

# RIVERDALE

*GET OUT OF TOWN*

An original novel by Micol Ostow

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Sweet Pea:



## **ARCHIE**

When Veronica told me she wanted to go to Reggie's party, my first impulse was *no way*. Even if Mom weren't sweating my legal case 24/7—with Betty always by her side—being the defendant in a murder trial doesn't exactly put a guy in the partying mood.

But of course, as much as Ronnie may despise her father, she does have one major thing in common with him: My girl does *not* take no for an answer. Veronica Lodge gets what she wants. And what she wanted tonight was one night off from all the stress and drama *I* brought into her life. She warned me, way back when, that getting involved with Hiram was a bad idea. I thought she was just being dramatic, overprotective. God, I was so naïve. And the ironic thing? The only reason I ever wanted to win Hiram over in the first place was because he's Veronica's father.

Veronica's dad may be evil, but *I'm* the one who made bad, stupid choices and got myself into this whole mess. Now I'm watching the stress and pain I'm putting my parents

through, seeing my friends completely freaked out . . . I just wish more than anything I could take it all back.

And since life doesn't work that way, the next best thing I have to offer—the *only* thing I have, right now—is to give Ronnie (and the rest of them) one “normal” night.

“Let's make an entrance, Archiekins.” Veronica kissed me quickly on the cheek, and I could smell that thick rush of roses and whatever else dark and musky goes into the expensive perfume she always wears. She was putting on a brave face for me, I could tell—that girl is *fierce*—but I could feel the waves of tension radiating off her, like heat or static electricity. *I'd* done that. It was my fault, how upset she was.

I thanked the driver and got out of the car, walking around to let Ronnie out in an old-fashioned, gentlemanly way. She smiled and held out a hand as she stepped out.

“Chivalry is not dead,” she quipped. “Promise me you'll always be my knight in shining armor.”

“Count on it,” I said. We were doing our best to be light, but the weight of my trial hanging over us put a damper on everything.

“Andrews!” I looked up. It was Chuck Clayton, waving a plastic cup at me like he was cheers-ing from a distance.

“Yo!” I gave my best smile and a noncommittal grunt. Chuck wasn't anyone's favorite since he'd spread nasty rumors after going on a date with Ronnie when she first got to town. That was bad enough, but when Betty and Ronnie

decided to get revenge on him, they discovered that a bunch of guys from the football team had this whole sick “points” system where they tracked their hookups with girls. They literally had a notebook where they kept score of everything they did. When the girls took the notebook to Principal Weatherbee, Chuck and a few others were suspended from the team.

So as you might guess, there was no love lost between Chuck Clayton and Veronica, and I didn’t blame her for holding a grudge. He wasn’t my favorite guy, either, though since being suspended, he seemed genuinely sorry about everything.

Veronica glanced in Chuck’s direction. She wrinkled her nose for a second, but then that smile was back. “You should go say hi. I mean, even if he was kicked off the Bulldogs, you guys were teammates.”

“You don’t need that. You brought me here so we could have *fun*.”

“Don’t you get it, Archiekins? I’m here with you. Ergo, I’m having fun.” Veronica’s dark eyes glittered. “*You* are all I need.” She gave me a little shove. “Go, say hi, be the dutiful alpha male I know and adore. I’ll meet you inside. I want to see if Betty and Jughead are here yet.”

I opened my mouth to say something, but she tapped me again, playful. “Seriously, Archie. Veronica Lodge can take care of herself at a party. You know that.”

“I do.” We kissed again, quickly, and she disappeared up the walk and into the front door. The roar of amped-up high schoolers swelled and then dulled as the door opened and shut behind her.

I made my way to the garage. It was wall-to-wall Riverdale High. Through the crowd, I could see a cooler, and in the corner, a keg—probably someone on the block would call the cops sooner rather than later. In Riverdale, parents tend to turn a blind eye when kids get rowdy, blowing off steam, but this thing was *loud*, and it was just getting started.

There was Chuck, and Moose . . . and against the wall, eyeing the cooler suspiciously, I saw Kevin Keller. His father was the former sheriff of Riverdale. But he’d had to step down after the Black Hood killed Midge. As Sheriff Keller’s son, Kevin probably got used to turning a blind eye at, um, “after-school events.” And I’m guessing old habits died hard. I felt a little bad for him. It had to be rough, always feeling torn between what your dad expected of you and what all the other kids were doing.

I had plenty of experience with falling short of other people’s expectations.

“Hey, Archie!” Kevin brightened, seeing me. “Welcome to the den of iniquity. Where’s Veronica?”

“She went inside,” I explained, shouting to be heard over all the conversation. “Didn’t want to . . .” I trailed off when Chuck sidled up next to me. *Awkward.*

“Didn’t want to . . . what? Have to associate with low-level pervs like me?” he asked, laughing loudly at his own “joke.”

“Come on, Chuck.” I rolled my eyes. “Give her a break.” The last thing I needed or wanted was to argue with my friends. Not if this might be one of the last times we all hung out.

He shrugged. “For you, Andrews. Not for her. The Clayton memory is long.”

I didn’t care who he did it for, as long as he dropped it so we could all relax. Someone shoved a red plastic cup in my hand and, without thinking about it, I took a big gulp. It was sour and cold and tasted like the promise of oblivion. Right then, those all sounded like good things. Another good thing? Chuck disappeared, trailing after a curly brown-haired ponytail in a River Vixens uniform.

“You been here long?” I asked, turning back to Kevin. His eyes darted around the space, like he was nervous about something, although when he heard my question, he gave me a strained smile.

What was it with everyone being on edge tonight? I thought it was just me, with the stress of the trial, but honestly, it kind of felt like everyone was off their game.

“Uh, a little while, I guess. I was trying to play it cool, make an entrance, but it didn’t end up working out that way,” he said, sheepish. “Don’t tell Veronica, she won’t approve. I officially have no chill.”

“Your secret’s safe with me,” I assured him. “I lost my chill a while back. Who’s here?”

“You mean, aside from basically the entire junior and senior classes? I think it would probably be more efficient to list the kids who *aren’t* here tonight.” He tried to gesture to the bodies stuffed into the space around us, but he didn’t have enough room to spread his arms out. Which kind of proved his point. “Betty’s inside; she and Jughead got here right before you did. I just got to talk to her for a second before she ran off. She seemed . . . Well, she seemed a little jittery, to be honest. So you know, I mean. If you talk to her later. Maybe just keep an eye out. I’m rambling.” He tilted his head toward a corner. “Moose is over there. With a *Vixen*.” His face crumpled.

I didn’t have a chance to ask him about it, though—the face, or what he was saying (or trying to say) about Betty. Next thing I knew, he was stepping back and making room for Reggie.

“Our gracious host himself!” Kevin said. “Reggie, this is quite a turnout. Kudos.”

“Thanks, man. Yeah. I guess Dad always traveling has its perks. And since Mom decided it was time to treat herself to another spa getaway, it’s just Vader and me—two alpha dogs. Lone wolves, together.”

“Wouldn’t a *lone wolf* necessarily be, you know . . . *alone*?” Kevin asked.



Reggie rolled his eyes. “You know what I mean.”

Reggie’s dad owned a car dealership in town. It was really successful; Reggie wasn’t rich the way that Veronica was (well, the way her parents were, since technically she’d decided to emancipate herself from them)—but his house was in the nicest part of town, with bigger lawns and shinier cars in the driveways. I wasn’t sure why a car dealer had to travel so much, but it wasn’t the kind of thing I could ask Reggie about.

“Don’t you get lonely?” I blurted. *Speaking of things you’re not supposed to ask about.* It was a weird thing to say, definitely not the kind of question we usually asked each other. But it was out of my mouth before I thought about it. And then there was no taking it back.

Reggie’s face got dark for a minute. But after a second, he smiled and his expression went back to normal. “Andrews,” he said, leaning in so Kevin and I could hear him. “Look around you, man. This house is *packed*. Who’d be lonely in this?”

I nodded, even though it felt kind of like he was missing my point. If that was on purpose, well, then, whatever. Sometimes a little denial can go a long way. I was learning that myself.

“Duh,” I said, shaking my head. “Sorry.”

He clapped me on the shoulder. “Whatever, bro. I get it. You’ve got deep thoughts on the brain.”

“Is it that obvious?” I flushed and took another gulp of my drink. *Slow down, Archie,* I told myself. But slowing down

meant letting those so-called “deep thoughts” rise up, and I didn’t think I could handle that.

“I mean, I would, too, if I were in your shoes,” Reggie said. Kevin nodded. “This is big-time. *Murder.*”

*Thanks, I’d almost gone four whole minutes without thinking about it.* I had to bite my tongue to keep from snapping. Instead I took another sip. “Yeah.”

“I’m sure Archie is all too aware of how ‘big-time’ the *murder trial* is,” Kevin said. “What with the murder part of it. Maybe we could try to forget about it, just for the night?”

“Yeah, what he said,” I agreed. “If we can.” I wasn’t sure about that—like I said, the energy coming off people was weird. Even Reggie seemed off, like he was itching for a fight. But maybe it was just me. It was probably me. It was a bad idea, coming to this party tonight.

It all came down to Veronica. She was the reason I was in this mess in the first place—not that I *blamed* her, at all! But I wouldn’t be out even pretending to have fun if it weren’t what she wanted. “That was Ronnie’s whole thing,” I went on, kind of thinking out loud. “You know, to come out, have fun, take our mind off things. It’s, uh, not easy.”

Reggie gave me a look. I already knew I wouldn’t like where this was going. “This must be hard on her, too. Knowing it’s her old man getting you sent away.”