

Stuck on One

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/73990181) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/73990181>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	Heathers: The Musical - Murphy & O'Keefe , Heathers (1988) , Heathers (TV)
Relationships:	Jason "J. D." Dean/Veronica Sawyer , Jason "J. D." Dean & Veronica Sawyer
Characters:	Jason "J. D." Dean , Veronica Sawyer , Veronica Sawyer's Mother , Veronica Sawyer's Father , Bud Dean (Heathers) , Officer McCord (Heathers) , Officer Milner (Heathers)
Additional Tags:	Jason "J. D." Dean Being an Asshole , Jason "J. D." Dean Lives , Veronica Sawyer is a Mess , Morally gray Veronica sawyer , Unplanned Pregnancy , Religious Imagery & Symbolism , Abusive Relationships , Murder-Suicide , Dark Comedy , Eventual Smut , Mildly Dubious Consent , Vaginal Sex , Breeding Kink , Discussion of Abortion , Murder , Oral Sex
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-11-10 Updated: 2026-05-08 Words: 45,608 Chapters: 20/?

Stuck on One

by [Slushieguts](#)

Summary

JD shouldn't have survived the bomb—but somehow, he did. By some twisted fate, Veronica makes the reckless choice to save his life. When JD discovers she's carrying his child, his obsession spirals out of control—much to her horror and, for him, delight. Veronica must fight off unwanted desire, cling to her sanity, navigate high school, and stay one step ahead of the law. Part of her almost wishes the bomb had gone off and taken them both.

Notes

A few things about this fanfiction before we start.

- 1.) This fanfiction is purely based off the movie Heathers 1989 by Daniel Waters not the musical. JD will not be soft or show much emotion outside of his own twistedness. JD does love Veronica in some way shape or form it will not be healthy that's specially an element I wanted to explore since my last fanfic had him be redeemed. JD will be dark like in the original source material he isn't soft or redeemable so expect him to be terrible. Veronica will also be more morally gray like in the movie she still longs for a better world but she's more jaded and cynic like in the movie.
- 2.) With this fanfic I'm trying to keep them as cannon to the movie as possible, yet I might take some liberties for the story I want to tell so it could include some OOC moments.
- 3.) This story contains adult themes murder, suicidal thoughts/actions, and smut later on if any of this makes you uncomfortable or you're under 18 I don't recommend you read it.

Chapter 1: One

Chapter Summary

I've had this idea since 2024 I finally decided to write it.

The slate is clean

Those were the words he'd spoken to her as he showed her the bomb strapped to his chest. She felt disbelief, terror knotted in her chest, but fascination kept her rooted in place as he set the timer. Her heart raced; she was partially afraid yet unable to look away from the calm control radiating from him. Even as he prepared to take his own life, he was methodical, thinking one step ahead of her—completely and totally in control.

The bomb was frozen at forty-five seconds. He hit the bomb, and the timer finally began a countdown from fifteen. JD grinned at her, his expression solemn; she felt a million emotions flood her. Part of her was scared; another part of her wanted to hold him in her arms, tell him it was all going to be okay, that there was another way out of this. Yet she did nothing; she couldn't let him live, not after everything he'd done. That they'd done together.

Veronica watched as he spread his arms out in a crucifix position. This was the end of JD's reign of terror on the world. She watched a cigarette dangling between her lips, tears trailing down her grimy cheeks, waiting for the explosion to ignite so that she could light it with his ashes. Veronica didn't know if she was far enough from the bomb to survive, so she didn't care. She left it up to God if she lived or died. To her, JD was god; he had played with the fates of other students' lives, choosing who lived and died. Now it was up to him if the bomb was far enough away to not kill them both.

JD closed his eyes. He stood there for a long moment, counting down the seconds in his head. When he got to zero, he opened his eyes, confused. "What the?" JD asked, looking down at the bomb timer. The number was stuck on one, stubbornly refusing to detonate. JD rapped his knuckles against the bomb again, trying in vain to get it to work. Veronica watched wide-eyed. She gasped, amazed, as she saw him smack the bomb some more.

JD's abuse of the bomb didn't work; the LED light stayed stubbornly at one second. JD's grin didn't falter. He tapped the bomb with deliberate precision, frustration flickering on his face for a fraction of a second before it disappeared, and the cold indifference returned. "Stubborn thing," he muttered, voice flat yet edged with amusement, as if the bomb's refusal to go off was just another student to manipulate rather than a failure.

JD glared at the ridiculous number, refusing to finish what it had started. Veronica watched with amusement and fear, a cigarette still clutched in her mouth, still unlit. She had left the gun in the boiler room despite the fact that he was in no position to fight her. He had been

shot in the chest twice and was missing a finger. He was still standing. She needed to be careful. If he could make his way after her that fast, he could still be dangerous.

JD reached up with shaky fingers and yanked the bomb off his chest, the duct tape ripping. “You see that?” JD asked softly, looking at Veronica. He pointed at the bomb now clutched in his hand and shook his head. “Stuck.”

Veronica felt the urge to answer, to say anything, yet she opened her mouth then shut it. She inched forward on reflex, the cigarette forgotten, shoving it into her jacket pocket. She was close enough now that he could reach out and grab her. Her mind screamed at her to get as far away as possible and call the police, yet as she stood in front of him, she looked him up and down. He was still dripping blood onto the pavement from his wounds. He was a wreck; she was sure she didn’t look much better.

Veronica reached a hand up and shakily touched the side of his face. JD flinched at first, like she was going to strike him, before he relaxed into her touch. His eyes searched hers, a mix of disbelief and hunger. “You should be scared of me. I just tried to blow up the school,” JD muttered in disbelief.

“I know,” she said, voice steady. And she did.

Veronica’s hand hovered near his shoulder, trembling but deliberate. “This is insane,” she muttered, eyes locked on his. JD’s smirk widened, tilting his head. Their lips met—not soft, not tender, but sharp and daring, a dangerous game neither was willing to admit they were playing.

JD’s eyes flickered over hers, amused and calculating. He hadn’t expected it, yet he didn’t mind—it made their game of cat and mouse all the more interesting. Slowly, as what was happening settled in, he kissed her back with as much intensity as she was. The kiss wasn’t tender, not soft; it was intense, reckless, and dangerous, just like them. For a moment, the world narrowed to just the two of them. Everything fell away from the distant noise of the pep rally, the bomb beeping still stuck on one second, the smell of ash and blood overpowering. Then Veronica pulled back quickly; she wiped at the back of her mouth with her hand, red smeared across her hand that wasn’t hers. Her attraction to him was like poison. It was bad for her, yet she couldn’t help but give in every time, her need for danger and thrill clouding her judgment. She played his game, but on her terms.

Veronica felt her heart pound in her chest, and she could see her hands trembling. JD’s eyes searched hers, searching for an answer in her brown depths. “What the hell was that?” JD asked, both shocked and deeply entertained, like it was all a game to him.

“I don’t know,” Veronica said honestly. She didn’t know what had come over her or why she did what she did. “I guess I acted on impulse.”

JD smirked dark and low. “I thought you were done with cool guys like me, Sawyer.”

She met his gaze, wary but unflinching. “Don’t think this makes me your anything.”

JD laughed—it hurt his chest and made him flinch as pain shot through him—yet he grinned despite it all, too amused by their banter. “You were always one to ignore the obvious,” he said. He tried to walk toward her, yet his knee buckled underneath him. JD let out a pained hiss as he hunched over on the pavement, his wounds throbbing. He would have screamed if he hadn’t gritted his teeth. He was losing blood fast, the bullet wounds still leaking.

JD’s head spun as he stared down at the pavement, his vision flickering in and out of focus. Moments later, the world went black, and he collapsed onto the bloodied concrete in a heap. Veronica froze, shocked. She had known he was in pain, yet seeing JD so helpless hit her like a splash of cold water—he had always seemed all-powerful, and now he lay half-dead before her. Veronica cursed under her breath. What was she supposed to do now? Panic clawed at her chest. She had to get him out of there quickly before anybody at school realized what was going on.

Chapter 2: Heroics

Veronica's heart hammered against her ribs as she stared at JD lying helplessly on the bloodied pavement. Every rational thought in her head yelled at her to get help, leave him where he was, let natural selection do its thing—anything. But rational thought had left the building hours ago. And her hands were tied. How would she explain all this to the authorities? She couldn't tell them about the murders, her plot to stop JD from blowing up the school without implicating herself in the process. No—she'd have to take this into her own hands, solve it herself like she had been solving JD's fuck-ups for a while.

Swallowing down her fear and ignoring the pain of her own injuries from the fight in the boiler room, she knelt beside him. She lifted him under his arms, trying to get him up. He groaned—a low, pained sound that sent guilt and fear shooting through her. JD didn't deserve to live, not for all the pain he had caused the world, and yet she couldn't stand by while another person died.

“Come on, JD...stay with me, asshole,” she muttered, her voice barely above a whisper. She began to drag his motionless form toward her car. It wasn't parked far from the entrance of the school. With each inch she dragged him, she was closer to freedom.

JD's blood soaked into her grey cardigan, yet she didn't care, and his blood stained her hands red. JD's eyes fluttered open for a moment, his expression twisted into something painful and frustrated; he looked almost feral.

“You...you're an insane woman,” JD rasped, voice barely audible yet filled with amusement. “Couldn't let me die, could you?”

“No more deaths—not on my hands,” Veronica said firmly. She grunted as she forced him into her backseat. He bled all over the seats, and she winced at the thought of getting it out later.

“You're not dying. You don't get to go out like some teenage martyr. You can speak to the judge when the police come knocking on our door.”

He coughed raggedly, blood running down his mouth. He smirked through the pain, forever the smug asshole she knew him to be.

“I can't tell if this is heroic or pathetic of you—maybe both,” JD said, his smirk whipped off his face as another ragged cough shook his frame.

“Try exhausted,” she shot back. “I'm tired of cleaning up your shit show.”

Veronica shushed him, yet he refused to be quieted. Even on the verge of death, he needed to be in control.

“I can't decide if I hate you or...” JD trailed off, refusing to say the three words that they both didn't really know if they felt. He felt obsessed, sure—he wanted to possess her, keep

her to himself like a shiny trophy—but love? No, he didn't do that. Not since his mom died and took all of it with her.

"I want to fucking kill you." JD admitted honestly.

"I hope you bleed out on the way to my house," Veronica shot back dryly and slammed the door in his face, getting into the driver's seat.

Once the engine roared to life, Veronica kept her eyes on the road, yet her mind raced with a million thoughts. JD was mercifully quiet during the drive; he might be in enough pain to finally shut his smart mouth for once. Veronica watched the scenery fade past as she drove toward her home. Her parents were gone for work for a few hours, which gave her some time to figure out what the hell she was going to do with JD.

It wasn't lost on Veronica that she had made a decision she couldn't come back from by saving his life. She had given him another chance—that meant that he could kill again and try to get her in on it. Except this time, she wouldn't submit to his cruel games; he was at her mercy if he wanted to be saved. The thought was bitter to JD, yet he had no choice but to accept her help.

Veronica thought about the best way to get him into her house without detection. If she took him into the house, he'd bleed all over her carpet, which would raise immediate suspicion with her parents. She decided she'd take him down to the basement, where he wouldn't be seen and could bleed all he wanted. It was the way with the least chance of neighbors sticking their noses into her business. She would run upstairs quickly to get the supplies she needed to patch him up the best she could, then go from there. It wasn't a detailed plan yet, but it was the best she had.

As they finally got to her house, Veronica acted fast. She opened the car door, slamming it shut behind her, and began to drag him across the lawn toward the basement. JD was blissfully knocked out, so at least she didn't have to listen to his complaining as she dragged him into the basement. She ran quickly, getting all the supplies she needed—gauze, bandages, disinfectant, among other things. The basement was illuminated by one dimly lit bulb. She dropped him on the old blue couch her family had put down there for storage with a thud and took a moment to rest, her chest heaving. Dragging him down there had been no easy feat.

Veronica pulled out the first aid kit and stared at his shirt. It clung to his wounds. She grimaced—she would have to cut it off if she wanted to get at his injuries. Grabbing the medical scissors, she carefully began to cut the fabric, careful not to touch any of the wounds. She pulled it away and grimaced as she saw the bullet hole in his chest. It rose with every breath yet was weak, a reminder that he was alive, yet just barely clinging to life.

Veronica poked around the wound and he groaned weakly, stirring JD into consciousness as the pain invaded his senses. The bullet appeared to have gone clean through, which made this slightly less complicated.

Veronica tore strips of gauze and pressed them against his chest, trying to clean the blood as much as she could. She was no medical expert; she only knew basic first aid, yet it would have to do. She dabbed the wound with disinfectant before she bandaged it. Next, she moved

on to his hand, still wrapped in the blood-soaked, dirty rag from the boiler room. She cut it away carefully; blood spurted from the wound. She wrapped it hurriedly in fresh bandages. Done with her work, she began to dab the cuts across his brow and near his mouth. They were minor compared to the one on his chest and his missing finger, yet she was through. She didn't want all her work to be disregarded because he died of an infection.

JD stirred on the couch, groaning as his eyelids fluttered open. The dim light of the basement made his features sharp, the cuts and bruises across his face more noticeable. He squinted at Veronica sitting on the edge of the couch, her hands covered in drying blood from where she had bandaged him.

"Damn you, woman. I can't believe you," JD said as he shook his head with an amused smirk. He tried to sit up, pain shooting through him. It must have shown on his face for a brief moment, as she pushed down on his shoulder gently. With a grumble, he laid back down against the cushions at her command.

"Don't move. You aren't exactly in fighting shape," Veronica said, her voice steady despite her heart hammering against her chest. He looked strangely fragile without his usual swagger and perfect control. He looked like a seventeen-year-old boy.

JD smirked despite the obvious pain. "Fragile, huh? Guess we all have our weak moments," he said, his head slumped against the pillows. His green eyes flickered up to hers. "But you saved me...that's almost heroic. Or stupid. Maybe both."

Veronica didn't answer immediately. She reflected on her decision—her reckless choice to save him when every part of her screamed not to. The idea that she had given him another chance at life made her stomach twist. She knew he was dangerous...yet she couldn't stand by and watch him die. She couldn't handle any more deaths; three people were already dead because she refused to act.

"You're lucky that I've always had a love for chaos," JD added, a grin on his face despite the pain. "Makes me wonder why you are helping me instead of letting me bleed out, huh?"

Veronica raised an eyebrow, wary. "Don't flatter yourself. I didn't save you because I wanted to."

JD chuckled softly, the sound sending a shiver down her spine. "Yet here you are. Perfect little Miss Veronica Sawyer with my blood soaking her hands, her cheeks flushed because—dare I say—some part of her is still attracted to me even if she doesn't want to admit it, risking everything. I have to say it's impressive." He paused, letting the words hang in the air, his eyes locked on hers. "And kind of sexy."

Veronica tensed, heart hammering. She knew exactly what he was doing—flirting in the middle of death, in the middle of chaos. For a moment, she almost hated herself for feeling the flutter in her chest.

"You shouldn't be saying that," she muttered, brushing at her hair and looking away. "You shouldn't even be alive right now."

JD smirked, a faint twinkle of amusement in his eye. “Yet here I am. Guess fate’s got a sick sense of humor, huh?”

She sighed, glancing at his wounds. The rational side of her screamed again—he could kill again, destroy more lives—but she pushed the thought down. She’d made the choice. He was alive because of her. And now, as much as she hated it, she had to deal with the consequences.

“You’re going to owe me,” she said softly, not looking at him.

JD tilted his head, smirk widening. “Owe you? Darling, I think I’m already paying in blood.”

Veronica rolled her eyes, a shiver of exasperation—and something dangerously close to thrill—running through her. She shouldn’t be feeling this. She shouldn’t be drawn to him. But as she leaned over to adjust another bandage, she realized something terrifying: saving JD had changed everything, and she wasn’t sure she was ready for what came next.

Veronica wiped her hands on a towel. “You bleed on my mom’s carpet and I’ll finish what the bomb started. So you have to stay down here. Otherwise, my parents might find you. I don’t want them asking questions.”

JD laughed, just amused by her threat instead of scared. “God, I missed you, Ronnie, my little monster,” he purred darkly.

Veronica ignored the shiver that went down her spine at his words—the dark thrill she’d long since begun to associate with him. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to scrub blood out of my back seat,” she said dryly, standing up to escape the tenseness of the room.

His hand shot out, grabbing her wrist on instinct. Veronica froze; she glared at him, her eyes sharp and calculating, ready to defend herself if needed. She could never tell his intentions until he revealed them.

JD tilted his head to the side, watching her with that infuriating lazy grin, like he knew exactly what she was thinking. It unsettled her. “Don’t go too far, babe. I like it when you worry about me,” he said softly, almost a whisper.

Veronica was frozen for half a second before pulling her hand out of his grip, glaring at him. “I worry about a lot of things,” she shot back, voice sharper than she felt. “You aren’t one of them.”

“Don’t pretend you didn’t miss me.” JD watched her eyes, observing her every little action as he always did.

“Missed you?” She snapped, jaw clenched tight. “Try again, jerk. I didn’t miss you. I only saved you because...” Veronica cut herself off; she didn’t really know what had compelled her to save him. Finally, with a huff, she stomped out of the room to go wash her seats before her parents got home. Her heart hammered in her throat. She forced his words out of her head. She did not miss him at all!

JD watched her go, an amused smile on his face. She was right where he wanted her—in the palm of his hand.

Chapter 3: Tension

Veronica's arms ached from what felt like the hundredth time of scrubbing the same blood stain in her car. The metallic reek of blood clung stubbornly to the fabric clogging her senses with a dizzying scent. She gagged, the smell sharp she hated that it affected her so much. It was just another way for him to get into her head and mess with her even if he wasn't doing it directly. Veronica hated how her stomach lurched at the scent; it was almost enough to make her hurl up her lunch, luckily she didn't.

The stain was at least lighter than it had been if her parents asked if she'd had a terrible accident with her period. It was only the one stubborn spot that refused to come out taunting her for her efforts. It was explainable at least her back seat no longer looked like a crime scene. Veronica threw the sponge in the mop bucket with a huff. The water was a muddy brown color. She winced when she pulled off the yellow gloves that she had used to protect her hands in the trash can outside. She dumped the bloody water quickly before making her way inside. She needed to check on JD to make sure he was still alive.

Veronica took a minute to compose herself; she didn't want him to see her shaken from the blood; he already acted like a smug bastard enough as it was. Veronica was merciful; she wanted to let him starve or die of dehydration yet that would defeat the effort of her saving him so she reluctantly brought him a package of peanut butter crackers and a water bottle. Making her way down to the basement she looked at the couch where she had last left him.

JD was asleep, his chest rose and fell with labored breaths; he was still alive. Veronica let out a relieved sigh she still wanted him dead but at least her effort wasn't wasted. Veronica set the snack and water bottle on the table in front of him; it was still littered with stained towels and medical supplies.

Veronica sat down on the edge of the couch softly not wanting to wake him. She stared down at his pale face. He looked almost peaceful like this. All the usual bravado and arrogance were replaced by the blankness of sleep.

Veronica froze, hand half-raised — then jerked it back. Don't be pathetic, she told herself. She had thought about brushing a strand of hair that had fallen in his face behind his ear. JD stirred in his sleep; she recoiled like she'd been burned. His green eyes opened; he stared at her in confusion for a brief second before realizing where he was dawning on him. JD tried to sit up automatically yet as pain shot through him he lay back down with a grunt.

"Jesus, what are you a nurse?" JD joked he eyed her sitting next to him and he smirked. "You're awfully close to someone who hates me. Starting to think you like me, baby."

She exhaled sharply, glaring at him. "Don't flatter yourself, asshole. I just didn't want a corpse stinking up the place."

JD eyed the snack and water bottle on the table, his grin only growing bigger with the discovery. "Oh, and that?" JD asked as he pointed knowingly at the items she had brought

with her down to the basement. “That’s for me? You shouldn’t have Sawyer. Guess you’re not the ice queen after all!”

She rolled her eyes, her voice flat. “Shut up dickhead.”

“God I missed that mouth,” JD muttered as he looked down at her lips. She shot him a glare for the comment he was such an asshole. Veronica cursed JD laughed wincing when it made his wounds hurt.

“Keep talking like that and I’ll hurt you.” Veronica snapped.

“Don’t threaten me with a good time, maybe I like a little pain.” JD purred, he winked at her.

Veronica sputtered at a loss for words. She opened her mouth then closed it trying to find something clever to say and failing horribly. Her face was on fire, she turned on her heel ready to leave and of course, he couldn’t help but say one more thing to her to get the last word.

“Where are all the smart ass comments now Sawyer?” JD asked amused. “Just a little flirting and you turn into a puddle. I’ll have you throwing your panties at me soon enough.”

Veronica left the basement with her heart hammering in her chest. She slammed the door shut behind her. She stayed there for a moment, forcing herself to relax. Finally, after a long moment, she went to her room to take a nap. She was exhausted after today. She would check on him in the morning. She didn’t have the energy to deal with him right now if he bled out while she was asleep. Well, that was just his problem.

JD reached over and opened the package of crackers popping one into his mouth. He grinned oh how he loved to play games with her. “Everything is more fun with a little push and pull drama,” JD muttered to himself.

///

Veronica woke up nauseous that was the first feeling that hit her it wasn’t bad enough that she had to run to the bathroom yet she had to lie down for a minute until it passed. When she brought JD breakfast instant oatmeal and a banana that she hoped he would choke on he was already awake. It was a little after six she would still have to go to school meanwhile he’d have to stay home. There was no way he could go to school not like that.

JD was already awake when she went down there much to her annoyance. “It’s a little after six,” Veronica said as she opened the door to the basement she was quiet as she walked down the steps her parents were still home yet asleep upstairs she’d made sure to check before going down to see him. Veronica set his breakfast on the table in front of him ignoring the urge to dump the oatmeal straight on him.

She looked at his bandages which had bled through a little red dotting them but other than that it seemed fine. Veronica silently patted herself on the back for her work she watched as he began to scarf down his food she shook her head.

“I have to go to school today. You on the other hand are staying here. You can’t go to school not like that.” Veronica motioned towards his bandages people would question his beat-up appearance if he went.

JD paused the spoon halfway to his lips he finally took a break from shoving oatmeal into his mouth it was the first real meal he’d had since the morning prior he was starving turns out getting shot took a whole lot out of you. “I’m not sad about it really. But keeping me prisoner in your basement? Cold Ronnie very cold.” JD placed his hand over his heart pretending to look sad he pouted.

Veronica rolled her eyes it was becoming a bad habit with him. Instead of giving in with a snappy answer like he wanted she went over to the window all the fight draining out of her. She leaned her head against the window letting the coolness soothe her headache and pushing down another wave of nausea. JD raised an eyebrow at the out-of-character behavior yet he mercifully shut up for once.

After the morning was over Veronica felt marginally better. She ate lunch without issues and as she got home from school she binged TV in the living room for a while before going to check on her prisoner. She settled in for bed that night early she felt drained after the day she told herself that it was just lingering exhaustion from yesterday everything was fine she was fine nothing was wrong.

///

The nausea hit harder the next morning. Veronica didn’t even make it out of bed before she had to lurch towards the bathroom one hand clasped over her mouth. The sound of water running from the shower barely covered her retching she worried for a moment that her mom might be awake and hear her but no one came to knock on the door so she was fine. She straightened up she looked at her reflection she looked tired, not just your usual tired but a bone-deep one that settled into her very soul, her lips were pressed into a thin line, and she suddenly looked way older than seventeen.

“Perfect,” she muttered. “I look like utter crap.”

By the time she went to check on JD, she had tied her hair back into a loose ponytail and put on a shirt and jeans to look somewhat presentable. JD was sprawled across the couch a book in his hands one of the ones that had been sent down there for storage a spy novel one of her dad's no doubt. JD grinned lazily as he saw her approach his ever-present Cheshire smile in place.

“Well if it isn’t my favorite nurse,” JD said without looking up. “You’re late. My breakfast service is slipping.”

She glared at him. “You have two legs use them.”

“Can’t leave the basement sweetheart,” JD reminded her he closed the book after dog-eared his page setting it on the table he watched her with his head cocked to the side like a predator watching its prey. JD smirked as he looked her over she looked pale and a little sickly.

“What’s wrong Veronica? Everything okay? You aren’t losing sleep over me are you?”

“More like losing patience.” Veronica snarled she walked away from him wanting to put some distance between them. Despite the space she could still feel his calculating gaze on her analyzing her every movement. The smell of the oatmeal made her stomach turn again yet she ignored it. Everything was too bright and the sounds too loud as he shifted on the couch the ancient piece of furniture creaking under his weight.

“You’ve been acting funny the last two days. Jumpier. Quieter. A little bit sick in the mornings...” JD’s gaze narrowed on her assessing. She turned around she met his gaze she swallowed harshly as she saw the coldness in his green eyes. It reminded her that he was a monster he would do anything for his own gain. He was playing with her trying to get her to react so he could get in her head and take control.

Veronica needed to wrestle it back she needed to put him in his place remind him that he was only her by her mercy because she had saved him.

She turned on him, her heartbeat stuttering. “Cut it out.” She growled trying to sound threatening yet she didn’t feel it in the oversized t-shirt and with her messy hair.

JD didn’t seem to think that she was threatening either judging by how he laughed at her threat. “Cute Ronnie though I’m just kidding.” JD said he held his hands out placatingly in front of him like he was taming a rabid dog and not trying to cull her anger. Veronica huffed crossing her arms over her chest.

The girl left after that JD’s words echoing in her mind. The rest of the morning dragged she tried to focus on her homework yet her mind kept drifting back to him. Her stomach ached and her head hurt she she ignored the implications. She told herself it was stress or exhaustion yet deep down she knew the truth. She was fucked.

///

The next time she awoke it was evening the sound of rain woke her from her nap. She’d been sleeping a lot the past few days she felt exhausted just from going about her day even when she didn’t do anything physically taxing. Veronica was able to stay awake no longer than thirty seconds before she had to bolt to the bathroom this time she missed. As she sat cleaning up her own bile she breathed through her mouth the smell would be enough to make her want to hurl again.

Veronica shook as she got his food ready it was a popart and toast she was feeling a little nicer now. As she descended the stairs she found him lying on the couch in the same spot he’d been the last three days. He still looked a mess his hair had gone greasy from him not being able to get a bath and he was still covered in all the grime and blood from the boiler room. Veronica pitied him almost when her parents left for the day it was the weekend if she felt merciful enough she might give him a rag to wash himself he still wasn’t strong enough to get in the shower or move much no matter how much his mouth tried to convince you he was in control.

Veroncia set her offerings in front of JD. He grinned as soon as he saw her. “Evening sunshine,” JD greeted her looking her up and down his eyes appraising. “You look like death warmed over.”

“Gee, thanks,” Veronica said as she sat beside him on the couch not that she wanted to be that close to him but because she was feeling another wave of nausea assault her. Veronica stayed as far from him as she could JD the asshole as always sprawled out further like a cat in a sunbeam his knee touched hers she ignored the warmth that radiated from his body.

He smirked. “What’s on the menu for dinner?” JD asked as he eyed the contents on the table. “Poptart and toast not bad considering I thought you were gonna kill me with bland food.”

“Don’t tempt me,” Veronica muttered as she slid the poptart closer to him.

JD finally took initiative he grabbed the foiled pastry undoing the wrapper he began to eat it slowly. He watched her the entire time waiting for her to say something when she didn’t he raised an eyebrow.

“You’re awfully quiet today,” JD commented.

“I’m tired.”

“You’ve been tired for days even before the explosion.”

“I’ve been tired because I’ve had to keep cleaning up your messes.” She snapped harsher than she meant to. His grin faltered for a second before it returned instantly.

“There she is,” He said softly, almost fondly. “The bites still there good.”

She wanted to tell him to shut up, throw something at his head leave him in the basement by himself god knows he deserved it. But instead, she looked at him for the first time really looked at him she noticed the purple bruises along his face one on his cheek the other on his jaw, the soft rise and fall of his chest, and the dullness that echoed in his normally sharp eyes.

He wasn’t invincible. Not even close no matter how much he tried to make himself appear so.

Veronica sighed and stood up done trying to fight him for now. She swayed lightly she used the couch to hold her up. The nausea hit her suddenly like a freight train it hadn’t gone away yet she’d hoped with a little rest that it would be gone. She pressed a hand to her mouth leaning over the sink in the small bathroom attached to the basement she barely kept what little was left in her stomach down.

“Hey,” JD called after her, his tone shifting losing some of the teasing edge. “You okay?”

She ran water putting her hands under it she splashed some on her face it brought her back down to reality a bit. Veronica leaned against the counter the nausea letting up a bit thankfully. “I’m fine.” She lied.

“Bullshit.”

She turned glaring at him, but he was already pushing himself upright, one hand braced against the couch. “Sit down,” she ordered. “You can barely move.”

“And you can barely stand without throwing up,” He shot back. “What’s wrong with you Veronica?”

The way he said her name soft and almost genuine made her chest tighten. She opened her mouth to tell him to mind his own business, to throw his concern back in his face. But instead she whispered, “I don’t know.”

For the first time since she had met him, he had nothing to say. No smart quip or biting words to control the situation. JD was silent he stared at her with an eyebrow raised maybe some small part of him was actually worried about her. She pushed the thought away he was an asshole who only cared about himself he didn’t care about her at all.

JD pushed himself to stand up. She thought for a moment that he might collapse yet he used the arm of the couch for support. Slowly he wobbled his way over to her she backed away until she was pressed against the wall she could easily fight him if it came down to it. Veronica flinched as he brought a hand up to cup her cheek. “What are you hiding woman?” JD asked in a low voice which sent a shiver down her spine.

“I’m not hiding anything,” Veronica hissed through clenched teeth yet they both knew that it was a lie. “Fuck off before I hurt you.”

JD chuckled at her threat he wasn’t scared of her he never would be. “You know for someone that doesn’t like to talk about feelings you’re awfully defensive about this one,” JD muttered.

Veronica tore her face out of his grip she glared at him if looks could kill he would die a million times over. She clenched her fists, nails digging into the palm of her hands. “Just drop it JD. I don’t need you to fix me!”

JD gave a humorless chuckle he shook his head. “You think I’m trying to fix you? I don’t care enough to fix you I love how morally broken you are. No I just wish you wouldn’t pretend to be some big superhero waltzing about as if you were feeding starving kids in Africa and not saving a murderer. You’re damaged it’s obvious to anyone who actually looks. You’re no better than me.”

“I am not as bad as you.” She shot back yet they both knew the truth. She was complicit in the murders she’s helped take three lives even if by accident, she never told the police to scared about what would happen to her if she did, she chose to save him for whatever reason, and even now she still didn’t turn him in. Veronica wasn’t the inventor of the machine yet she still rode along content to let him pull whatever strings he wanted speaking of rebellion that treaded in violence yet doing nothing to end his reign of terror for good.

“Keep telling yourself that darling,” JD purred he grinned his smile was wide he looked like the cat that got the canary. “You pretend you have it all together yet you’ve got the same shit everyone else does. Stop pretending to be so high and mighty.”

“Veronica felt a pang of something deep in her something impossible to ignore. The raw honesty in his voice unsettled her. *Everyone’s got their shit*. She had a feeling that JD had more than anybody else that she’d ever known. But she didn’t want to know. She didn’t want to care.

“I didn’t ask for your advice.” She snapped yet it sounded weak to her own ears.

JD’s usual smirk that annoyed the hell out of her was still in place. It looked more like a reflex now than genuine amusement. Slowly he backed up letting her finally have space to breathe comfortably.

“You don’t have to ask. You never do.”

Veronica stood there feeling small she always did compared to him. It was hard to compare herself to somebody so enigmatic even as horrible as he was. JD did it in a quiet way he was never loud with his appearance unless provoked he was content to stay in the corner. His energy was subtle yet always present he screamed danger, rebellion, and change violently, and teenage angst that was what attracted her to him in the first place.

She pushed past him to the stairs she needed to get away from him before he somehow read her more. He was good at seeing through any wall she built up while he was unreadable as a blank book he did it intentionally so he could maintain power over her. Veronica didn’t want to acknowledge his words give him the satisfaction of shaking her yet she kept hearing them echoing in her mind. *You’re just like me.*

As she lay down on her bed that evening the nausea finally gone she decided to finally figure out if the suspicion she was getting was true. Throwing on a jacket she made her way outside there was a corner shop only a few blocks away she would walk to clear her head and pick up the things she needed. Not sure really what she’d do if her suspicions were right she set off in the rain-filled evening to figure out the truth.

Chapter 4: Results

Veronica walked to the store with her hands stuffed in her pockets. It wasn't cold out yet, but she didn't fancy getting rained on either. It was the middle of October; she hoped that her exhaustion was just seasonal or some sickness she couldn't shake. Yet deep down, she had the feeling something wasn't right. Veronica walked into the pharmacy with her shoulders hunched, looking like a wild animal about to bolt at any moment.

She walked down the aisles until she stopped in front of the pregnancy tests. Some promised instant results, others were more clinical than boastful about their fast answers. Veronica scanned them all; her hand shook as she grabbed one without thinking. 'This is fine,' she repeated to herself in her head over and over again, trying in vain to keep herself calm.

Veronica trudged over to the register. She refused to look the clerk in the eye—it was a teenage boy around her age. He checked her out without a word. She felt like he was silently judging her, even though he didn't even spare her purchase a glance. Grabbing her items and change, she walked back to her house, feeling shame and fear follow her like a dark cloud.

'What if I'm just being paranoid?' Veronica thought to herself. It was possible that she had just caught a stomach bug and was being overdramatic. 'What if I'm right?' The thought slammed into her like a freight train, sending a shiver down her spine. She hoped, for once, that she wasn't correct.

Veronica went to the bathroom the first thing she got home. She locked the door behind her. Setting the test on the bathroom counter, she opened the box, reading the directions before she went about her task. Once done, she set the test flat on the counter and paced around the bathroom, her nerves eating away at her. She glanced at the clock—the minutes seemed to go by like years, crawling slowly along. Finally, after what felt like forever, ten minutes had passed. Anxiously, she approached the test.

Veronica's feet felt heavy; she moved slowly, like she was being dragged down. She wished that she had never bought the test, but she had to know. She couldn't live in ignorance forever. She had to face this head-on, no matter the result. With one last shaky breath, she picked up the test. What she saw made her heart stop for a beat. Her hand trembled as she held the stick up.

The results appeared instantly, clear as day. Two lines stared back at her accusingly, undeniable in their confirmation. The line wasn't faint; it wasn't a maybe—she couldn't deny it. It was bold and unmissable.

She blinked, not sure if her mind was playing tricks on her. But when she looked again, it was still there. Two lines.

"I'm pregnant."

The words didn't make sense to her. This wasn't supposed to happen. It was like the world had flipped on its head—she was living someone else's reality, not her own. Yet this was her

life, and she had to deal with the consequences of her own teenage stupidity. She closed her eyes, thinking back briefly to a few weeks ago. She remembered that she'd forgotten her birth control. She had been too worried about the murders to think about something as mundane as taking her medicine.

Her breath hitched in her throat; she felt lightheaded all of a sudden, like the room was closing in on her. She clutched at the edge of the sink desperately as the weight of what the test told her settled in.

She was pregnant. Not only that, but with JD's baby—it was undeniably his. She had been with no one else in her entire life, so he was the father. That didn't soothe her nerves at all. She was pregnant with a psychopath's baby. She couldn't tell JD—not only because she didn't have the words yet, but because she didn't know how he'd react. Would he get mad? Upset? Happy? She didn't know, and that scared her more than anything. Veronica was alone in this battle; she didn't know what to do yet.

Veronica shoved the test in her pocket. She wasn't about to leave it in the trash can for her parents to find—that'd be even worse than if JD were to find it. She'd never be able to look them in the eyes again after that. Taking it with her to her room, she shoved it in the bottom of her dresser. Curling up in bed, the exhaustion that had been haunting her for the past few weeks settled in.

Veronica brought her knees up to her chest, curling into a little ball. She let the tears that wanted to fall down her face go. She cried herself to sleep. As she dozed peacefully, she didn't hear it—the basement door unlocking, or the sound of someone creeping into her room.

Chapter 5: Reveal

The floor creaked lightly, a sound that would have roused her on any other night. But exhaustion had caught up to Veronica, so she remained peacefully asleep. Her cheeks were still wet with tears, her breath even and slow.

The figure paused in the hallway for a second. The faint yellow glow of the light that spilled in from the hallway illuminated a tall, lean figure. A low sigh escaped his lips, barely audible in the quiet of the room. Slowly, JD stepped closer once he confirmed that she was still asleep.

His eyes lingered on Veronica's sleeping form. For a moment, something almost tender swept across his face before it was replaced by a blank expression. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a sharp, metallic object. It gleamed menacingly in the low light. He spun the switchblade idly between his fingers before snapping it shut again. The sound was sharp and final.

"Sleeping, are we?" he murmured softly. "You always did look peaceful when you don't know what's going on."

He crouched beside the bed. A lock of her dark hair had fallen across her face, and he brushed it behind her ear tenderly before standing to leave. She stirred but didn't wake. JD grinned. It wasn't warm. Instead, it was calculating. He could kill her now, in her sleep. He'd recovered the last few days, but he was still weak. One slice of the switchblade across her throat...

Her throat would be slashed. She wouldn't even have time to scream before she choked on her own blood. It would be quick, mostly painless, and no one would know it was him. JD almost contemplated it, opening the knife again. He opened and closed it as he decided. Shaking his head, he pocketed the knife. He didn't have the heart to kill her—not when she looked so innocent like that.

"I thought you might've figured it out by now," he whispered. "You've been... off lately." His gaze drifted to her dresser—something about the slightly open drawer caught his attention. His eyes narrowed.

Quietly, he slid the drawer open further. Nothing unusual at first glance—folded shirts, socks, pajama pants. But then he saw it: the corner of a small white box, just barely visible. JD reached in and pulled it out, tilting it toward the dim light.

The pregnancy test box.

For a long, unbearable silence, JD didn't move. His thumb traced over the brand name printed across the front. Then his jaw flexed, and his breathing deepened.

"Well," he said, his voice soft, measured—too calm. "That's... interesting."

He looked at Veronica again, fast asleep and oblivious.

“You and me,” JD whispered, a hint of a smile curling his lips. “Guess we’re really stuck with each other now, huh?”

He replaced the box exactly where it had been, closed the drawer, and stood up. The blade clicked open again in his hand—not as a threat this time, but almost out of habit, a nervous tick.

JD walked to the window, glancing out at the street below. Rain had started to fall—slow, rhythmic, like a heartbeat.

“We’ll make it work,” he said quietly, almost to himself. “We always do.”

Then he turned back toward her sleeping form, eyes glinting in the dark. “You just have to trust me, Veronica.”

He stepped back into the shadows, the sound of the basement door clicking shut moments later.

Downstairs, the rain intensified, beating harder against the glass. Veronica stirred in her sleep, brow furrowing, as if she could sense something just beyond her dreams—the echo of a promise or a threat.

When she woke the next morning, the first thing she noticed was that the air in her room smelled faintly of cigarette smoke. And the second was that her dresser drawer was just slightly open.

Veronica rubbed her eyes, trying to get rid of the lingering traces of sleep. The room was still dark, the only light coming in from the crack in her curtains. She sat up slowly. Her room still reeked of cigarettes. She hadn’t smoked in a while—not since before she and JD had broken up.

She stiffened. Her dad smoked, but never inside. He knew her mom would throw a fit if he did. That meant...

Veronica shook her head. It was impossible. He hadn’t been strong enough to barely stand yesterday. There was no way he could make his way from the basement all the way to her room. Not to mention, she’d locked the basement door—he wasn’t getting out if he tried. She was just being paranoid.

Turning on the light, she looked over at her dresser, out of habit.

She walked over, her eyes flicking to the drawer. She hadn’t remembered leaving it open, but maybe she’d forgotten in her haste, in all the emotion from the night before. The box was in the place she’d left it, and nothing was moved. Yet she had a sinking feeling in her chest. She pulled the box out, opening the lid. The test was exactly where she’d left it—the two lines staring back at her accusingly. Veronica shoved it back under her clothes, slamming the drawer shut with more force than necessary. She got dressed for the day.

Veronica hadn't told JD about the results. She didn't want to. She wasn't about to give him another reason to try to control her. No, she'd keep this a secret for now.

Making her way down the stairs, she still had that feeling—something wasn't right—but she pushed it down. She was just being paranoid. Veronica grabbed a simple breakfast—cereal and an apple—before making her way down to the basement stairs. She pulled out the key that locked the basement door, jamming it into the lock. It turned. The door had been locked. That eased some of her nerves, at least.

As soon as she opened the door, she was assaulted by the smell of cigarette smoke. Veronica coughed, almost dropping the bowl in her hands. The smoke filtered through the air—noxious and making her stomach queasy. Veronica pushed through her nausea, making her way down the stairs, breathing through her mouth. She saw JD finally. He was sprawled across the couch. In one hand, he had a cigarette dangling between his fingers. He took drags off it every so often, releasing it into the air. His other hand held a book.

As soon as he saw her, he grinned, setting the book aside. He patted the spot beside him on the couch. JD looked too happy for someone who was injured and locked in a basement.

“Morning, sweetheart. What did you bring me today?” JD asked, his voice sickly sweet, making her skin crawl.

“Cereal and fruit,” Veronica said, setting the offerings before him, careful to keep her distance. JD was watching her with a sharp look in his eyes. She didn't know what it meant, but he was watching her like a hawk, analyzing her every movement.

“You shouldn't be smoking,” she said softly, trying to keep her voice steady. “Not with... everything.”

She didn't say that it was making her nausea worse or that her mom would be suspicious if the house suddenly smelled like smoke. He smirked, exhaling a stream of gray smoke right in her face. Veronica coughed, doubling over, fighting back the instinct to vomit right then. JD only laughed. He grabbed her arm, and she panicked, trying to pull away. Yet his grip was strong for someone who was injured. If he could grab her, could he somehow get out?

The thought hit her like cold water to the face. She gasped as he pulled her onto the empty spot on the couch beside him.

“Relax, I was just having one. I deserve it for healing,” JD said, his voice smooth and practiced. He stubbed the cigarette out on the edge of the table. “You need to relax, Ronnie. You're so tense these days.” JD's gaze flickered over her face, studying her, then drifted down to her stomach before returning to her eyes. The movement was so quick, she almost missed it. Almost.

Veronica felt her stomach tighten as fear washed over her. Did he know? It was impossible. There was no way he could have gotten out of the basement. It had been locked when she'd gone down there.

JD pulled her further against him until her head rested against his chest. He was wearing one of her father's old shirts and his trench coat. It was stained with blood, yet he didn't seem to care. The smell of iron burned her senses—sharp, metallic, and disgusting.

"JD, did you leave the basement last night?" Veronica asked, her voice so quiet she almost didn't hear herself. She didn't want to know. If he had, that meant he could get out whenever he wanted.

JD didn't answer for a long moment. He gave her a look like she was stupid, and she shriveled under his gaze.

"Babe, where else could I go besides staying down here?" JD smirked, relishing the way she flinched when he called her "babe." "I can't exactly go far, not with my injuries."

"Yeah," she said carefully. "I guess not."

He leaned back against the couch, bringing her with him. He wrapped his arms around her waist, resting his head on top of Veronica's. He breathed in her familiar scent—vanilla and lavender. He had missed it. Missed her. The thought made him clutch her tighter. She was so soft under his touch. Meant to be his. She felt right with his rough edges.

"You look tired," he murmured. "Rough night?"

She blinked, caught off guard by the softness in his tone. "I... I've just been exhausted all the time."

He nodded slowly. "You usually sleep like a rock. Something been on your mind lately?"

Her throat went dry. There was something knowing in his voice.

"I'm fine," she lied.

JD fiddled with the cigarette pack on the table. Mercifully for her, he didn't take one out and light it. He just played with the carton. "Hm, sure, Ronnie." JD shook his head. His eyes met hers, clearly not believing her. "You've been forgetting things. Leaving them out."

Her breath caught. He said it so casually, yet his gaze spoke volumes.

"I don't know what you mean," she said quickly, forcing her voice to sound even.

He shrugged. "Doesn't matter. We all slip up sometimes. You just... have to be careful about what you leave lying around for people to find."

"Listen, JD, I should go—" Veronica began, but she was cut off when he pressed a kiss to her forehead. Veronica tensed as she felt his lips against her temple. It was brief, but she felt the warmth of it even after he pulled back. She shot up like lightning. He laughed, grinning at her lazily, his eyes hooded. It shouldn't affect her, yet she felt a traitorous rush of warmth between her legs at his dangerous smirk—the one he'd give her before they...

Veronica shook her head. No. She wasn't going to let him win. Not like this.

“Don’t fucking touch me, asshole!” Veronica yelled. She could still feel his grip on her, unyielding and hot like iron. She started making her way up the stairs slowly, careful to never turn her back on him. Despite his physical limitations, he had proved he was dangerous.

JD’s voice stopped her ascent.

“Veronica?” His tone was soft—the same false calm that always came before the storm. It sent a shiver down her spine. She shouldn’t answer him. Shouldn’t give him the satisfaction of the last word.

“What?” she snapped.

“We have a lot to look forward to, babe, don’t we?” JD asked. The question was pointed. She had no doubt then and there that he knew. Somehow, he’d discovered she was pregnant—whether through his own intuition or some other way.

She didn’t answer him. Instead, she slammed the basement door shut behind her, double-checking that it was locked.

Veronica felt her breathing quicken. He knew. He didn’t seem upset by it, yet she couldn’t really tell his reaction. He hid his true feelings well when he wanted to. He wasn’t safe to be around, especially right now, when she was vulnerable like this.

Veronica cursed as she made her way back to her room. She could still faintly smell cigarette smoke clinging to her clothing.

Chapter 6: Control

Veronica stayed holed up in her room for the rest of the morning. The sunlight filtered through the curtains; she alternated between staring blankly out the window, haunted by what had happened that morning, or dozing off. Veronica didn't know what time it was or how long she'd been in her room. She was afraid of leaving, like JD might be at her door if she opened it. She knew that was impossible—he was locked in the basement—yet the thought that he knew about the baby...

It made her shiver. When she heard a knock on her bedroom door, it startled her out of her spiraling thoughts.

"Veronica, dinner is done. Are you coming down?" her mother's voice called from behind the door.

Veronica hesitated. She wasn't hungry by any means—the mere thought of food made her sick—yet she hadn't eaten much the last few days, feeling sick to her stomach and filled with enough anxiety to make her nauseous.

"I'll be down in a minute," she called back, forcing a neutral tone.

She sat there for a minute, her thoughts tangled up in the mess that was her relationship with JD, the pregnancy test, and the uncertainty of her future. Finally, she forced herself up, her hand shaking as she made her way down the stairs. There was no way that JD would be there—he wouldn't dare come out with her parents home. He'd met them before, briefly, when he told them that he thought she was suicidal.

It was another thing entirely to risk them seeing him all beat up; they'd ask questions—ones that she was sure he didn't want to answer any more than she did. Veronica had the brief fear that JD's dad might come looking for him—she would be the first one the police asked. She shoved it out of her head. Unfortunately, Big Bud Dean wasn't a very loving parent; he wouldn't care if JD came home or not. The man might think his son just ran away—or worse—and he still wouldn't look or file a police report. The thought made her feel brief pity for JD. She shook her head. She wasn't about to feel sorry for a murderer, even with his shitty dad.

Veronica made her way to the kitchen. Her mom was sitting at the table, her dinner before her, and her dad was beside her, newspaper spread out before him.

"Hey guys," Veronica said with more enthusiasm than she felt. She sat down in the third chair at the table heavily. Her mom shot her a worried glance, yet she ignored it. "Anything interesting in the paper, Dad?" Veronica asked.

"Nothing much—just talk about the next election and the stock market," her dad muttered. He flipped the page, his disinterest clear.

The rest of the meal was spent with small talk. Her parents asked her how her schoolwork was going; she responded when asked but didn't do much to maintain conversation. Her mind

was far away.

“Honey, are you okay?” Anne Sawyer finally asked, shooting her daughter a concerned look. “You’re acting weird—you’re never this spaced out. What’s going on?”

Veronica stiffened. She took a drink of her milk to give herself a moment to come up with a lie before she answered. Veronica forced a smile—it didn’t quite reach the corners of her mouth, revealing the truth—yet Anne didn’t say anything, though her eyes did narrow.

“I’m fine, Mom. Just haven’t been sleeping well,” Veronica lied.

“That’s odd, because I’ve noticed you’ve been doing a lot of extra sleeping,” Anne shot back.

Veronica deflated. She looked at the ground, unable to meet her mom’s questioning gaze. “I can’t fall asleep at night, so I’ve been sleeping during the evenings.”

“Veronica, if something is wrong, you can tell us.” Anne grabbed her daughter’s hand. When Veronica flinched back, her brows drew together—she had never acted like that before. “Whatever it is, we’re here to help you.”

“Yes, we are,” Leonard Sawyer added, nodding his agreement with his wife’s words.

“Look, guys, I appreciate the concern. I’m fine, really,” Veronica said, but her voice wavered. “Just been a lot on my mind, I guess.”

“You don’t have to carry it alone,” Anne protested. She hated seeing her daughter upset and knowing that she couldn’t fix it. She stood up, eyes scanning Veronica’s face like she could somehow see through her carefully constructed façade.

Veronica swallowed harshly. She wished she could tell somebody—especially her mom—yet when she opened her mouth, the words got caught in her throat. Besides, how was she supposed to explain her situation? ‘Hey Mom, so I dated this boy who turned out to be a psycho murderer who I accidentally killed three people with. And oh, by the way, I’m pregnant with his baby, and he’s staying in our basement because I can’t let the police know what’s going on.’ Veronica thought dryly to herself.

“Mom, it’s nothing huge—just school stuff,” Veronica said finally, forcing a small, unconvincing smile.

Her mom didn’t push, but she didn’t look entirely convinced. “Ronnie, I know you better than that... You’re usually much more cheerful. This isn’t like you.”

“Mom, I’m fine—for the last time,” Veronica groaned. How long was this woman going to interrogate her?

Anne softened. She moved to brush a strand of hair away from her daughter’s forehead. “Alright... I’ll let you be for now. Your dinner’s getting cold,” she said lightly, though the worry never left her eyes. “Just don’t let it eat away at you, okay?”

Veronica nodded. She stuffed a mouthful of macaroni into her mouth just to satisfy her mom and quell her worry. She forced it down despite her stomach protesting. When was the nausea going to stop kicking her ass? Veronica still hadn't had time to think about whether she wanted to keep the baby or not. She was still in shock. She sure as hell wasn't going to discuss it with JD. His reaction hadn't been negative, yet it hadn't been positive either. He just alluded that he knew, not bothering to share his real thoughts with her.

Veronica sighed. It was going to be hard to pretend she wasn't pregnant around him, especially if he already knew. Maybe she should just rip the Band-Aid off and see what he thought. Not that she cared, but it could make him more violent—or dare she say, possessive. She didn't want his volatile emotions to influence her decision. At the end of the day, it was her decision.

Veronica was the one who had to deal with the consequences of her explosive relationship with JD. Not only was she the one having the baby—it was her parents who would stare at her with disappointment, her money she'd have to spend on doctor's visits, and her body that would be the one to carry the damn thing. She wasn't going to let JD decide for her. She'd make her own decision in time.

She had no idea at the moment what she wanted to do. She wasn't too far along, judging by how her sickness started two weeks ago—maybe three, a month at most. She still had a while to decide. There was no rush.

Knowing that, she relaxed. She managed a few more bites of her food before she shoved it away. When the sky turned black and her parents were definitely asleep, she snuck downstairs—leftovers from dinner on a plate, warmed in the microwave.

She didn't want to face him, especially so soon, yet she needed answers to her questions. How did he know about the baby? What would his reaction be, and what did all of this mean for them?

There was no way to know for sure until she asked, so reluctantly, she went down to the basement. Setting the food on the table, she flipped on the light switch—it bathed the room in a fluorescent glow. JD blinked; he must have been sleeping, judging by how he rubbed his eyes. Veronica backed away before he could even think of touching her. She was still on guard from last time.

"I brought you food," she said, motioning toward the plate on the table, as was their custom the last week.

JD rose slowly. He didn't even bother with the food—instead, he stared at her for a long moment. She shivered. He stood up; she backed away a few steps, her hands trembling. She was alone, locked in the basement with him. Even injured, he was still a threat.

"How did you know?" Veronica asked accusingly.

JD tilted his head to the side like he was confused, yet she could see the glimmer of amusement in his green eyes. He was purposely playing dumb—maybe to get her to admit it.

“Know what exactly, Veronica?” JD asked. He made sure to emphasize her name. She felt a shiver shoot down her spine. He stayed where he was, yet he was looking at her like a tasty piece of meat—and he was a hungry wolf.

“You know what I’m talking about. Don’t play dumb,” she snapped. She clenched her jaw tight enough that her teeth started to hurt. “I don’t know how you figured it out, but you did.”

“Figured out what, Ronnie? I’m completely confused,” JD pretended to look hurt by her accusation. “Is there something you aren’t telling me, baby?”

Veronica felt her heart pound in her chest. He smirked at her with that familiar grin—the one that used to make her heart flutter and now only filled it with dread. His body language was full of his usual charm, a guise to hide his real, dark intentions. JD was playing his usual game, trying to twist her into saying something she wasn’t ready to tell yet. She was on edge, her mind racing as she fought to keep her composure. She couldn’t afford to lose it—not now.

“Don’t call me that,” she bit out, her voice more forceful than she’d intended. “You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

She could feel his gaze boring into her, dark and unrelenting. The way he looked at her—like he owned her. In his head, he probably did own her—and the baby. Like he thought he could break through her defenses with just a damn glare.

JD raised an eyebrow, taking a deliberate step forward, and Veronica backed up instinctively. He didn’t seem to notice—or maybe he did, and he liked it.

“I’m just trying to understand, Veronica,” he said, his voice sickly sweet. “You’re being awfully cryptic for someone who has nothing to hide. Now tell me the truth, darling, because I’m growing impatient.”

Veronica’s eyes darted around the dimly lit room, searching for anything that could distract her from his looming presence. But there was nowhere to go—nowhere to look but into his eyes.

JD grabbed her chin, forcing her to look at him. She was petrified; she gasped but didn’t bother to shove him away. JD grinned. He must have seen something he liked on her face because he leaned down and claimed her lips with his.

It wasn’t sweet or caring—it was rough and desperate. The way his lips moved against hers was demanding; he took without question. When a sharp nip was placed against her lips, she opened up automatically. His tongue invaded her mouth. She cried out, trying to turn her head away from his invading tongue, yet he held her chin roughly, his fingers digging hard enough into her jaw that it hurt. Veronica was forced to stay still as he plundered her mouth. He tasted like cigarettes—it made her stomach queasy.

Finally, after what felt like years, his tongue left her mouth—yet it wasn’t the end of her torment. He pressed a kiss against her racing pulse point. He was tempted to bite down, yet he decided against it before placing more kisses down the column of her throat. He pulled back her shirt until he exposed a shoulder. This was where he decided to leave his mark—his

claim on her. JD bit down harshly. She cried out, yet he ignored it, biting until he tasted blood. A hand in his hair tried to shove him away; he grabbed her arm, forcing it down to her side. He groaned as he tasted the metallic tang of blood. He soothed the wound with his tongue, pulling back to examine his work. He grinned as he saw the purple bite mark marring her shoulder.

“Stop pretending like you still don’t love me, Ronnie. You were meant to be mine after all,” JD purred. His hand slid down her sides—it was getting dangerously close to between her legs.

Veronica acted before she could think. She brought her knee up hard into his crotch. JD let out a pained howl as he bent over in pain. Veronica used the opportunity to race toward the door. JD growled, trying to run after her, yet he only managed a few steps before doubling over again, clutching his injured area.

“You fucking bitch!” JD roared.

“You goddamn asshole!” Veronica screamed back. She kept one hand on the door, ready to flee if he tried anything else. “Keep yelling—see how my parents react when they find a goddamn psycho in their basement. They’ll call the police and lock your psychotic ass up for good.”

“Takes one to know one,” JD shot back. He smirked at her, tilting his head to the side. “Now, what was it you were gonna tell me?”

Her fists clenched at her sides until her knuckles turned white. “You want to know how I figured it out? I thought I was just being paranoid, but my room looked different when I woke up. My dresser drawer was open—you were in my room while I was sleeping, weren’t you?” Veronica asked accusingly, already knowing the answer based on how his smile widened.

“Yup. You left the door unlocked. Not a good idea when you’ve got psychos such as myself locked down in the basement, is it?” JD crossed his arms over his chest, watching her, examining every little shift in her facial expressions. “How long were you going to keep it from me, Veronica?” he asked. The mask melted away for a fraction of a second—it was barely there, yet there was a flicker of hurt.

Good, let him hurt, Veronica thought smugly. “You’re not as clever as you think, JD. You left a trail. You didn’t cover your tracks well enough.” Veronica had found his sloppy mistakes. She wanted to revel in that reveal, to make him angry because he messed up—but when his expression remained impassive, she deflated. He was still the one in control, even being held captive down in the basement.

His eyes narrowed slightly, but there was still that spark of amusement in them. “I left a trail? That’s cute, Veronica. Real cute.” He tilted his head again, as though considering something, the smile never wavering. “But you still haven’t answered my question. You’re avoiding it, you know. How long were you planning on keeping this a secret from me?”

Veronica's chest tightened, her breathing quickening. The secret. The baby. That had changed everything. She could barely stand to think about it, let alone talk about it with him. But there was no avoiding it anymore. JD knew. And he was enjoying every second of her torment.

"I wasn't planning on keeping it from you," she said, her voice much quieter now, all the fight having drained out of her. She couldn't let him see how much this was getting to her. "I just... I needed some time to figure things out. I didn't want you to make it worse. I didn't want you anywhere near it—or me."

JD smiled, but there was nothing warm about it now. "You think you're the one who gets to decide that, Veronica? You think you're the one who gets to decide what happens to our baby?" JD moved forward again. She didn't move—she just stared at him unflinchingly. "No, that's not how it works."

"You're not getting out of here." She forced the words out, ignoring how her mind screamed at her to run. She needed to end his rebellion now; if she gave him an inch, he'd take a mile. "I won't let you near it—or me. Not after everything you've done."

JD laughed—a bitter, grating sound that made her flinch, yet she didn't back down.

"The things I did? No, Veronica—you mean the things we did. I killed Heather Chandler because you wanted me to. I killed Kurt and Ram because you wanted me to. That was all you, babe. I just did what you wanted me to do." JD shook his head and began to pace. She watched him warily.

"I did not want them dead," Veronica said softly.

"We can have this argument again and again—it doesn't change the fact that they're rotting six feet under, and we're both still alive. Make of that what you will, but you will not keep me down here forever. I am not your prisoner—and that baby is half mine. Don't you think I deserve a say, too?" JD ranted. He stopped in front of her, his green eyes boring into hers.

"I'll consider it, but don't you test me," Veronica agreed only to shut him up.

"Wow. Thanks."

"No problem, babe," Veronica spat. The words tasted acidic in her mouth—like she wasn't supposed to say them. Perhaps she wasn't, not with him.

It was all about the baby with him—and the control he could have over her. JD didn't view her as an equal; he viewed her as beneath him. The baby was part of him, so by the law in his mind, it belonged wholly to him. She knew it wasn't about getting a fair say as a concerned parent—no, he just wanted to control another thing about her, another part of her body.

She still didn't know if she was keeping it or not—that decision would be made by her, thank you very much.

"I'm going to go now. I'll let you out when I think you're safe to be around," Veronica said. JD protested, yet she didn't spare him another glance as she left the basement.

Her heart was still pounding against her chest. She ignored it, pressing one hand against her stomach. She felt the first flicker of protectiveness for the new life growing inside her. She'd protect it from anyone—including its father. Especially its father.

Chapter 7: Discovery

Veronica gasped as she felt nausea slam into her the moment she woke up. Being bent over the toilet during the morning hours was becoming painfully familiar to her lately. Veronica retched up last night's dinner; it was a pitiful amount—she had barely taken more than a few bites to satisfy her mom. Hacking up what little she had in her stomach, she slumped against the toilet. She felt frustrated tears running down her face. Why did all of this have to happen to her?

Veronica was supposed to apply to Stanford or Harvard, get a law degree, get married, have three kids way down the line with a man she loved when she was ready—maybe in her thirties. Instead, here she was: seventeen, with a baby she didn't know if she wanted, a psychopathic boyfriend who had barely survived being shot, and a crippling anxiety building in her gut. Veronica cried not just for herself but for all the loving JD had wrought onto the world. Three kids were dead because of her. Her best friend and two star football players were rotting in the ground because she hadn't had the strength to stop JD.

Veronica brought her knees up to her chest and sobbed silently. Eventually, after what felt like an eternity—but might have only been a few minutes—she pulled herself up on shaky legs. Veronica looked at herself in the mirror; she looked just as much of a wreck as she felt. Her hair was a mess from sleep, deep purple eye bags marred the skin under her eyes—she looked like a damn raccoon—and she could see how much weight she was losing in her cheeks. Veronica turned on the faucet, ignoring the feelings in her head, and splashed water on her face. Making her way back into her room, she got ready for school, no matter how much she didn't want to.

///

Veronica needed answers more than anything. The not knowing was killing her. She needed to find out exactly how far along she was in her pregnancy so she could figure out her options. Veronica still didn't know what she wanted; she didn't know if she ever would—but she had to make a decision at some point.

She had spent many days at school alone ever since JD had tried to bomb the school. It was like before she joined the Heathers—she was alone, a nobody. Duke, the new Heather in charge, didn't bother with her. Nobody did. She didn't mind; it gave her time to think.

Heather McNamara had been shooting her longing glances from across the cafeteria ever since she had saved her from her attempted overdose. The girl clearly wanted to sit with her, yet she didn't have the confidence to break away from Duke. She seemed to cling harder to the other Heather after Chandler's death—perhaps it was her way of coping, of keeping one part of her past in her life. Veronica never met her gaze. She didn't want to explain to anyone why she was upset—didn't want anyone getting too close to the truth.

Veronica was going to make an appointment after school. She needed to figure out her situation. With that in mind, she made her way to a payphone after school. She inserted a

quarter and dialed the local doctor's clinic. She made an appointment for that evening; luckily, they had a slot available.

She had about an hour to kill before she could go to the appointment. She was craving a slushie—she blamed JD's half of the genes for it. Making her way to the small Snappy Snack Shack on the edge of town, she got herself a blue raspberry slushie. She sipped it while she waited.

Veronica bounced her foot nervously in the waiting room. She looked at the other people there to distract herself from her building anxiety. She wanted answers, yet getting answers also meant directly confronting her problems. She didn't know if she was ready—but she'd have to be.

There was a mother with her son, clearly sick judging by how he was crying and his face flushed red with fever; an elderly lady with her hand in a cast; and a middle-aged man who didn't have anything obviously wrong with him.

Finally, after a while, they called her name. She stood, following the doctor back to the room. She felt her heartbeat in her chest like a jackhammer. Veronica sat on the exam table with her half-drunk blue raspberry slushie cupped between both hands. She let the coolness soothe her—she felt like she was burning up from the inside out. Her fingers were freezing at this point, but she needed something to ground her.

The doctor—Dr. Caldwell, mid-forties, kind eyes, soft voice—glanced at the drink with mild amusement as she settled onto the rolling stool.

“Craving something cold? It's about to start getting freezing here—you know how Ohio weather is,” she said lightly.

Veronica forced a laugh. “I guess you could say that.”

“Well,” she began gently, pulling a clipboard into her lap. Examining it, she leveled Veronica with a serious gaze that made her squirm. “Let's talk about what's going on with your body.”

Veronica's lips pressed into a thin line at the mention of what was happening with her. Her stomach twisted—not from nausea this time, but from pure anxiety.

Dr. Caldwell talked through things slowly, like she'd done this a thousand times: symptoms, early signs, timelines. Veronica took small sips from the slushie to keep from crying again. Her throat felt tight.

“You mentioned that your symptoms started about a month ago with a missed period, right?” Caldwell asked. She looked up from the clipboard and into Veronica's eyes. The teenager looked uncomfortable, but she nodded. “That lines up with early pregnancy symptoms. And you took a test that came out positive?”

“Yeah, it did,” Veronica confirmed, her voice soft.

“Based on what you told me, I’d guess you’re likely between four to six weeks along. Still very early.”

Early enough to stop it if she wanted to. Early enough that she could still run from her mistake if she wanted to. Early enough that JD didn’t have to know—for all he knew, she could say she had a miscarriage from all the stress he put her through. Her fingers tightened around the cup, her knuckles turning white.

Dr. Caldwell continued, her voice steady and professional—a constant to the teen’s panic. “I want to give you information about all your options. And I mean all of them. This is your body, your choice, and your life, Veronica.”

Veronica’s chest tightened. She knew it was her choice, yet she heard JD’s voice in the back of her mind telling her that it wasn’t. That he was hers, the baby was his, and that she was going to have it no matter what because it was proof of their love. Veronica gripped the cup tight enough that the plastic crumpled under her fingers. She let out a shaky breath, forcing herself to relax.

The doctor handed her a pamphlet—first option: continue the pregnancy; then adoption; and then... abortion. Veronica clutched it to her chest like it was a lifeline. Her heart pounded like she was holding something illegal instead of something meant to help her make possibly the biggest decision of her life.

“If you continue the pregnancy,” the doctor explained, “we’ll schedule prenatal appointments. If you’re unsure, that’s okay—it can take time. You don’t have to decide today or even a week from now. You have time to make the best decision for you and the baby. Just know that if you want to terminate, it’s easier now—the earlier, the safer. Make the decision that is best for you, dear. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. Not your parents, not the father—no one but you gets to decide that.”

Veronica swallowed harshly, nodding. She didn’t know if the doctor knew about her situation with JD. It was impossible, yet maybe the way she acted gave it away—or the fact that Sherwood was a small town where everyone knew everybody. Still, hearing the words from someone else made it real.

She took another small sip. Her tongue was numb, and she felt a brain freeze threatening. She winced. She didn’t understand why JD liked getting them.

“And Veronica,” Dr. Caldwell added, softer now, “if you see any problems, don’t feel afraid to speak up. Everything here is confidential. I can help.”

Veronica didn’t even know what safe felt like anymore. She hadn’t since September, and it was October quickly bleeding into November. Her life had been turned completely upside down by one big—and one dumb—decision of letting him into her life.

“I—thank you,” Veronica said. She cursed herself for stuttering over her own words, yet she was feeling very overwhelmed.

“It’s normal to be overwhelmed, dear,” the doctor assured her. “You’re doing the right thing by coming here.”

Veronica nodded, even though she wasn’t sure she believed it. Her eyes drifted to a poster on the wall—something about prenatal vitamins and growing a healthy baby. The words blurred from the tears gathering in her eyes. She blinked them back stubbornly.

Growing a baby.

JD’s baby. A part of him inside her, taking root, infiltrating her like he always did. Except it was part her too. Half of that baby was her. Did she really have it in herself to kill a part of herself?

“We can make a follow-up appointment,” Caldwell offered. “Or you can call when you’re ready to talk more about the decision you want to make.”

Veronica swallowed hard. “I’ll... I’ll call.”

She slipped off the table, her legs trembling. She left the room clutching the slushie like a lifeline, like it would save her from all her problems. The future was heavy. She left the doctor’s office with no new answers to what she wanted to do—yet she felt the doctor’s words echo in her head as she drove home: it was her decision.

///

That night, as she brought food down to JD, she felt her mind racing. All she could do was stare at the wall, her thoughts running ten million miles a minute. The basement door creaked as she eased it open. She clutched the paper bag of food to her chest, swallowing down the tight knot of dread sitting in her throat.

Takeout tonight. Her parents had raised an eyebrow when she mentioned wanting an extra hamburger, yet they hadn’t done more than that. It was the least worrying behavior she’d shown in the last few nights, so luckily they chose not to question it too much.

Veronica set the bag on the table. JD was standing near the window, looking outside. Veronica ignored the urge to flee in the opposite direction—he had that effect on her lately.

“There’s my girl.”

His voice was warm like honey, dripping with affection she didn’t want. JD’s eyes were aglow with an unsettling tenderness—one that never matched the violence in him. Veronica took a step backwards. This wasn’t like him. What was going on?

“I missed you,” he murmured, stepping close—too close. “How’s our little family doing today, baby?”

Before she could react, his hand lifted—slow and careful—reaching toward her stomach like she was made of glass. Like she belonged to him. Veronica took another step back. This earned a growl from him. She flinched—at least he was acting like himself now. A flicker of anger crossed his features before he forced it down.

“Hey... it’s okay. I’m here for you, Veronica.”

Veronica didn’t believe him. He was a liar. He twisted the truth to benefit his desires. It wouldn’t be the first time he’d tried to manipulate her into doing what he wanted. He wanted something; there was no way he was suddenly acting this sweet to her for no reason. Her eyebrows furrowed. What was it that he wanted?

JD’s fingers brushed her cheek—featherlight—with a tenderness that made her skin crawl. He had never touched her gently before the test. Now he was all soft smiles and honeyed words made of lies.

It slammed into her like a freight train.

He wanted her to keep the baby. That was why he was being nice—he didn’t want to set her off.

Veronica forced the bag of food into his hands to keep him from touching her. “Eat,” she muttered. “You need to keep your strength up so I can get your ass out of my basement once and for all.”

JD grinned as if she’d just confessed her undying love to him. “You worrying about me, baby?” His voice dipped lower, almost reverent. “God, Ronnie... you’re going to be an amazing mother.”

Her stomach lurched at his words. She tried not to show it, yet she failed miserably.

JD sat down on the couch. He patted the space beside him like they were a normal couple hanging out and not a girl hiding her ex-boyfriend in her basement.

“Come here,” he coaxed, voice sugary sweet. “Let’s talk about things. Our future. The life we’re going to build together.”

“You and me,” he said, flipping open the food containers. Seeing what she’d gotten him, he grinned—she still knew all his preferences, even if she wanted to forget. “A place of our own. Maybe a porch swing. I was never one for domestic shit, but for you I could make it work... it’ll all work out. We’ll raise our baby somewhere peaceful.”

Veronica’s throat tightened. He was talking about it like it was all easy. Like they didn’t have the murder of three kids hanging over their heads. Like they weren’t so messed up. Like the baby wasn’t the worst news she’d heard in weeks. The sweetness was suffocating—worse than his rage, worse than the gun he often waved around carelessly like a toy, worse than him hurting her.

Because it was all fake. None of it was real. He was hiding the real him behind a façade—he wanted her to do what he wanted. The threatening hadn’t worked, so he was switching to something else.

At least the violence was honest—she could tell herself he was no good, she could think clearly. But like this?

Her world blurred. Everything she knew about him felt fake. She nodded slowly, like she was agreeing, yet her mind was buzzing with panic about the secret she was hiding. Veronica didn't tell him about the clinic visit. She couldn't. She couldn't let him know she was making a decision on her own—and it might not be one he liked.

JD reached for her hand. She yanked it away like she'd been burned. He paused—just a flicker of emotion crossed his face. It was barely there for a second; if she blinked, she would've missed it. Confusion, anger, and then caution all crossed his face just as quickly as the others.

The smile returned instantly—smooth and practiced to perfection.

“It's okay to be scared,” he whispered as if comforting her. “You're scared. That's normal. This is a big change—the next chapter of our lives.”

As he talked—slow and gentle and endlessly sweet—she realized:

His tenderness wasn't tenderness at all.

It was ownership.

It was control.

He wanted her to make the only decision he deemed acceptable.

“I gotta go, JD. Goodnight,” Veronica said. She turned on her heel, leaving the basement with her heart racing. She didn't bother to see his reaction. Instead, she made her way up to her room.

Her door was ajar. She furrowed her brows, confused—she hadn't left it open when she came down.

///

Anne hummed a tune under her breath as she pushed open Veronica's bedroom door with her hip, laundry basket in her arms. She had done the girl's laundry. Veronica hadn't been keeping up with it—something was wrong with her. Anne didn't know what yet, but she wasn't going to let the girl go without clothes.

Anne opened the drawer to her dresser. She saw a half-folded sweater. She frowned—she always prided herself on neatness. She was a clean freak, and she'd admit it.

Grabbing the sweater, she pulled it out and shook it before going to fold it again—when something plastic slipped out from it, hitting the carpet with a dull thud.

Anne frowned and reached down, expecting chapstick, a pen, or something completely harmless.

Her hand closed around the object: a pregnancy test.

She froze. The air left her lungs in one sharp, silent exhale.

She looked down at the test. She saw the two lines—positive.

Her heart raced against her chest. She sank onto the edge of Veronica's bed, the sweatshirt forgotten and crumpled on the floor. For a long moment, all she did was stare. No outrage. No yelling. Just a heavy quietness that filled the space.

Her fingers shook as she set the test on the bedspread. Her eyes scanned it again—it was unmistakably positive. Understanding washed over her in waves: the fear, the secrecy, and the loneliness her daughter had been carrying by herself these last few days.

Anne swallowed hard, blinking rapidly, fighting the urge to cry. She pressed the test to her chest for one second—the gesture more helplessness than comfort. Then she stood, tense and unsure what she should do. Should she tell Veronica she found the test? Should she wait until her daughter told her and pretend to be surprised?

She didn't get to decide, as the door creaked open—and in stepped her daughter.

Anne straightened up.

She didn't have an option now.

Chapter 8: Conversations

Veronica froze in the doorway as she saw what her mom was holding. She swallowed harshly; any words that wanted to come out of her mouth got stuck. She could only gape like a fish out of water. Finally, after a long moment of just staring, her mom spoke.

“Sweetheart, come sit with me. We need to talk,” Anne said. She didn’t sound angry, but Veronica couldn’t gauge her reaction based on that.

Her heart was racing a million miles an hour. Slowly, she entered her room—the space that was supposed to be her safe haven but was quickly becoming a place filled with her exposed secrets. Veronica sat on the edge of her bed. She stared at the incriminating test in her mom’s hands. She wondered how she’d found it, then she eyed the sweater on the floor. Veronica cursed at herself. This was the second time someone had found out because she hadn’t hidden it well enough.

Her mom didn’t have a reason to be in her room most of the time, and JD should’ve never escaped. It was just fate’s cruel joke that two people would find out she was pregnant before she was ready to tell them. Veronica really wasn’t ready to tell her mom, but it was too late now—and how else could she explain a positive test? No matter how she tried to spin it, she was screwed.

“Mom, I can explain...” Veronica said, but her voice cut off. She attempted to explain the test, yet when she tried to come up with excuses, her mind blanked. Veronica’s lower lip trembled; she felt tears threatening to spill. The damn pregnancy must’ve been making her emotional, because she hadn’t cried this much since she was a child. She looked like a spooked animal, like she was going to bolt at any moment.

Anne softened. Her daughter was already having a hard time—berating her wouldn’t do any good. Besides, what was done was done. There was no undoing it; she could only help her daughter move forward.

“I was just putting away your laundry. I know you’ve been having a hard time, so I was trying to help,” Anne said, her voice soft. “I promise I wasn’t looking for this. I grabbed an unfolded sweater and was just trying to help...”

Veronica relaxed a smidge. She grabbed her mom’s free hand and squeezed it tightly. “I know, Mom. It’s okay. You’d never invade my privacy on purpose. It’s all just... so much, you know?” Veronica asked.

Anne slowly nodded. She knew the overwhelming feeling and joy of finding out you were pregnant. “I know, honey. When I had you, I was more grateful than I had ever been for anything—yet overwhelmed. I was told I could never have children, then you came along. My little rainbow baby. We never could have another, but I’m glad I got blessed with you.”

Veronica closed her eyes, unable to meet her mom’s gaze. “Mom, I’m so sorry. This was never supposed to happen.” A single tear slipped down her cheek, and it hit Anne like a

physical blow.

“Oh honey, no. It’s okay. You have nothing to apologize for.” Anne reached out, holding her arms open—offering, not demanding. “Come here.”

After a shaky breath, Veronica scooted closer to her mother. Anne wrapped the girl in a tight hug. Veronica went slack against her; suddenly, she felt like a little kid again, desperately hanging onto her mother.

“How long have you known?” Anne asked gently.

“About a week.”

“That’s why you’ve been so quiet and distant,” Anne murmured, concern etched on her face. “Why you haven’t been acting like yourself.”

Veronica nodded, tears slipping down her cheeks. “I didn’t know how to tell you or Dad or anyone. I thought you’d be angry or disappointed, or something else.” Her breath hitched. “I thought you’d be anything but... this.”

Anne grabbed her daughter’s shoulders, forcing the girl to look at her. “I’m certainly surprised, yes, but I’m not mad, sweetheart. I’m just glad you don’t have to suffer alone anymore. Whatever this means for you—whatever you decide—your father and I are here for you.”

Veronica choked back a sob, just barely. “Thanks, Mom. I love you.” Her heart overflowed with love for the woman. Anne squeezed her back just as tightly, a small smile on her face. Veronica smiled back uncertainly, yet at least she managed to smile after days of nothing.

“I love you too, honey. Do you want to tell your father?” Anne asked.

Veronica thought about it for a long moment before nodding. “Might as well rip the bandaid off, right?”

“Atta girl. We’ll tell him at dinner.” Anne ruffled her hair, making her laugh. As they sat there for a few more moments, just hugging, Veronica thought—for the first time in a while—that everything might be okay.

///

Leonard stared silently at Veronica for a long moment. He was shocked, but not angry. He muttered something about needing a beer—he had two, to be precise—just to process it. It went surprisingly well, though there was another conversation that made Veronica’s heart race. Her parents wanted to meet the father. She supposed it made sense—she would want to meet the father too if it were her kid—but she couldn’t let them meet JD.

Still, she couldn’t give them the real reason they couldn’t meet him. Maybe she had no choice. Veronica would think about it. Either way, she was going to have to lie to them. It didn’t thrill her, yet she had no choice.

“I’ll bring him by sometime for dinner,” Veronica promised. She hated how much her mom lit up at that, and her father let out a heavy sigh.

After that, the rest of dinner was filled with other subjects that didn’t make her want to pull her hair out. The metaphorical elephant was still heavy in the room—everyone was thinking about it—yet none of them talked more about it. Luckily for her.

As Veronica left the room, Leonard turned toward Anne with a look that meant we need to talk. “So our daughter is pregnant,” he began, shaking his head in disbelief. It wasn’t anger—just surprise mixed with a feeling of not knowing how to process it yet.

“Looks like it. I found a test in her room. It’s definitely true,” Anne confirmed.

“It’s just a lot to take in. I never thought I’d be a grandparent so early. Jesus, I hope everything goes well for Veronica, no matter what decision she makes, but it’s just... a lot.” Leonard took another drink of his beer—his second. He wasn’t going to get plastered, but it helped take his mind off the stress.

“I know, honey. She’ll be okay. She’s strong. She’s a Sawyer, remember?” Anne grabbed his hand, giving it a tight squeeze.

“I hope you’re right.” Leonard agreed—he trusted his wife’s judgment, yet he couldn’t help but worry.

///

Veronica went down to the basement. She was going to tell JD the news- not because he needed to know everything about her life and because he was going to have to meet her parents now. The idea made her sick, yet she had to see this through, especially after she’d promised they could meet the father. Veronica brought him her dinner and set it on the table. As soon as he saw her, he raised an eyebrow.

“What’s got you so worked up, Ronnie?” JD asked, more amused than concerned.

“Don’t call me that. And... my parents want to meet you. They know about the baby.” Veronica explained. She frowned when he grinned like she’d told him he’d just won the lottery.

“That’s great news!” JD said. He stood and approached her, wrapping his arms around her. Veronica wanted to shove him off, yet she didn’t have the energy. When he pressed a kiss to her cheek, she flinched immediately, reaching up to wipe the skin he’d kissed. JD laughed, holding her tighter. She was always so cute pretending to resist him like that—as if she didn’t want him. Deep down, he thought, they both knew the truth: she was still in love with him.

“Can you come to dinner tomorrow night?” Veronica asked. When he nodded, she relaxed—at least he would show up. “And you need to be on your best behavior.” Veronica warned, her voice carrying an underlying threat, daring him to protest.

“Of course I will be. For Mom and Dad.” JD let her go finally. She let out a breath she didn’t know she’d been holding as she finally had her personal space back. She wanted to correct him—say they were her mom and dad, and he couldn’t call them that—but all the fight had drained out of her.

Veronica slumped against the wall. JD shot her a concerned glance. At least he seemed to be starting to care about her feelings—but she doubted it.

“Are your parents knowing stressing you out?” JD asked knowingly.

“Yeah, not that it’s any of your business. Also, stop with the whole sweet concerned father thing. We both know it’s bullshit,” Veronica snapped.

JD’s mouth turned into a thin line. He was trying to keep his cool; she saw the rage in his eyes, yet it quickly subsided.

“Veronica, don’t push your luck, darling.” JD’s voice was sweet, yet she sensed the underlying threat.

“Don’t you tell me what to do,” Veronica snapped. She wasn’t going to deal with his attitude. She was already tired of him trying to control her.

JD’s jaw tightened. She saw the small signs anyone else wouldn’t pick up on, but she knew him. Veronica watched it like someone who knew they were in immediate danger yet was unable to do anything but watch as everything crashed down around them.

He stepped toward her again—this time slow and deliberate. “You’re tired,” he murmured, as if that explained everything. As if her anger was just exhaustion wearing a mask. “You get like this when you’re overwhelmed. I’m not trying to control you.”

“You are trying to control me,” she shot back. Her voice shook—not with fear but with the effort of holding down her anger. She was so tired of the mind games, the way he tried to manipulate her, acting like he had a right to her when he didn’t anymore. They weren’t even dating. The only thing tying them together was the baby. “You always do this. Act like you’re the calm one and I’m crazy. But guess what, babe? You’re a goddamn psycho, and compared to you, I’m fucking normal.”

JD sighed—the sigh he used when he thought her actions were unreasonable in his eyes. “Ronnie, the pregnancy is making you emotional—”

“Don’t call me that!” she yelled.

Veronica didn’t care if her parents heard. She was done with all of it. The words were sharper than she intended, yet she didn’t regret saying them. Seeing the shock on his face was worth it. Veronica straightened up and leveled him with a glare that would make most men cower. However, JD wasn’t most men, so he just stared back with his own glare, daring her to keep up her little protest.

“Fine, Veronica. You win this time. Don’t think this means you can just do whatever the hell you want. Your actions have consequences.” JD warned. With that, he moved to the window, looking outside. He refused to meet her gaze.

Veronica crossed her arms over her chest. A chill ran down her spine. He was staying calm *for now*—but how long until his mask slipped? JD was still regaining strength, yet he could move around much better now. It wouldn’t be long before he could overpower her. He was just biding his time.

“Look... just come to dinner, be on your best behavior, and then you can leave. That’s all I need from you. That’s it,” Veronica said softly.

“Need from me, huh?” His voice softened—too soft. “I like it when you say that.”

She froze.

JD smiled slowly, satisfied. It wasn’t warmth—it was possession. Veronica walked away from him, turning her back. She looked over her shoulder. “Just be ready by six p.m. tomorrow. I’m going to let you out so you can go home and get cleaned up. After this dinner, I don’t want to see you again.”

JD’s head tilted to the side, his expression unreadable in the dim basement light. For a moment, Veronica thought he’d finally blow up—release all the built-up rage he’d been keeping inside for the past few days. She thought he’d push back, start a fight, tell her exactly how much danger she was in after declaring those words.

Instead, he only smiled.

It freaked her out more than any outburst ever could.

“Tomorrow at six,” he repeated. “Got it.”

Veronica swallowed hard and walked toward the stairs. Each step felt like she was walking in a dream. She kept her eyes forward, not giving him the satisfaction of seeing her shaken. She locked the door behind her, hands shaking as she pocketed the key. Tomorrow she would be letting him back out into the world. She didn’t know what kind of destruction JD would wreak once she let him free.

Would he murder again?

The thought sent a shiver down her spine.

She had no way of knowing—but he was going to leave the basement soon. With her permission or not. His strength was returning quickly.

Tomorrow was one day.
One dinner.

She could handle it—or at least she told herself she could. Then she could cut herself off from him completely.

She had no doubt he would do anything in his power to get her back—but she was going to get him out of her life for good if it was the last thing she did.

The baby had changed everything.

It meant she had something else to think about besides herself. The thought made her feel overwhelmed. Could she really bring a baby into this mess? She didn't necessarily want to get an abortion either, but it wouldn't be fair to bring a child into her world. Her parents already knew—they hadn't pressured her either way—and the doctor had told her it was her decision too.

Veronica formed a decision right then and there.

The baby wouldn't get a fair chance at life. She couldn't bring a child into this mess. Not in a world full of uncertainty, murders, anger, fighting—and JD.

Veronica felt more certain than she had in weeks. Making her way up to her room, she made a mental note to call the clinic tomorrow.

///

Officer Levi McCord stared at the files he'd been looking over for several weeks. The case had seemed open and closed at first: teenage suicides. One girl drank drain cleaner, then smashed through a glass table, and the two football players had shot each other in a gay suicide pact. The handwriting on the notes matched perfectly. Yet, with urging from Kurt and Ram's dads, they reopened the case—just to look at the possibility of murder.

It hadn't given them much at first. The suicides seemed perfect. Real.

There was one error, however—one that puzzled McCord.

The gun used in the boys' deaths wasn't registered to Kurt, Ram, or even their dads. They had been high when they'd first opened the case—they hadn't questioned it. But now, with the files open on his desk and his mind clearer, McCord noticed the mistake.

The gun was registered to Benjamin Bryce Dean.

He was an out-of-state construction worker who'd settled in Ohio shortly before the deaths began. McCord frowned. It was certainly suspicious, but what motivation did a middle-aged man have to shoot two teens and make another drink drain cleaner? His son went to the same school as them, though... None of it made sense.

"Hey, Milner, I have a new lead on the suicide cases," McCord told his partner. Milner raised an eyebrow; he thought it was all said and done. Still, he nodded.

"What've you got?" Milner asked.

"The gun used in the boys' suicide was registered to Benjamin Dean—the construction worker who just moved to town," McCord explained. His partner looked just as confused as he felt.

“Weird. We’ll check it out tomorrow then,” Milner said. They made a plan to check into the inconsistency.

Chapter 9: Freedom

A knock sounded on the door, startling Big Bud Dean out of his attention to the football game. The man grumbled, thinking it was someone coming to mess with him or his son come skulking back. He took his time getting out of his chair. Another knock sounded; Bud grumbled under his breath.

“I’m coming, damn it, wait a minute,” Bud growled.

Bud opened the door. His eyes widened as he took in the sight of police officers McCord and Milner. Bud’s mood instantly shifted from annoyed to paranoid and confused.

“To what do I owe you boys the pleasure?” Bud asked. He looked from McCord to Milner with clear distrust in his eyes.

“We’re here to talk to you about a case,” McCord said. He watched every nervous tick of Big Bud Dean’s—he sure looked guilty of something, that was for sure.

“Yeah, of course, officer.” Bud agreed, though he seemed hesitant. He finally opened the door wide enough to let the police in. McCord stepped in first, Milner behind him. It wasn’t long before they were all gathered around in the living room, Milner and McCord on the couch and Bud sitting in his recliner.

“Are you aware of the suicide that happened about a month ago? Those two boys that shot each other?” McCord asked.

“Yeah, what does that have to do with me?” Bud asked. He didn’t know what these officers were trying to get at, but he didn’t like it.

“Well, the gun used in the suicide was registered in your name, sir,” Milner said. He saw Bud’s face turn from wide-eyed, to confused, to annoyed.

“You accusing me of shooting those boys?” Bud snapped, quickly getting defensive. Bud gripped the arms of his recliner with a white-knuckled grip. McCord thought that if he had a gun right now, he’d plant one in their skulls for the suggestion that he’d ever even consider murdering the two boys.

McCord held his hands up like he was placating a wild animal. “Look, Benjamin, we aren’t accusing you of anything. We are just looking at the facts. The facts say that the gun used was registered to you. We just want to know why it was at the crime scene, that’s all.” McCord saw the man’s jaw tighten, though luckily he stayed seated. The last thing they needed was a fight.

“I haven’t even had my guns since we moved here. My brat stole them.” Bud said, disinterested. He scratched at his jaw. The two police officers looked at each other, their gazes saying everything.

“Mr. Dean, is your son home?” Milner asked. It was after school hours; the boy should be home by now.

Bud scoffed. He shook his head. “No, the brat ran off about a week or two ago, I don’t remember. He’s done it before. I didn’t concern myself with it.” Bud waved a hand dismissively like he didn’t care. It made the officers’ skin crawl how easily he dismissed the fact that his son had been missing for two weeks and he hadn’t even bothered to go looking for him. It bothered them even more that Jason Dean had been missing and apparently had been the last one with the firearm according to his dad.

“Sir, did it ever occur to you to lock up your guns so he couldn’t get them?” McCord didn’t bother to hide his contempt for him now, leveling him with a glare.

“Did it ever cross your mind to file a police report for your missing minor son?” Milner asked.

Bud slammed his hands on the armrests of his recliner. It startled both officers; McCord’s hand went instantly to the hilt of his pistol. When Bud didn’t get up, he slowly removed his hand yet stayed cautious, watching his every move.

Bud’s eyes narrowed; he shot the officers a venomous look. Although his voice remained controlled, there was a quiet growl beneath the surface that was telling of his real emotions.

“You think I don’t know what you’re insinuating?” Bud’s jaw was clenched so tight it almost looked like it would crack. “I didn’t report him as missing because he is a damn headache. He’s done this before—runs off, gets into trouble, then I have to clean up his mess. Not that it’s any of your business, but I’m tired of it. He turns eighteen in December, then he’s not my problem anymore.” Bud spat the words out like they were poison.

Both officers looked at each other before McCord leveled Bud with a serious gaze. “Well, it *is* our business, Mr. Dean. You’re telling us your son has been missing for two weeks and you haven’t filed a report? That’s not normal. That’s not what a father does when their kid goes missing.”

Bud shifted uncomfortably in the chair, the scrutiny seeming to get to him. Now faced with the officers’ pointed questions, the spotlight was on him. He tried to stay strong, yet he was quickly unraveling under their glares. Bud opened his mouth like he wanted to argue, before he shut it promptly, probably recognizing that it would do him no good.

“Mr. Dean,” Milner began. He leaned forward so he could better look at the man in front of him. “When was the last day you saw your son? Can you pinpoint an exact date? And what was he doing the last time you saw him? It’s imperative that you tell us, because maybe we can help locate Jason.”

Bud scoffed, though this time it was weaker—the fight had drained out of him. “Hell if I know. All I remember was it was about, give or take, two weeks ago. He was holed up in his room probably, like always. He comes and goes as he pleases, always has.”

“That’s not an answer,” McCord said, voice thick with disapproval.

“I’m not his damn babysitter.”

“No,” McCord began, his voice not hiding his contempt, “you’re his father, so act like it.”

“You don’t know a damn thing about me or him,” Bud snapped.

“No, but we know enough.” Milner opened the notebook in his lap. “Let me make sure we got this straight. Your son was in the possession of a stolen firearm—one that ended up at a suicide scene. He’s been missing for two weeks. And you didn’t report it? You claim he’s run off like this before as well.”

“Because he has,” Bud growled. “Kid’s trouble—has been since his mom died when he was nine. I don’t know what he’s gotten himself into this time, but I’m not interested in being involved. I ain’t chasing after him.” Bud shook his head, his fingers clenching tightly into a fist. “Not happening.”

“Do you know how this makes you look, Mr. Dean?” Milner asked. “It at best makes you look like a bad parent, at worst makes you responsible for two boys’ deaths and maybe a girl.”

A heavy silence fell over the room. No one dared to speak, as if in some sort of trance. Finally, after what felt like hours but was just mere moments, Bud stood up. His expression was dark; it caused a shiver to go down Milner’s spine. Yet he stood tall, refusing to back down.

“I think it’s about time you left, officers,” Bud snarled, his voice low and threatening. Milner felt himself reaching for his pistol for the second time during the interview. Bud made no move to grab a weapon—he was smarter than that—yet his body language was anything but friendly. Milner had no doubt that if he wasn’t armed, there would be a very different outcome to the night. It was then and there that he knew that in some way, shape, or form—no matter what it may be—Benjamin Dean was involved in the deaths of Kurt, Ram, and Heather.

“We’ll be going, alright,” McCord rose slowly out of his seat, Milner following behind him. “But don’t think this is the end of the conversation.”

McCord made his way to the door, Milner exited with him. As they stood on the porch, they heard the deadbolt slam into place on the door. The two officers looked at each other knowingly.

“That man is hiding something,” Milner muttered.

“Yeah,” McCord agreed, voice low as he headed toward the patrol car.

Milner frowned. “Do you think he knows where Jason is?”

“I think,” McCord said as he opened the driver’s door, “that he’s more afraid of what Jason did than of Jason being gone.”

Veronica had been up all night wondering if she was making the right decision. By letting Jason Dean back out into the world she was releasing a terror few could imagine. She was practically giving a murderer a chance to kill again, yet it wasn't like she could keep him in the basement forever—he was already retraining his strength. She couldn't turn him in either, not without implicating herself. Maybe it was selfish of her, yet with her situation, it just wasn't about her anymore. How could she raise a baby in prison?

Veronica held the key tightly in her hand; she was shaking. It was the last control she had over him. If she let him go, she was giving him free reign. Still, she didn't have much of a choice. She didn't have the guts to kill him herself—that would defeat the entire point of saving him and further muddy her already conflicting morals. Veronica put the key in the lock. Her parents were still at work—that gave her time to sit with her actions and the consequences.

Her mind raced with a thousand different possibilities each one more darker than the last. What if he hurt someone again? What if she wasn't strong enough to control him this time? But the longer she stood there the heavier the weight of her choice felt. He had already escaped before it was only a matter of time before he did again. She couldn't keep him locked away forever. She'd also noticed how much his strength was returning. It wouldn't be long before he could overpower her again.

Veronica slid the door open slowly. He was standing near the window looking out at the backyard, the only view he'd had for the past two weeks. Slowly he turned around. When he saw her, a smirk appeared on his face, his green eyes shining with amusement.

“Ah, there's my little jailer. Ready to let the birdy fly free?” JD asked. He eyed the door she left open, like she'd slam it shut and leave him down there, changing her mind at the last second.

“Shut up, asshole, and just be back by six,” Veronica snarled. She couldn't hide her distaste for him, not even now. JD only smirked, seemingly amused by her anger.

“Will do, princess. I'll be back before you can even miss me.” JD moved closer to her, standing in front of her. He leaned down and pressed a kiss to her cheek.

“You can let me out, but you can't get rid of me. Just remember that.”

Her face scrunched up in disgust. He laughed as he exited the basement for the first time in weeks—he finally got to see something other than the same four walls. JD took a moment to look around her house; it looked the same as the last time he'd set foot in the living room.

JD didn't waste a moment longer. His wounds screamed at him as he moved more than a few feet for the first time since he got them. He ignored it, pressing on despite the pain and the ache in his ribs. JD squinted as the afternoon sunlight filtered through the curtains—it was the first time he'd seen it in weeks other than the small dingy basement window.

Veronica followed behind him, only far enough away to watch with her arms crossed, ready to bolt at a moment's notice in case he tried anything. Her heart thudded—part fear, part anger, and something else she didn't dare name—as she saw him stagger out of the basement.

“Don’t look so glum, baby. I’ll be back in a few hours,” JD teased. He winked at her, and she rolled her eyes.

JD staggered toward the door. She had half a mind to trip him just to get even. JD looked like a wreck with his bandages still stained coppery brown with old blood, his stolen clothes from her dad, and the rest—his own—that were covered in holes and dust. He couldn’t go out looking like that; news traveled fast in the small town of Sherwood, Ohio. Veronica, questioning her sanity yet not wanting people asking questions, grabbed her car keys.

“C’mon, asshole, I’ll drive you home. You can’t go out looking like that. You won’t make it anyway.” Veronica grabbed her car keys. She didn’t let him say anything, instead going out the door before he could protest.

JD watched after her, both stunned by her offer and amused. It was probably a good thing that she was going to drive him—he might not last long enough to walk home otherwise. As he got in the passenger seat of her car—this time luckily not in the back—he watched her as she drove.

“I’ll pick you back up at six, okay?” Veronica asked. When he nodded, she pulled out of the parking lot.

JD stared at his house. He hadn’t been here in weeks. JD started toward the door; he pushed it open. It was dark in the living room except for the faint glow of a TV.

The blue light bounced off the walls. He could hear the announcer of the football match shouting different things as the game wound up. JD paid it no mind, just as he paid the man who was asleep in the recliner no mind. JD snuck past him easily—he’d done this hundreds of times; this was no different. JD eyed the numerous empty beer cans. He shook his head—he didn’t even care. He just thought the old man was pathetic for drinking until he passed out again.

JD moved up the stairs to his room. The first thing he did was finally rid himself of his old clothes. He took a shower, careful of his wounds, and once he was out, he redressed them the best he could. JD looked at himself in the bathroom mirror. He looked a little scruffy; his stubble had grown out from his inability to shave, his eyes looked tired, and he looked pale, but other than that, he was fine.

He quickly got dressed. He had a little over an hour before Veronica was back, so he spent the rest of the time reading. When a honk sounded outside, he made his way out. Big Bud Dean was still passed out in his chair, none the wiser that his son was home. JD got in the passenger seat. Veronica looked him over assessing him; she didn’t spare him another glance after that. As she pulled up outside her house, she sighed.

“Don’t make a fool of yourself, and remember—on your best behavior,” Veronica reminded him.

“I will. Have some faith in me, woman.” Despite his words, he was grinning. Veronica ignored the bad feeling in her gut as they walked into the house. She couldn’t help the anxiety she was feeling.

Chapter 10: Family Dinner

The moment they appeared inside, Veronica's mother emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dish towel. Her eyes lit up as she saw her daughter; when they landed on the boy beside her, she frowned. Her eyes narrowed with the kind of suspicion only a mother could have.

"Oh, Veronica, is this the lucky boy that captured your attention?" Anne Sawyer asked, trying to sound polite. She eyed him up and down, clearly not approving of the worn, scuffed boots he was wearing, the earring in his ear, the beaten-up appearance of him—little did she know her own daughter did that to him—the black trench coat, and the old button-down shirt with torn jeans.

"Yes, this is Jason Dean, or JD for short," Veronica said, trying to get rid of some of the awkwardness. JD stood there for a moment, hands in his pockets; he almost looked like he didn't know what to do. Veronica had a feeling he'd never had to meet parents before—normally he was the kind of boy most girls had to hide from theirs.

"Ah yes, JD. We met before—you said you were concerned about Veronica," Anne said, recognition appearing in her brown eyes. They had met before, when he'd stopped by the house to tell them he thought their daughter was suicidal.

"Yes, I was. Nice to meet you again, Mrs. Sawyer," JD said. He offered his hand to her, and she slowly shook it.

"Dinner is done if you kids want to come eat. Your father should be home soon, sweetheart." Anne motioned toward the kitchen, where there was already a roasted chicken on the table along with sides of mashed potatoes, corn, and green beans. Anne always went all out with cooking, even on nights when it was just the three of them. Veronica had a feeling she was meant to have a bigger family to cook for, but nature never allowed her to have her dream.

Both teens followed her into the kitchen. JD whistled at the setup. He'd been here before—briefly, no longer than a few minutes. The Sawyer house wasn't fancy by any means, but it definitely screamed upper middle class, with two parents who had good jobs, cared about their kids, and lived the white suburban American dream of the '80s. It was a far cry from his barely lived-in shithole of a house. Walking into this place was like stepping onto a movie set—one he wasn't supposed to be in, yet here he was.

"Your home is lovely, Mrs. Sawyer," JD complimented as he sat down next to Veronica. She tried not to flinch as his hand found hers under the table. She allowed it so she wouldn't raise questions, yet she wanted to pull away like his touch was a hot brand against her skin.

"Why, thank you, Jason." Anne smiled—genuinely. Veronica rolled her eyes when her mom wasn't looking; the woman was obsessed with house décor, and a compliment like that would definitely put JD in her good graces. Veronica saw him open his mouth—he wanted to correct her and say his name was JD—but he didn't. Veronica let them small-talk until her dad

arrived. She didn't say much, only contributing now and then to break the ice when the silence pressed in.

"Hello kids, what did I miss?" Leonard Sawyer asked as he sat down at the table.

"Not much, Dad," Veronica responded. She flexed her fingers, testing JD's hold on her hand. He gripped it tighter. He wasn't going to let her go, and she had no way of pulling away without her parents noticing. She forced herself to relax.

"Hello, Jason." Leonard waved at the boy, who waved back. They talked for a minute about different kinds of books before Anne came into the room.

Now all sitting at the table, it was time to address the real issue in the room—the issue of the baby and what all of this meant for them. Leonard was the first to speak. He leveled both teens with a look that made Veronica shrink and made JD tense.

"What do you plan to do? A baby is a big responsibility. It costs a lot of money, time, and effort," Leonard said. He folded his hands together in front of him, examining their facial expressions, trying to get a read on what they were thinking.

"Me and Veronica decided to keep it," JD answered for both of them before she could even think of a response. Veronica opened her mouth to argue, but at a glare from JD she shut it promptly. She wasn't scared of him—more scared of what he'd do when they were in her parents' home. She didn't want them to become casualties of his anger, so she kept her mouth shut obediently for a moment.

Leonard stared at them in surprise. "You've both decided this, then?" His gaze flickered from JD to his daughter before settling on her. "You think it's the best decision?"

Veronica felt her cheeks flush. She felt stupid, even though she hadn't even made the decision they were talking about or spoken with JD about whether she wanted to keep the baby or not. She was on the opposing team, ready to do anything to keep JD from having more control over her. JD's hand tightened on hers—a silent warning, a command to do as he said. Veronica forced herself to nod, though she grit her teeth so hard she felt pain in her jaw.

Anne let out a soft, shaky breath. "A baby is a blessing from the Lord," Anne murmured, though she didn't sound sure of her own words. She looked between the two teens with kind, worried eyes. "But there are lots of options. You both are so young. No matter what, we're here for you, Ronnie. We always will be."

"Thanks, Mom," Veronica said—and she meant it. Her brown eyes found her mother's. Anne smiled, hoping to ease some of the panic she saw there. She didn't know Veronica was more afraid of the boy beside her than anything to do with the pregnancy.

"We're definitely keeping it," JD repeated, firmer this time, his voice leaving no room for protest. He sat up straighter, shoulders squared, as if daring either adult to challenge him. "I'll get a job. I can handle it."

Leonard's gaze landed on JD, assessing him. He didn't like the possessive way JD was handling his daughter—speaking for her—and he didn't miss the tight grip he had on her hand. Veronica looked more uncomfortable than he had ever seen her, even as a child with crippling social anxiety. She looked scared—frightened—like she couldn't voice her own thoughts for fear of repercussions.

“What kind of job, son? Do you have a plan? A budget? Raising a child is a big responsibility, not something you decide on a whim.” Leonard's eyes narrowed as he stared at JD. He was starting to see the cracks in the boy's polite façade—it was all a ruse meant to lure them into his trap. Leonard wasn't dumb—not even close—and neither was Anne, but she was far more trusting than him. Leonard always erred on the side of caution. He was friendly until shown otherwise, and this boy was proving to be anything but good news.

JD's jaw clenched, clearly angry at being singled out like that. “I said I'll figure it out.”

“That's not an answer.” Leonard's tone cut cleanly through the room—stern but not unkind. It was the voice he used when he expected honesty, the voice Veronica heard as a child when she got caught doing something she shouldn't have. His gaze slid back to Veronica.

“Sweetheart, is this what you want to do?”

JD's grip tightened dangerously on her hand, to the point she felt pain shoot up her arm. Veronica bit her lip to stifle a cry. Her breath caught; she looked from JD to her parents and back again. JD wasn't looking at her—he was looking at her father, daring him to push further.

She swallowed hard. “I...” Her voice cracked. JD's nails dug into her hand. She hesitated for a long moment. Leonard saw it—she knew he saw it—judging by the look that crossed his face. Subtle, but unmistakable.

“Veronica, are you all right?” Leonard asked, his voice dropping an octave.

JD finally turned to look at her, and there was nothing gentle in his eyes—only warning.

Say yes.

Say it.

Veronica forced a weak smile. “I'm fine, Dad. Really. We... we both talked about it. We decided together.”

A beat of silence.

Anne clasped her hands to her chest, relief and worry battling for dominance. She didn't pick up on the unsettling vibe that lay underneath the calm façade. “Well... then we'll support you both however we can. But we need to discuss practical needs—appointments, finances, school—”

“None of that is a problem,” JD cut in. “She can stay with me part of the time. I'll help take care of her and the baby.”

Leonard glared at JD, not bothering to hide his distaste this time. “She is sitting right there. She can answer her own questions.”

JD stiffened, and Veronica felt her heart race. She knew this moment mattered. She also knew her dad was giving her an opening—a small one, but big enough to share her voice.

She drew in a breath. “Dad, I—”

JD’s thumb pressed into the back of her hand—a reminder of his control. Veronica flinched, and Leonard saw it too. The room suddenly felt a lot colder. Anne looked between them all, confused. They were all in on a truth she didn’t understand; she was too sweet to suspect it.

“Veronica,” Leonard said quietly, “would you mind helping your mother with the dishes for a minute? I’d like to speak with JD.”

JD’s eyes snapped to his. “About what?”

Leonard didn’t blink. “About responsibility.”

Veronica felt her stomach drop. This could go very, very bad.

“Come on, honey, let’s go do the dishes,” Anne said. She grabbed Veronica’s shoulder softly. The girl followed her without protest, though she shot a look at JD and her father over her shoulder. As Veronica busied herself in the kitchen, she stayed within hearing distance of the conversation. It wasn’t polite to snoop, but anxiety swirled in her gut—she knew that if pushed too far, JD could go off the rails, and that was the last thing she wanted.

Leonard leveled the boy with a look that meant he was serious. JD didn’t flinch; he sat up straighter, more tense, but he didn’t back down. “So, JD, have you told your father about the baby?” Leonard asked.

“No, I haven’t. It’s none of his business,” JD shot back.

“None of his business? What about your mother?” Leonard asked, raising an eyebrow. JD talked about his parents like he had one—perhaps he did. Leonard saw the boy stiffen; it was clear he’d hit a nerve.

“She isn’t alive anymore—hasn’t been since I was a child. Can we move on, please? I don’t exactly like to talk about her that much.” JD’s eyes had a fraction of sadness in them for a second before it was replaced by the stony indifference he’d had since he walked in the door. Leonard nodded, agreeing to let it go. It would do no good to make the boy reopen old wounds.

“Very well. Just know that you and Veronica are both minors. Legally, financially, emotionally—this decision affects more than just the both of you,” Leonard warned.

JD didn’t answer; he just stared down at the floor, his expression hard.

“You don’t have to do all of this alone, son,” Leonard pressed gently. “You don’t have to pretend all of this falls on you.”

“I’m not pretending,” JD murmured. “It all does fall on me. I’m the father. She’s my girlfriend. It’s my baby.”

“You talk about this baby like it’s only yours. It’s hers too,” Leonard said; he couldn’t keep the distaste out of his voice.

“I know it’s hers too,” JD said quietly, though the edge in his voice hinted he didn’t appreciate the correction. “I never said it wasn’t. But I’m the one who has to make sure nothing happens. I’m the one who—”

“Protect them,” Leonard finished for him, leaning back in his chair with a sigh. “Yes, I gathered that much. But protection doesn’t mean control, son.”

JD’s hands clenched into fists under the table. “You don’t get it.”

“Then help me understand,” Leonard said, his tone soft. “Because right now, all I’m seeing is a scared young man carrying the weight of a whole family on his shoulders. You’re going to break yourself in half if you keep this up.”

JD didn’t look up, but the stiffness in his posture wavered—just slightly, like a crack in a frozen lake. Leonard studied the boy in front of him—this kid trying to act invincible, like he was made of stone.

“Responsibility doesn’t mean you have to do this alone, Jason,” Leonard continued. “You’re allowed help. You’re allowed support. Just because you’re going to be a father doesn’t mean you’re not still a kid trying to figure things out.”

JD finally lifted his gaze, just enough for Leonard to see the flicker of fear he tried so hard to suppress. “I can’t afford to be weak. Not with her. Not with the baby on the way,” JD whispered.

Leonard shook his head. “No. But you can afford to be human.”

JD didn’t respond, but his eyes dropped again. Leonard could see the war raging inside him—the need to be strong outweighing the need to let go. This boy was haunted by something, and had been for a long time.

“I’m not your enemy, JD.”

“Never said you were.” JD huffed out a humorless laugh.

“You didn’t have to. You walk in here like you’re expecting a fight—like I’m trying to take something from you,” Leonard replied.

JD swallowed harshly, eyes narrowing. “Most adults usually are. I won’t let you take that baby from me. I won’t let anyone take it—not even her.”

Before Leonard could respond, Anne came back with dessert. She didn’t sense the awkwardness—or didn’t comment on it—as she set a chocolate cake in the middle of the table. Leonard shivered at the boy’s possessive words replaying in his mind.

I won't let you—or anyone—take the baby from me. Not even her.

The rest of dinner was eaten in silence. Leonard didn't bother talking to JD anymore. He wasn't sure he wanted to. He had all the answers he needed. JD viewed Veronica as his property, and by extension, so was the baby.

Leonard would have a private talk with his daughter when there wasn't the threat of JD around to hear it—then he was going to put a stop to all of this, once and for all, no matter what. His gaze caught Veronica's across the table; he winked at her—a silent promise that he'd protect her.

Chapter 11: Clearing The Air

The door shut behind JD softly. He had stepped out onto the front porch as soon as dinner ended—either to calm down or to smoke, maybe both knowing him. Leonard waited for a long moment to make sure the boy was gone and had no chance of listening in, before he finally spoke.

“Sweetheart, what’s going on with JD? I need you to be honest and tell me the truth,” Leonard said softly.

Her eyes flickered to the door as if expecting him to burst through it and tell her what to say. When he didn’t, she relaxed a smidge, yet her shoulders were still tense.

“He’ll be a while if he knows what’s good for him. Now let’s talk,” Leonard said. He glared at the door.

Veronica let out a shaky breath. Slowly, she nodded, ready to tell her side of the story.

“Dad, I— JD isn’t who you think he is,” Veronica began, her voice quiet like JD could still be listening outside the door.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but I think he scared you,” Leonard said, his voice even despite the rage simmering under the surface at seeing the boy try to control his daughter like that.

Her face fell just a smidge, yet it was enough to confirm his suspicions.

“He does,” she whispered. “He didn’t used to when we first started dating. Then some things happened and he started getting controlling. The baby certainly hasn’t helped. I thought he loved me—maybe he does, but not in the way he’s supposed to.” Veronica admitted.

“What kinds of things happened?” Leonard asked.

Veronica’s lips pressed into a thin line. She shook her head. She couldn’t tell him. She couldn’t admit to the murders—even if guilt ate away at her. Prison wouldn’t help her situation any. Even if she hadn’t been the one to plot them and hadn’t gone in with the intent to murder Kurt, Ram, and Heather, she was still guilty. Their blood was still on her hands.

“I can’t tell you that. Just know it changed something in him for the worse.”

Leonard didn’t press any further, seeing as she wasn’t going to tell him anyway. His jaw tightened at her words; it was clear that JD was manipulating her.

“Has he ever hurt you?” he asked.

Veronica shook her head quickly. “No, not physically at least. More mind games. That kind of thing. He gets angry really fast though, and I can’t argue with him—he’ll twist the truth until I have to apologize to him.”

Leonard closed his eyes, suppressing the rage that wanted to consume him. When he opened them again, his voice was calm and controlled, the opposite of what he felt on the inside.

“That’s not love, Veronica. That’s control, and it’s got to stop.”

“We aren’t even technically together together. The only thing keeping us tied is the baby,” Veronica admitted. JD wasn’t even really her boyfriend—no matter what he thought. She had dumped him over a month ago. He wouldn’t let her go though; he never would so long as he was alive. She had the dark thought that maybe she shouldn’t have saved him, yet it was too late to regret her choices now.

“I don’t know what to do, Dad,” Veronica admitted honestly, her voice cracking at the end. “I mean, he’s not going to leave me alone. The police are useless—they won’t help, and he’ll just find a way to get back at me somehow. I’m worried what he’ll do to the baby if I let this go on.” Veronica took in a large breath, ignoring the urge to cry; she’d done it so much lately. “I think I want an abortion. It’s the only way to get him to leave me alone.”

Leonard nodded slowly, agreeing it may be the only option they were faced with. He grabbed his daughter’s hand across the table and gave it a tight squeeze.

“Listen honey, if that’s what you want, we’re here for you. I’m here for you. Whatever you decide. If you keep it or if you choose to go through with the abortion, me and your mom are one hundred percent behind you.”

Her eyes filled with tears, yet she nodded, feeling safe for the first time in weeks.

“Thank you, Dad. Thank you.” Veronica let her tears fall this time. She didn’t feel weak—she felt seen. And knowing that she had help to get rid of JD only made her feel better. Everything was going to be okay. All she had to do was bide her time and rely on her dad and mom. They would protect her from that monster.

“You’re safe,” Leonard muttered softly, holding her hand tighter. “I promise you, Veronica, you’re safe now. I got you, baby girl. I got you.”

Chapter 12: Stay Gone

Veronica hadn't planned to go upstairs right after dinner, but exhaustion dragged her there. Her eyes were still red from crying and her throat was tight, yet she lay down, her mind racing. At least she was safe now. She was being protected by her parents. She was sure her dad would fill her mom in about the real nature of JD.

Veronica closed her eyes. She was dozing, not yet quite asleep, when she heard her bedroom door open. Assuming it was her mom or dad, she didn't bother to look up—not until a familiar voice made her freeze.

"What all did you say to them?" JD asked, his voice accusatory as he grabbed the blanket she had wrapped around herself and yanked it off her.

Veronica tried to grab it back, yet he yanked it completely out of her grip so that she couldn't hide from him. JD sat on the edge of her bed. She glared at him, yet he didn't move.

"I didn't say anything that would make you look bad," Veronica lied. She tried to keep her face as neutral as possible so as not to give away the fact that she had told her dad the truth.

JD's eyes narrowed. He clearly didn't believe her, yet he let it go for now.

"Good, because if you did, I'd have to kill them. Can't have them getting involved now, can we?" JD asked. He reached his hand into his inner pocket, and she froze.

JD's hand emerged with the metal glint of a gun. She froze. He must have found the other gun; he had left one behind at her house last time. Veronica watched as he put it back inside his trench coat. She felt her breath hitch.

"They don't know anything," Veronica insisted again. Anything to protect them, even if it put her at risk. At least they wouldn't be hurt.

She felt tears come to her eyes. She'd have to convince them not to get involved for their own safety. She didn't think about that when she'd told them the truth. JD was still dangerous and armed. She couldn't get away from him; she never would be able to.

"Good. Keep it that way," JD growled.

He softened a fraction as he pulled her to his side. She tensed under his touch for a minute before forcing herself to relax. JD ran a hand through her hair and pressed a kiss to her head, and she hated how her heart raced.

"I'll see you tomorrow, baby. Behave and nothing will happen."

JD left after that, leaving her alone.

As soon as he left, Veronica buried herself under her blanket. She held back the tears that wanted to fall. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of upsetting her.

Veronica closed her eyes, willing sleep to take her under so that she didn't have to think about the mess that was her life.

Veronica fell into an uneasy sleep. Her dreams were haunted by the gleam of a gun. She woke up at several points, yet she was exhausted enough that she went right back to sleep.

Morning came too quickly, and yet she needed to do a lot that day. Veronica rubbed the sleep from her eyes and went downstairs. Her dad was there, a mug of coffee and the paper before him.

"How did you sleep, honey?" Leonard asked, eyeing his daughter's exhausted frame.

"Alright, I guess. Just lots of nightmares," Veronica replied honestly.

She rubbed at her eyes as she sat down at the table. Her mom set a plate full of pancakes in front of her. Veronica thanked her quietly, laying her head down on the table. She thought about all she had to do that day. Not only did she have to schedule an abortion appointment, she had to keep JD from figuring it out on top of that.

Veronica was filled with nerves as she went to school. Her dad dropped her off with the promise of taking her to the clinic after school to inquire about her appointment.

"Bye, Dad. I love you," Veronica said. She watched him leave with fear in the pit of her stomach, yet she pushed it down.

JD should be at school today, though she secretly hoped he skipped. Yet he was already behind, and she had a feeling that he'd show up just to keep an eye on her.

Veronica went about her morning like normal, ignoring what she had to do.

JD appeared right after lunch. He hadn't cornered her all morning, yet at lunch he found her and sat beside her. Veronica eyed him warily, yet she didn't get up.

"How's my girl?" JD asked as he wrapped his arms around her from behind.

Veronica tensed up. She wanted to correct him—that she was, in fact, not his girl—but she didn't have the energy.

"Tired," Veronica supplied.

"Hm, yeah. Growing a baby is hard work," JD said as he sat beside her. She ignored the urge to flee.

She glared at him at his casual reference to the baby, something she didn't want. Veronica looked around. Luckily, no one seemed to have heard.

“Don’t say anything about it so loud,” Veronica hissed quietly. “I don’t want anyone to know yet.”

“Why does it matter? They’ll notice eventually. You can’t hide it forever, Ronnie, and everyone knows it’s mine,” JD said softly.

“I don’t want anyone to know. That should be a good enough reason,” Veronica spat.

His eyes narrowed like he was considering punishing her for speaking to him like that, yet he only grinned and patted her on the head condescendingly, like one would an animal.

“Whatever, Ronnie. I’m just saying it’ll be obvious soon enough,” JD rolled his eyes.

The rest of lunch was spent in uneasy company. JD asked her about her plans for the evening. She lied, saying that she was going to go home and sleep. JD asked her if she wanted to come over to his house. She declined quickly. He grinned, asking her if she didn’t have any plans why she couldn’t.

Veronica got mad. He didn’t seem to get it through his thick skull that they weren’t together anymore.

“I don’t want to spend time with my ex,” Veronica said, crossing her arms over her chest and glaring at him.

She stuck her lip out in a way that he found infuriatingly cute. He couldn’t even get mad that she called him her ex, which wasn’t true in his eyes.

“Ex,” JD repeated slowly. “That’s cute. You keep saying it like that makes it true.”

“It is true,” Veronica said quietly. “I broke up with you. You don’t get to decide otherwise.”

JD tilted his head to the side the way he always did when he was calculating something. “People don’t just get to walk away from things that matter. And this?” He tapped two fingers against her stomach lightly. “This matters.”

She flinched before she could stop herself, shoving his hand away. “Don’t touch me.”

For a split second, something dark flashed behind his eyes, but just as quickly it was gone.

Then JD laughed softly. “Relax. I’m not mad. Just surprised you’re pretending you still have choices.”

The bell rang, sharp and shrill, cutting through the moment. Veronica seized the opportunity. She grabbed her tray, standing so fast her chair scraped across the floor.

“I’m going to class,” she said, not waiting for permission.

JD stood too, falling into step beside her as if it were the most natural thing in the world. “Same way,” he said cheerfully.

They walked through the hallway together, Veronica acutely aware of every inch of space between them—and how little of it there was. She kept her eyes forward, counting her breaths, reminding herself that this was temporary. After school, she'd be with her dad. She'd be safe. She had to believe that.

At her locker, she stopped short. "I need to get my books."

JD leaned against the metal beside her, crowding her space without touching. "You know," he said lightly, "I was thinking. Maybe tonight I swing by your place again. Your parents seem real welcoming."

Her blood ran cold. She slammed her locker shut harder than necessary and looked at him, fury finally breaking through the fear.

"Don't," she said. "You are not coming to my house."

He smiled, unbothered. "See? There you go again. Acting like you're in charge."

Veronica swallowed, lowering her voice. "If you care about me at all, you'll stay away."

JD studied her for a long moment. Something unreadable passed over his face before he shrugged. "We'll see."

He pushed off the locker and strolled away, whistling, leaving Veronica standing there shaking. She hugged her books to her chest, breathing hard, fighting the urge to run.

Just get through the day, she told herself. Just get to after school.

But even as she walked to class, she couldn't shake the feeling that JD wasn't done—not by a long shot.

After school, her dad pulled up as promised. Veronica got into the passenger seat of the car. She felt immediately safer once she was away from JD's vacillating gaze. He'd left her alone the rest of the school day, yet he'd kept watching her between classes, and they shared an American Lit class last hour.

She dropped her bag onto the floorboard with a sigh, buckling herself in. She leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes for a minute, allowing herself to relax for the first time all day.

"Long day?" Leonard asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Very. JD stalked me like a hawk. He didn't leave me alone all day," Veronica groaned.

"I think, honey, we might want to go to the police with this matter. Or at least find a way to get him to leave you alone, if that's what you want," Leonard said as he pulled out of the school parking lot. They didn't notice the motorcycle following behind them.

"I do want him out of my life for good. Hopefully after this whole affair is done, he'll lose interest. He won't have anything tying him to me after that," Veronica said, hopeful yet knowing deep down that her words were hollow.

The drive to the clinic was short. It was just across town, and Veronica's dad had to run a few errands. He promised to be back to get her in an hour.

Veronica waved him goodbye as she approached the clinic. She let out a shaky breath. It was now or never.

Veronica didn't see the motorcycle parked around the block, or the figure in black that followed in behind her.

As she checked in at the front desk, the figure seated himself behind her in one of the waiting room chairs. When she turned around, her heart began to race. JD was sitting there with his usual snarky smirk on his face, looking like a cat who'd just gotten the canary—and more.

"Hey, babe. Thought you had no plans after school," JD said, arching an eyebrow as he looked her up and down. She shrank under his gaze, immediately feeling small.

"I didn't have any that involved you," Veronica snapped. She felt cornered, trapped with no escape in sight.

"We make decisions together now. Come sit," JD ordered, patting the seat beside him.

Veronica wanted to bolt, but she needed this appointment, so she reluctantly sat down beside him, careful to keep as much space between them as she could in the limited seating.

He grabbed her hand and she jumped.

When they called her name to check in, she rose. His eyes never left hers. She could feel him burning a hole into her back.

As she sat back down to wait for her appointment, he kept hold of her like she'd bolt if he let go. She might actually.

About fifteen minutes later, after tapping her foot nervously on the tiled floor, they finally announced her name. Veronica stood. Her heart dropped as he stood to follow her.

The receptionist looked from her to JD, concern evident on his face as he watched Veronica's fearful reaction.

"Is this your friend, Veronica?" the receptionist asked.

JD glared at her, daring her to say anything that would arouse suspicion. Veronica swallowed harshly. Slowly, she nodded.

"Yes," she said.

Veronica slowly followed the receptionist, JD in tow behind her. She remembered the gun he carried on him, and it sent a shiver down her spine.

As they sat in the room waiting for the doctor, she stared at the informational posters on the wall, desperate for a distraction.

“Our first visit as a family,” JD said, amused.

Veronica refused to give in to his ploy. She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from saying something she’d regret.

“I can’t wait till the little one arrives,” JD continued. “He’ll be part me and part you—the perfect combination.”

“How do you know it’s a boy?” Veronica asked, annoyed.

“I just have a feeling. Call it my divine prediction,” JD smirked.

He leaned back in the chair, eyeing her sprawled stiffly on the examination table. “Relax, babe. I ain’t going to bite you. Unless you ask nicely.”

Alone in the room with her, he put a hand on her thigh. She tensed but didn’t remove it. His touch crawled upward until it rested on her hip.

Veronica was about to tell him off when the door opened. JD didn’t remove his hand. Instead, he grabbed hers like he had earlier in the waiting room.

Dr. Caldwell entered, looking from JD to Veronica and back again. “Oh, Veronica, I see you brought a guest this time,” she said with a smile.

JD waved, half-enthused, leaning back in his chair.

“Yeah, he’s my…” Veronica began. She didn’t know what to call him anymore. Boyfriend was too strong. Friend wasn’t right. Acquaintance didn’t fit either.

“…friend,” she finished.

“I see. Well, what can I help you with today?” Dr. Caldwell asked, looking at her chart. “An examination for a potential abortion, yes?”

JD went rigid beside her. His relaxed posture vanished, his hand tightening painfully around hers.

“Yeah, about that—” Veronica began.

“We are considering getting an ultrasound,” JD interrupted.

Dr. Caldwell looked to Veronica. “Is that what you want?”

JD’s presence felt suffocating.

“Yes,” Veronica said flatly.

Dr. Caldwell nodded. “Very well.”

She dimmed the lights and proceeded. Soon, Veronica stared down at a picture in her hands. It was blurry, but real.

“That’s him,” JD said in awe. “That’s my son.”

She didn’t respond. Her chest felt tight.

JD paced the room, energized. “We’re going to be parents.”

Dr. Caldwell reminded him the sex couldn’t be determined yet.

JD didn’t care.

“We’re going to be a family,” he said proudly.

Veronica tucked the ultrasound picture deep into her bag, unable to look at it.

As they left, her heart raced.

Was there no escape from him at all?

Chapter 13: Telling The Truth

Chapter Summary

Edited for their to be more legal consequences for Veronica because it was unreasonable to think that she'd get off Scott free.

Veronica left the clinic. JD stayed behind.

Her heart was racing in her chest as she made her way to her father's car. Veronica got in the passenger side, slammed the door shut with more force than necessary, buckled herself in, and then put her hands over her eyes, trying to hold back the urge to cry. Leonard pulled her into a hug. He didn't ask questions at first. He only offered to console her. He cradled her like he had when she was four and had nightmares that would wake her up in the middle of the night, screaming.

"Shh, shh, it's okay. I've got you, Ronnie. Let it all out." Leonard ran a hand through her hair. She sobbed, burying her face in his shirt. She clutched onto him like she would fall if she let go. Veronica shook. It took her several minutes to get coherent enough to even mutter a sentence.

"What happened?" Leonard asked. He grabbed her by the shoulders and stared into her red-rimmed eyes, desperately searching for answers.

"J-JD, he showed up and..." Veronica began. She couldn't finish the rest of her words. A sob forced its way out of her throat. Leonard hugged her again. Finally, after taking a few shaky breaths, she continued. "JD followed us to the clinic, and he knew about my appointment. He came in with me. I was so scared, Dad. He had a gun. It was loaded, and I didn't know what to do. I thought he would shoot somebody. It's happened before." Veronica confessed. Her eyes widened as the truth of what she'd revealed hit her.

"Honey, what do you mean by that?" Leonard asked. He looked just as afraid as she was. If he couldn't protect her, then no one could. JD was an unstoppable monster. Not even the CIA or the FBI could stop him from getting what he wanted. What he wanted was her. Complete and utter control. She was his property in his eyes, and he'd not rest until he had her. Nobody was safe with JD around. Maybe it was time she gave in and gave him what he wanted. That way, no one else would get hurt.

"N-nothing, Dad, forget I said anything," Veronica said, hoping he'd drop the subject. She was already scared, and she couldn't confess to being an accomplice in a murder spree too.

"Veronica, has JD hurt someone?" Leonard asked. His eyes were serious. She crumpled under it. She couldn't meet his gaze. Her lack of words spoke volumes more than her words.

did. Suddenly, Leonard was pulling out of the parking lot. He was driving into town and heading right for... the police station. Her heart dropped. She begged her dad not to go, but he wasn't listening.

"Veronica, if he hurt someone, that's really, really bad," Leonard said. His jaw was set tight, and he looked just as terrified and angry as she was.

"No—Dad, please, listen to me." Veronica slammed her hand against the dashboard like that'd somehow get him to stop. "You don't understand. If you go to the police, JD will know. He always knows."

Leonard tightened his grip on the wheel until his knuckles turned white. "Then he'll understand," Leonard said quietly. "Because all I know right now is my daughter is terrified, and someone brought a loaded gun into a clinic."

Veronica swallowed hard. She couldn't come up with a defense for that. The buildings blurred by as tears shone in the corners of her eyes. Finally, with a weary sigh, she told someone for the first time what had really gone on during her relationship with JD. "He... he killed people, Dad," she whispered. "I didn't know at first that was his plan. He said we'd scare them. But Kurt, Ram, and Heather are all dead."

Leonard slammed on the brakes so hard at a stop sign that they screeched. He turned to her slowly, disbelief and fury etched onto his normally kind face.

"Killed?" His voice cracked on the word. "All those kids?"

She nodded once, miserably. "It was always for me," she said. "That's what he tried to say, at least. Anyone that made fun of me, anyone who he didn't like, he got rid of. I tried to leave him. That's when it got worse."

Leonard reached out. He cupped her cheek with his fingers. "Oh, Ronnie," he murmured. "You should've told me."

"I was trying to protect you," she sobbed. "He would go after you, though. You and Mom. Everyone."

The police station came into view. It was a small building. Sherwood was a small town and didn't have much more than a handful of officers to handle the occasional domestic dispute and drunk teenagers. Veronica's chest tightened until she could barely breathe.

"Dad, if you do this, he'll be after you, and after me."

"Then what? We just let him get away with it?" Leonard snapped, harsher than he meant to. Veronica shrank under his anger. He quickly softened, not wanting to scare her. She was just terrified, was all. "Listen, honey, we can't let him just walk around free. This needs to end. You need to tell the truth, your story, what happened. Then all of this will be over. JD will be rotting behind bars, and you'll be safe."

“People will die if I say anything,” Veronica said, unconvinced that her dad’s plan would work. JD had evaded capture from the law this far. He would leave town for good if he caught wind that she went to the police, and she had no doubt that he’d try to take her with him. “Including you.”

Leonard finally exhaled, long and slow, like a man standing at the edge of a cliff. “Listen to me,” he said. “What JD has done, what he’s doing—that’s not on you. You were surviving. But I won’t let him keep owning you. And I won’t let you carry this alone anymore.”

He turned off the car.

Veronica grabbed his sleeve, panic flaring. “Dad—”

He covered her hand with his own. “We’ll do this the right way,” he said. “Together. And if that means I sit in that station all night until someone listens, then that’s what I’ll do. He doesn’t get to decide how this ends.”

Tears streamed down her face, but for the first time that day, something else crept in beneath the fear—small, fragile, and terrifying all on its own.

Hope.

///

The station smelled like old coffee and disinfectant. Veronica sat in a hard plastic chair with her knees pulled up to her chest. She tried her best to look small; she didn’t want eyes on her. She was alone in the room with a police officer—Milner, if she remembered his name correctly—and the other officer, McCord, was questioning her dad about how all of this had been brought to them in the first place.

“We had suspected that Jason Dean was part of the murders,” Milner said. He leaned back in his chair and leveled the girl with a serious look. “Look, kid, we need you to tell us the truth. Lives could be at stake. Now let’s start from the beginning: how exactly did you meet Jason?”

Veronica swallowed harshly. She hadn’t spoken for several minutes. It was like her mind wouldn’t let her. It was catching up to all that had happened—that she was in a police station, telling the cops the crimes she’d helped commit, or at least been an accomplice to. Veronica opened her mouth, then closed it, trying in vain to get the words out.

“I met him at school. He was the new kid. Moved from out of state.” Veronica said, pulling her knees further up to her chest. She was sure she looked like a scared child, but she didn’t care.

“Okay, good. How did you two first get close?” Milner asked. He pulled a notepad out of his pocket and began to write down the things she told him.

“He climbed through my bedroom window one night, and one thing led to another, and we started dating.” Veronica flushed red, remembering what exactly JD and she had done when

he'd entered through her window. She'd been dumb, naive, and desperate for love then. Now it all felt like years ago, when it was only three months ago. So much had happened. She'd changed as a person, and so had he—for the worst. Or maybe he was awful to begin with, and she was blinded by the need to be seen.

“How did Jason get the idea to kill Heather? Why were you at her house?” Milner asked pointedly.

“I went to a college party at Remington with Heather the night before. I threw up on her shoes. She was mad I was part of her group then, so I went to apologize to save my reputation. It was too late. I was going to feed her something gross to make her throw up. JD put drain cleaner in a cup, I think, as a joke, and I grabbed the wrong cup and...” Veronica began. She choked up at the end, blinking her eyes, refusing to cry.

“What about Kurt and Ram?” Milner asked.

“They were making up rumors about me. Said they had slept with me when they didn't. And well, JD got mad. He said we'd humiliate them, make it look like a fake suicide. We were gonna shoot them with ‘Ich lüge’ bullets.” Veronica shook her head. It all sounded so stupid now. How could she believe it? Because JD had wanted her to, and she did anything he wanted. That was why. “I didn't take German. He lied to me.” Veronica finished.

Milner questioned her for several more minutes. The hours went by, and soon enough, they had pieced together the story. Veronica was tired, more than anything, yet she couldn't ignore her anxiety. Would they lock her up? Send her far away from anyone she ever cared about? Fear planted itself in her gut. It was bad enough she felt like throwing up, though luckily she didn't.

“Veronica,” he said, “I'm not going to lie to you. What you're describing makes you a material witness, potentially an accomplice.”

The words hit her like a slap.

“I didn't want anyone to die,” she said desperately.

“I believe that,” Milner said. “But belief doesn't erase consequences.”

He stood and opened the door.

“We're placing you in temporary protective custody,” he said. “You're not under arrest right now, but you're not free to leave either.”

Her heart sank.

“What about JD?” she asked.

Milner's expression hardened. “We're issuing a BOLO and a warrant. But if he realizes you talked...” He paused. “You're not safe going home.”

Veronica cried into her father's shoulder when they told him.

A social worker arrived. A lawyer. Papers were signed. Questions repeated. Her confession became evidence.

By the time she was escorted to a secure room to wait, exhaustion weighed on her bones.

She thought about her bedroom. About her bed. About how badly she wanted to be home.

She didn't know that the house was already dark.

Didn't know the closet door in her room stood open just enough to breathe.

Didn't see the familiar shape crouched in the shadows, fingers curled around cold metal, waiting for the sound of her key in the lock.

Chapter 14: Casualties

The house was quiet; you couldn't even hear the sound of the floorboards creaking. Anne Sawyer was peacefully unaware of the intruder who had snuck through the back door and up the stairs into her daughter's room. JD wasn't hunting for her—he wanted Veronica—but she wasn't in the house; she was away talking to the police. JD had been huddled in the closet for hours. He didn't dare move, didn't even dare breathe too loudly or make any noise, afraid that he'd give away his position and she'd run away.

JD was going to leave town; he was taking her with him. He hadn't followed her from the clinic—she had surely told her dad about him visiting her. JD wasn't stupid; he knew that she would talk, yet he didn't know how much she'd told. He didn't know the police were on his tail, searching for him at that very minute for murder charges. They wouldn't find him—not yet—because he was somewhere he wasn't supposed to be.

JD waited, pistol clasped in his hand, loaded, safety off, for the second she walked through that door. But Veronica would never walk through her bedroom door. Anne Sawyer, humming a tune and blissfully unaware of the danger she was in, did.

Anne heard a noise. It startled her out of her trance. JD cursed; he had been trying to be quiet, and yet he'd bumped into the wall. The humming came to an abrupt stop. Suddenly, light flooded into the closet as the door was flung open. JD came face to face with Anne Sawyer. She opened her mouth to scream, yet she never got to, as the glint of a pistol shone in the light and a loud bang filled the air.

The sound reverberated through the too-quiet house; it rang in his ears for minutes afterward. Anne fell backward, her body slumping to the ground, her humming replaced by the cold, compressing quiet that filled the air. JD watched as blood seeped into the floorboards, staining them a dark red. He breathed heavily, his eyes wide and his heart racing in his chest. This wasn't supposed to happen. Anne wasn't supposed to be home. He had been startled for the first time; he had killed someone without planning to.

JD cursed as the sound of a siren split the air. The neighbors, alarmed, must have called the cops. Smoke curled up from the gun barrel, still lingering like a finality that had been cemented. Reality crashed down on him all at once: Veronica wasn't there. He had waited for hours for a plan that no longer existed, and the police were outside, waiting to arrest him. Everything was closing in on him, fast. He had to leave, or risk being caught. He wasn't afraid of the law or a jail cell, but they didn't understand what he was fixing, what he was doing to protect his legacy. The child she was carrying was his shot. Veronica was the exception to the rot of the world, and he needed her. She was his cause now, his reason for living. Without Veronica, none of it meant anything. She was his witness, the proof that his plan worked.

JD wiped his hand on his jacket; it was covered in blood, as was his clothing. He could feel it on his face, in his hair, all over his hands. Panic would get him caught. He forced himself to breathe. This was out of his control, something that wasn't supposed to happen. He let out a

shaky breath. Everything was ruined. He was so used to having perfect control over everything—himself, Veronica, and any situation he found himself in—he was out of his element, and for the first time in a long time, he wasn't perfectly in control.

JD stepped over Anne's body. He went to the window where the ladder still was from when he used to sneak into Veronica's room. She had never bothered to remove it, like she was inviting him back in. JD left down the ladder before flashing lights filled the house, leaving behind only death, blood, and a body that wasn't even supposed to be there.

"Every war worth fighting has casualties. The system forces mistakes," JD whispered to himself as he slunk away, leaving the house behind.

///

We're sorry.

That was what growing up looked like to her: a body upstairs and muttered apologies. They hadn't protected her like they were supposed to, and she was dead.

The words kept blurring into her head over and over again, yet it did nothing to make her feel any better. She couldn't see, not with the tears blurring her eyes and distorting her vision. Everything was wrong—so wrong. Her mom shouldn't have been home. JD shouldn't have been in her house. They said they didn't know who did it, but she did.

Veronica had no doubt who did it—he must have been waiting for her. Her mom had stumbled across him unknowingly, and in a panic, he shot her. She could almost picture his face. Maybe he'd done it on purpose, to torment her—another victim of her failure to protect the innocent, because their love was toxic and slowly corroding the world. It was her fault. All of this was her fault. If she had never met him, never given in to his dark impulses, none of this would have happened. She wouldn't be sitting in a police station, hearing about her mom's death. No kids would be dead, and she wouldn't be having his child.

Veronica pulled at her hair. She could feel tears coming out, yet she didn't stop. The burn in her scalp grounded her. It wasn't enough. She dug her nails into her arms until they bled. Nothing was enough—not when she screamed her throat raw, not when her dad hugged her, tears streaming down his own face, not when he begged her to stop, not when she punched the wall hard enough that her knuckles swelled. Nothing was going to bring her back.

It was like her world tilted violently that day, in a way that nothing would ever be able to right. If Veronica had never led her parents into her world with JD, her mom wouldn't be dead. Enough was enough. Veronica was defeated; there was no way to keep anyone she loved safe anymore. He was taking them all one by one. If she wanted to protect them, she had to get JD away from them. He wanted her—if he had to have her, then that was what she had to do to get him to leave her dad alone.

She didn't have time to mourn, didn't have time to even process it. The police still questioned her, gathering every detail they could. Was she guilty or innocent? An accomplice in murder, or just a scared girl going along with the plan to protect herself? The worst part was, she didn't even know anymore. She used to be so sure of her morality, and now it was so gray

that she couldn't even see what was good or bad about her anymore. Maybe she was bad—rotted from the inside out and always had been. Maybe she was a puppet, strings being paraded about and commanded by JD.

She was never alone, constantly being monitored by police. It made her paranoid. Would they lock her away, finally? Veronica had been sure that if she got rid of her last tie to JD, her life would go back to normal. He'd interrupted her. She didn't dare make another appointment to get an abortion, almost like he was watching her, judging her every move—maybe he was. She didn't know her own agency anymore. She had no doubt that he'd come for her, and when he did, she knew that he'd have to have her.

The police knew, and that was why they used her as bait. She went to school as normal, pretended to be fine, all while an officer stood watch from the shadows, constantly surveying her like a wanted criminal. They told her they'd let her know when they found him, yet they hadn't for weeks. He had always been good at hiding when he wanted to. He was evading them, biding his time until it was right.

Veronica became their tool. She was what he wanted, so they were going to offer her up on a silver platter to lure him out. Except he wasn't stupid; he wouldn't fall for it. He was scheming, no doubt, but he'd wait until they let their guard down. She lived in constant pain and agony, even worse than before her mom died.

Veronica stood in the doorway of her room. It never felt the same after. The floorboards hadn't been replaced. She could still picture the bloodstain that her father had spent hours scrubbing, trying to erase what had happened. Yet it never came out, like it was laughing at them, telling her to remember what her actions had led to.

Veronica had nightmares of her mom screaming. She hadn't been there, yet she could picture it: blood pouring from her chest, he had shot her in the heart. An innocent, loving woman dead because her daughter had loved a criminal. JD knew the layout of the house. He knew she wouldn't be home—all because she let him into her world. Even if she hadn't pulled the trigger, she felt like she was responsible.

The silence pressing in was the worst. Her father became a husk; he barely spoke, barely ate. She didn't either. It was like they both died that day, except she'd been dead a long time. He put everything into catching JD, not just to save her, but to avenge Anne Sawyer. She stood at the bottom of the stairs that night, dread building in her gut. It took her a long time to go up them, one at a time.

Her dad told her she didn't have to go up to that room, but she felt like something was pulling her there. An invisible force. The crime scene had been cleaned up, except the stain. She stared at it for long moments, not even daring to blink. The place that had once been her safe haven, where she could escape from her trivial high school drama or from the monster she had created, now was haunted by blood.

"Mom, I'm here," she muttered, even though she knew she wouldn't get an answer. She stepped into the room, flipping on the light switch, bathing it in fluorescent glow. She could see the brown bloodstain—the one that refused to leave, much like JD. Her chest ached with everything she had never said and would never get to say now. Her stomach lurched as she

pictured her mother's surprised gaze, eyes wide as a bullet pierced her heart. She hated herself for every time she'd chosen to spend time with JD instead of spending it at home with her mom and dad curled up on the couch, watching movies she was too old for.

They could sometimes be dismissive of her feelings, chalking her depression up to typical teen angst. Sometimes they didn't understand her, but they loved her, and that was enough.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean for this to happen, I didn't," Veronica choked. "It wasn't supposed to happen. You weren't supposed to be here."

Tears soaked into her sweater. She dropped to her knees, curling up on the floor just outside her closet. She laid down in the bloodstain. It had been there a long time, yet she felt like maybe she could somehow get closer to her mother. That was all that was left of her—a stain and a memory. Outside, kids screamed as they played a game of tag, a reminder that the world didn't stop just because hers was shattered.

Silence pressed in on the house, suffocating. Slowly, she began to hum a tune her mother loved. She felt like it would bring them closer. She pressed a hand to her stomach. It had been two months since she'd figured out about the thing that had changed her life. She had gained a little weight. It wasn't too notable, not with her decreasing appetite, but she wasn't going to be able to hide it much longer. She closed her eyes. Outside, the police officer on duty could only press a hand to his throat as it was slit. As the figure skulked toward the house, finally intent on getting what was his, everything was coming to a boiling point.

Chapter 15: Can't Keep Us Apart

It wasn't hard for him to break into the house the ladder had been removed yet he found it easily in the shed. She left her window unlocked, almost as if she were inviting him in. She never did learn, did she? Veronica was still lying on the floor; she'd been there for hours, just lost in between the haze of sleep and the fullness of wakefulness. She didn't notice him at first until his booted feet stopped right in front of her.

She was startled yet it was already too late. JD had her by the arm before she could even react or run away. Veronica stared at him shock and fear taking over her face.

JD grinned he pulled her close until she was pressed against his chest he wrapped an arm around her slim waist. "Miss me, Veronica? I've come for you. We don't have much time so you'd better cooperate if you know what's good for you." JD's voice was calm yet she could sense the underlying threat to obey or else.

Veronica felt a shiver go down her spine she wanted to smack him, stab him with his own knife, or do anything he had ruined her life. It wasn't even the murders anymore he had killed her mom shattered what was left of her world. "You killed my mom," Veronica said flatly her voice wavered and she felt tears come to her eyes.

JD's grin faltered for just a second it was so brief she almost missed it. His fingers tightened around her arm a warning squeeze that made her gasp.

"That's a lie," he said smoothly, though something sharp crept into his eyes. "She was in the way I was looking for you. If you hadn't told the fucking police what happened none of this would have happened. This is all your fault Veronica."

Veronica's breath hitched. White-hot anger burned through her fear dissolved all she felt was rage. It crept through her like a fire dissolving the numbness that had claimed her for months. "You shot her," She whispered harshly. "You shot her and left her to die."

"She wasn't supposed to be there you were," JD snapped, the calmness he was projecting finally snapping. "So stop blaming me and let's go we're leaving we have to since you told the damn police."

Veronica laughed it was a sharp broken sound that even surprised her. "You don't get to rewrite it," She whispered. Her hands were shaking, yet she forced herself to meet his eyes. "You don't get to pretend it was an accident or that it was my fault. You killed her. You pulled the trigger at least give me that. Take responsibility for your actions for once." Veronica pleaded.

Something ugly flickered across his face he raised his hand she flinched for a second she thought that he'd hit her. Then he shoved her backwards she was left lying on her back in the exact spot her mom had done days prior. The irony wasn't lost on her. "Shut up Veronica I didn't come here to argue with you. I came here to get you back for good. If you want your

fucking father to live I suggest you listen to me.” JD warned her was tired of her games he pulled his pistol out shoving it menacingly in her face.

Veroncia froze slowly she nodded she didn’t have much of a choice did she? The police officer who was supposed to protect her was surely dead if he was in here so she was on her own. She was so used to surviving JD that it was almost more moral for her than anything else.

“Good now you have a few minutes to pack your shit then we’re leaving. Hurry up.” JD ordered him to aim the gun at her chest very pointedly.

She scrambled up grabbing her school backpack she emptied all the contents of the homework and school supplies she’d no longer need onto her bed. She packed what she could and before she could even consider getting help he was ushering her out of her bedroom window down the latter and into the night. As she watched her childhood house fade into the distance as he revved his bike down the street with her on the back she had only one thought she hoped her dad was safe.

///

Leonard Sawyer set his keys on the table he called his daughter's name upon receiving no answer his brows furrowed in confusion. Thinking that she was asleep he made his way up to her room he knocked on her bedroom door before entering something she’d requested once she’d gotten to high school for her own privacy.

“Ronnie?” Leonard asked he pushed the door open slowly the light was off. He called her name again recording no answer he felt panic fill his chest he flipped on the light switch he half expected her to grumble at him that she was tired and not to turn on the light yet why he saw made his heart ache. The window was halfway open and her school bag was gone her dresser drawers were thrown open like she left in a hurry and her school supplies were littered all over her bed.

“Veroncia!” Leonard screamed as he ran over to the window he looked down hoping in vain that he’d see her before it was too late. Yet as he looked out into the blackness of the night he didn’t see anything. Leonard shook as he grabbed the house phone he dialed 911 he wondered why the police officer outside hadn’t greeted him like usual and it all made sense. JD had gotten to his daughter first.

///

Veroncia felt herself nodding off the cool air of the motorcycle kept her aware but it was still night and JD had been driving for hours. Veroncia was getting tired he snapped at her anytime she asked how close they were to finding a hotel so she’d resigned herself to staying quiet silently wondering what her kidnapping would look like. As the hours slipped by she found her thoughts going to her dad and her heart ached.

Leonard would have no idea what would happen to her but at least he’d be safe. That thought was enough to get her to relax a smidge yet still was anyone really safe if JD was free? Finally after what felt like years but was only hours JD pulled into a parking lot it was a

motel it was small a little shady looking but at this point, she'd take anything if it meant that she got to sleep.

"Come on let's get some rest babe." JD got off the bike he offered her his hand. It was somewhat romantic considering his nature she accepted it and he led her into the motel.

The clerk looked them over with interest. "What brings you kids all the way to Kentucky at this hour? Never seen you two before you from out of state?" The clerk asked eyes narrowed as he looked at them clearly suspicious.

Veroncia swallowed harshly she opened her mouth to speak but was silenced when JD sent her a glare. "Yeah, not from here. Can we have a room? I have cash." JD said he pulled out his wallet setting down some money on the counter. Veronica wondered how he'd gotten it then his father popped into his head he had a safe if she remembered correctly with a lot of money in it. She wasn't surprised that JD would steal from his dad though that was the least of his crimes.

"Alright, sure." The man said he still seemed suspicious about what two teenagers were doing in the middle of the night at the motel but chose not to question it. "I don't get paid enough for this shit."

He mumbled under his breath he took the cash out of it in the register and then handed JD a key. Veroncia thanked him and JD dragged her towards their room.

The motel room was just as dinky as she thought the wallpaper was peeling it was an ugly faded floral pattern, the floor had holes in the wood, there was one bed in it that looked like it had seen better days it was covered in stains yet she chose not to think too hard about it and JD was already unpacking their things.

As she settled in that night she tried to stay as far away from him as possible. Yet the bed was small so she was forced to allow him to put an arm around her waist. Veroncia stiffened yet she forced herself to relax unless she wanted to sleep on the floor which she really didn't want to do this was what she had to put up with. Veroncia closed her eyes her new life on the run was going to be an experience she wondered if JD could think that he would be able to outrun the law forever. At some point, it'd catch up to them if it were tomorrow, a month from then, or years later, they would be found. She could only hope that it'd be soon for her sake. But she had a feeling help wasn't coming.

Chapter 16: Reconnecting

Chapter Summary

Nothing like drinking piss tasting beer while updating a story you haven't updated in months. ✨

Veronica didn't know at what point in the night that his hand had found her thigh yet she tensed. It was at first innocent just a little touch that was warm against her cool skin then it dipped lower dangerously close to between her thighs. Veronica wanted to run away from his touch yet it grounded her against the million thoughts rushing through her mind. This was familiar; she didn't know if she hated it or not much like all her thoughts when it came to JD.

Veronica felt his hope breath against her neck she could feel the smile of his lips the fucker was enjoying this. Veronica tried not to react pretended to be asleep maybe he'd leave her alone if she pretended to be out cold. She knew it was a long shot JD would push her over the edge if it meant getting whatever sick satisfaction that he wanted.

"I know you're awake Ronnie." JD mumbled against her neck. Veronica froze she felt like ice was shooting through her veins he mouthed at her neck first with soft kisses before he grew more urgent and he started planting bite marks on the side of her neck before he soothed it with his tongue. Veronica felt a molten heat pool in her stomach a contrast to the feeling of wanting to freeze like a cornered prey animal. She didn't know which side of her was winning and she hated that.

JD's hand rubbed circles into the skin of her thigh she hated how she shivered. JD could read her like a book and he could be a one where the pages were all blank. Veronica felt her breath hitch as his fingers finally settled between her legs all the teasing gone. Veronica bit her lip to stifle any sounds that wanted to come out of her throat as his calloused fingers brushed against her most sensitive spot.

JD merely chuckled against her neck the sound dark and doing nothing to help the growing problem she was facing. JD played with her for a little while just holding her in the small motel room bed chest pressed to her back she couldn't escape not without fighting him off. She didn't know if she wanted this or not but before she could think about it much further his hand was sneaking past the waistband of her jeans and underwear.

Veronica sucked in a harsh breath as his fingers circled her clitoris she nearly jumped out of the bed at the electric feeling of finally being touched. It had been at least a month if not two since they had last done anything she hated to admit but she was starved for touch she hadn't even touched herself the last few months stress and anxiety making it impossible. "That's it, take it good girl." JD purred against her neck dark and low a dangerous sound that had wetness forming between her legs.

Veronica bit her lip this time until she tasted blood she would not give him the satisfaction of seeing her affected by his actions. It was dark in the room; she couldn't see anything except blackness, so when JD pulled away for a second to switch on the small lamp on the side table, she missed his touch. It wasn't long before he was right back beside her JD popped the button on her jeans Veronica should fight back tell him to go eat a dick and die while choking on but she didn't. She didn't help the asshole take them off she made it more difficult by not raising her legs when he asked. JD just smirked at her and tugged harder at the material.

"Stop resisting me Veronica you know you want me." JD said knowingly. Veronica rolled her eyes she was going to tell him to fuck off but his grip on her shirt stopped her. JD tugged it over her head he stared at her hungry like a wolf about to devour a lamb. It sent shivers down her spine she was wearing a basic blue bra yet he was staring at her like she was the next runway model. Veronica felt her heart beat fast against her chest all of this was confusing her feelings for him more than they already were.

JD wasted no time tearing her bra off Veronica tried to cover her chest with her hands yet JD pulled her arms down to her sides. "Don't hide from me Ronnie none of that." JD chided satisfied that she wasn't going to try to cover herself again he let go of her hands. Veronica felt the heat pool on her cheeks she was utterly exposed to him and yet he was still fully clothed totally covered except for his iconic trench coat which was lying over the chair in the corner so he could sleep comfortably.

JD as if sensing her thoughts shrugged off his flannel shirt. Veronica watched as he began to tug off his tank top, the grey one that he'd worn when they'd killed Kurt and Ram. The reminder was enough to bring her back to reality a bit she looked off the side she thought about jumping off the bed making a run to the door her exposed state be damned and shouting for help. He had kidnapped her she had every right to be disgusted by him. He had killed her mom.

Veronica felt tears prickle in the corner of her eyes as she thought of her mom. JD sensing her change of mood grabbed her face gently. It was probably the nicest he'd touched her in a long time. The small gesture made more tears threaten to fall she couldn't hold back the small sob that left her throat.

His hand came up to her face, giving her just enough space to pull away. She didn't.

"Hey..." His voice dropped, softer—but measured, like he was testing which version of it she'd respond to. "Don't go there."

His thumb brushed under her eye, catching the tear before it could fall. He watched her reaction more than her face.

"You're okay," he murmured, not asking—telling. "You've got me."

A pause.

"That's what matters."

She curled into his side desperate for comfort not thinking about the source at the moment. JD ran soothing circles down her back until her sniffing had stopped. JD looked down at her

he cocked his head to the side his eyes were sympathetic she could almost convince herself he was sorry for what he did but she knew it'd be a lie.

"You feeling better?" JD asked when she nodded he leaned down and kissed her. Veronica thought about the last time they'd kissed when he'd shoved her against the wall in her basement. He'd bitten her lip until it bled and kissed her forcefully.

This kiss was different JD kissed her softly one of his hands stroked her cheek while the other held her close. The difference made her dizzy she kissed him back hesitantly like he would snap at any moment he very well might given his track record. When JD pulled back, he rested his forehead against hers, his green eyes staring into her brown ones. For once, there was no smugness, no anger, or even that possessive expression she was so used to. There was a softness there that she hadn't seen aimed at her in a while and it took her breath away.

"Lay on your back I'm going to make you feel good you'll like it" JD said. Veronica complied it wasn't like she had anything to lose at this point he had shattered her world and she knew that he'd rebuild it piece by piece until it fit his narrative. Veronica lay on her back she stared at the freckles on JD's shoulders the ones she used to count like little constellations when he'd sneak into her bedroom late at night sometimes to cuddle sometimes to do more dubious things like they were doing now.

JD grabbed the waistband of her underwear he slowly tugged them down her legs. JD chucked them somewhere in the room he didn't care where it was their problem to find it later. Veronica now fully exposed to his gaze felt herself blush she felt like a virgin being seen for the first time by someone else. She was far from one obviously given the fact that she was currently pregnant but as JD's gaze roamed over her body appraisingly it did weird things to her.

Veronica had spent so long needing to be wanted. Veronica had always been an outsider looking in. She was the weird girl until she joined the Heathers and suddenly she was popular and all the attention was on her. It was all superficial she liked the attention sure but it was nothing compared to when she had met JD.

He looked at her like she was truly something worth keeping he'll treated her like a god when she did exactly what he wanted. No one had and probably would look at her and see her the way he did the thought made her heart ache.

Veronica didn't believe in the fairytale romances that Betty made her watch as a child. JD wasn't some romantic prince coming to sweep her off her feet. He was a villain the bad guy kidnapping the princess for his own selfish gain. Much like a lot of princesses, she fell for her captor and she didn't know if given the choice she'd trade him in for some Prince Charming. Could she even do that if she had the choice? Were they really meant to be one? As fucked up and unfixable as they were could they really be together?

JD grabbed her ankle she let out a yelp as he tugged her close to him on the bed. There wasn't much space between them before but now they were touching knee to knee. JD's touch was hot on her skin like a brand. JD shoved her legs apart he crawled into the space between them. JD lifted one of her legs onto his shoulder she stared at him confused for a few seconds before he grabbed the other and put it on his other shoulder.

Veronica got the hint she wrapped her legs around his neck. JD leaned down and licked at her clit experimentally. Veronica let out a low moan. She didn't bother to hold it back as he sucked on it harder. Veronica tugged on his hair JD growled lowly the vibration added to the sensations he was giving her.

JD sucked on her clit harder he alternated between that and lapping at her folds. JD savored the taste of her on his tongue it had been a while since he'd been allowed to do this. Veronica's cries were like music to his ears as she tried to squirm away from him or get closer almost like she couldn't decide which she wanted to do.

It didn't take long for Veronica to get close to the edge she shoved at JD's face trying to get him to stop instead he pushed her hand away and doubled his efforts. Veronica's back arched as she came JD didn't stop until she was shaking.

JD let Veronica's legs drop from his shoulders finally she was given relief from the overwhelming sensations. JD wiped his mouth with the back of his hand he smirked at her like a cat who'd caught the canary.

"Good?" JD asked smugly.

"Yeah whatever." Veronica mumbled.

JD didn't give her much time to rest she heard the sound of him undoing his belt buckle. Veronica looked as he popped the button on his jeans pulling them down along with his underwear. Veronica swallowed hard as she watched his erection it was hard between his legs and already leaking pre come he must be as desperate for her as she was for him. Her folds clenched down around nothing she felt part fear part excitement as JD lined himself up between her legs.

Veronica forgot to breathe for a moment as JD pressed the tip of his length into her. It hurt for a moment Veronica squeezed her eyes shut. She didn't look as JD forced more of himself inside of her she tensed up and she resisted the urge to shove him off of her. Finally, after what felt like forever but was really just a few seconds JD bottomed out inside her. "Fuck." JD cursed he sat there for a moment probably to give her a moment to adjust or maybe just to savor the moment for a minute.

"God you're so tight. It really has been a while hasn't it? Too long if you ask me." JD pulled out almost all of the way just leaving the tip inside her before he slammed back in with one cruel motion. Veronica cried out in pain she gripped the sheets with both hands. "Shhh it'll start to feel good soon if you let it just relax Ronnie," JD said as he began a slow pace that had her insides screaming in pain.

Veronica wasn't used to penetration not after almost two months of nothing. She couldn't do anything but clutch at the sheets and take it as JD slammed into her over and over again. JD muttered curses under his breath he groaned as he slammed into her again he was picking up pace the bedframe rattled under his movements Veronica's ears burned as she imagined what the next-door neighbors were hearing.

"You feel so good, baby." JD praised he pressed his lips to hers in a hungry kiss and she was forced to kiss him back. JD sensing she wasn't enjoying herself reached his hand between her

legs he found her clitoris he circled it with his thumb. Veronica let out a small moan JD grinned she was starting to relax she'd enjoy it just as much as he was soon.

Slowly she untensed JD could tell the exact moment that he had her he slammed into a spot that had her clutching the sheets tightly this time not because she was in pain. JD hit that spot again and soon he had her making all kinds of wonderful noises.

"Good girl taking it all so well. I knew I picked the perfect partner as soon as I saw you." JD rambled he was lost in the sensation of her she was so warm wrapped around him she was perfect. "You're going to be the mother of my child. God just the thought that a part of me is in you..."

It wasn't long before JD was close to his rhythm faltering. "Fuck Ronnie I'm going to- " JD warned, but he didn't get to finish the rest as he was emptying himself inside her. Veronica felt hot molten heat inside her as JD finally came he thrust into her a few more times before he collapsed on top of her. JD panted they were chest to chest sweat was cooling in their bodies yet it wasn't entirely unpleasant.

Veronica closed her eyes letting herself drift off to another place for a little while. Eventually, JD stood up, and he pulled out of her with a groan. Wetness flooded out from between her legs JD stared for a long moment a smirk on his face. "I wish I had a camera I'd frame that."

Veronica told him to shut up, but he merely laughed. JD went into the bathroom, and a moment later he returned with a rag. JD wiped away the mess between her legs it was almost tender yet it was still JD. As JD turned off the light seemingly satisfied for now he settled in behind her a hand around her waist and he buried his head in between her shoulder and neck. Veronica sighed what had her life come to?

Chapter 17: No Distance

Veronica woke up before JD did. For a long moment she didn't even dare breathe, as if making any sound would make him stir from his slumber. The sun was just peaking over the horizon, shining through the curtains into the motel room. JD's arm was still around her waist, his hold was loose unlike the tight hold he'd had on her before he'd fallen asleep, almost like he was afraid she'd escape.

Veronica's stomach twisted as she thought about her mother. The image popped into her head with alarming clarity; she hadn't seen the event itself, but she remembered the blood stain, the funeral. Veronica closed her eyes; she could picture clearly the day that her mother was taken from her.

///

Veronica was one of the few people who stayed after the service. There had been family from out of town, family friends, and sympathetic people from town. She felt empty inside as she watched them lower her mother into the ground. She didn't know how to say goodbye to someone who was never supposed to die this early. Veronica watched stone-faced as dirt was poured over the casket; she didn't even cry. She couldn't anymore. It was like all her emotions had bled out of her, and she was left an empty husk.

As her dad led her away from the cemetery, she followed on autopilot. Veronica didn't let her mask slip until she was in the car. She pressed her head against the cold glass as she watched the world fade by in a blur. She closed her eyes. She pictured her mom's smiling face. She felt a tear slip from her eye, knowing that she would never see that face again except in memories and pictures.

///

Veronica opened her eyes, shaking her head, clearing the memory from her mind. Veronica's hand clutched at the sheet on the bed until her knuckles turned white. She forced herself to calm down; she wouldn't be vulnerable. Not with him this close. Not even asleep. Was she safe from his control? She turned to look at JD; he was still fast asleep, unaware of the thoughts going through her head.

JD looked almost peaceful like this; his face didn't hold the usual anger and malice it normally held. He looked like a boy she could take to meet her parents—the normal kind that hadn't murdered four people in cold blood, one who didn't have a kill count. Then her eyes drifted to the door. It was closed; it wasn't far. Her heart pounded in her chest as she considered the possibility.

Veronica quietly lifted JD's arm off of her and slid out of bed, standing up shakily. Each inch she moved closer to the door, she felt like she was one step closer to freedom. Her hand hovered over the doorknob; she hesitated for a long moment. Could she ever really escape JD? He could hunt her down, and she'd be back where she started—maybe in an even worse place.

JD hadn't just isolated her from her family and friends; it was much deeper than that. JD had successfully isolated her from everyone. The thought made her stomach churn, yet she couldn't stop now, not when she was so close to freedom she could taste it. Veronica's hand felt the coldness of the doorknob underneath her touch; she hesitated. Could she really do this?

Veronica took a look back at JD. It was dangerous. Even now, asleep, he was in her head, making her stop and rethink her decisions. Part of her hated him. She should kill him in his sleep, suffocate him to death with a pillow—but he was stronger, and she knew it. Veronica stood no chance against JD physically; he was 5'9, 160 pounds, and lithe muscle. Comparably, her 5'4, 100 pounds was nothing to him.

JD looked peaceful like this; it was almost enough to convince her that he was safe. She shook her head. She'd never be safe, not with him around. Veronica twisted the knob before she could think about what she was doing. The cool air hit her; it was like a wake-up call, making her shiver in her nightgown. Veronica's eyes locked on his trench coat, which he had hung on the bathroom door.

Veronica grabbed it along with her shoes. She was quick as she shrugged on the trench coat, then her shoes. She could smell the stench of gunpowder and cigarettes—the scent that was all him. It didn't make her sick this time; instead, it almost comforted her. It was familiar in an aching way. Veronica took her first step out into the night, her heart racing as her foot passed the threshold to her escape.

Veronica put her other foot out next, slowly glancing back at JD every few seconds like he'd somehow spring awake and catch her. Veronica closed the door softly behind her. She made sure to be quiet, tiptoeing down the hall; with each step she put between her and the motel room, she couldn't believe her luck. She looked behind her again, half expecting JD to be bolting down the hallway behind her.

Veronica made her way to the front desk. The same clerk that had been there when they checked in was there. He had a magazine spread out before him—Playboy judging by the cover, which made her nose scrunch up in disgust. “Well, if it ain't the cute little madam from earlier.” The clerk's eyes raked up and down her figure, making her cringe.

“Can I use the phone?” Veronica asked, her gaze snapping to the landline on the desk.

“Only if you give me something in return, cutie.” The clerk winked at her, leaning against the desk. She could smell the alcohol on his breath.

“Can't I just use the phone?” Veronica asked, somewhat irritated. She was tired of being used by men.

“Come on, that's no fun.”

The clerk reached across the counter and grabbed her arm. Veronica tried to pull back, yet his grip was strong. “Let go of me!” Veronica shouted. She looked around, hoping that someone would hear her and rescue her. When she saw no one, she felt her heart drop. She was left alone with this creep.

“This is how it’s going to go, girlie. You’re going to get on your knees, give me what I want, and maybe then I’ll consider letting you use the phone. It’s not often a pretty thing like you comes by.” The clerk grinned, his yellow teeth glinting in the low light. Veronica felt tears gather in the corner of her eyes. She opened her mouth to say something, anything, so she wasn’t powerless.

“I have a boyfriend.” Veronica shot out, hoping it would somehow dissuade the clerk. JD wasn’t really her anything, but this creep didn’t need to know that.

The man just laughed instead. “That kid you came in with? He’s hardly a man. Come on, let me show you a real good time. What a real man is like.”

“I said no.” Veronica spat. She tried to yank her arm back, but his grip was like iron; it made her cry out in pain.

///

JD woke. The first thing he noticed was the empty space beside him. JD sat up suddenly, feeling beside him in the dark. When he didn’t feel Veronica, he scrambled up. JD flipped on the light switch; his gaze swept around the room. When he didn’t see her, he pulled the bathroom door open so hard it slammed against the wall. When he didn’t see her there, he pulled on his boots hurriedly.

JD grabbed his gun. He went to grab his trench coat and saw that it was missing as well. JD gritted his teeth so hard that they hurt. He opened the door to the motel room, not bothering to close it as he ran down the hallway. He didn’t know what Veronica thought she was doing, but he was going to make her regret even thinking about leaving him.

///

Suddenly, the clerk’s gaze snapped over Veronica’s shoulder. His expression shifted—anger, confusion, then something sharp and unmistakable: fear. Before she could react, his grip disappeared. She was shoved backwards, stumbling, and the clerk scrambled away from her like she was something diseased.

The clerk didn’t get far. His arm jerked mid-step, yanked so hard that it twisted at an unnatural angle, and a sharp crack sounded in the air, making Veronica cringe. “Get your hands off her,” a voice said behind her, low, steady, and far too calm for the way the clerk panicked.

Veronica felt her blood run cold; her heart beat fast in her chest. She didn’t need to look to know who was there. She did anyway, and what she saw made her gasp. JD was there. He was in his pajamas, yet that didn’t minimize the look in his eyes. It was pure murderous rage. It betrayed his calm exterior. He had the clerk’s arm twisted unnaturally behind his back; his other hand was holding his pistol, aimed right between the clerk’s eyes.

Veronica opened her mouth to say anything to make this situation look better than what it was, but she didn’t know where to even begin. The clerk pleaded for JD to let him go. Instead, JD pulled on the arm he had harder, making the clerk whimper in pain. Veronica

found it almost ironic how he'd treated her, and now karma was getting back at him at its finest.

JD slowly let the man go. The clerk bolted away as far as he could from JD, behind the desk. His hand reached for the phone, perhaps to call 911, when a sudden bang stopped him. Both Veronica and the clerk jumped as a bullet slammed through the phone, rendering it useless. Veronica felt her hope die even more as the phone was destroyed. There was one thing her and the clerk had in common: they were both scared of JD.

JD slowly lowered the gun. He didn't spare the clerk another glance, like he was unimportant. It didn't leave his hand as his gaze snapped to Veronica. She felt like the air left her lungs as those green eyes took in her appearance. She expected him to react violently—yell, aim the gun at her, anything—instead, a low languid smirk played onto his face.

“Going somewhere, babe?” JD asked, looking at her in his trench coat, clicking his tongue. “Taking me with you, are we?”

“I was just taking a walk when this creep decided to grab me,” Veronica lied. She knew he'd see through it effortlessly like he always did, but it was worth the effort; he didn't need to know what she was really trying to do.

“She asked to use the phone,” the clerk supplied. JD shot him a venomous glare that had him cowering immediately.

“Oh, did she?” JD asked. He didn't want a reply; he stepped closer to her.

Veronica took a step back, but JD was already grabbing her. Veronica yelped as his hand enclosed around her wrist. It wasn't harsh like the clerk's, yet his grip was tight. He yanked her toward him. Veronica was pulled against his chest. She put her hands against it, not pushing him away, knowing that wouldn't help her right now. JD grabbed her chin, forcing her to look him in the eyes. The calculating gleam in those eyes unnerved her; she didn't get much more time to think before his lips met hers.

Veronica gasped as he pulled her into a harsh kiss. JD nipped at her bottom lip and she was forced to let him in. He tasted like cigarettes and mint toothpaste. He pulled her against him until their bodies were practically flush. “Next time keep your hands off what's not yours,” JD growled. The next second he was leading her back to their room, not sparing the clerk another glance.

The kiss had been purely for show—a clear claim as to what JD viewed as his. The clerk wouldn't call the cops; he was too scared of JD, and he couldn't not with the phone destroyed anyway. JD led her to their room. As soon as the door was closed behind them, he wheeled on her, backing her into the corner.

“You lied to me,” he growled.

“No, I was just getting some air—”

“Bullshit,” JD snapped, pinning her against the wall.

“You were leaving,” he said softer this time. It wasn’t a question.

Veronica swallowed. “No—”

“Don’t,” he interrupted quietly. “Don’t do that. Don’t lie to me.”

“Why shouldn’t I? You lie to me, and you didn’t rescue me like you thought you did. I just traded one monster for another,” Veronica snapped. She was tired of him trying to control her, acting like she didn’t have a voice. JD’s jaw tightened; she could tell her words were making him angry. “Good, let him be mad,” Veronica thought smugly. “You don’t own me.”

“That’s what all this is about? You tried to leave because you don’t want me to own you?” he asked softly.

Veronica swallowed hard, forcing herself to keep going despite the fear she felt. “No. This is about you deciding that I don’t get a life outside of you.”

His gaze sharpened at that, like she’d finally said something worth hearing.

“I didn’t stop you from anything,” he said.

“That’s not true,” she snapped, harsher now. “You follow me. You watch me. You always show up—you don’t give me a choice if you’re here or not.”

JD’s jaw tightened, but he didn’t interrupt.

Veronica took a shaky breath and pushed forward. “You don’t protect me,” she said. “You control me and call it love because it sounds better in your own twisted head.”

JD looked at her for a long moment, like he was calculating something.

“I do own you,” he finally responded, stepping closer until he was so close she could reach out and touch him. “You’re mine. You were since the day you agreed to be mine.”

“I’m not your anything anymore.”

“It’s funny how you think you get to decide that.” JD still had the gun in his hand; he looked at it, then back at her—the meaning clear even if he didn’t say a word. Veronica should feel scared. Instead, something cracked in her—something sharp and disbelieving—and she only laughed. JD raised an eyebrow; he looked at her like she was the one who’d lost her mind.

“Say it again,” he said quietly.

Veronica’s pulse spiked, but she held her ground. “Say what?”

His gaze sharpened a fraction; his finger fiddled with the trigger like he was truly thinking about unloading a round into her.

“Without me,” JD said quietly, “you would’ve been alone with him. He would have taken what he wanted, and no one would have stopped him,” JD growled.

“I don’t need you to keep me safe. I’m safer without you,” Veronica shot back.

JD slowly lowered the gun. He set it on the dresser beside them. Slowly, he stepped back, and for the first time all night Veronica felt like she could finally breathe. JD put his hands up like he was soothing a wild animal, slowly pointing to the door. “You’re safer without me? Then go,” JD said.

Veronica felt her heart race in her chest; she knew that he couldn’t really be letting her go—it would never be that easy. This was a test, a mind game he was playing her for a fool. Veronica glanced from him to the door; she was still wrapped in his trench coat, a physical reminder of him, and its weight, the feel of the fabric against her skin, was a reminder of how she’d never truly be free from him.

Veronica took one step forward, then two. She looked back at JD. He raised an eyebrow, shrugged like he didn’t care that she was about to leave. Veronica hesitated; she expected him to grab her, threaten her, maybe even finally shoot her as she took a step out of the motel room. When he didn’t do any of those things, she paused.

“You’ll just hunt me down anyway. You won’t ever leave me alone,” Veronica said. She knew the truth—how he works.

JD just smirked lazily, like a cat who’d finally caught the canary. He watched as she hesitated, thought, and re-decided what she should do. He was enjoying all of it—this little game they were playing.

Veronica was now standing out in the hallway. JD made no move to stop her; he didn’t move from his spot, he just kept smirking like he knew something she didn’t. Veronica halfway down the hallway now froze. JD would never truly let her go; she knew that. Besides, who would she call? No one could help her. Her dad wasn’t safe with JD around. No one was.

So many people had died because she couldn’t control JD. When was it going to end? Veronica was slowly pushing back—maybe somehow she could find a way to stop it without anyone else dying. It was a risky thought, one she didn’t know how she was going to execute, but she couldn’t just do nothing. JD needed a collar, a chain—something to keep him in line. Maybe she could be that chain. She just had to figure out how to one-up him. She knew how he ticked; she just had to find a weakness.

Veronica hated how she hesitated. Slowly, she turned around. JD just kept that stupid smirk on his face as she walked back into the hotel room. “I knew you’d come back,” JD said quietly.

“This doesn’t mean anything.”

“Sure it does.”

They didn’t say anything after that. JD led her back to bed; he hung his trench coat back up where he had hung it earlier. As JD wrapped his arms around her waist and pressed a kiss to her head, she didn’t resist this time. Instead, she laid her head on his chest and listened to his heartbeat. She counted the beats, got up to one hundred, and felt herself grow drowsy after

that. It had been a long night. Veronica fell asleep like that, and she didn't know how to feel about anything anymore.

Chapter 18: Learning The Game

Chapter Summary

I need some time to work on this stories plot I've been mostly winging it from the beginning with a rough idea for the beginning, middle and end. I'm going to take a few weeks to work on where I want it to go so expect no updates for a bit. Thanks for understanding. -slushieguts

The next morning, Veronica wakes up half drowsy. Last night had been horrible. She doesn't wake with the panic of last night; instead, she feels groggy, like she's weighed down by a hundred bricks. Veronica feels JD's chest rising and falling steadily beneath her cheek. She listens to his heartbeat—she stops at twelve. Veronica finally opens her eyes. She turns her head, and she freezes when she sees JD staring down at her.

“Morning, babe. Sleep well?” JD drawls, his voice deep, the early hours making it scratchy.

Veronica swallows harshly. She forces herself not to pull away from his hold; he still has his arm wrapped around her waist. “Morning.”

For a long moment, neither of them says anything. JD's eyes search her face like he's searching for something in her gaze. Finally, he looks away, laughing quietly to himself like he's discovered something funny.

“You sleep alright?” he asks.

Veronica takes a moment to answer. “Yeah.”

JD hums in acknowledgment, his fingers tense on her waist—not moving, not trapping her, just there. “You moved around a lot in your sleep. Bad dreams?”

Veronica hesitates for a moment before answering. “Something like that.”

JD just smirks. He presses a quick kiss to her head. He holds Veronica tighter against him, and she feels a sudden wave of nausea slam through her. Whether it was typical morning sickness or JD's presence, she didn't know, but it hit her like a freight train. Veronica puts a hand over her mouth; it takes everything in her not to lose everything in her stomach right there.

Veronica shoves herself up in a panic. She nearly falls from how fast she stands up. Her head spins—one hand clamped over her mouth, the other scrambling against the wall. Veronica almost thinks she won't make it to the bathroom before passing out.

“Whoa, hey—” JD pushes himself up on his elbows, watching her with sharp, alert eyes. JD pulls himself to his feet; a second later, his hands are around her waist. He pulls her against him, easily holding up her weight. JD helps her stumble into the bathroom. They barely make it halfway in before she collapses to her knees in front of the toilet.

Veronica heaves what little she has in her stomach into the toilet. JD watches, almost like he’s unsure of what to do. For once, he doesn’t have any smart quips or comments to make. He just stands there, looking from her to the toilet like he’s searching for answers.

JD moves slowly, his hand resting on her back, barely touching. “Easy,” he murmurs, voice rough from sleep but steady. “Don’t fight it.”

Veronica doesn’t argue—she can’t, not when another wave hits her. She forces herself to breathe through it. Luckily, this time she doesn’t vomit. JD runs his hand down her back and then back up. He repeats this until she relaxes. Veronica hates how she feels soothed by this monster.

“You’re pushing yourself too hard,” he says after a moment.

Veronica lets out a weak, humorless breath. “I didn’t realize you were a doctor now.”

JD huffs quietly at that. He reaches for the towel rack. He turns on the water and lets it run for a minute before placing a towel under it. JD wets the towel and deftly wipes her mouth until she’s clean. Veronica looks at him—this is too gentle for him. The pregnancy is turning him soft. Maybe she can use that to her advantage.

Veronica swallows. She looks into the bowl, flinching at the mess she’s made. “It’s getting worse.”

“I know,” JD says.

“You didn’t eat enough last night,” he adds. “That’s part of it.”

Veronica shoots him a look over her shoulder. “You tracking my meals now?”

“Someone has to,” he replies evenly.

Veronica pushes herself up. Her world spins; she stumbles, yet JD’s hands are instantly back on her waist to steady her.

“I’m fine,” Veronica lies.

“Sure you are.”

JD doesn’t let go, even when she shoots him a nasty glare. “You’re hovering. It isn’t helping anything,” Veronica snaps.

“You passing out in a motel bathroom isn’t going to help either,” JD shoots back.

Veronica has no response to that. He leads her out of the bathroom; his grip doesn't slip until she's sitting on the bed.

"We can't stay here—or anywhere—for that long. They'll be looking for us, especially after I killed that police officer to get to you." JD paces the room. He looks out the window like he expects someone to be there.

"You killed a police officer? Jesus Christ, JD!" Veronica yells. Just when she thinks the situation can't get any worse, it somehow does.

"What? I couldn't just let them keep you away from me." JD shrugs like his murdering spree is a small inconvenience and not the taking of human lives. "Look, point is, we have to go. Take a minute to get your bearings, then we pack our shit and leave."

Veronica takes a few minutes to rest while JD packs their things. She hadn't been allowed to bring much when he took her—not more than a few days' worth of clothes. It doesn't take them long to pack. Veronica pushes herself up on shaky feet. JD carries both of their bags, not trusting her to manage the extra weight. JD grabs his trench coat last. He stares at it for a long moment before looking back at her.

"It's cold out here," JD says. He pushes it over her shoulders before she can protest.

Veronica doesn't fight it. She lets him put it on her; even in jeans and a T-shirt, she's cold. Veronica tugs it tighter around herself. The smell of cigarettes and gunpowder invades her senses.

After one last sweep of the room, they leave the motel behind. JD stops at the front desk. His eyes narrow when he sees the same clerk as last night. The man cowers as JD approaches. JD doesn't say anything—he merely sets the room key down, gives the man one last glare, and then tugs Veronica out behind him.

JD puts their bags on the back of his bike. He gets on; Veronica climbs on behind him, and then they're out on the highway, leaving the motel behind them. Veronica lays her head on JD's shoulder. She closes her eyes, letting the wind soothe her. She wonders how far until they stop again.

///

It feels like hours since they last stopped—maybe it is, or maybe it's only been thirty minutes. She can't tell the difference. Veronica raises her head; all the miles blend together, so when the roar of the engine finally stops and JD pulls into a gas station, it's disorienting. JD pulls up to a pump and gets off the bike.

"We need gas," JD murmurs. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out twenty dollars.

Veronica stares at him, confused, when he holds the money out in front of her. "You wanted more freedom, so go ahead—pay for the gas. Go in the store," JD urges.

Veronica takes the money from him hesitantly. It feels like some kind of trick. JD wouldn't give her a chance to escape like that. Veronica slowly slides off the bike. She's feeling better now, luckily, as she makes her way into the store, shooting glances behind her at JD every once in a while to make sure this isn't some kind of game.

Veronica goes up to the register. A middle-aged woman greets her and asks what she needs.

"Twenty dollars, pump three," Veronica says. She hands the employee the money. Veronica looks around the gas station as the employee puts the money in the register. She spots a phone on the far wall, and her heart races in her chest.

"Can I, um, use the phone?" Veronica asks.

Before the employee can answer, the door opens behind her. Veronica chances a look over her shoulder, and what she sees makes her heart drop. JD is approaching the register. He stands behind her, a knowing smirk on his face. This is a test. She'd been right.

"Can I get a pack of smokes?" JD asks. His eyes flick between Veronica and the employee like he's trying to read what they said.

The employee grabs a pack of Marlboro Lights and sets them on the counter. JD pays for them before tucking them into his pocket.

Veronica's fingers hover near the counter for a second too long. She looks at the phone from her peripheral vision.

Veronica forces her hand to move. She curls her fingers into her palm and lowers it like she never meant to reach for the phone. "Actually," she says, voice steadier than she feels, "do you have anything for nausea?"

The employee blinks, thrown off. "Uh—yeah, aisle three."

Veronica moves slowly. She brushes past JD, her shoulder grazing his. She goes to aisle three and grabs the first thing she sees, staring at the label long enough to make it look intentional. She brings it back to the counter. The employee rings it up. JD pays, takes his change, and leads her out of the store.

JD grabs her hand with his free one, tugging her toward the bike. "You were going for it," JD whispers. It sends a shiver down her spine.

"Going for what?" Veronica asks, playing dumb.

JD shakes his head, but he doesn't say anything else. Instead, he helps her onto the bike. JD gets on in front of her, and as they pull out onto the highway, Veronica smirks. She got away with it. Even if he's suspicious, maybe she can turn this game around.

///

"Where are we going?" Veronica asks. They've been on the road for a while. She wonders where he's taking them—does he even have a plan, or is he just driving aimlessly?

He doesn't answer right away, yet she feels it—the subtle shift in him. He's heard.

She swallows, choosing her words carefully.

“Where are we going?”

For a while, there's nothing but the roar of the engine and the empty road ahead. Then suddenly, he speaks.

“Does it really matter?”

Veronica's fingers curl into his shirt. “Yeah,” she says after a second. “It kind of does.”

“Why?” he asks. “You planning your escape route?”

Veronica forces herself to remain calm. She isn't going to give him a reaction. “No,” she says steadily. “I just want to know where I'm going.”

“Same place I'm going.”

“That's not an answer.”

“Yes, it is.”

The speed of the bike picks up, the wind cutting harsher now, louder—like he's trying to push the conversation away.

“Stop asking questions,” he snaps.

“JD—”

“Veronica.”

The name is a warning. She shuts her mouth after that. She isn't going to get any information out of him anyway. Veronica pouts like a sullen child who's been scolded. Just when she thinks she's gotten the upper hand, he easily takes it away from her.

///

Milner flips through the file. It has grown from a stub to several pages as the case unraveled. With Veronica's testimony, it has opened up a new door—murder instead of several unrelated suicides. McCord and Milner got an interesting call that morning from a motel clerk. When they questioned him and asked why he waited to call, he claimed the phone had been shot by a young man after he came after his girlfriend.

When asked what his intentions were with Veronica, the clerk said that he had been concerned because her boyfriend seemed suspicious. Milner didn't believe him. The man was shady, yet he wasn't the suspect in this case. After getting his statement, they tried to think about where JD and Veronica would head next, yet they came up blank. Kentucky was a

pretty random spot for the teens to settle—they must just be trying to escape with no real destination in mind.

Milner and McCord were up all night trying to think of where they could be. Drawing a blank, they decided to bring in someone who knew their suspect better. Mr. Sawyer was in the waiting room, waiting to be invited into the interrogation room. When they were ready, he was led in by the police secretary.

Leonard Sawyer sat down across from the detectives at the table. “We have a sighting of your daughter from Kentucky,” Milner began. He folded his hands on the table in front of him.

“That’s good—that means she’s still alive,” Leonard said hopefully. “Is she safe?” he asked, concerned.

“As far as we know, yes. He hasn’t appeared to hurt her, but we don’t know Jason’s motive yet. Why does he want your daughter? Other than the fact that she’s his ex-girlfriend,” McCord asked. They knew about the murders, yet as far as JD’s motive, they didn’t know. Even after questioning Big Bud Dean several more times, they had come up with nothing. The man truly didn’t know his son—it was sad.

“Jason is obsessed with my daughter. He’s controlling—I saw it for myself when I was introduced to him at dinner,” Leonard began. His eyes turned dark, like he was remembering something unpleasant. “He wouldn’t let her speak for herself. Veronica... she told me that night before she left that she was pregnant, and JD is the father.”

Both officers blinked. They turned to look at each other, a silent conversation passing between them. McCord was the first to recover. He leaned back in his chair and studied Leonard more carefully now. “She told you this the night before she disappeared?” he asked.

Leonard nodded. “Yes. She was scared. I promised that me and her mom would protect her. I told her she didn’t have to stay with him. Then that monster took everything away from me—my wife, my daughter...” Leonard cut himself off. He covered his mouth, barely holding back a sob.

“And you’re sure that she wanted out?” Milner asked.

“Of course. She begged me to help her.” Leonard frowned.

“Well, that complicates things,” McCord muttered.

Leonard’s gaze snapped between them. “What does that mean?”

“It means if he’s as controlling as you say, he has a reason to keep her closer,” McCord said.

Leonard stiffened. “No—no, no. She wouldn’t stay with him, not because of that. You have to understand—she wanted out.”

“But we’re saying she might think she has to stay.”

Leonard shook his head. He slammed his hand on the table, startling both officers. “She is not weak. She would not stay with that monster if she didn’t have to. He’s keeping her with him—he has to be.”

“No one said she was,” Milner replied. “Survival isn’t weakness. I’m just saying she might do what she has to do to survive, which might look like siding with him. Until we know for sure, we have to be careful. Who knows what he’s done to Veronica? She’s probably scared—for herself and for the baby.”

Milner closes the file with a soft thud. “Let’s think about this logically,” he says softly. “Three kids are dead, two are on the run, and add a pregnant girlfriend to the mix.”

McCord nods slowly. “He’s not heading somewhere random anymore.”

“No,” Milner agrees. “He’s heading somewhere permanent. A new town—maybe a new identity. He’s going somewhere he can hide without having to run.”

Leonard’s voice comes out tight. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means he’s not just running,” Milner says. “He’s planning something.”

“They won’t stay on the road forever,” McCord adds. “Too many faces, unknowns—and too visible.”

“Friends?” Leonard offers quickly. “Does he have any friends?”

“Not that we know of.”

Milner glances back at Leonard. “Did your daughter ever mention anywhere he liked to go? Anywhere outside of school—trips, drives, anything like that?”

Leonard hesitates. “...No. Not specifically.”

“Think,” McCord presses. “Anything unusual. Even small.”

Leonard drags a hand over his face, searching. “She said he liked... quiet places. Places where no one bothered him. That’s all I remember.”

Milner lets out a quiet breath. “That tracks.”

McCord steps back from the board. “Then we stop chasing highways,” he says. “We start checking places people disappear into.”

Leonard stands abruptly. “Then go. If you know that, then go find her.”

Milner looks at him—really looks this time.

“We will,” he says.

A beat.

“But when we do... we need to be prepared for the possibility that she doesn’t run to us.”

Leonard’s expression hardens immediately. “She will.”

Milner doesn’t argue.

But he doesn’t agree either.

“I’ll get units to start sweeping rural stops within a fifty-mile radius of that motel,” he says.

“Gas stations, diners—anywhere they’d have to pass through.”

Milner nods. “And flag any purchases that look like supplies—food, meds...”

He pauses, glancing briefly at the file.

“...prenatal.”

Leonard’s face pales slightly.

The room falls quiet again.

Outside, somewhere down the hall, a phone rings.

And this time—they have a direction.

Chapter 19: Playing House

Chapter Summary

I lied when I said I needed time to figure out the plot lol. Here's another update.

Eventually pavement turned into cracked gravel and then into dirt roads. The path wound between rows of trees. Branches clawed at the sides of the bike as they rode by. JD slowed down, picking his way through the winding path, avoiding tree roots and loose dirt. The outside world feels foreign now; it's quieter than normal, more isolated.

The trees broke to reveal a small cabin down the end of the dirt path. It was withered paint peeling, the deck sags on one side, and a sheet covered the window instead of a curtain. This is a place that wasn't inhabited; it was abandoned. The thought made her stomach churn. Why was he bringing her out here?

Veronica knew the answer; he wanted to isolate her. He wanted to take her away from any chance she had of escaping. Veronica clutches JD tighter; she buries her head in his flannel shirt mostly to keep herself from crying at the thought, yet she forces herself to stay strong. Finally the bike stops, the roar of the engine dies, and JD parks near the cabin.

Veronica doesn't move for a long moment; she just keeps her face buried in his shirt. Finally JD swings his leg over the bike; he stands, and she's forced to look at him. JD grins; he gestures at the cabin in a wide gesture. "Home sweet home." JD grabs her hand and forces her off the bike. He wraps an arm around her waist. Veronica thinks for a minute about running off into the woods and facing the elements instead of him, yet she doesn't know where she is, and that would be stupid.

She forces herself to stay still and not flinch away from his touch. JD pulls her closer as if testing her. He looks down at her lips; it's brief, but then he's leaning down. Veronica should stop him with a hand on his chest. Not that he'd listen yet, but it was worth a try, yet she doesn't. She keeps her hands down, and when his lips met hers in a soft kiss, she doesn't pull away. She doesn't kiss him back, yet she doesn't stop him either.

JD seems content with this as he pulls back and presses his lips against hers a second time. This kiss is more insistent; he grabs her jaw. His hand is warm and rough on her face. JD rests his forehead against his green eyes can hers searching for her reaction. "Welcome to your new home for now," JD murmurs.

"How did you find this place?" Veronica asks.

"Dad took me here once before we moved to Sherwood on vacation." JD supplies. His response is short; he doesn't supply any more information, just walks away from her

expecting her to follow.

Veronica glances at the pile of firewood that's set against the cabin. It hits her like a truck. He had planned this; all of it was too precise. He must have come here before. He'd meant to bring her the entire time. JD's gaze follows hers; he smirks just slightly. "What, thought I was just winging it?"

JD grabs their bags off the bike; he carries them both up to the deck where he drops them. Veronica stops; she looks around at the trees. It's too quiet here; she is alone.

"Veronica."

His voice cuts through the silence, not loud but sharp. She turns quickly and follows him. JD steps on the deck; it groans under his weight. JD pulls out a key out of his pocket. 'Of course he has a key.' Veronica thinks venomously.

JD glances back at her; he catches her expression, and he grins. "Hey, if I really wanted you in a cage, I'd put you there; we wouldn't need a cabin," JD says.

Veronica doesn't respond; she knows it's a trap. He was keeping her in a cage; whether it was Ana's crush or not, she knew that she wasn't really free; she would never be with him around. JD unlocks the door; he shoves it open. It creaks with a loud noise as it's pushed in. The first thing that hits her is the stale smell; it smells like moldy wood and dust. It's completely dark inside; she has to watch her step as she makes her way in after him.

JD moves like he knows the place; he leads her to the center of what must be the living room. He reaches along the wall and flips a switch; suddenly the room is bathed in a sucky yellow glow. Veronica takes in her surroundings. There's a worn couch in the corner of the room; it's torn in several places, exposed foam clear. There's a coffee table in front of it, clearly old. There's a TV stand with a small TV, and under it a stack of old VHS tapes.

JD lets her take in the room before he's leading her into the bedroom. The bedroom is small the cabin itself isn't that large the bedrooms walls have peeling paint line the outside theirs a small bed in the corner, a dresser and that's it. Then the bathroom is just as small, and the tub is a yellowed color, and there isn't a curtain. Veronica shivers as she thinks about him just walking in on him.

"Make yourself at home." JD says he steps away from her to go get their bags.

Veronica is alone for a minute as she sits down on the old couch, trying to flinch at the ragged texture of the fabric. Veronica, eyeing the TV set, got up. She rummaged through the pile of VHS tapes more for something to do than any actual interest in the movies. She pulls out something horror-related, a movie she remembers watching when she was in middle school. She shoves it in the player and turns on the tv settling back on the couch.

JD walks in a moment later with the bags in his hands; he sets them down. "Already playing your part well." JD purrs as he strides up to her and plops down on the couch beside her. He eyes the movie she's watching with a grin. "The Shining, nice pick."

“Playing what role well?” Veronica asks.

“The one where you’re my wife and you act accordingly.”

Veronica resists the urge to slap him; she akmsky considers it for a moment. She shoots him a venomous glare; his jaw clenches tight, and her hand balls into a fist at her side. She wants to chew him out, tell him to go fuck himself, and never talk to her again, yet she resigns to turning the other way and glaring at the peeling paint on the wall.

“The silent treatment, really?” JD asks lightly. JD watches her reaction, her clenched jaw, the way she’s stiffened up, and the way she glares at the wall. “Come on, Veronica, we’ve had worse fights than this.”

Veronica doesn’t answer him.

The television flickers across the room, illuminating JD’s face in a sickly pale glow. She finally looks at him. Jack taunts Wendy on screen, yet she drowns it out, focusing on him. Beside her JD stretches his arm across the back of the couch he puts it behind her head casual and posseive all at the same time.

“You know this is kind of nice,” he says after a moment.

She glares at him hard. “You can’t be serious.”

“What can you blame me? No parents. No cops. No people telling us what we have to do. No more high school bullshit.” JD grins almost like he believes his words he probably does. “It’s peaceful.”

“You dragged me from my home,” she says coldly. “You’ve killed people nothing about this is peaceful.”

JD shrugs, “Details.”

“You are a heartless asshole!”

“Oh well.”

“Fuck you! You’re psychotic.”

“You aren’t saying anything that I don’t know, babe. I did all of this for us.” JD sighs dramatically like she’s exhausting him. “And despite how much you claim not to like me, you’re still here.”

He’s right.

“When are you going to stop looking at me like I’m going to bite you?” JD asks he leans closer until she can smell the scent of cigarettes. She wrinkles up her nose and tries to lean back, yet he follows her.

“You kidnapped me,” Veronica shoots back instantly.

“And yet I still haven’t hurt you.”

Veronica stares at him. “You think that makes this okay?”

“I did what I had to do, okay?” JD laughs; he lays back, finally giving her some space. He drags a hand down his face; he shakes his head. He levels her with a serious look. “You understood me before, so why not try now?”

“That was before you murdered four people in cold blood.”

A cold look passes over his face; it’s there for a flicker of a drone, then it’s gone. “Sometimes I have to do things that are extreme. You still don’t get it.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry I don’t understand murdering innocent people!”

Veronica turns her head away from him. She tries to focus on the television, anything before this conversation spirals further out of control. JD is quiet for a long moment and suddenly his hand is on her knee. She brings her leg up to kick him, yet he pins it down easily. Veronica stiffens under his touch.

“JD,” she says warningly.

“What?” He asks innocently.

“Don’t.”

His thumb traces idle circles onto her knee. “You’ve been tense all day.”

“I wonder why.”

“You know what your problem is?” He murmurs.

Veronica didn’t answer him.

“You keep acting like I’m your enemy.”

“You are.”

“No, I’m not.”

Veronica tries to pull away, yet his grip on her knee hardens. “You keep trying to run away; just accept that this is what your fate is.”

“My bad if I don’t want to spend the rest of my life trapped with a serial killer.” Veronica snaps.

JD’s gaze drifts to her stomach; it’s subtle, yet his tone changes instantly. Something crosses his face, not quite soft but something almost affectionate. “I don’t want to fight like this anymore.”

“Then let me go.”

“That’s not an option, Ronnie.”

Before she can react, JD grabs her wrist and pulls her towards him on the couch. She gasps in surprise, bracing one hand on his chest. "JD—"

“Relax.” His voice is calm, yet his grip is iron-tight. “I’m not going to kill you.”

“Oh well, gee, that’s comforting!”

She shoves at his chest hard, yet JD only pulls her closer. One arm traps her against him; the other grabs her face. She scowls at him; if looks could kill, he’d be dead a thousand times over.

"See, you always fight me, but then you give in," JD murmurs.

Veronica shoves harder against her chest; she hates how he’s right again. “Get off of me.”

Instead JD just laughs; he presses a kiss to her head that makes her lips curl up in disgust. “You know,” he says. “You’re awfully pretty when you’re pissed off.”

Veronica hates the shade of red she turns at the comment; she buries her head in his chest to hide it, yet she knows he’s already seen. JD laughs again; his hand drifts down to her stomach, and she freezes. “This still doesn’t feel real,” JD says softly. “That I’m a father.”

His hand stays against her stomach; it’s solid and warm. Veronica can feel how careful he’s being like touching her too hard might break him. Veronica pulls her face out of his chest. She catches a look at him; the softness in his eyes makes her breath hitch.

“You loved me once; do you think you could ever learn to do it again?”

The statement lands hard because she had. That was the truth before the murders, before all the blood, before he drug her on his bike like he owned her.

Veronica swallows thickly. “I loved someone,” she says carefully. “I don’t know who the hell you are anymore.”

Something flickers across his face—real pain. Before she can even memorize it, he forces a lazy smirk onto his face. JD leans back against the couch cushions, yet he doesn’t let her go. “Damn that’s cold babe.”

“You killed people.”

“There it is again.”

“What?”

“You say that like I enjoyed it.”

Veronica lets out a strained laugh. “Are you kidding me?”

JD's expression sharpened. "You think I wanted any of this?"

"You shot a cop!"

"I would do it again if it meant getting to you."

"I'm not trying to scare you." He murmurs.

"Well, congrats, you are."

JD finally releases her; she leans back, yet she doesn't move out of his lap. JD, of course, notices. "See?"

"Don't."

"You stayed."

"Because you dragged me here!"

"At first."

Her stomach lurches violently at the implication.

"Shut up."

"You're tired." He murmurs.

"Stop acting like all of this is normal!"

"It could be."

"Oh my god."

"I mean it." His voice stays calm, steady. "We stay here awhile. Lay low. Things cool off." His eyes drift downward briefly again. "We figure things out."

"You mean you decide things."

"That's not true."

Veronica just stares at him.

JD actually has the nerve to look offended.

"Okay," he says slowly, "maybe a little."

Despite herself, Veronica lets out a short, disbelieving breath through her nose.

JD immediately catches it.

"There she is," he says with a grin.

Her expression drops instantly. “Don’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“Act like this is cute.”

His grin fades.

For a moment neither of them moves.

Then JD’s eyes drift toward the television again. “Are you hungry?”

The abrupt change nearly gives her whiplash.

“What?”

“I asked if you’re hungry.”

Veronica blinks at him suspiciously. “Why?”

JD stares at her like the answer should be obvious. “Because you threw up this morning and barely ate.”

The concern in his voice feels wrong. Twisted.

“I’m fine.”

“You’re a terrible liar.”

“You’re a murderer. Guess we all have flaws.”

That one lands.

JD goes still beneath her.

The cabin suddenly feels very quiet.

Veronica immediately regrets saying it—not because she feels bad, but because she sees the exact second something dangerous flickers behind his eyes.

Not rage.

Something colder.

JD tilts his head slightly. “You know,” he says softly, “most people would be a little nicer to the guy keeping them alive.”

Veronica’s pulse spikes.

There it is.

The reminder.

The threat underneath everything else.

JD must see the shift in her face because he suddenly sighs and runs a hand over his eyes.

“Jesus Christ,” he mutters to himself. “I’m trying here, Veronica.”

“Trying what?”

“To make this work.”

She stares at him in disbelief. “You can’t kidnap someone and then play house!”

“Why not?”

“Because that’s insane!”

JD gives her a long look. “You say 'insane' like it’s a dealbreaker.”

Before she can answer, he suddenly shifts underneath her and stands up, forcing Veronica awkwardly to her feet with him.

The sudden movement makes her dizzy.

JD steadies her automatically, hands gripping her waist again.

“You really are pale,” he mutters.

Veronica pushes weakly at his chest. “I’m not fragile.”

“No,” JD says quietly. “But you’re pregnant.”

The words hit differently coming out loud like that.

Not hypothetical.

Not abstract.

Real.

Veronica looks away immediately.

JD watches her for a moment before stepping back toward the tiny kitchen area. “Sit down before you fall down,” he says. “I’ll make something.”

Veronica almost laughs at the idea of JD cooking.

But then he starts opening cabinets like he’s done this before.

And somehow that scares her too more than him being violent does.

Chapter 20: Love Me Sick

Chapter Summary

Another update let's go I'm going to try to get another one done by tomorrow.

JD spends a few minutes rummaging through the cabinets; he grabs a few things, setting them on the counter. Veronica watches him part of the time; the other part, she watches the movie. Veronica hates how much she relates to Wendy as Jack ruins the family's life. The irony isn't lost on her; she glances over at JD. He's rummaging through the fridge now looking for something.

"How about something easy? You like tomato soup and grilled cheese?" JD asks.

"Sure." Veronica responds she doesn't really care; she'll probably throw it back up in a few hours anyways.

JD nods slowly. He makes his way over to the stove; he turns it on before setting a pan on it. Veronica ignores him. After that, she lies down on the couch. She doesn't feel nauseous, yet she doesn't exactly feel good either. She can feel a headache coming on, and she's tired.

JD brings a plate and a bowl over; he sets it on the table in front of her. "Eat, you need to regain your strength." JD murmurs; he sits on the couch beside her with his own plate.

Veronica stares at the plate for a long moment; her stomach churns at the thought of food. Veronica sits up; she grabs the bowl. She takes a hesitant bite of her soup. JD seems satisfied after she takes a few bites, and then she sets it down.

"What's wrong? Is it not good?" JD asks when he notices she isn't eating.

"No, it's not that I just don't feel good." Veronica says quietly she curls in on herself, trying to hide from his penetrating gaze.

"Veronica, you need to eat. You need to regain your strength." JD argues he grabs her wrist; he tries to drag her up so he can look at her, yet she fights him. Veronica goes dead weight; he easily lifts her into his lap. He cradles her head against his chest; it's like earlier except this time she gives up after a second.

"I don't feel good. I can't eat." She hates how whiny she sounds, but she can't even think about forcing food down. Veronica listens to his heartbeat; she buries her face in his chest.

JD tightens his grip on her. "You have to eat something." His voice is calmer now, but there's an edge to it. "You haven't kept anything down in the last two days."

"I said I can't." Veronica mutters against his chest. The smell of the food makes her stomach churn unpleasantly. "I'll just throw it back up anyway. No point."

"So throw it up," JD snaps, harsher than he means to for once. He exhales sharply. His hand finds her jaw; he forces her head up to look at him. "You have to try."

Veronica squeezes her eyes shut; she refuses to look at him. Everything hurts her head and her stomach; she just wants all of this to stop. "You don't understand what this is like. It's horrible; I can't control it. You're not the one that has to deal with all the symptoms. I didn't even want to be pregnant."

"Yeah, well, you are, so you're just going to have to suck it up," JD growls. He seems irritated that she's even bothered by this whole situation. It wasn't like she ever gave her a choice anyways. "You're exhausted, you're pale, you can barely stand up without passing out. You're scaring the hell out of me."

That makes her go still; slowly she opens her eyes and looks at him. JD drums his fingers anxiously on the couch cushion; he pulls her closer. "You need your strength... for you, for the baby. You have to see where I'm coming from here." JD says the words quietly, almost like he doesn't want to say them.

"I think you're an asshole."

"I'm trying my best, Veronica."

"Trying doesn't magically fix things."

JD grabs the bowl off the table; he hands her the spoon. "Just a few more bites and I'll leave you alone."

"No, you don't ever leave me alone, you liar." Veronica says she can't hide the smile that comes onto her face. It's almost funny in a messed-up way; they both know his words aren't true.

"Somebody's got to take care of you. You have the self-preservation skills of a goddamn lemming." JD forces her to put the spoon in the soup.

Veronica glares at him, yet she hesitantly takes a bite before taking another and then a third. After that she drops it in the bowl, and luckily he doesn't pressure her. Veronica leans back against him; she doesn't have the strength to get up, so she just lies on him. JD wraps an arm around her waist; he plays with her, absentmindedly running his hand through the strands.

Veronica feels her eyes flutter closed before she can stop it. His touch feels nice no matter how much she tries to ignore it. She flickers in between dozing and being awake for a while before her body finally gives into her exhaustion.

"Veroncia?" JD asks why she hasn't bothered saying anything for a while. When he looks down, he finds her asleep. He can't help but grin; she looks so innocent like this. For once she isn't fighting him. JD presses a kiss to her head before he can stop himself. He leans back

against the couch; he closes his eyes. He doesn't want to get up and risk waking her up, not when she's this relaxed, so he resigns himself to a night on the couch.

///

The next morning Veronica wakes up, and she's alone. She feels the spot under here where JD had been last night. The couch is still warm; he must not have left that long ago. Veronica sits up slowly; she stretches, and it immediately slams into her. Veronica's head spins as she sits up fully. She tries to force it down, yet her nausea beats her as she doesn't even get the chance to get up before she's vomiting right onto the floor.

Veronica gasps; she slumps to her knees on the floor. She heaves as the last of it comes out. Veronica feels vomit on her chin; she doesn't bother to wipe it away. She shudders; she can't keep the tears from prickling on the corners of her eyes.

"Fuck." Veronica curses hoarsely.

Veronica braces herself as another wave hits her. For a second she panics; she's all alone in the cabin, she's sick, and her stomach cramps with pain. She cries out in pain; she slumps against the floor and barely avoids her own mess as she lies down. Suddenly the door to the living room creaks open. She doesn't look; she feels too weak to lift her head, yet she knows it's JD.

JD freezes in the doorway the second he sees her lying on the floor. In a second he's leaping to her side; he grabs her shoulders, hauling her up. She looks away, embarrassed, very aware of the fact that her vomit is all over the floor and her sweatshirt.

"Veronica, are you alright?" JD asks; he ignores the mess.

"No," she snaps. Another shudder runs through her. "I'm disgusting. I can't control my body and..."

JD's face twists into an angry expression. "Don't say that."

"I just threw up on the floor."

"It'll wash."

JD wastes no more time; he pulls her into his arms. She protests, yet he ignores it; he picks her up. Veronica didn't even try to fight him as he began to carry her towards the bathroom. JD sets her down on the floor gently, and he begins to peel off her clothing. Once she's unclothed, JD sets her in the bathtub.

He turns on the faucet, testing the water's temperature with his fingers; he puts the plug in the drain. JD lets the bathtub fill up; he is gone for a while. She thinks he's cleaning up her mess. Soon he returns, and he shuts the water off once it reaches her shoulders. JD sits beside her on the floor; neither of them speaks for a long moment.

"You're going to the doctor today." JD says, finally, his tone leaves no room for any objections.

"JD—"

"No, Veronica, you're going," JD snaps.

She's quiet; after that she clenches her jaw hard, yet she doesn't say anything. JD softens; a moment later, he reaches his hand up and tucks a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "There's something wrong with you. We need to find out what before it gets worse." He says softly.

JD begins to bathe her; after that, he wets her hair with a cup before he puts shampoo in her hair. After that he rinses it. He drains some of the water before he scrubs her body. He's extra careful with her face; he wipes away the dried vomit carefully. Once he's done, he drains the rest of the water and pulls her out of the tub.

Veronica can barely stand; she shakes, yet he sets her on the edge of the toilet seat as he dries her off, not caring about the water that drips onto his clothes. JD carries her into the bedroom. He roots through her bag; he comes back with a set of pajamas. He dresses her carefully and then lays her down on the bed.

Veronica curls into a ball; JD settles beside her. "Veronica, you drive me crazy sometimes, so much it hurts." He says softly. "And now there's a baby to worry about. I'm worried about you and I..." He swallows hard. "I love you; I can't live without you."

The confession hangs in the air; Veronica doesn't stir, and she doesn't respond. She feels her heart race in her chest; her breathing hitches. She has to force herself to breathe. Did she hear that right? JD doesn't say anything else; he only wraps an arm around her waist and holds her close until he can shove his nose against her neck and inhale her scent.

Veronica didn't know what to think about any of this. The caring, his manipulation, his possessiveness, and the words he's said. She closes her eyes and forces herself to try to sleep. She has a long day ahead of her tomorrow; for now she just needs to rest.

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