

PROLOGUE

THERE'S NO PARTY like a Cheryl Blossom party.

Bass pumping, speakers jumping, bottles spinning in a game that's only going to lead to kissing and crying and somebody breaking up on the front lawn after midnight, but isn't that the fun of it?

It is for me, anyway.

Cheryl's wearing cutoffs—the ones that Mommie Dearest always says are trashy, with that rictus smile she's so practiced at giving her daughter—with a tight white tee and, of course, her signature Bombshell lipstick. Tonight, for the first time in a long time, she feels like a queen reigning over her wild kingdom. There, Chuck Clayton and half the football team playing some stupid game on the deck. Here, Alanna Chiang and the Vixens throwing out tipsy cheers by the pool. And by her side, her sometimes-loyal minions waiting for their next instructions.

She looks at Nancy and Midge and snaps her fingers. "Ladies!" she barks. "Fetch me a drink." Then she turns to the group of girls



mingling behind her and throws her hands in the air. “Who wants to play seven minutes in heaven?”

The boys over on the deck look up, jaws dropped, and Cheryl laughs with her red-painted lips wide open. Like she’s interested in any of them. “Sorry, boys, this is strictly—”

A scream slices through the night.

“—girls only,” Cheryl finishes, but the hairs on the back of her neck are standing up, and she half turns at the thud she hears behind her.

It’s some kid, hunched over and staggering toward her.

“Excuse you,” she says, her voice loud and sharp to counteract the chill rippling along her spine. “This party is *exclusive*. No sloppy messes allowed. Got it?”

The boy keeps coming, and he’s clearly hammered already, from the way he’s shambling along, and Cheryl has had enough. This is her house, her rules. No one defies Cheryl Bombshell in her own backyard.

“Hey,” she says. “Are you listening? Shoo, little vermin.”

There’s another thud to her left, and Cheryl whips around.

Another crasher, hunched over in the same way as the first.

“Take him with you, too!” she snaps, but the first one is still ignoring her, and so she takes a few steps forward, hands on her hips, her never-fail power stance. “I said, get—”

The first boy rears up, and now Cheryl is the one who screams, a short wild noise at the sight of the boy’s face—one she finally recognizes—contorted into a snarl that shows a row of dangerously sharp teeth that maybe used to be shiny white but are now stained and marbled a deep, dark red.



Almost as red as the color on Cheryl's own lips.

And not teeth.

Fangs.

**FIVE DAYS
EARLIER**

CHAPTER ONE

VERONICA

“BREAK THAT WALL—make them fall—across the goal line—take that ball—GO, Bulldogs!”

Veronica Lodge swishes, shimmies, and struts through the cheer. When they’re done yelling, she drops her poms, winks, and blows a kiss over her shoulder to an imaginary audience. It’s only stalling for time while the girls set up for the stunt, and when they’re ready, she hops up into their waiting hands, fingers digging into their shoulders for balance, and then she’s launched into the air.

Veronica rides the waves as long as she can before twisting and tucking backward, trusting that her teammates will be there to catch her.

They do—they always do—and let her down gently before hitting their final position, shoulders back and smiles bright and shiny.

They hold the pose for a few seconds before releasing, and Veronica claps her hands together. “Okay, girls, let’s—”

“Ronnie!”

Veronica glances back and smiles again, wider than her fake-cheer smile. “Stretch it out,” she says to the girls, and then spins,

throwing her arms open wide. “Archiekins! Shouldn’t you be tackling somebody right now?”

Archie Andrews is sweaty and out of breath, a streak of mud across one perfect cheekbone. “Coach finished practice early,” he says. “I just came to watch you. Don’t you get dizzy when they throw you up there?”

“Nuh-uh,” Ronnie says, but she’s thinking more about what he just said: *I came to watch you*. Archie came to watch *her*.

Score one for Veronica Lodge!

“It’s cheerleading, Archie,” she says. “Not for the faint of heart.”

“I see that,” he says with that smile of his, and Veronica swoons on the inside. This right here, flirting with Archie? It’s her favorite part of practice.

“So,” she says, stepping up close and sliding her arms around Archie’s neck. “Where are you taking me tonight?”

“Tonight?” Archie furrows his brow. “Did we have plans?”

“Well, not as such,” she says, pouting just a little. “But I figured you just hadn’t asked me yet. So—what are we going to do?”

Archie ducks his head. “Sorry, Ronnie—I would, but I already have plans tonight.”

Veronica lets her arms fall back to her sides. “Oh?” she says, careful not to sound like she’s bothered by this information, like she wasn’t planning on Archie being hers and hers alone tonight. “Who—”

“Archie!”

Betty Cooper’s perky blond ponytail almost smacks Veronica in the face as she half dances past her, her Vixens skirt perfectly pressed as always, and slides her arm around Archie’s waist. “There you are,”

she says. “What time are you coming over later?” And then, like she’s only just noticed Veronica standing there, she puts her hand over her mouth. “Oh! I mean— Oh, you don’t mind, do you, Ronnie? We’re just going to watch a movie or something. No big deal.”

Veronica flashes a tight grin at her best friend as the stragglers of the football team pass them by, headed to shower off the practice sweat. “Mind? Why would I mind? You two have fun tonight,” she says.

“You sure?” Betty makes her eyes wide. “I mean, we could always swing by Pop’s after to hang, if you want. I told Jughead we’d go say bye before he and his dad go off on their fishing trip or whatever, and you know he’s always at Pop’s, so—”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Veronica says, and out of the corner of her eye, she spots the one and only Reggie Mantle chugging Gatorade. An idea blooms in her mind.

Perfect.

“In fact,” she says, raising her voice, “I completely forgot, but I already have plans, too. With Reggie!”

At the sound of his name Reggie looks over, one lock of dark hair falling perfectly across his forehead, and points at himself. “Me?”

“Yes, you, silly!” Veronica shimmies over to him and throws one arm around his neck. “We’re going out tonight. Remember?”

Reggie frowns like he’s trying to remember when he asked Ronnie out, except he asks her out at least three times a week—it’s just that Veronica never says yes.

Unless she needs a backup, of course.

“Oh, yeah,” he says, the confusion clearing from his pretty face. “Like I could forget.”

“Perfect,” Betty says, her cute little nose scrunched up from the



effort of her smile. “I’ve got Archie, and you’ve got Reggie. What more could a girl ask for?”

Veronica has to bite her tongue to keep from saying what she wants to. *Yes, I’ve got Reggie, she thinks. What more, indeed.*

Betty slings her bag over her shoulder and waves. “See you later, V.”

“Bye, Ronnie,” Archie says. “Reggie.”

The boys do one of their oh-so-Neanderthal chest bumps, and then Archie and Betty walk away, Betty’s arm still possessively around Archie’s waist. It’s all Veronica can do not to let out a mournful sigh as she watches them go. Why is it always Betty and never her?

What does she have that I don’t?

“So.” Reggie rakes a hand through his hair and looks down at Veronica in a way she guesses is supposed to be hot but kinda makes him look like a puppy dog. Yes—that’s exactly what Reggie is: an overexcitable Labrador with big brown eyes and a deep-seated urge to sniff people’s butts. “You have great timing, Ronnie. My parents are out of town all week and—”

Veronica cuts him off. “You wanna go out? Pick me up at eight,” she says, all her faux perkiness dropped. “Daddy has a business meeting at the house, and I do not want to get trapped in another one of his deadly boring discussions about town planning regulations or whatever it is.”

“But what about—”

Veronica snatches her pom-poms up and shakes them in his face. “Eight o’clock sharp, Reggie. Or don’t bother coming at all.”