's not even just Cheryl's testimony that made her mad, it's how fucking smug the other side was.

She couldn't stand hearing their arguments. God, Toni wants to stand up and slap the self-righteous look off that lawyer's face just thinking about him. And how he acted like he won the whole case when he got Cheryl to admit Christianity is against gay people.

Honestly, Toni *was* upset at hearing Cheryl's admission, but she's kind of decided to ignore it for now and talk about it once this whole thing is over. Mostly because what else would she expect Cheryl to say? She had just told an entire courtroom full of people her terrible story entirely revolving around homophobia in the Catholic Church, and fuck, after hearing all those other kids Toni was about ready to say the same thing Cheryl said.

It was miserable watching that trial. Toni swears if she hears the words 'homosexuality' and 'sin' come out of a Catholic nun's mouth in the same sentence one more time she might just burst. She couldn't decide half of the time if she was angered or saddened by the blatant homophobia from the other side. And of course, they weren't bothering to hide it considering their entire argument essentially revolved around free speech or some shit.

It was hard for Toni to watch, making her feel awful and she had been out and proud since she was *twelve*. And this was only the first day. She can't even begin to imagine how Cheryl must feel. Frankly, Toni feels a pang of guilt for feeling upset considering how much *worse* Cheryl must be feeling.

Maybe she'll make dinner tonight to make her a little happier.

"Only six more days of this, girls," Sierra says in an effort to relieve the obvious tension in both girls.

"Six? I thought there were only four more days after this," Toni exclaims hitting her head against the back of the seat.

"It was lengthened," Cheryl mumbles sleepily. Toni starts rubbing Cheryl's arm, wondering briefly how much sleep she had gotten the night before.

"Wait, why was it lengthened before it even started?" Toni asks Sierra curiously.

"Well, for starters, there's a *lot* of witnesses who will be taking the stand. Also, the judge-HEY! PUT YOUR BLINKER ON NEXT TIME YOU FUCKING IDIOT!" Sierra jerks the car away from the guy who had abruptly turned into their lane and slams her hand down on the horn aggressively.

Toni laughs at Sierra's road rage given she's always rather collected. "Anyway, the judge also wants to be extra thorough considering the possibility of law changes following this."

“You guys are trying to change a law?” Toni asks, confused. “Not necessarily, but we have lacking evidence in terms of abuse at the Sisters, all we have are witness statements which the defense contradicts with other witnesses, so what that means is the underlying factor for us winning the case is if the jury thinks that conversion therapy is unjust. People and politicians know this which is why this case *could* result in New York banning it.”

Toni frowns, trying to put the pieces together in her head. “Oh, that makes sense, I think.”

After that, the car ride is relatively quiet outside of the music playing on the radio. At one point during the ride, Cheryl falls asleep still leaning against Toni, so Toni takes out her phone texting everyone updates on the trial.

Finally, the car pulls into their driveway. Toni lightly shakes Cheryl to wake her and she groans latching on tighter to the other girl. “You’re such a baby, get up Cher,” she says jokingly, trying to pull out of the other girl’s grasp.

Cheryl giggles, “Fine, fine,” she says raising her hands up and moving out of the car alongside Toni.

“See you tomorrow, ladies!” Sierra calls out. The girls wave and say their goodbyes before they trudge their feet through the newly fallen snow heading towards Thistlehouse. Toni twists the knob open and motions for Cheryl to walk through, “Such a gentlewoman,” Cheryl teases.

“Always am,” she says pecking her on the lips and closing the door behind her. Once they’re inside, Cheryl pulls Toni in for a deeper kiss, wrapping her arms around her neck. Toni pushes against her, humming contently.

Their lips move languidly against each other’s, a gentle push and pull with their tongues dancing effortlessly together, something so second nature at this point, yet still manages to get better every time. Toni bites back a groan when Cheryl’s hips move dangerously hard against her own, and she speeds up in response, moving her fingertips along the taller girl’s back.

It’s so satisfying to kiss someone in the midst of chaos, so completely gratifying for two people to meld into one no matter what the outside world has to say.

Toni pushes Cheryl up against the door while Cheryl moves her arms to Toni’s back in an effort to pull the other girl closer to her. Their mouths continue to move in sync before Toni starts thinking about the day they just had, and their day tomorrow, and the day after that.

“I’ll make dinner tonight,” Toni says pulling back and breathing deeply with her hands still on either side of Cheryl’s head. Cheryl frowns, “No, TT, I’m cooking lasagna tonight, you simply relax on the couch, converse with your serpent friends,” she says playing with a strand of Toni’s hair that had managed to work its way out of her ponytail.

“After today? No, I can cook us something, you look so tired, Cher,” Toni says as Cheryl yawns only proving Toni’s point. Cheryl takes Toni’s face in her hands and tells her softly, “TT, as much as I adore you, you’re a terrible cook.”

Toni gasps in mock offense, knowing full well she could hardly make anything, “What? You love when I cook!”

“Me favoring something my *girlfriend* does, in no way makes her any good at it,” she says teasingly before adding, “Your scrambled eggs are definitely eligible to be served at a five-star restaurant, though.”

“Scrambled eggs it is then,” Toni confirms, making her way towards the kitchen.

“TT, really, I can-” she starts before Toni interrupts her, “Cheryl, I insist, go take a nap, chill out.”

Cheryl yawns once more before groaning, “Ugh, alright, but tomorrow get ready for lasagna,” she flips her hair and strides towards the bedroom, Toni assumes to change. Which, actually seems like a good idea, so Toni follows after her.

Toni opens the door to Cheryl in her underwear holding up a nightgown. Toni leans against the doorway, “Hot,” Toni teases. “Oh!” Cheryl exclaims before modestly holding her pajamas up, covering her torso.

A chuckle escaped her lips before she says, “You act like I’ve never seen you in your underwear before.” Toni smirks, reaching towards the dresser for her own pajamas. Cheryl tenses up, standing stiffly as a sort of tension fills the air. She shakes her head, closing her eyes and with a heavy sigh says, “Right, my apologies.”

Toni scrunches her eyebrows in confusion and walks towards Cheryl, “I’m just joking, Cher, you don’t have to apologize,” she says rubbing the other girl’s arm. Toni’s smiling to lift the tension that’s entered the room and Toni’s not even sure why it’s there or where it came from.

“Of course, I know that,” Cheryl says stepping into her nightgown as Toni unzips her own dress. Toni slides her dress down to her ankles, stepping out of it and tossing it onto the dresser, making a mental note to take care of that. She straightens back up and sees Cheryl staring at her with this sort of awe as though she had never seen Toni before.

They make eye contact, the two of them smiling at each other like they have a thousand times before and Cheryl stands and takes a step towards Toni, “How do you manage to be so beautiful?” She asks softly, tucking a strand of hair behind Toni’s ear. The sudden shift of conversation and energy in the room is odd to Toni, not that she’s complaining.

“It helps to have a girlfriend as gorgeous as you,” she says coyly, leaning forward to connect their lips. Cheryl smiles into the kiss and Toni presses their foreheads together, their noses bumping together ever so slightly.

“I’m so happy to have you in my life, Toni, you’re simply wondrous,” she says with unadulterated love shining ever so brightly her eyes, such that Toni doesn’t miss, but doesn’t comment on, only sending the same look back.

“Well, I think you’re simply *wondrous* as well,” she whispers their lips brushing together slightly, Toni’s eyes fluttering shut.

Cheryl pulls back and brings her hands up to Toni's face, her thumb tenderly caressing her cheek. "Really, Toni, you're the best thing that's ever happened to me. And I seriously cherish every ounce of you, every inch of your being. I just want you to know how deeply I care for you and how appreciative I am to be with you," she says, smiling before yawning once again.

"I already know, Cher, and for the record, I feel the exact same way," Toni assures her, bringing her face forward to meet the other girl's for a gentle kiss. Toni's lips stay attached to Cheryl's for a few seconds before the two pull away in order for Toni to dress and make dinner while Cheryl takes a much-needed nap.



"The defense calls Lisa Woodhouse to the stand." The vile woman rises, straightening her black dress as she stands up and fiddling with her cross necklace so that it's centered on her neck.

She makes her way to the witness stand as Toni watches on from the audience. "Please stand," a man says next to the stand. Toni clenches her jaw and glares at the woman at the stand. A fleet of anger flows through her at the sight of the woman and her ridiculous nun uniform. This is so fucking stupid.

"Raise your right hand. Do you promise that the testimony you shall give in the case before this court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"I do." Toni's eyes narrow at what she would consider an obvious lie. There's no way this evil lady could possibly tell even an ounce of the truth. Toni hates her so much for what she did to Cheryl. God, she can't stop thinking about it, all she can think about is Cheryl in pain all because of the woman fifty feet from Toni.

"Please state your first and last name."

"Lisa Woodhouse." Camera flashes fill the silence that overtakes the room. Journalists watching with steady eyes, their pencils held tightly between their fingers.

"You may be seated."

Lisa sits back down as Sierra McCoy rises. "Mrs. Woodhouse, could you tell us what you and the other workers in the Sisters of Quiet Mercy did to the kids to try and rid their same-sex attraction?" She asks confidently.

"We weren't doing very much work as the kids are the only ones who can dispel their inner demons. We only helped them along through one-on-one and group sessions where we talked about what's causing their abnormalities. We taught them to develop healthy relationships with their peers through many different activities throughout the year."

Toni rolls her eyes and nearly laughs at loud. Her little speech sounded so rehearsed. Their ‘inner demons’? God, what a fucking idiot. She acts like she’s really helping them, as though she’s really someone important.

“What were those activities?” Sierra asks calmly. Toni commends Sierra for being able to keep her cool. If Toni were in her position she’d probably be kicked out of the courtroom

“We had painting classes, movie nights, sing-alongs, board games, we even went bowling a few times,” Lisa says smiling.

“What types of movies did you play for the kids?” Sierra questions.

“Just regular movies, ones that were in theaters. Sweet Home Alabama, Titanic, things like that mostly.” Toni rolls her eyes once again at the obvious lies spouting from this woman. As if they played just normal, fun movies at a conversion therapy center. How the jury can’t see that is something Toni will never understand.

“So they never had anything to do with homosexuality?” Sierra asks with a raise of her eyebrow.

“We played a few ones that taught the kids the wrongness of it,” Mrs. Woodhouse admits, her eyes dancing left and right between the different cameras pointed at her.

“What movies were those?”

“I’m not quite sure what the names were, another re-education camp had gifted them to us. They’re all rather old,” she remarks calmly.

Toni despises how cool and collected she is. She can feel Cheryl’s nerves from the audience and it’s so frustrating how the one who deserves to suffer is so okay. It’s as if she knows she’s going to win, even though she really has no chance. To Toni, this is the most black and white trial there’s ever been. This is so fucking stupid.

“I actually have one of the movies that were found in the basement of the Sisters. Your Honor, would you allow me to play a clip of it?” Sierra asks.

“Go right ahead,” the judge responds. Some man pulls out a TV on wheels from the corner. Sierra grabs a VHS tape off the stand and pushes it into the player.

Toni’s looking right at Cheryl, hoping she’ll turn around so that Toni can give her an encouraging look. Which is totally stupid, but Toni just wants her to know she’s here. Cheryl’s eyes are peeled to the screen and Toni really just wants to protect her from whatever the movie is, even though Cheryl’s already seen it.

The movie starts with a crackle. It’s in black and white and may as well be a fossil. Toni’s watching it, but still glancing at Cheryl every so now and then. After a few moments into the movie, Cheryl brought her head down, now staring at her lap. Toni’s glad for that too, not wanting to have anything more affecting her.

They only watch maybe twenty minutes of it before it gets shut off, or at least that's what it felt like to Toni. The video was crazy stupid, it was merely two boys taking a walk by the river showing love in the most PG and beautiful way while a narrator chastises their innocent smiles and bright eyes.

It's so ridiculous and Toni can tell just about everyone in the room is more than a little uncomfortable. Even a few of the people on Lisa's side seemed a little grossed out when the narrator referred to the boys' hand-holding as Satan's grip on their sanity.

Sierra pops the tape out of the player, the screen turning black as a response, while the same man who wheeled the TV into the room takes it out.

"That was one of the movies, correct?" Sierra asks in the same loud voice as before.

"Yes," she responds clearly unable to see any problem with the film.

Sierra purses her lips and takes a few steps towards the stand, "Mrs. Woodhouse, would you say the kids in your program were happy?" She asks carefully, yet her voice still holds strong.

Toni just about scoffs at such a clear-cut answer. Obviously, they were unhappy. All that ridiculous place did was teach kids to hate themselves. Christ, Toni sees firsthand the type of effect that could have on a person.

Cheryl used to struggle so bad, even if she rarely admitted it, it was so obvious to Toni. She could tell in the little ways. For the first week after, Cheryl could hardly hold hands with Toni around other people without getting *that look* on her face, like something was going to happen to her. Or Cheryl would look at some of the other couples with envy. It hurts Toni so bad sometimes, she just wants to help Cheryl but she hasn't a clue how.

She used to be so clearly unhappy, and Toni can tell she's been doing well, but then she decided to take on this case. Obviously, Toni is happy she's shutting down the vile place, but at what extent? Cheryl is so stressed out all the time, and she's way too hard on herself when it comes to winning this. Toni's terrified of what would happen to her if they were to lose.

Lisa still hadn't answered Sierra's question through Toni's thoughts, Sierra had to ask her to answer. She's taking a while because no kid in that place was anywhere near a healthy state of mind, and she obviously knows that but just doesn't care. She finally takes a breath, straightening her back and answering with, "I'd say most of them were very pleased in their self-discovery, but some simply refused to listen to us and that aversion to God forced them to be unhappy."

It's the most unsure answer Lisa has given and Toni thanks God for that. She rushed through her answer, as though the jury wouldn't hear her half-assed answer.

"Mrs. Woodhouse, has a child under your care ever taken their own life?"

Unlike the previous question Lisa answers immediately, clearly having been asked similar things before, "Well, I work with kids who are already unhappy with their lives, having

already succumbed to evil, so you have to understand that these children are at greater risk of suicide, as every homosexual is.”

“That’s not an answer to my question,” Sierra quickly responds, her voice raising.

Lisa sits there quietly for a moment while Toni glares at her with the sharpest look she can muster. She just hopes she’ll look her way and know just how much Toni hates her. She looks down and answers, “Yes, there have been kids who have unfortunately killed themselves.” Her voice cracks on the ‘yes’ as though she feels guilty, but she obviously couldn’t care any less what happened to those kids. To her, they hardly even counted as human.

‘Why is she even on trial?’ Toni thinks to herself. It’s just so obvious Lisa’s guilty, it shouldn’t even be a question.

“In your time working there, how many children have taken their own lives?”

Once again Lisa pauses glancing from left to right as though the walls could answer for her. She probably has no idea how many kids killed themselves there, it’s not like she cares. A tear runs down her cheek and Toni rolls her eyes at the fake crying, it’s so amateur. She finally musters up an answer, “Thirteen, but that wasn’t because of anything we did, even their parents admitted that to us. Not one of those parents blamed us for the tragedy,” she says with such a hideous voice, like a terrible actor trying to express guilt.

“That’s all, Your Honor,” Sierra says, returning to her spot next to Cheryl. Sierra brings a hand to Cheryl’s back, rubbing it gently to comfort her. Toni wishes she could be up there holding Cheryl’s hand and pressing kisses to her cheek. She feels so *useless* in the audience.

“Does the defense wish to cross-examine the witness?”

“Yes, Your Honor,” the lawyer from the other side says, standing and making his way towards the witness stand. He’s got a confident, powerful walk, with his back straight and his head held high.

“Mrs. Woodhouse, how long have you worked at the Sisters of Quiet Mercy?” He asks, straightening out the crinkles in his jacket.

Toni thinks he may be one of the most annoying, smug people she’s ever seen. She used to think Cheryl was overly smug, but she has nothing on this guy. He’s a different type of terrible.

“Thirty-six years,” she answers smoothly.

“What do you do there?”

“I organize everything that happens in the convent, though I primarily work in the teenage discipline sectors,” she responds as Toni nearly scoffs. Discipline is an awfully weird word to describe torture. She wasn’t teaching kids to respect their elders, she was teaching them to hate themselves and ignore their feelings.

“Does that include the conversion therapy program?”

That’s a fucking obvious question.

“Yes.”

“In your time working at the Sisters, about how many kids do you think have been enrolled in conversion therapy there?” He asks calmly.

“Maybe six-hundred.”

Toni’s mouth nearly drops to the floor. Six *hundred* kids in just under forty years. That’s insane. And not one of them had said anything, Jesus Christ. This woman is evil, a disgusting disgrace to humanity.

“How many of them would you say successfully passed your program?”

Toni wants to jump up and yell ‘None!’ before this terrible lady could answer. This is all so stupid, it’s so obvious this place shouldn’t be running. You can’t change someone’s sexuality and to say otherwise is dangerous.

“A little over half. There would be more, but homosexuality is a very hard sin to dispel of, it often roots deep inside the children when they’re very young and infects them like a virus. It makes them think that they don’t need changing.”

God, she’s such an awful person. Toni’s angry and maybe a little hurt from her statement. She’s filled with hate, it’s flowing through her veins. This woman is the most atrocious person Toni’s ever seen. How could someone hate love so much?

“Did you work to properly care for the kids in your program?” He asks confidently.

Toni rolls her eyes once again. She doesn’t even think Lisa considers those kids worthy of living, much less being cared for. From what Cheryl had said, she couldn’t care whether they were alive or dead.

“Of course, those kids are our future. We care very deeply for them, just as God does - or did - and we would never harm them while we were removing their sin. If we didn’t care for them we would’ve merely thrown them out on the street.”

“That’s all, Your Honor.”

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Toni sits comfortably on a couch in Thistlehouse, her arm wrapped securely around her girlfriend whose head is resting against her chest. She rubs the arm of the girl wrapped up in her grasp, pressing a gentle kiss to her forehead.

“They’re all so cowardly, Toni,” she says, frustration lacing her voice. She’s referring to the kids who had given their testimonies earlier that day and had claimed the Sisters of Quiet Mercy was entirely legal and cared deeply about the kids there. Toni stays silent, merely responding by pulling the girl closer to her. “I need to win this, Toni. I *need* this so bad. They’re all such utter liars,” she says desperately.

“I know, babe,” Toni whispers, reaching for the hand of the girl next to her. Cheryl instantly responds by interlacing their fingers together. The porcelain white contrasts in the most elegant way with Toni’s darker skin. Cheryl’s soft skin and perfect nails compared to Toni’s scarred hands and chipped nails is the most beautiful example of two people coming from such different backgrounds joining together.

“They can say whatever they want and-and they say such awful things. It’s all so wrong. And shutting them down shouldn’t be this *hard*. I mean, the looks on the jury’s faces and that stupid lawyer’s-” she cuts her rambling off with a deep sigh, while Toni presses a soft kiss to the top of her head. “Toni, I can’t lose this, I *can’t*.”

“You won’t, Cher, don’t worry,” Toni assures her softly, running her hand up and down her back.

“Those kids are so pathetic, they have this opportunity to help prevent this awful place from doing any more damage and they just don’t care.” Cheryl sits up, still keeping a grip on Toni’s hand.

“They’re just scared, Cher,” Toni reasons. Toni empathizes with those kids, they’re really just terrified of everyone around them. They’d lose their families, their friends, everyone if they came out and said what really went on there. Not to mention there must be an underlying fear of Lisa Woodhouse and the other workers.

Cheryl rolls her eyes, “I’m scared too, Toni, but you don’t see me endorsing reparative therapy.” Toni feels her heart clench at Cheryl’s admission of fear. Obviously, she knows the other girl is scared, but she hates hearing it considering how rarely Cheryl really is afraid of something.

“I mean, God, I’ve been getting death threats and I’m still holding my ground,” Cheryl says somewhat nonchalantly and Toni sits up a little straighter in shock.

She’s been getting *death threats*?

Toni knows about the general attention they’d been getting online. Fuck, Toni had even been getting some hate of her own, but death threats? That seems absurd. Toni had nearly laughed out loud when Sweet Pea and Fangs had offered to drive Cheryl everywhere. The notion seemed ridiculous to Toni, most people agreed with Cheryl. Sure, there were a few here and there who were upset, but it didn’t seem like anyone would do anything or threaten anyone.

“Wait, death threats? Like full on *death* threats?” Toni asks numbly. It’s twenty-eighteen, this is ridiculous. She must just be messing with her.

“Just on Twitter, so in all honesty, it hardly counts as a threat, merely a scare tactic, I suppose,” Cheryl says, brushing it off. But Toni’s still in shock at the fact that people wanted to torture kids so bad they’d threaten death to a sixteen-year-old girl.

What if someone actually *did something*?

Toni instinctively grasps onto Cheryl a little tighter with a frown, her heart beating erratically. Her hands start to sweat a little as she straightens her back and clenches her jaw.

Someone wants to *kill* Cheryl.

God, someone wants to take the life of the girl who she cherishes, who has done so much for her. Toni can’t live without Cheryl. She’s Toni’s lifeline, everything she needs, she keeps her safe and happy. She comforts her in her darkest moments, keeping her afloat even when the world around her threatens to drown her. And someone wants to take that away from her.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

A world without Cheryl would be unbearable, so miserable and bland. Toni can hardly stand the thought. She *needs* her so bad it’s terrifying sometimes. Toni’s eyes start to fill with tears and she quickly closes her eyes to rid of them.

She can’t cry, this isn’t about her, this is about *Cheryl*.

“It’s not a big deal, Toni. It’s just a few people and they’re all nowhere near us and besides, there’s a police officer right outside our door, okay? Nothing can happen,” Cheryl assures her, reaching a careful hand up to caress Toni’s cheek.

“It is a big deal. Someone wants to *kill* you,” Toni says quickly and somehow manages to keep her voice steady.

“It’s the internet, Toni, people-”

“Cheryl, someone wants to hurt you and you don’t even care,” Toni interrupts, feeling tears start to build in her eyes again and she immediately blinks them away. Cheryl brings both of her hands to Toni’s face, forcing her to look her in the eyes.

“Of course I care, but no one can or will do anything. We’re safe, Toni, no need to get worked up,” Cheryl comforts her quietly, placing a small kiss to the corner of Toni’s mouth. She wrings a hand through Toni’s hair, wiping the one tear that had managed to fall from her eye.

God, she can’t lose her. She can’t lose the one thing that’s good in her life.

Someone wants to *kill* Cheryl.

“You should’ve told me,” Toni says softly as Cheryl places a hand on Toni’s thigh.

“I didn’t think it was that big a deal, it’s just a few crazy homophobes. You already knew that there were some people upset about the trial,” Cheryl remarks, rubbing circles on her thigh.

Toni tries to calm herself down. She reminds herself that it’s only a few people causing a fuss. Most people are on their side. There’s just a couple of crazies who got cocky on the internet. They won’t do anything.

But, God, what if they *do* ? And what if Toni can’t stop it?

It doesn’t matter how many people are running their mouths because there’s more than one and hate is so loud . Not to mention, Toni has spent the last two days in a courtroom riddled with palpable, unmistakable, unadulterated *hate*.

“Someone wants to hurt you, Cher.”

God, this is all Lisa Woodhouse’s fault. No, actually it’s Penelope Blossom’s fault. Toni doesn’t care, she hates them both. They’re both awful, terrible, evil lowlifes who get off on other’s pain.

Toni hates Lisa, hates Penelope. She’s filled with hate and sadness and love and fear and all these different things she’s afraid she might just burst apart.

“They won’t, there’s a police officer right outside and ignoring him, you’re here, and you could totally kick some homophobe’s ass,” Cheryl says with a small smile, trying to liven the mood just the slightest.

“I couldn’t if he had a twelve gauge shotgun,” Toni chokes out, still thinking about what could happen. All these possibilities are rushing through her head, all at once. She can see a man breaking into Thistlehouse through the back, loading his gun, breaking into their room and BAM!

It’s all over.

Why doesn’t Cheryl care? There are people who want to hurt her. Toni keeps hearing Cheryl tell her about the death threats like a mantra. Over and over. Then there’s the man with the gun, rushing through Toni’s mind shooting just about everything good.

“Toni, no one will do anything. Look, I’m okay, you’re okay, we’re both perfectly fine. Nothing’s going to change that,” Cheryl says, placing Toni’s hand over her heart to remind her it’s still beating. It’s not helping much because maybe she’s fine now, but what if she’s not by morning?

Toni takes a few deep breaths in. She needs to calm down. She’s so selfish, sitting here getting all sad as if Cheryl doesn’t have it a hundred times worse. This is about Cheryl, Toni needs to just calm down. She closes her eyes, blinking away the last few tears.

She nods her head numbly, “Okay,” she whispers. She leans against Cheryl, breathing in the smell of her fading perfume. Cheryl’s the most perfect thing Toni thinks she’s ever experienced. She can’t even comprehend how Cheryl manages to like her back.

Cheryl kisses her cheek just as she has a thousand times before and a smile dances on Toni's lips just as it has a thousand times before.

They're okay.

Everything's okay.

## Chapter End Notes

what do you think of this one? kudos and comments are appreciated as always. have a nice day!

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

ahhhh, super sorry for the late update. i've been crazy busy with school, sports, and the holidays lol. for reference the first section of this chapter takes place the night before the rest of the chapter, it's a little awkward since there's nothing happening i felt like showing during the day so whoops. enjoy, don't cringe too hard at jughead's part and good luck lol!

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

Jughead doesn't care about the trial. Why would he?

He doesn't really like Cheryl all that much, he's never been to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy, he's never known someone who's been there (except for Cheryl), a gay conversion therapy center doesn't really connect to him, and even if he *did* care he has a gang to lead.

He has people counting on him, people's lives are held in the tips of his fingers. He's been gracious enough to allow Toni to stay away from serpent business for the time being. Just while the trial is going on.

Jughead *does* think the Sisters should be shut down. He's not a monster.

He thinks this a stupid way to go about it.

Jughead takes things into his own hands. Jughead leads a gang, he's been poverty-stricken his whole life, homeless, his mother left him and took his sister, his dad is distant, and his girlfriend never understands him.

He loves Betty so much, but sometimes she just doesn't get it. She lives in this perfect world and he's so selfish sometimes he wishes she could spend a week down in the southside just to know what Jughead's world is like.

Most of the time he wants to protect her, though.

Jughead would do anything for Betty. Rules don't apply to Jughead. Survival is all that he cares about. Sometimes, he comes across as apathetic and selfish. He doesn't care.

He just survives.

Southside High was shut down and he staged a protest in an attempt to keep it running. It was a place where he was understood. Where no one judged him. Where he could live freely. So, even though he had only been there a few months he still fought for it to stay running.

It was shut down anyway.

They moved to Riverdale High and Principal Weatherbee wouldn't let them wear their serpent jackets. It was a total act of discrimination.

He told Toni that and she scoffed and Jughead didn't really catch on to why. They *were* being discriminated against. Everyone else in the school could wear whatever they wanted except for them, just because they were Southsiders.

And maybe because they were trying to wear gang jackets in a high school.

Jughead was still angry.

He's sitting in his beat-up trailer twiddling a pencil between his fingers staring at the television screen that has just gone out along with all the lights. He can't decide if it's worth getting up to do something else. He'll yell at his dad later for being too much of a deadbeat to pay the electric bill.

It's five a.m. and he's not even sure why he's awake. He just is.

The couch he's sitting on isn't even very comfortable.

Still, he doesn't move.

He just stares blankly at the TV wrapped up in a winter jacket and two blankets, it's as though if he just keeps looking at it the lights will turn on and the TV will play.

It's supposed to snow all day today. It snows and rains and storms a lot in Riverdale. Jughead thinks that's fitting. Dreary weather for a dreary town.

Jughead's tired. He's tired of everything being such a struggle. He would kill to be able to wake up and not worry if someone has broken into his trailer. To not have to worry about whether or not his dad was paying the bills.

If he was even *alive*.

He hates that he and every Southsider has to struggle to do anything that everyone else can do easily. He doesn't want *anyone* to struggle in the same way he and everyone around him does.

Jughead doesn't care about much that doesn't affect him, but he doesn't want others to struggle how he does.

Someone knocks on the door.

Jughead stays seated.

Someone knocks harder on the door.

Jughead leans back against the couch.



Someone yells, “JUGHEAD! I know you’re in there! Open up!”

He groans and stands up, taking tentative steps towards the door. He reaches for the handle, wrapping his fingers carefully around it, and he sees Toni standing at his door, her hair glistening with fallen snowflakes.

“What are you-” She pushes past him before he can finish his sentence. She sits down on the couch and Jughead raises an eyebrow.

“Your lights are off,” she says simply, her wet boots coming to rest on the coffee table. He goes back over to the couch, flopping down into the same tired position he was in before.

“Dad didn’t pay the bills,” he responds. She nods, saying nothing more. The two sit in silence together. It’s not an uncommon position for the two, both of them were more introspective and cherished silence in a way the other serpents don’t understand. Jughead appreciates Toni’s company, and the same goes the other way.

“Why are you here?” Jughead asks. Admittedly, Jughead hasn’t had company in a while. He’s busy. He doesn’t socialize much. He has this huge weight on his shoulders, he can’t move to do much of anything. He talks to Betty. He talks to serpents. They don’t talk to him much anymore. He’s the leader. The leader is treated differently.

“Kevin wanted to talk to Cheryl. Alone.”

Jughead frowns and runs a hand through his hair. “At five a.m.?”

“He said it was important.”

“And now, you’re here?”

“And now, I’m here.”

“Oh.” The two fall back into silence. There’s some yelling outside. Two people yelling about something irrelevant. Something breaks. Probably a beer bottle. It occurs to Jughead that Toni is getting his couch all wet. He’s okay with that. There’s a leak in the ceiling behind the couch. He noticed it a while ago.

He gets up and searches through the cupboards in the kitchen to find something to set under the leak. He grabs a mixing bowl and uses that. He places it in the middle of the puddle forming on the ground.

“Cheryl’s getting death threats,” Toni blurts out as Jughead returns to his spot on the couch. It’s got an imprint on it from him sitting there so long.

“Why?” He asks, confused. He doesn’t see any reason for people to be upset with Cheryl. Toni sort of gives him this look, like he’s an idiot. She gives him that look a lot. He still doesn’t understand.

“Why do you think?” Toni asks.

“I don’t think there’s any reason for anyone to be upset with Riverdale’s princess,” he says simply.

Jughead hasn’t seen his dad in a while. He hasn’t left or anything. Jughead trusts he’ll be back. He does this a lot. Jughead yells at him sometimes. Usually, he doesn’t. He writes about it occasionally. Sort of. He writes of other characters (much wimpier, sadder, pathetic characters) with flaky fathers who used to drink too much and now they don’t, but the characters still hide any alcohol they see.

“There isn’t any reason,” she responds.

Jughead’s awfully alone. And he hasn’t a way to fix it. He has a girlfriend, but sometimes she seems distant. And he has a gang, but they don’t think of him as brotherly anymore, they roll his eyes when he gives an inspirational speech, he’s like a teacher now. He used to have fewer friends then he does now, but then he wasn’t surrounded by people considered his family. He wants to do something to change that someday. Not today, though.

“Then why are they?” He asks.

She pauses before answering, pursing her lips. She ends up coming to the conclusion that, “People are crazy. And bigoted.”

“What does bigotry have to do with this?” He asks, confused.

“What doesn’t it?” She retorts.

He guesses it might have something to do with it. Though, he doesn’t see what Cheryl being gay has to do with anything. Or maybe it’s all anything is about. But then *nothing* would really be about it, because everything would be about it, and if it’s the only thing people focus on, no one’s really focusing on anything and there’s no bigotry, but then bigotry would be the only thing that matters because everyone’s focusing on Cheryl being gay and nothing at all and-

Jughead’s head hurts.

He thinks too much sometimes. He likes to solve puzzles and crimes, he likes to answer philosophical questions. Thinking has always been his favorite subject.

He decides to drop the bigotry dispute.

“What are you guys doing about the threats?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh.”

Jughead doesn’t feel like telling Toni what he thinks she should do. He doesn’t feel like doing much of anything anymore. He leads the serpents and he kisses his girlfriend. Sometimes, he wonders if he’ll ever do anything else.

“I want to do something,” Toni says simply.

“You should,” Jughead responds. Jughead thinks a lot about who he wants to be in the future. He wants to be like his dad. But he also doesn’t want to be anything like his dad. He wants to be strong, a good leader, and charismatic. But he also wants to be kind. He doesn’t know if he can do that in Riverdale. Maybe he’ll move tomorrow.

“Cheryl said not to.”

“Cheryl doesn’t control you.” He thinks he ought to get a glass of water. His mouth is dry and he hasn’t drunk anything since he woke up.

“Do you think it’d be wrong if I did?”

“I think it’d be wrong if you didn’t.”

After a while of sitting and talking, Toni leaves.

Toni has to go watch a trial on conversion therapy.

Jughead stays seated for a while but eventually leaves.

He has a serpent meeting to lead after AP Biology.

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Billy Crawford adjusts his hat that’s uncomfortably resting against the seat of his police cruiser. The heavy snow is trapping him in his car, he sometimes has to turn on his windshield wipers so he can see. It’s pitch black out, the sun had set long ago. He’s got his phone out, playing Tetris and occasionally texting his friends. This is the last place he wants to be.

He’s thirty-five and the sheriff still doesn’t trust him out in the field. He hasn’t a clue why either. It’s been his dream ever since he was young to be a big city police officer and save lives. He really wants to make a difference.

Instead, he ended up meeting the love of his life and wanting to get away from the hassle they moved to Riverdale. He has one son, and one on the way, both of whom he cares for deeply.

He loves his family, his town, his life. It’s all going smoothly for him. Except, Sheriff Minetta wouldn’t let him do anything except sit outside some sixteen-year old’s house. And he knows that *someone* has to do it since Sierra McCoy had all but him strapped him to the seat of his car, but it doesn’t mean he wants to. Or really *has* to.

It's such a stupid job that no one wants to do. He knows his wife would hate him to be put in danger, but he loves it. The rush of adrenaline when he's running after some lowlife, he lives for it. Sitting in a police car outside of a home, just in case something happens is what the old guys should be doing. The guys double his age should have to do this. Or some kid who hardly knows how to fire a gun.

That house is so big too. If anyone did try anything it's not like they'd be able to find their way around in order to do their crime. They'd probably get lost in the expensive, lavish walls.

He's so *tired*. He would just take a nap, but the last time he did that Cheryl Blossom came out and yelled at him. How the fuck did she even know he was sleeping? He had been so angry with her. And he still had to sit in his car and watch for any danger while she got to sleep in her rich-person bed. He thinks it's probably made of gold or something.

'You know what?' He thinks after he loses his hundredth game of Tetris. 'Fuck this, every man for himself.'

He shuts his phone off throwing it onto the back seat so he can finally sleep. He would've taken a nap before he got here but his son had the flu so he had to care for him. He shifts his hat so that it's lying over his eyes and he leans back, crossing his arms.

God, it's such a simple relief, but he's been awake for over twenty-four hours and just being able to relax feels so good. He stretches out his muscles and leans the seat back.

His limbs start to grow heavy and he finds his mind dozing off after what feels like just a few seconds because he's just *that* tired. Just as he's about to fall asleep someone knocks on the window.

Oh, for God's sake. How did this teenage girl know he was taking a fucking nap? God, what a stuck-up brat. She's not even in any real danger, he shouldn't even have to be here.

He pushes his hat up, eyes opening angrily as he groans in frustration. He looks towards the window and sees that the intruder is not Cheryl Blossom, but her girlfriend.

He thinks she's her girlfriend, at least. He's really just making assumptions since they live together. Plus, Sierra requested him to watch for any trouble because she's involved in some conversion therapy trial, so it's safe to assume she's, well, *you know*. He's been staying far away from the trial sweeping Riverdale. He works, he comes home, he puts his kid to bed, and he sleeps. That's it. No politics for him.

He rolls down the window just the slightest, not wanting to let the rain in, while the girl stands outside clearly anxious. "What's the trouble?" He asks carefully with a bit of a southern accent being he grew up in Tennessee.

"Were you just sleeping?" She responds without acknowledging his question.

Ugh, she's just as annoying as the other girl. Can't he just take a nap in peace? Rich people are the worst.

“No, just resting my eyes,” he says in case she’s just as harsh as the other one. Seeing her eyes narrow he adds, “It’s a slow night,” like it’s not a slow night every night.

Why is she even out in this weather? It’s too dangerous for them to sit in their house, but not too dangerous to go out in the middle of a snowstorm at two a.m. How stupid.

“Whatever, look, I’m gonna be gone for the next hour or so. Can you just be extra careful while I’m gone?” She asks with subtle glances back towards the house. At least this one’s nicer than the other one.

“So, instead of sleeping you should try and do your fucking job,” she adds angrily. So, maybe she’s not that much nicer than the other one.

“Yes, ma’am, where’re you heading off to?” He asks, trying his absolute best to keep his eyes open.

“Nowhere important, it’s no biggie, just wanted you to know,” she says nonchalantly. “And be awake,” she adds while he tries to keep his composure.

God, he was awake the whole shift and the one time he closes his eyes Ms. Money walks out to lecture him.

“Well, thanks for letting me know. You go on your way and I’ll promise to stay awake this time,” he says which is a total lie. He’ll set an alarm on his phone so he’s awake when she comes back, but she’s insane if she thinks he’s gonna stay awake for the rest of his shift.

“Alright, bye!” She says with a smile and he rolls the window back up. Once, she’s out of sight he pulls his hat back over his head and falls into a deep slumber.

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Toni hates the police. She hates the government. She hates the judicial system, the upper-class, big corporations, racists, homophobes. She hates a lot of people.

She grew up on the Southside, the poor part of Riverdale overrun with violence. She watched her dad die when she was just the tender age of nine and went to her mom’s funeral a year later after she killed herself. She learned to fight and stand up for herself. She did graffiti, ran from the cops, joined a gang. She’s never been one to follow rules.

She’s loyal, hard-working, and determined. When she wants something, she gets it, no matter the consequences. For her family, she’d walk through gunfire, jump off a cliff, kill someone. She’d do anything.

She hates sitting still.

Her exposure to violence had shaped her whether she liked it or not. As a young girl, she would watch from afar as fights broke out among the streets, or a kid would cry because his parent was on drugs or so drunk they could barely walk. She always wanted to step in, but she never knew how.

She used to sit on her bed, trying to draw something, but never being very good at it. She wanted to capture the essence of the world around her, the good parts, not the violence. She would've taken a picture, but she could never afford a camera. She wanted to remember everything good in her life. Her friends, her family, there were certain areas in town that were so beautiful.

There weren't any pictures of her dad.

While she fiddled with her pencil and paper on her bed her mom would drink. And drink. And drink. She wouldn't get angry with Toni. She'd just cry. Toni couldn't ever sleep because she could always hear her mother's gut-wrenching sobs through the paper-thin walls.

She would always go into her room and hug her tight, never wanting to let go. She wanted her mom to be happy like she used to be. She did well in school so that she could impress her. She'd run through the door with an 'A' marked on her test and her mom would give her a smile through her glassy eyes.

She always tried to make her laugh and smile and just get out of bed.

She should've done *more* .

The last time she saw her mom was at the funeral.

Sometimes, she thinks her parents would be ashamed of her. Sometimes, she tries to make the thought go away.



She climbs down the ladder that's all too familiar to her, taking careful steps down each rung. She trudges her feet along the dirty tunnel. The air is thick and heavy, the scent of something putrid and inhumane invades her senses as she walks further.

There's water on the ground and it splashes against her boot with every footstep. The liquid splashing against her already soaked black jeans.

Toni doesn't know what she's doing. She can't really think straight. She's just going. She doesn't even think before she tears through the yellow police tape. She doesn't think before breaking the law. She never has. She opens the door right behind the tape, pushing it open carefully.

The first thing she notices is white. Everything is so white. The walls, the floor, the ceiling, the lights, it's all a perfect shade of pure white. Nothing like the gray-brown from before.

She briefly wonders if this is even the right place, but the uneasiness she feels tells her this is the same place as before.

She walks lightly on her feet in case there's anyone here. She swears the walls are watching her, whispering words of pain into her ear, sending a shiver up her spine.

She opens every room looking for something to help her. She knows there has to be something. Every door she sees she opens, moving along the halls in hopes of finding anything remotely useful.

A door is marked C. Blossom and she almost pukes when she sees it. They still haven't changed the name out. Not that they ever will.

Cheryl's room is the same as any other, but Toni's knees almost buckle at the sight. There's a window with bars in it on one of the walls, as though this room is for a criminal and not an angel. The walls and floor are concrete, they're almost completely bare.

There's a blood stain on the wall to her left, it's right by where the wall meets the floor and it's so small it's hardly noticeable. Toni doesn't look at it too long in case it's Cheryl's.

Twenty-five tally marks are written on the wall right next to the bed. Marked in chalk, she thinks. She doesn't know. She knows Cheryl wrote them there, though. Toni's got the same tally marks etched in her brain like a haunting ghost.

She sits down on the bed almost too scared to move. It feels like the mattress is made of rocks it's so uncomfortable. And before she started dating Cheryl she had only slept on couches or mattresses that had likely been found on the side of some road.

She takes a deep breath and stands back up, leaving the room. She closes the door and slides the piece of paper with her name on it out of the metal piece holding it on the door. She tosses it on the ground for it to forever collect dust and moves on.

Everywhere she goes there's no color. None. It's all just white. Nothing else. The more she explores the building the more she realizes this. And the more anxious it makes her.

How did they manage to clean the place up *so well*? And before the police even searched through it? It seems impossible.

She finds a room filled with pews and a screen on one end. It's where she kissed Cheryl for the first time. Their lips had met in front of an anti-gay propaganda movie. How terrible is that? The background music to their first kiss was the chastising of the very thing they were doing right then and who they were as individuals. The memory is bittersweet.

She flicks on the light switch and once again she can hardly recognize the room. It's perfectly clean, no trace of any person. There have been hundreds of kids in this room and all of them have been erased. Though, they never quite left.

There's nothing else in the room. Just empty pews and memories.

She moves on.

There's a door with no label on it, no anything. Just a handle. She pulls on it. It's locked. There's something in that room. She knows it, she can feel it.

She pulls a bobby pin out from her hair and starts using it to fiddle with the lock. After a few moments, she hears a click and she quickly pulls the door open.

She flicks the light switch on and examines the room. There's a desk in the middle of the space with a computer on top of it, and shelves lining the walls. They're all empty. She assumes the police must have cleared through the room.

She walks over to the desk and notices a nameplate with 'Lisa Woodhouse' printed on it. She clenches her jaw and takes shaky, determined steps towards the desk. She sits down on the chair feeling bile rise in the back of her throat. This is *her* desk, *her* office.

She turns on the computer and it opens to the home screen. The wallpaper is still the Microsoft logo and it looks as though no one's touched the thing. She clicks on Google Chrome and tries to view the history, but it's been cleared. She looks through a few other browsers before giving up and shutting the computer off.

The desk has four drawers under it, two on each side. She opens them all. They're all empty. There's one that seemed off, though.

She opens the top right drawer once again and places her hand in it. There's nothing. She frowns and stares at it, tilting her head a little. That's when she realizes how much smaller it is on the inside than it looks on the outside.

She reaches aimlessly into the drawer before she finally grips onto the fake bottom. Her fingernails grip into the wood, knuckles scratching at the sides trying to pull it out.

She holds the wooden plank in her hand and grins when she realizes what was underneath. It's a manual. A manual on conversion therapy. And Lisa Woodhouse's name is right on the cover.

She opens the book carefully and skims through it. Everything Cheryl's mentioned is in here, there are things even *worse* than what Cheryl's talked about. There's a section on electroshock therapy, there's one on the 'link' between homosexuality and pedophilia, God, there's even one on corrective *rape*.

Lisa Woodhouse will be in jail for life for this.

It's what she deserves. Toni doesn't think she could die happy if Lisa Woodhouse didn't spend her days rotting in agony. She hates her more than she's ever hated someone.

The words in the book are all a jumbled mess, clearly written by someone who isn't particularly intelligent. It's disgusting and wrong much like what it preaches Toni is.



This is what Cheryl needed. This is what they *both* needed.

Toni's going to fix this.

She grips onto the book as she races through the halls, not caring if anyone can hear her. It's dead silent, she can only hear the sound of her footsteps echoing throughout the building. She's not quite sure where she can go to get out. She just needs to keep running.

She figures since almost the entire place is shut down she could go upstairs and leave through an actual door and not the tunnel she came through. So once she sees a set flight of stairs, she climbs them.

The rest of the Sisters of Quiet Mercy is definitely different from the basement. There's more color, it's more lively. It doesn't make Toni's heart race like the rooms below her feet do. Maybe it's just because there are no remnants of Cheryl up here. It's still haunting, though.

She stumbles across a room filled with easels. There really were painting classes here. Of course, only for the straight kids, though. Cheryl would've killed at that class too. She's an amazing artist.

She continues walking aimlessly around the building before she suddenly stops in her tracks. Her eyes widen as she hears the tapping of footsteps near her. She stuffs the book she found into the back of her shirt, the emblem of her serpent jacket covering it. She quickly runs into the room next to her.

This one's a bedroom. There's a dresser and the walls are covered in posters of different musicians and boybands. It's a harsh contrast to the bedrooms she had explored in the other rooms.

She sits down on the bed, realizing even the beds are more comfortable. She notices a few pictures on the nightstand. She grabs the pile and stares at them curiously. The first is of just the girl who she assumes was staying in the room, she's blonde with dazzling eyes. The picture is of her staring out at a river, a bright smile etched on her face.

She looks so normal. Not someone who would need to be *here*. She flips to the next picture and sees she's a cheerleader. She's wearing River Vixens uniform and Toni frowns trying to place a name to a face. Once again, she's laughing and smiling, this time with her friends.

Toni flips to the next one and immediately realizes whose room this is. It's Polly's. The picture she's holding now is of her and Jason. Her head is resting on his shoulder while he has a hand wrapped around her waist. Neither are smiling, simply staring at the camera, a sad look on their faces. Toni wonders who took the picture. Probably Cheryl.

Toni pockets the picture, deciding to show Cheryl it later. The next one is an ultrasound of the twins Polly had. It's clear it's from early in the pregnancy, Toni hardly able to make out what she's supposed to see. She pockets that picture, too.

This was the right decision. She's gotten a lot out of the trip. At first, she wasn't comfortable leaving Cheryl alone, but now it's clear she did the right thing.

The doorknob turns. Toni's eyes snap over to the direction of the door. She frantically throws the photos she hadn't kept back on the nightstand. She searches the room for a place to hide, but the space under the bed isn't big enough for her to even fit her hand. She jumps up towards the window and tries to open it, but the door opens before she can move the glass.

She turns around, frightful of what could be there. She could be arrested or worse. She pulls her jacket tighter around her so that the book can't be seen.

Standing in the doorway is just a little boy. He's probably about six, holding a little teddy bear by its hand. His black curls are messy and all over the place, his hair in need of a comb, and he's wearing pajamas with little cars on them. Toni's heart just about melts at the sight of him.

He looks just as scared of Toni as she was of him just seconds ago. He looks so innocent, he hasn't been touched by the cruelties of the world yet. Though, if he's staying at the Sisters maybe he has been.

"Hey, buddy," Toni says quietly, she bends down on her knees as the boy watches in awe. He doesn't say anything, he just holds tighter onto the bear in his hand,

"What are you doing here?" She asks carefully. This part of the Sisters is still considered a crime scene, and yet Toni still hasn't seen any police officers outside of the few cruisers she noticed outside of the building.

He can't be here, it's not allowed. Toni knows what happens at the Sisters. He'll be in huge trouble if he's found.

So will Toni.

And somehow, the sight of that boy jumpstarts Toni's mind.

She can't be found here. She'd be arrested and God, she can't be arrested. Not now. Cheryl's still on trial and the town is still in pieces, she can't leave her alone. And besides that, the police hate serpents. And they especially hate *black* serpents.

What if they shoot her?

The reality of what she's doing suddenly dawns on her as this little boy continues to stare unmoving at her. There are probably cameras everywhere too.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

He's not supposed to be here. This isn't the orphanage. They're going to be looking for him. Oh no. They'll find Toni and God knows what'll happen from there. She needs to get out.

"Do you know where the nearest exit is?" She asks frantically though she's not sure what she expects the silent boy to say. He probably wouldn't know how to leave. Even if he did, he hasn't said anything yet, it doesn't even seem like he can.

She awaits the boy's answer, hoping to seem as innocent and kind as she can. She smiles at the boy hoping to relieve his fear and hers on top of it. A single tear leaves his eye and falls to the hardwood floor. She hears what sounds like footsteps and she grows more anxious.

She needs to leave *now*.

She can't leave him here, can she? He looks so scared and the longer he goes without making a sound the more Toni starts to wonder if she's what he's afraid of.

It occurs to her that he knows she was here. And what she looks like. And she has fucking pink hair. He'll tell them who she is and they'll tell the police and it will be all over from there.

It turns out he can make a sound. An ear-shredding scream escapes the little boy's mouth and echoes throughout every hall in the building.

Toni immediately leaps into action, she pushes past the kid, bursting into a dead sprint. She almost thought about grabbing the boy and taking him with her. Almost.

She looks behind her and sees a horde of a few nuns yelling and trying to catch up to her. She grabs the book from her pants to prevent it from falling out.

She can't be caught. They'd lose the case if she was, she'd be arrested if she was.

She has to get out of here.

She's made a huge mistake. She's going to go home and they'll arrest her for trespassing and tampering with evidence. And the Sisters of Quiet Mercy will win and that poor boy will stay there to live out the rest of his childhood and Toni won't be able to do anything about it.

She'll go to juvie and see Archie, but it won't bring her any solace because she'll be there for life and she'll never be able to see Cheryl again.

Maybe they didn't see her well enough, though. She was wearing a hood, so they might not have gotten a good look at her fading pink hair, and there's no way she looked long enough at them for them to be able to identify her face. The kid saw her, but she's not sure he can even speak.

She runs and runs and runs. The place is like a maze and she swears if she slows down, they'll catch her. Eventually, she finds an exit and she races through it. There are police in the parking lot and she knows better than to run from the police but she's not thinking about anything right now.

A police officer jumps out of his car and is yelling after her, but all she can think about is getting home and seeing Cheryl. The snow is falling so heavy she can barely see, the wind is beating against her. She's just running and running and running and the book is awkwardly bouncing in her arms and she just keeps *going*.

*BANG!*

Toni comes to a standstill, her feet digging into the dirt. For a second, she wonders if she's been shot, but she doesn't feel any pain. Her ears are ringing and it doesn't even feel like she's breathing.

"Put your hands up where I can see them!"

No. No. No. No. No. No.

Toni can't be arrested. She can't be in trouble. She can't. Not now. This is bad. This is so bad.

There's no way he can see her. It's snowing so hard right now. She could make it. She could run and there's no way he'd be able to catch her.

So she does.

She keeps running.

*BANG!*

She keeps going, twisting through the trees and feeling the cold bite of the air attack her. The snow feels like pins and needles poking and prodding at her skin. She's not stopping now.

The deep snow is halfway up her calf making hard to run and she can feel her toes going numb. She just keeps running and running. The police officer is yelling at her, but she's not listening. She's got to keep going.

*BANG!*

This one's farther away. She has to be making good distance. He can't identify her. It's way too hard to see.

She just needs to get home.

## Chapter End Notes

heyyyy! as always, comments and kudos are appreciated! have a good day!

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Notes

toni's in this for like three seconds, feelin like ras haha... like the other chapters, this one has got a fair share of homophobia so uhh just tread carefully. for anyone still reading this lol, i'm releasing this one a little early, because looking at my schedule i can pretty much guarantee the next one will be super late, so i wanted to make sure i got this one out in case i didn't have time lol. anyways, enjoy!

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

Kevin can't sleep. Everything's hitting him like a bulldozer.

He's guilty and sad and angry and exhausted because he can't *fucking sleep*.

He's pacing in his room. Walking in circles after long giving up on getting any rest.

Moose told him about Cheryl's testimony.

Kevin could've stopped it.

He came out when he was thirteen. His dad had promised him the world and assured him of his acceptance and Kevin listened. The loneliness was striking and unexpected. It felt like he had been flying freely as a bird along a buzzing highway with a truck coursing just behind him, moving just a little faster than him. He doesn't quite splat against the windshield. It's more of a bounce. He's dead either way.

At the time, there were maybe three out gay guys in Riverdale. The two ones that weren't Kevin were dating each other. Kevin was just fourteen when he learned if he wandered out into the woods, there were a *weird* amount of gay boys lurking. Kevin was desperate and his first time was against a hard tree.

The forest became Kevin's favorite place. Meeting kids like him, having *experiences* with kids like him. It was gratifying, exhilarating. His dad knew he went to the woods sometimes, and he knew what he did, but Tom Keller was a simple man who wanted to accept his son. He didn't know if intervening was the way to do so.

Kevin realized after a few months the boys he was meeting were from a conversion therapy center. He didn't know what that was at first. He went home and googled it. He immediately shut his laptop.

Admittedly, he didn't care much about where they were coming from. They found Kevin and Kevin found them and God, did it feel good.

Sometimes, Kevin would ask them to stay, he promised they could stay with someone in Riverdale. They always went back. Kevin didn't see why.

The more he went into the woods, the more he learned. He wasn't surprised when he heard of the things Cheryl said, but hearing of *Cheryl* being the one to tell everyone hit him hard. Call him whatever you want, but thinking of the redhead encountering that sort of evil hurt him in a way his forest flings couldn't.

He should've said something, shouldn't he have? His dad is the sheriff. Well, *was* the sheriff. Kevin could've told him about what was happening and he could've stopped it. He's sure there are other people who knew about the 'therapy' the Sisters offered, but Kevin, of all people, should've said something. Gay solidarity or whatever.

He almost forgot about the place once Moose came along, and then Cheryl went there and for some reason that didn't even feel real. Cheryl seemed fine after, or maybe she didn't. Kevin didn't pay that much attention. He should've, though. Kevin was thinking about Moose.

Kevin still thinks a lot about Moose. He hasn't come out yet. Kevin doesn't know why he ever thought he would. Moose doesn't care much for Kevin, he just likes the sex. Kevin won't get too mad. After all, that's how he was with the Sisters of Quiet Mercy kids.

He is sad about it, though. Kevin thinks he ought to break up with him. It's been *months* since their thing turned relationship has been consistent. Moose is a coward.

He *promised* he would and he still hasn't. Moose said Cheryl's trial is scaring him. It's scaring Kevin too. Only because he could've stopped it. And he didn't. He didn't even really think about it. It's scary to realize you've done something wrong.

"Kev?"

Kevin stops moving, looking to the door and pondering pretending to go to sleep. He decides against it and rather says, "Yeah dad?"

The door opens and in groggily walks his dad wearing red, flannel pajamas. "What are you doing up?" He asks barely managing to keep his eyes open. Kevin purses his lips before responding with, "Can't sleep."

Tom sighs, "Course you can't, you're not in bed."

Kevin doesn't respond for a moment. He doesn't quite know how. He's got a lot to say, but he's not sure he should tell his dad, or anyone really, and there's too much for Kevin to be able to get a coherent thought out.

He does manage to ask, "Did you know about the Sisters of Quiet Mercy?"

His dad takes a breath in, "I think we all wondered if there was something going on," he says. Kevin yawns and wrings a hand through his hair.

"I knew about it. All of it," Kevin admits. Tom frowns, scrunching his eyebrows in a look of confusion. He reaches and turns the light on.

"Why don't you... tell me about it. How you know, what you're thinking, just let it out," Tom offers, sitting down on the bed.

Kevin obviously doesn't plan to tell his dad about how he knows, considering his late night rendezvous weren't necessarily something he was proud of nor willing to talk about with his dad. It's not like he and Tom have ever been very good at communicating either. There's always some sort of tension. It's *always* been like that. They're just really different.

"I feel guilty, like after hearing Cheryl talk about it. I could've stopped all those kids from going through that and Cheryl wouldn't have to do this. And-and it's like I, of all people, should've spoken up. I mean, I've known what was going on since I was fourteen and I've known Cheryl's been there for the last three-four months and I still didn't say anything." It all kind of comes out like word vomit. It's just this big rush of words and feelings coming to light.

"Son, you're not the only one who could've done something," he assures him, leaning in with a warm look he continues, "You were in no way responsible for dealing with them, that's the justice system's job, and they're finally getting what they deserve. No need to beat yourself up," he says, patting Kevin on the back and offering a nice smile.

Kevin doesn't respond. He just sits there, twiddling his fingers. He knows that in hindsight he didn't *have* to do anything and no one's really mad at him for not. Well, no one actually knows just how much Kevin was aware of. Not even Cheryl.

Kevin just feels like such an asshole, using those kids who were being *tortured* for sex. He could've saved all of those kids but he was so focused on getting fucking laid because he was so fucking lonely, he didn't. He just waited in the woods for the next blonde boy with bruises Kevin didn't ask about.

Thinking about Cheryl going through all that makes Kevin's head hurt. She's just so powerful, she's this huge omniscient entity with a somewhat tragic backstory that no one pays attention to. Kevin can't even imagine her being weak, he can't even imagine her being brought down by them. But she must have been. And Kevin could've fucking stopped it.

"I should talk to Cheryl," Kevin lets out.

"I think that's a great idea," his dad responds, smiling one of those dad smiles.

Kevin gets up and walks towards the door, turning the handle. He'll apologize to Cheryl, she at least needs to *know* what he did. Or didn't do?

"Wait, not right now, Kev," his dad says. Kevin leaves anyways. Tom's a pretty lenient guy.

He gets into his car and drives to Pop's. He hasn't a reason to go there. It doesn't feel right to go to Cheryl's yet. So he drives somewhere away from his dad.

Kevin will get scolded when he goes back, but right now he has something important to do.

The car skids to a stop in the parking lot and he hops out. He takes a deep breath and pulls out his phone to call Cheryl. He leans against his car with his phone held to his ear waiting for Cheryl to yell at him for waking her up. He hears her voicemail instead. For a moment he considers going back.

He calls her again.

This time she answers.

*“What the hell, Kevin? It’s four in the morning!”* Her words are whispered harshly, laced with annoyance, anger, and exhaustion.

“Well, really it’s four-forty-five which isn’t that much earlier than you normally get up.”

*“Well, really I don’t care, you bumbling mongoose.”*

“What does that even- nevermind. I need to come over and talk to you,” he says quickly. He yawns a little. It’s empty in the parking lot outside of Kevin. No one does anything this early, or is it this late? Either way, no one does anything worthwhile at almost five a.m.

*“No you don’t, I need my sleep. Do you think this kind of perfection comes naturally? No, Kevin, my appearance and fantastic GPA are the results of my diligence towards taking care of my body, such that you will not ruin. Good night.”*

Jesus. She had a lot to say.

Kevin has more.

“It’s about the Sisters of Quiet Mercy.”

The line goes silent.

Kevin takes his phone away from his ear and looks to make sure Cheryl hasn’t hung up.

She hasn’t.

It’s still quiet.

“Cheryl?” He asks into the line.

*“What about the Sisters?”*

“It’ll be easier to explain in person. Can I come over?”

He probably could explain over the phone. It’s not hard to explain. He saw people going through the same thing Cheryl did and he just used them as sex toys instead of helping them. Or helping Cheryl. It’d just be shallow to say over the phone.



*“Right now?”*

“Right now. And can it just be us? The two of us, I mean.”

Toni kind of scares Kevin. Well, she doesn't scare him that bad. That's not true, she scares him a lot (she's in a gang). Plus, Kevin wants to be able to tell Cheryl the whole truth about how he betrayed her, and he can't quite do that with Toni around.

*“Anything you tell me, you can tell Toni.”*

“Cheryl, I'm serious. This is important and I don't want Toni hearing about it.”

There's a silence at the other end of the phone, Kevin fills it with, “Cheryl, *trust me* .”

Nothing.

Nothing.

*“Fine.”*

Cheryl hangs up.

Kevin lets out a sigh of relief. That could've gone much worse. Now he'll be able to tell Cheryl what happened, he can apologize and move on with his life. That's the important thing. Moving on.

What if Cheryl gets upset with him? She's definitely the type to be angered over even the most trivial things, and this isn't very trivial, is it? Kevin could've prevented Cheryl and so many other people from being *tortured*, and yet, he didn't. He let them be ostracized, ridiculed, and abused all so he could bang some kid who's even more desperate for love than himself.

That's *disgusting* . Kevin has always wanted what's best for others and he never had realized that pleasurable moments might not be best for people who are suffering if those moments do nothing to appease that suffering. Kevin has only been taking advantage of that suffering.

He deserves every ounce of Cheryl's hatred.

He doesn't want it, though.

That's why he walks into Pop's and orders himself and Cheryl a milkshake.

He doesn't want Toni's hatred.

That's why he doesn't want her in Thistlehouse when he tells Cheryl what he's done.

When he does walk into the cryptic mansion he's hit with the ever-looming darkness of the house. This sort of tension and heaviness feels built into it. He gets a chill in his spine when Cheryl greets him at the door.

It's somehow colder in the house than it is out in the winter air.

"Cheryl!" He greets enthusiastically, though he doesn't sound very excited.

"Kevin, please can you talk quickly? I'd rather return to slumber before the breaches of daylight." She rubs her eyes and yawns.

"I'll go quick, I want to hit the sack too," he laughs. She rolls her eyes.

He's pretty sure Cheryl likes him. They usually are pretty civil towards each other and Kevin genuinely cares about Cheryl (even if she is an asshole), and he thinks the redhead feels the same way. For the most part. Sometimes, she'll call him a 'stereotypical twink', which is annoying, but then he'll call her a 'lipstick lesbo' and that shuts her up. It's all in good fun. Probably.

The two take a seat at the couch and Cheryl takes the milkshake Kevin brought as a sort of offering.

"Well, if you have something to say, then say it," Cheryl says bluntly. She glares at him coldly, but then yawns once again and rubs at her eyes. It's pretty cute. She's really not that much of a hard-ass.

So Kevin tells her. He tells her about how he would go into the forest to hook up with guys, and she reminds him, "I already knew that, moron, have you anything of value to say?" He rolls his eyes and continues.

He explains that he knew of what was going on in the Sisters and that those boys were from there and he didn't do anything. Once, Kevin finishes with his tangent Cheryl says, "Is that it?"

Kevin frowns.

"Well, yeah."

Cheryl scoffs, "Kevin, it was wrong of you to use boys who were being abused for sex, but frankly, I don't care, and I don't see why you came to my house at five a.m."

"Because I could have done something! I could have stopped you from-from having to go through all the shit that you did!" He asserts.

"A lot of people could've, Kevin. I get upset by people's *actions*, not their *inactions*. Trust me, you'll dig yourself into a cheap, beat-up coffin infested with worms by playing this 'could have' game. No one cares but you."

She takes a sip of her milkshake while Kevin stares at her.

"You're a better person than most people think," he says simply.

"How very kind of you," she says sarcastically with a roll of her eyes.

Kevin doesn't feel a need to stay much longer. He's not sure what he's got out of this. But he must've gotten something.

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Cheryl sits on the swingset, her little feet dangling carelessly in the air as she watches her twin brother play with some other nine-year-old boys. Cheryl thinks it'd be nice to be a boy, then she could play with all of them, instead, she just sits at the swingset smoothing out the wrinkles in her dress. It's super boring.

At some point during Cheryl's rocking, another girl comes over and sits at the other swing. Cheryl's not very good at talking to strangers. She's too quiet. And when she does manage to say something usually it's the wrong thing.

"Who are you?" She asks.

"Heather."

"... so yes, sometimes we were harsh, but not so harsh as to be labeled abuse. It is under our religious belief that they are sinners, but it is also under are beliefs that sin can be forgiven, so I can't understand why that would constitute abuse."

Cheryl's half-listening to everyone's testimony and witness statements. It's not that she doesn't care. It's just exhausting to listen. It's tiring hearing them drone on and on about their religious beliefs and how there was no violence in the Sisters. It's hard listening to kid after kid tell the same story as Cheryl. And it's just as hard hearing kid after kid tell a completely opposing story to Cheryl's.

*"...what they are doing is wrong, it is our belief and you **cannot** take that away from us. It's just WRONG!"*

"Objection!"

"No no," Cheryl laughs at Heather's clumsy footing. She's got one arm around her waist with another latched on to Heather's hand. There's music playing in the background from the speaker; a lovely classical tune with the perfect mix of piano and violin, just what they need for ballroom dancing.

*Cheryl always preferred Heather's room, it was so much more fun than her's. There were posters and art supplies, and it just reeked of **Heather**. Despite Cheryl already being twelve, her room was still empty and bleak outside of her bed along with a few pictures.*

She tries to spin Heather around, but the blonde girl is latching too tightly onto her hand for it to work, and she ends up awkwardly stumbling over a pile of clothes. Cheryl quickly recovers, grabbing the other girl by the waist and pulling Heather towards her. "This is hard, Cher," Heather says with their faces a little bit closer than normal.

"It gets easier."

Cheryl grips onto Sierra's hand, worriedly watching her mother drone on. "... and I love my daughter. I would never do anything to harm her."

It's insulting that she would claim to love her. The woman who abused her for years and sent her to conversion therapy. And here she claims *love*. It stings more than it should. Penelope's always managed to hit Cheryl where it hurts. Mothers know their daughters better than anyone else, that never went well for Cheryl.

"If I had encountered abuse while I was at the Sisters, why on Earth would I send my daughter there? This is simply preposterous. I know my daughter, she just wants attention."

Cheryl's looking at her mother with this absolute death glare. This woman ruined so much for Cheryl, so much without any reason. Penelope finally meets her eyes and she blinks in surprise at the look on her daughter's face. Cheryl can't blame her. It's always surprising when your own blood looks at you with hatred burning in their eyes.

"Ugh, I have to go on a date tonight," Cheryl groans. There's a soft breeze cursing through the trees, blowing Cheryl's hair ever so slightly. Heather sits up in the grass. She looks at Cheryl funny, "Wait, actually? With who?"

"I don't know, my mother set us up. She's always talking about me finding a nice, strong man for the family. It's super annoying." The river is beating against some of the rocks on the shore, this is Cheryl and Heather's favorite spot. No one ever comes here, other people always go to one of the beach spots. That's why they like it. "Oh God, I'm gonna have to kiss a boy," Cheryl says exasperatedly. She puts her head into her hands.

Heather scoots closer to her, bumping their knees together. She puts a hand on the redhead's shoulder and with all the courage she can muster says, "We could practice if you'd like. Kissing, I mean." Cheryl turns her head away from her hands and towards Heather. She stares at her for a long while.

Her mom talks a lot about the 'homosexual agenda.' Is that what this is? Her mom always described it as something evil, but Heather's nothing short of benevolent. Her mother's made it clear she hates girls who like girls.

Cheryl kisses her anyways.

"... kicking me and kicking me and kicking me. They wouldn't stop. They yelled about my-my sin and how disgusting I was and-and they just wouldn't stop."

The boy on the stand has been crying for a while now. Cheryl swears he started crying the second he put his hand on the bible. Cheryl gets it. She commends the kid's confidence to be able to so freely sob away his troubles in front of all these people. It's pretty impressive.

She hopes Kevin doesn't hear about this kid's testimony, considering he got a pretty hefty beating for sneaking out to see Kevin. Probably Kevin, at least. Some gay boy. Cheryl

doesn't think there are really any options outside of Kevin. Then again, it's not like she's ever tried cruising for men.

"I just felt so wrong, and-and I still feel that way. How-how could I know if I'm doing the right thing or not?"

*The Blossoms plus Heather all sit at a large dining table silently eating their dinner. The only sounds are the cutlery hitting the plate and the rain tapping softly against the window. Cheryl's making subtle glances at Heather since the blonde girl **hates** steak and has even threatened to become a vegetarian. Every time she takes a bite of the meat her eyebrows scrunch up just a little bit. She always reaches for her glass of water immediately after swallowing.*

It's kind of cute.

Since their first kiss, Heather and Cheryl have decided to kiss a lot more. At first, Cheryl thought it was weird (and kind of wrong), but then Heather made her watch the pride parade on TV and now the redhead swears she's in love.

"Have you heard about that Keller boy? What's his name?" Her mother says with disgust. "Kevin?" Cheryl's brother responds. Kevin had just come out. Jason worriedly looks over at Cheryl and Heather. The look he sends them makes Cheryl almost start choking on her food, and she swears her heart might start beating out of its chest.

"Yes, God help that poor boy. Can you believe Tom is okay with his-his homosexuality? It's disgusting. If I was that kid's parent well I'd-"

"You're not, mother, no need to spoil our appetite. We have a guest," Jason jumps in smoothly. And that all but confirms it for Cheryl. Jason definitely knows. Her hands start sweating as her eyes dart around the room. She swears she might faint. He wouldn't say anything, would he? How does he even know? She and Heather had been so careful.

'Better Jason than anyone else,' she supposes.

"It is our God-given right to help those kids for the better. This is a sin that we wholeheartedly believe *needs* to be removed. So that's what we did in the kindest way we could. We would..."

Cheryl blocks out the rest of his speech, not wanting to hear the same thing again. It's all prayers and singalongs and art classes. They're all total lies. She doesn't want to hear it. She twiddles her fingers underneath the table, wishing Sierra wasn't questioning the guy so that she could comfort Cheryl.

She turns her head around to find Toni, who it appears is about to fall asleep. She's got her head resting in one of her hands and her eyes are barely staying open. Cheryl nearly laughs at loud at the sight. Classic Toni. The amount of times she's had to shake Toni awake during history is seriously uncountable. And despite her sleeping, she still manages to get an 'A' in that class. She's really a genius.

Cheryl turns back to the stand and half-listens to the man droning on about every little detail of the fake work he did. If Cheryl wasn't so annoyed, she'd honestly be impressed with the Sisters clean-up act. Their fake-story all lines up surprisingly well. Super frustrating and evil, but a little impressive.

Cheryl presses closer to Heather under the covers. The two are wearing only shorts and tank tops with their bare legs tangled together. Cheryl presses a chaste kiss to Heather's cheek causing the blonde girl to turn towards her.

Taking a deep breath and gathering up all the courage she has, Cheryl blurts out, "I think I'm in love with you, Heather."

Heather grins and reaches forward, tucking a strand of red hair behind Cheryl's ear, she whispers, "Me too."

They both lean forward and their lips connect perfectly. Cheryl smiles into the kiss. She's never loved doing something as much as she loves kissing Heather. She always has this sweet, tangy taste that makes Cheryl swoon.

*With a burst of confidence, Cheryl pushes herself on top of the blonde girl. Hands roaming and bodies pressed together she moves her lips effortlessly with Heather's. It feels so **good**. Cheryl doesn't think she'll ever experience anything as good as this.*

They don't notice the quiet steps in the hallway.

They don't notice the doorknob turn.

It all ends with Penelope's harsh words.

*Cheryl doesn't hear the end of it for weeks on end. Every step she takes is monitored. Her parents belittle her and ruin every ounce of good in her soul. Every bit of happiness is left shriveled and dry on the floor. Cheryl accepts the insults, she accepts that she is a disgusting deviant. She **hates** herself.*

She always lies about the bruises.

~~~~~

Cheryl shoots up in bed, her breathing is heavy, her clothing drenched in sweat. She looks around in fear, before reminding herself of where she is and taking a few deep breaths in. She reaches for Toni absentmindedly, not thinking about whether she's asleep or awake.

Or gone?

She frowns in confusion and stares at the empty spot next to her. That's not right. Toni must

be in the bathroom. But then, wouldn't she have noticed an obviously nightmare-stricken Cheryl? Her nightmares aren't exactly subtle. And this one centered around Nick St. Clair so there's no way she was quiet.

She wonders if Toni had just woken up and made herself a cup of tea. Cheryl learned quickly when Toni first moved in that she never slept very well. Cheryl thinks it could be her upbringing. Cheryl could never sleep well either.

But after a few weeks, Toni started sleeping really well. Or at least, Cheryl thinks she's been.

So where is Toni?

She gets out of bed, clutching the nightgown around her with a shiver and stepping into her slippers. She treads carefully throughout the halls despite there being no real danger. The only danger is a past of abuse engraved in the walls. Old habits die hard.

There hasn't been proper heating in Thistlehouse ever. When Cheryl had moved from Thornhill to here with her mother, they just placed a space heater in most of the rooms. Admittedly, that's a pretty big fire hazard and it's kind of funny that they hadn't cared about the likelihood of this mansion burning down like the last one.

Toni's the one that's been trying to get Cheryl to buy a furnace or just something more efficient to heat the old home. Toni's been regulating how much they use the space heaters, and right now all the ones outside their room are off and Cheryl's fucking freezing.

She grabs a blanket off the couch and wraps it around herself, making her way to the kitchen. She sits down on one of the chairs, still reeling ever so slightly from her nightmare and not quite wanting to go back to bed, and *especially* not wanting to go back to bed without Toni.

She calls Toni.

*Ring.*

*Ring.*

*Ring.*

*Beep.*

*"Hey! This is Toni, well you know that already. I can't come to the phone right now, you know what to do."*

She hangs up .

She frowns and tries again.

*Ring.*

*Ring.*

*Ring.*

*Beep.*

*"Hey! This is Toni, well you know-"*

Cheryl ends the call before the voicemail finishes playing. She tries once more and this time she notices a ringing coming from somewhere that isn't her own phone.

She follows the sound, calling Toni again each time the voicemail plays until she finds herself back in their bedroom holding Toni's phone which was previously on the dresser.

Cheryl sighs and sits down on the bed. She purses her lips and taps her foot anxiously. She sits there for a likely unreasonable amount of time before deciding that Toni had definitely left the house and was not in some off-reach corner somewhere or playing in the gardens.

She calls Jughead.

She asks, "Do you know where Toni is?"

He says, "What the fuck? It's two a.m., I don't know where Toni is, Jesus Christ."

He hangs up.

She groans and calls Veronica.

Once again she asks, "Do you know where Toni is?"

Veronica says, "No, oh my God, is she missing? I'll go talk to my dad and-"

Cheryl hangs up. She thinks it's annoying that Veronica involves her dad, of all people, in literally everything. And besides, Toni is not missing. Toni is a dumbass.

Maybe, Cheryl's getting a little worried, though.

She calls Sweet Pea.

For the third time she asks, "Do you know where Toni is?"

He responds, "Fuck off, it's two a.m."

"Wait! Do you really have no idea where she is? I woke up and she's gone and I'm starting to get worried." She bites on her bottom lip anxiously, waiting for his reply.

"I really don't, when did you wake up?"

"Like twenty minutes ago."

"Just give her time, Red. Call me in thirty minutes if you still can't find her."



He hangs up.

Cheryl groans and decides against calling every person in her contacts, because honestly, Toni doesn't do this kind of thing without it involving the serpents. Actually, Toni doesn't do this sort of thing at all. She's never randomly left in the middle of the night without telling Cheryl. She would never do that. Especially not during a snowstorm. *Especially* not while Cheryl's involved in a painfully controversial trial and could be in danger at literally any moment.

Cheryl's a little worried.

She's a little more than just a little worried.

Something could've happened to Toni. She could've been kidnapped, killed, all sorts of things. Cheryl's mom is nuts, maybe she did something. What if this is just some plan to scare Cheryl into dropping the charges? Or what if the black hood is back? Or what if Penny Peabody broke into their room and killed Toni because she's a serpent and Penny *hates* serpents?

Cheryl takes a deep breath in. And out. She reminds herself over and over that everything is alright, nothing has happened to anyone. Any thought saying otherwise is nothing more than a thought, it's unimportant and unfounded on.

She needs to think rationally. So, she marches out of her room, down the steps, out the front door ignoring the terrible chill and heavily falling snow, and-

"Were you just sleeping?" She asks angrily, though it's really more of a yell.

Billy quickly recovers, sitting up straight, rolling the window down just the slightest, and pulling his hat up in a desperate attempt to act like he wasn't just asleep while he was supposed to be doing his job. For God's sake, his job is basically just to stay awake. Toni could've easily left while he was asleep or someone could've broken in or-

"No."

"Yes you were, don't lie to me," she retorts with a roll of her eyes.

"I was resting my eyes-"

"Oh my God, never in my life have I seen such perpetual incompetence from a police officer," she interrupts harshly. Toni could be missing, something terrible could've happened, and *he's* being paid to stop that, but instead, he's not even conscious while he's on watch. Unbelievable.

He lifts his hands up in a show of innocence and says, "I'm sorry ma'am, it won't happen again."

"This is the second time it's happened, I'd chastise you further if it weren't for the bitter cold, so please, could you just do your job?" She asks.

“Of course,” he responds sweetly. It’s kind of gross. Well, not in that way. It’s just annoying. Cheryl’s annoyed and men are gross. She has an opinion, sue her.

“Whatever, just, did you by any chance see Toni leave?”

“Who’s Toni? I didn’t see any guy leave if that helps,” he responds with a shrug of his shoulders.

She rolls her eyes, “So you’re just as moronic as you are incapable of being a useful member of society and *doing your job*.”

“Still don’t know who Toni is,” he counters arrogantly.

The frigid air is starting to really render her useless, and she really needs to get inside because there’s an extreme risk for frostbite out here. Combine that with the fact that she’s only wearing a nightgown and realistically she’s minutes away from turning blue. It’s snowing *really hard*.

“Pink hair. Short. The only girl you would see leave this house in the middle of the night, how hard is that to understand?” He’s such an idiot. A selfish, privileged, annoying idiot. Jesus Christ, it’s so cold out and she has to deal with this simple-minded, lazy, ridiculous police officer while she’s freezing her ass off.

“Oh yeah, I saw her.”

“What? Where? When?” She blurts out quickly.

“I don’t know, an hour or so ago. No, more than that. Well, it was a while ago. I think. I’m not sure-”

“Oh, for the love of God, would you speed it up? Do you know where she went?”

“No, miss, she just left and told me to keep a careful watch,” he says with a bright smile on his face. She glares at him, annoyed with his barely useful information and retorts, “And a great job you did at that.”

She races back inside and immediately rushes to the bedroom wrapping herself in blankets. Her mind races and her body shivers. Why has Toni been gone so long? Where is she? How did she go anywhere in the middle of a *blizzard*?

This is insane. It’s ridiculous. It feels like everything is this huge cartoon. Nothing even feels real. The police officer outside her door who’s supposed to keep watch keeps falling asleep like someone straight out of a sitcom. Cheryl wouldn’t be surprised if one of these days she catches him munching on some of their food.

Her girlfriend has managed to leave in the most ridiculous weather, at the most ridiculous time, for no reason. She hasn’t consulted Cheryl. She just left. In the middle of the night. Cheryl has half a mind not to assume she’s cheating, but she can’t possibly assume she’s cheating because there are so many worse things that could happen. Right now, they’re at

such a risk and Cheryl's *always* thought the worst and now seems like the appropriate time to think that way.

For God's sake, Cheryl's involved in a conversion therapy trial and the other side is being *listened to*. People believe them and *agree with them*. It's unbelievable that a place where kids are being tortured can have any semblance of legality behind it. And people are so angry about it. Cheryl's so clearly right and people still are against her. Fuck, maybe she's not even right. How can something so seemingly obvious be so controversial unless it's not as obvious as she thinks?

There has to be some reason for people to think that. There has to be some logic behind it. Cheryl's been getting death threats and constant hate and anger. The villains in stories get that reaction. How implausible is it to believe that Cheryl's the villain and anyone who says otherwise is just wrong? How ridiculous is it for Cheryl to think she's just playing some mental game with herself in a less mental game against her mother?

'Very,' she reminds herself. It's very ridiculous. She's very okay and this is very ridiculous and the world is very insane and she very much needs to calm down. But how can she calm down when the only person keeping her grounded, the only person giving her any sense of self-worth and acceptance is gone?

Toni could be anywhere. She could be in danger or she could be off banging Jughead. Either way, she's gone.

*Ding dong.*

## Chapter End Notes

you made it!! as always, comments and kudos are greatly appreciated. have a nice day!

# Chapter 7

## Chapter Notes

what the fuck is UP? i'm back and ready to write lol. things have been hectic for me this last month, but things have started to simmer down. and now that basketball season is ending, i *\*should\** have more time (but that also means track is starting so who knows?). this chapter is pretty angsty and kind of a mess tbh. there is some homophobic rhetoric in the beginning, so tread carefully if that's not your thing, but most of it's pretty chill. happy reading!

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

“Oh my God.”

Toni stands at the front porch shivering and covered with snow. She’s pale and her arms are wrapped around herself in a desperate attempt to keep warm. Cheryl grabs the smaller girl, wincing at her ice cold hands, and ushers her into the house, which is admittedly freezing.

A trail of melted snow and dirty footsteps are left as they walk to the heated bedroom. “Jesus, Toni,” Cheryl says as she grabs a blanket and wraps it around the still silent girl. She rubs her sides in an effort to create friction while enveloping her in a tight hug. She kisses the side of her head, letting the cold, white snow prick against her lips. “Let me get you some warm clothes, darling.”

“Cheryl, I can-”

“Babe, just let me.” Cheryl smiles softly, trying to push away thoughts of where Toni had been. She only thinks of the white snow threaded in the strands of Toni’s hair. She grabs a soft blanket, tossing it to Toni who easily catches it and immediately wraps herself in it.

Cheryl grabs some pajamas and hands them to Toni saying, “Go change while I get you a nice cup of hot chocolate.” Toni nods with a shiver, holding onto the clothes.

As she leaves the room Cheryl frowns, trying to wrap her head around this. Toni had been gone for who knows how long and had come back as an icicle. And clearly pretty shaken up.

Warm, brown liquid spins slowly in the mug as Cheryl stirs the hot chocolate, her mind drifting elsewhere. The hot chocolate licks at the edges of the mug, threatening to spill over onto the white, granite countertops. To seep into the pure stone while Cheryl would grab a paper towel, wiping up the scorching liquid with a grimace.

It doesn’t quite spill, though.

Cheryl returns to their bedroom, finding Toni dressed in warm clothes, looking much better than before. And in fact, upon seeing Cheryl, Toni's face lights up. She grabs the warm mug from the redhead's hands. "Thanks," she says simply as she blows softly into it and takes a sip. Cheryl sits down on the bed next to Toni.

Her words die in her throat as she nods back at Toni, casting a soft smile. She stays silent while Toni takes more gulps of the warm liquid. She places a loving hand on Toni's thigh in hopes Toni will tell her where she had gone.

Toni doesn't though.

She only grabs onto Cheryl's hand and rubs small circles into it with her thumb. Cheryl blinks once. Twice. Takes a deep breath and making sure to keep any malice out of her voice asks, "Where were you, Toni?"

Cheryl stares at the other girl in a vain attempt to read her like an open book. Of course, Toni isn't a book, she hasn't any words written on her forehead, any letters dazzling in her eyes. She only sets her drink down while Cheryl thinks of all the possibilities for her answer.

She could've been cheating, or she could've sat out to watch the blizzard roll in before being caught in it. She might've sat on top of a hill, holding her camera steady toward the falling snow. Toni spends a lot of time at the hill near Sweetwater River. They had a picnic there not too long ago. Cheryl had planned on confessing her love there only to settle on feeding her red grapes and kissing the tip of her nose.

"Well," Toni starts, grinning ever so slightly at Cheryl before saying, "I went to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy." Cheryl scrunches her eyebrows, narrowing her eyes as she takes another deep breath to calm herself.

"Pardon?"

Toni frowns before responding quickly with, "I know it sounds bad, but look at what I found." Toni reaches behind her and grabs a short book from under the covers. Cheryl tries to keep her composure with anger building up as she says, "Toni, why would you-"

"Just look, babe."

The cover reads, *'The Cure to Homosexuality'* and Cheryl grimaces slightly upon reading the title. "Toni, the Sisters is a crime scene, how did you get that?"

"I broke in," she responds nonchalantly. Cheryl's eyes widen as she realizes what Toni had just done. Trespassing, tampering with evidence. And what for? Toni could be put in jail or fined. The trial could be ruined. Why on Earth would Toni do something so reckless and so incredibly stupid?

Cheryl closes her eyes slightly before asking, "Why would you do that?" and Toni smiles her dazzling smile, putting the book down in her lap with the words, "For *us*, Cher. This could win us the case." Cheryl frowns and says sharply, "You're not involved in this."

No. No. No. This isn't right. Toni broke the law. Toni broke the law so that Cheryl could shut down the Sisters of Quiet Mercy. And Cheryl's trying to prove the Sisters of Quiet Mercy is illegal. And Toni wants to prove that by doing something illegal, something wrong. She shouldn't have done that. She didn't have to. But she did. This is bad. This isn't how this should go.

*This isn't right.*

Toni rolls her eyes which only fuels Cheryl's frustration, "I'm plenty involved in this, Cheryl."

"No, you're not," Cheryl reminds her sternly. This has nothing to do with Toni. Toni doesn't have her name plastered all over the news. This isn't Topaz Vs. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy. Toni doesn't have to stand in front of the world and shout her trauma from the rooftops. Toni doesn't have to *care*. That's Cheryl Blossom. Cheryl never got to decide to play a part in this. Cheryl can't stand this. This is dangerous. Toni said she'd stay out of it.

She promised.

"I'm your *girlfriend*, how could I not be?" Toni scoffs, standing up. Cheryl purses her lips and reaches for Toni's hands. She knows better than to lose her composure in an argument. That's when things go awry. That's when someone leaves.

"You promised you would stay out of this," Cheryl reminds her of the promise from just a few days ago. Days which feel like years which feel like torture.

Toni barely notices Cheryl's plea, simply letting go of her hands and shooting back with, "Cheryl! This could win us," she pauses and corrects herself by saying, "*You* the case."

Cheryl stands up off of the bed and replies, "I don't care, Toni. I can't use that." She glances back at the vile thing before looking back at Toni.

"Why not? You haven't even read it! It's cold, hard evidence." Toni grabs the book and points it at Cheryl. She grabs the paperback manual out of Toni's hands. She looks down at it for a few moments before throwing it back on the bed as though it had scorched her hands.

She closes her eyes, bringing her manicured nails to her ear she responds with, "I'm not reading it, Toni." Toni must've noticed Cheryl's discomfort since she lets the book lie limply on the bed. Instead of arguing further for Cheryl to read it, she says, "Cheryl, don't be ridiculous. This is practically a confession, you'd be stupid to not use it."

"Toni, I *can't*. You'd be arrested if I did." Cheryl's voice is soft and quiet, trying meekly to deescalate the argument. Toni smiles a little mischievously, like a child getting away with something. "No one would know where you got it, Cher."

"They'll ask."

"You can lie."

“I’m not lying in court.”

“You’ve lied before.” Toni points a finger accusingly at Cheryl while the redhead simply scoffs at the poor accusation. Sure, Cheryl did lie in court. Only because she didn’t want Betty Cooper releasing the video of her brother dying. And besides, “That was before.”

Toni sighs, rubbing at her temples in frustration. “Cheryl, we can win the case with this,” Toni says simply, as though this were so black and white. But Cheryl hardly thinks they’d win using the manual. Even if the verdict rang guilty.

And, for the love of all things good, Toni can’t be involved in this. She should stand by Cheryl’s side, holding her hand and stroking her hair. Not standing in the front lines leading the charge. Toni can’t be the one to fix things.

Especially not like this.

“Stop saying we. Stop saying us. This is about *me*, Toni.” Cheryl points a finger at her chest, trying to cast her sharpest look to the girl of her dreams.

“You still haven’t even seen what’s in this thing, Cher!” Toni yells.

Cheryl takes a sudden step back.

Takes a deep breath.

Blinks once. Twice.

And quietly says, “I’m *not* reading it.”

“Fine, I will,” Toni responds sharply. She grabs the manual off of the bed in anger. She opens the book, flipping through the pages before settling on a passage, “Oh, here’s a good one, Cher. This one’s on ‘*electroshock therapy*’. Isn’t that lovely?”

Cheryl bites her lip. “Stop.”

*“‘Studies have shown that by creating a negative association with homosexual behavior, patients-’”*

Her fingers grab onto the edge of her shirt, twisting the fabric between them. “Just stop, Toni,” she pleads. She can’t keep listening to this. She can’t hear this.

Toni continues on. Louder this time.

*“‘-will experience fewer feelings of desire for those of the same sex and will feel a strong aversion to homosexual behavior.’”*

Cheryl bites down hard and closes her eyes. One. Two. Three. Deep breath. One. Two. Three. Deep breath. She opens her eyes again.

*“‘Many trained psychologists have come to the conclusion that using electrodes implanted directly into the brain while-’ ”*

“Toni, for the love of God, stop!” She snaps, her voice raising ever-so-slightly. Toni doesn’t bother looking up, still reading the page.

*“-showing gay pornography or lewd pictures of the same sex is the most effective way to create that aversion . ’ ”*

She can’t listen to this anymore. She needs it to end. For the words to be locked in a box, thrown into a fire, and burned to ashes. And for the ashes to be buried far from here. Far from Cheryl.

This all needs to go away.

Away. Away. **AWAY.**

*“‘It is our duty to remove the sin from those afflicted with it no matter how they fight. ’”*

“TONI, STOP!” Cheryl yells out desperately with tears pricking at her eyes. Toni glances up, her eyes softening slightly at the sight of Cheryl. She sets the book back onto the bed and takes a tedious step forward.

Cheryl moves back, shaking her head.

Toni wrings a hand through her hair. “Cheryl, don’t you see what we can end?”

“I can’t, Toni, I just-”

“This isn’t only about you, Cheryl! This could save so many kids and what? You’re scared you’ll get in trouble?” She scoffed before adding viciously, “Don’t be so selfish.”

Her anger bubbles to the surface and Cheryl can’t help but laugh, “Are you kidding? Of course, I understand what’s on the line. Of course, I understand the kind of good that could come of this.”

Cheryl understands more than anyone how much is riding on this case. She understands more than anyone how much that place deserves to be torn down. How that vile building tears people to shreds and stomps them in the ground.

Cheryl gets it.

Toni’s the one who doesn’t.

“You’re not acting like you do,” Toni snipes. And Cheryl can’t even believe Toni is saying this.

“Oh, right. I forgot that I live in some kind of bubble. I can’t understand the *real world*, can I?” She asks with sarcasm lacing her voice. She laughs humorlessly and says, “Gee, I must be



the worst person alive, right, Toni?”

Toni shakes her head. “No, you’re not, Cheryl just-”

“No, no, Toni, you’re right. I’m awful. I mean, trying to shut down a conversion therapy center? Ugh, just terrible, isn’t it?”

Toni’s eyes narrow as she says, “That’s not what I’m talking about.”

A sigh leaves her lips as she sits back on the bed. “Toni, can’t you see how hard this is for me?” She pleads with a shaky voice. “This *hurts*, Toni. This hurts so terribly bad. And to fix that pain you think you have to go and illegally break into some convent. I can’t use that, Toni. I can’t do this.”

Toni purses her lips before sitting down next to Cheryl and wiping a tear that had managed to fall upon porcelain skin. “Cheryl, this hurts me too,” she asserts as softly as can. “I can’t just sit around and watch you in so much pain.” She grabs onto Cheryl’s hand, linking their fingers together. “I can’t sleep knowing people who’ve done this to you could go on living normally. It’s not *fair*.”

Cheryl wants to tell her that using illegal evidence isn’t particularly fair either nor is it necessary, but she swallows the words and instead says, “I know, Toni, but you can’t just go sneaking around behind my back. You *promised* to stay away from this.”

“I just want this to turn out, Cher.”

“So do I, Toni.”

Toni glares at Cheryl with frustration in her eyes. “Then why won’t you-”

“Toni, drop it!” Cheryl snaps and adds, “Let’s just go to sleep and discuss this in the morning.”

Toni swallows thickly before saying, “Whatever.”

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Pop’s has always been a sort-of safe haven for the residents of Riverdale. The place has this pure and wholesome energy in it. With its fifties jukebox and colored lighting. It’s been known for having some of the sweetest milkshakes around made by one of the sweetest men to live in this bleak town.

The diner is frequently filled with young couples looking for a nice night out and friends looking for a cheerful atmosphere to catch up. There were regulars and one-timers. Those who had been banned and those who were given a free basket of fries.

Betty Cooper and Veronica Lodge went there every week to catch a bite to eat. Pop Tate has their orders memorized by now. All the two girls have to do is walk in and take a seat at the booth they always sit at and it wouldn't take long for Pop to get the girls' food along with their milkshakes.

Tonight, the two girls had done so as normal. They'd chatted about their math test that day, with Betty complaining about the boy behind her who had cheated off of her while Veronica scoffed at the girl beside her who kept shifting her shoulder so that Veronica couldn't see her paper.

The two of them are opposites for sure. Veronica, the rich girl from New York with an irredeemable past begging for forgiveness. Her appearance is sharp and her image cruel. Nonetheless, she certainly has a heart filled with treasure, but it's hard for her to forget how she had tainted it in the city she comes from. Even so, she's certain Betty Cooper and Archie Andrews can wipe the mud and dirt off of her shining soul.

Betty is the perfect, all-American girl craving something real. Something raw and wild is buried within her, picking the right to come out. She fears it's her father's sin. Or maybe she doesn't. It adds a certain color to her pastel pink world, a blotch of black upon her pearly white walls. She honestly would be grim without it. The blotch has turned her perfect, prim and proper world into something twisted and new, something that could be written in a storybook.

So, maybe it wouldn't be so bad if it was her father lurking in the shadows of her conscience.

"I didn't know Moose was in the RROTC," Betty remarks, trying to get a better glance at the football player. Veronica turns toward the group of boys gathered at the door. She takes a sip of her milkshake before saying, "He's really only joined so he can pine after a certain modern-day Joel Cairo. Totally desperate, I can only imagine it ends in untimely disaster."

Betty frowns, watching Moose laugh along with the other RROTC members. "Moose isn't gay." Veronica rolls her eyes, looking behind her once more. She grabs a fry and tosses it innocently into her mouth and informs Betty that, "He's a total closet-case ridden with insecurity likely to live a sad life of shame and guilt unless..." Veronica trails off with a devious smirk on her face which causes Betty to narrow her eyes. "We help him out a little bit."

"We're not outing Moose."

"I never said that," Veronica shoots back. She taps her fingers against the table and proclaims, "He just needs to understand that you and I, along with *all* of Riverdale are accepting and welcoming," she smiles, obviously pleased with her progressive and definitely not ignorant answer. Betty thinks it over for a few moments before saying, "I think we should just let him be."

Veronica rolls her eyes once again, "Absolutely not, B. Don't you want to see a happy ending be bestowed upon this pair of star-crossed lovers? This is a Shakespearian love-story written to end in disaster if we were to sit back and watch like sheeple."

“I guess.”

Veronica grins, bringing the straw between her lips. It’s unsurprising Veronica would want to see two teenagers be brought together considering her love had been taken from her. Ever since she had watched her dear redheaded boyfriend be handcuffed and taken away she hasn’t been the same.

She stands up and begins walking toward the group of boys now seated in a booth. Upon realizing Betty isn’t following her, she waves her best friend over. Betty stumbles over awkwardly in response. Veronica slides into the booth, bumping innocently into Kevin, and says, “So boys, how are you all on this evening?”

Kevin smiles, “We’re good, Veronica... Why are you here?” Veronica twirls a strand of her hair, asking Kevin, “Can’t I just talk to my favorite gay boy in Riverdale?” Kevin looks to Betty with a cry for help written on his face, but the blonde responds by shrugging and eyeing Veronica worriedly. Betty crosses her arms uncomfortably, glancing at the other boys at the table.

Kevin eyes Moose for a second before sighing, “Is that all I am to you?”

The kids all turn to look at Veronica, awaiting her answer to the unexpected question. Veronica only frowns and says, “What?”

Kevin chuckles, “Veronica, have you ever talked to me and *not* mentioned how I’m this ‘special gay unicorn?’” One of the boys snickers before quickly stopping himself and turning to Veronica.

“I’ve never said that, Kevin.”

“You might as well have,” Kevin scoffs, glaring at the confused girl. Kevin doesn’t usually act like this. Does he? Usually, Veronica just talks with him about James Macavoy and Chris Pine. He’s her GBF, her stylish scarf. He’s never complained about Veronica coming to him for fashion advice or input on the best Broadway musical. It’s not like he couldn’t have just shifted the conversation subject.

At Veronica’s silence, Kevin continues, saying, “Name one thing I like to do. Just one.”

Veronica blinks a few times. “You like musicals,” she sputters out. Betty awkwardly looks to the ground, while another kid cringes at Veronica’s admittedly poor response. Kevin simply laughs, “Nice, Ronnie, you really showed me.”

Her mouth gapes open for a second before closing again. Her best friend, her ride or die, immediately jumps to her defenses, “To be fair, at least she’s not being homophobic.”

“She doesn’t have to view me as a caricature.” Veronica’s about to defend herself when Betty steps up again, “She doesn’t, Kev. Ronnie is one of the most accepting people I know. This is how she acts with *everyone*.” Kevin stays quiet for a few moments, likely gathering up a response, but it doesn’t matter what he was going to say because Betty beats him to it.

“Kev, the whole reason we came over here was to offer you and your secret boyfriend support so you two could come out. That shows you how accepting she is,” Betty says with a smile. A really, truly genuine smile. There’s not a bone in her body that believes any of what she said was wrong. She doesn’t think it’s bad when Moose frantically glances to Kevin with nothing but fear and betrayal painted in his eyes. Not even when Veronica’s eyes widen and she jabs her with her elbow.

She realizes what she said wasn’t quite right when Kevin stares at her with a disgusted expression and terrified eyes. That’s when she realizes she had done more than stand up to Veronica; she had all but outed Moose.

The boys are all looking around at each other. There’s six of them. Five options. And only one of them is single. Upon this realization, Moose stands up quickly toward the bathroom. “Shit,” Kevin grunts, running after him.

The girls ultimately return to their previous booth, watching silently for Moose and Kevin to leave the bathroom.

It takes a while.

But eventually, Kevin leaves. Leaves with a beet red face, covered in tears. Betty wants to follow after him, but Veronica shakes her head and tells her to let him be.

Moose leaves later and doesn’t even spare the two a glance.



A yellow number two pencil moves between her fingers, marking the paper in her hands with words and ideas. Her eyes and ears are wide, taking everything in. Uncovering the truth. That’s what she does. She finds reality.

No matter how many lies can drip from someone’s lips, Alice Cooper finds the truth. She searches and searches, digging into the ground with a steel shovel made of purity. Trudging through feigned realities made of mud and fallacies made of rotting bone.

She stays unbiased. Perfectly centered. She’s spent years practicing this skill, allowing her mind to be willing to change no matter how certain she feels. Her mind is critical, eager to learn and eager to educate.

Words come easily to her. The skill having been refined since she had first picked up a pencil. She had chipped away at grammatical errors, killed redundancy, and augmented her vocabulary to the point where she was an expert in her field.

She’s a journalist through and through.

There's a certain power that comes with journalism. The public opinion is written on your fingertips. No matter how absurd, people will follow what they read. Believe what those smarter than them tell them. Or rather people with more power. People who spent four years in college studying how to deliver the public the truth. Why would anyone refute that?

People are stupid. So insanely stupid. Unable to critically think, merely following the trends of today. Who do we hate and why? They follow. That's it. Alice knows this. People don't think deeper than what's presented to them. They like to form their own opinions, but it's not hard to give them a small push in the right direction. Or maybe hold their hand the whole way there.

It's still free-thinking, right?

Riverdale had once been a boring town to stay put in for someone in her job, but lately? Lately, it's been exciting. Twists and turns at every corner. Gang wars, murders, crime, everything a journalist can hope for. Her mind has been filled to the brim with story after story. The letters on her keyboard are starting to wear away and engrave themselves into her fingerprint.

She's an expert.

She knows what she's doing.



Betty loves, more than anything in the world, solving mysteries. She dreams of becoming a detective. Waking up every morning and drinking black coffee before figuring out who robbed the little old lady on Elm Street.

She's seen the way crime tears people apart. She's seen people cry at the funeral of their murdered child. She's seen guilt flood people at once, tears streaming down their face at the realization of what they had done. She'd seen them on their hands and knees begging for God to forgive them, for Him to allow them past the pearly gates and to their mother who had finally finished knitting their sweater.

Betty sees how sin destroys people from the inside out. She'll do anything to stop it. To help the victims. And to help the criminals.

In order to become something great, you have to prepare for your whole life. Become a slave to the work necessary for whatever you set out to do. That's why Betty tries to solve a lot of things in her life. She likes to check herself too. She likes to wake up early and read the paper written by her mother usually. See if she had gotten it right. See if good old Greg had really stolen starry-eyed Archie's bike.

Usually, she was wrong.

But today? Today she's so certain she's right when she reads the words on the morning newspaper she frowns in confusion. She gets up from her seat. Sets down her coffee. And says, "Mom? What is this?"

She throws the paper down onto the counter and stares at her mother questioningly. The blonde woman frowns before perking up and answering with, "The morning paper, honey," then she pauses and asks, "Do you need your eyes checked?"

Betty shakes her head with a scoff. "No, mom. What is *this*?" She taps her finger against the story marked 'Blossom Vs. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy' and looks at her mom with a raised eyebrow. Her mom only looks more confused telling Betty that, "That's a story I wrote. Do you like it?"

Her mouth drops as her eyes go wide. "No, I don't like it at all. It's terrible." Alice puts her hands on her hips as she snaps, "What's wrong with it?"

"The trial's not even over!" Betty yells, growing more frustrated. The article was terribly biased and horribly articulated. Not bothering to provide any substantial information to allow anyone to formulate their own opinion, only essentially calling Cheryl a stupid teenager whose claims are groundless and hypocritical.

"Don't you raise your voice at me!"

Betty groans, "Mom, the trial isn't even over yet, and on top of that, this-this 'story' is *so biased*." The Sisters of Quiet Mercy, of course, was the Catholic orphanage dedicated to helping children and teens live happy, fulfilled lives.

"Well, Betty, I'm not just going to leave all of Riverdale in the dark."

"Then don't just light a single match. This isn't the full story." Betty presses the heels of her palms into her eyes. This is so bad. Cheryl's going to kill her.

Great.

Betty is going to be murdered by Cheryl Blossom.

Cheryl's going to show up on her doorstep with a candle in her hand. Say something sinister and lick her lips. And then drop the candle on their carpet. She'd probably watch in pure delight as the flames would rise up the walls, how the scorching light would lick curiously at the ends of Betty's shirt. Cheryl would stand there with her fiery red lips hearing Betty's burning white screams of agony.

All because of her stupid, idiotic, vengeance-obsessed, selfish mother.

"Betty, I only gave facts."

"The facts you *wanted* people to hear," she scoffs. She grits her teeth and asks, "Has Cheryl taken the stand?"

“Yes.”

Betty swears she could almost scream as she snaps, “You didn’t even mention that!”

Is her mom kidding? The bulk of the article should be about what Cheryl endured, or ‘supposedly endured’ at the Sisters. Hell, it should at least mention it. Just a solid line or two. Betty barely even knows what this trial is even about. Just that Cheryl’s unreliable and the Sisters are a part of Riverdale’s roots.

What kind of child abuse? Are they talking some means words? A couple of knees to the ribs? Or something entirely more wicked?

Alice Cooper was supposed to tell her that. Instead, she tells her, “It’s unimportant, Betts.”

“In what world is that unimportant?!” Betty yells.

“Betty, I didn’t outline Mrs. Woodhouse’s time on the stand, so why would I outline Cheryl’s?”

Betty runs a hand through her hair with a scoff, “You should’ve written about both.”

Betty finds it obvious who’s in the right. She might not have watched the trial, but she can’t imagine why someone would lie about something like this. At school, she had seen Cheryl’s heavy eyes and weary face. Had seen her shoulders droop further and further down with each passing day. Had watched her and Toni fall farther out of the limelight and gravitate away from the attention they’d usually crave. Betty knows who’s right and who’s wrong.

Honestly, just about everyone does. There can’t possibly be a single soul in this sad, rainy town who believes the Sisters are truly innocent. But the poor, old man down the road can’t believe the convent is abusive, what would that mean for his dear sister who stayed there for a few months in their adolescence? He can’t fathom the possibility of his parents doing such a thing to her. So they didn’t.

And besides, he thinks the convent is just trying to put a little bit of good back in the world. He doesn’t really see the problem in trying to make a kid straight. He figures it’s probably the right way to go.

No one really thinks the Sisters are innocent.

They just want to.

“It doesn’t matter. It’s already written and I’ll obviously be writing a follow-up once the verdict is reached.” Alice shrugs, deciding this conversation is dead in the dirt. She turns around and fishes through the pantry.

“It *does* matter. You control public perception and this is practically a slander article.”

“No, it’s not.”

“Yes, *it is*. ”

Alice turns back around with a granola bar in her hand. “Elizabeth, I would never write anything negative about a *teenager* , that’s evil.”

Betty frowns. “You did, though.”

Alice takes a bite of the granola bar. “No, I didn’t. That’s a fair article.”

“Mom.”

“Elizabeth.”

Betty rolls her eyes at the second usage of her full name. “You called Cheryl a liar.” Alice’s eyes widen in offense, swallowing quickly. “I said no such thing.”

“You implied it.”

“No, you just drew your own conclusion from what I presented,” she points at the newspaper article and continues, “Never do I make such an assumption.”

Betty leans forward onto the table and scans the paper for what she’s looking for. After a few seconds, she finds what she’s looking for and points to it. “You called her ‘the daughter of a murderous drug-dealer’, that definitely implies that she’s lying.”

“I’m just telling the truth. You draw your own conclusion. And besides, Betty, usually our conclusions are the correct ones, aren’t they?”

Betty frowns before giving up. It’s almost seven-thirty. She can’t miss school.

Hopefully, her mom will figure it out and correct her error.

Chapter End Notes

yooo, kudos and comments are always appreciated!! have a nice day xx

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