

*(Veronica Frank's lab. This homemade hub of scientific glee takes up the large attic space of a house converted into apartments. Through a trapdoor, it is connected to the apartment below, the highest and smallest apartment of the building. There are windows, but the windows are at least partially covered with newspaper and magazine pages—Discover, National Geographic, and ELLE, probably. The person who uses this space doesn't want anyone to be able to see in. Anatomical diagrams, chemical formulas, and notes in terrible handwriting are taped up on the walls. Tables are covered with bubbling beakers, tubes of candy-colored chemicals, syringes, scales, burners, pink energy drink cans, lamps, books, orange prescription bottles, and pieces of pigeons. On one table is a cage, covered with a white sheet. On another is something about the size of a small dog, likewise covered with a white sheet.)*

VERONICA FRANK *(off)*

Okay, careful on the ladder.

HADLEY CLEMENT *(off)*

I can climb a ladder, Veronica.

VERONICA *(off)*

I believe that; I fully do, but, you know, old buildings, they have their quirks.

*(VERONICA enters. HADLEY enters shortly after. For Veronica, this is where she has spent the majority of the last year. For Hadley, it is a shocking wonderland.)*

HADLEY

Oh my god.

*(They wander a little, looking around. VERONICA watches them.)*

Veronica, this is...

VERONICA

See? Failing out of school isn't all bad. I wouldn't have had the time for this if I had to go to class.

HADLEY

Yeah, well, I'll still miss you at graduation.

VERONICA

I promise I'm going to be better about staying in touch from now on. I promise.

*(She extends her little finger. HADLEY links theirs with hers and VERONICA shakes to solidify this pinky promise.)*

HADLEY

It's my fault too. I'm shit at texting back.

VERONICA

And I'm shit at making plans to meet up in person. Fuck us, I guess.

*(They keep their fingers linked for an extended moment before they finally break contact.)*

So—grad school, right? This fall? Or are you taking a break?

HADLEY

No, no break. Right on to grad school.

VERONICA

There's that Hadley Clement work ethic.

HADLEY

No rest for the wicked.

VERONICA

Please. You're the least wicked person I've ever met. Are you sticking with environmental science?

HADLEY

Yeah.

VERONICA

"Hadley Clement the *Ecologist*." Hot.

HADLEY

Shut up.

VERONICA

I'm serious. Science is hot. I mean—look around you.

*(She turns in a circle, gesturing to the lab around them, as if to say that the lab and what it represents is so incredibly sexy. HADLEY looks at her as she turns, not at the lab.)*

Hot. Right?

HADLEY

Yeah. Yeah, I can see why you chose the place. When I just saw the apartment, I was like, this is really tiny, even for just one person. But this attic...

VERONICA

Exactly. Who needs a full kitchen when you have a private lab?

HADLEY

I mean, if you're looking for lab space—I know it's not *private*, but our school has really good labs. Especially if you were to go on to be a grad student. It's sort of known for its STEM programs and all that.

VERONICA

Yes, believe it or not, Hadley, I do remember spending five semesters of my life at that school. I remember the lab spaces.

HADLEY

I'm just saying. Professor Kennard would advocate for you if you wanted to come back; I know he would. You don't have to try to double major like you did before—I mean, I know you're a genius,

but there's nothing wrong with just picking biology or chemistry. You don't have to be that much of an overachiever to get into a good med school. Or you could ditch the med school plans entirely, go to a new school, pick up something totally new. You could. I *know* you could; you're the smartest person I know.

VERONICA

I'm doing just fine without school. That's the perk of Wall Street parents. I'm not exactly in desperate need of a career.

HADLEY

And that's fine for mediocre people, I guess. But you're not mediocre. I'm not trying to be a dick. I just think you're way too smart to give up on your education.

VERONICA

I haven't given up on it. I've just taken it into my own hands.

*(She goes to the cage and uncovers it.)*

This is Lizzie.

HADLEY

She's a pigeon?

VERONICA

She is definitely a pigeon and actually probably a he. But I named him before I knew that.

HADLEY

Why do you have a pigeon of any gender in your apartment?

VERONICA

He was injured. So I brought him back here to fix him up. I've done it with lots of pigeons, some mice, and once, memorably, an opossum.

HADLEY

So that's what you've been doing with your parents' money for the last year? Running a pro bono vet service for the city's wildlife?

VERONICA

Sort of. That's more of a side effect. Not the main goal.

HADLEY

So what's the main goal?

VERONICA

When I found Lizzie, he'd been gored by a cat. Or maybe like a really angry small dog. Puncture wounds all over him. Incapable of flight. One of his wings was hanging on by a thread. He wasn't just injured. He was dying.

HADLEY

And you were able to keep him alive? He looks pretty healthy now. Both his wings look good. How long did that take? You must have had him up here for ages.

VERONICA

I found him yesterday.

HADLEY

What do you mean?

VERONICA

I found him yesterday. I brought him back here. I fixed him up. He's ready to be released, if you want to watch him fly away.

HADLEY

You're telling me that this bird was almost missing a wing and on the verge of death via cat yesterday and today he's ready to fly away?

VERONICA

Or small dog. But yes.

HADLEY

How is that possible?

VERONICA

It's possible through a lot of practice, a lot of experimentation, and many, many mistakes. I got sidetracked by another project or two along the way, but I do think I've finally perfected this particular prescription.

*(She holds up a bottle of a luminescent, orange liquid.)*

I could have done it faster, maybe, if I had put everything else on hold, but...

HADLEY

But you've always been a multitasker. Can I...

*(They reach towards the bottle. VERONICA gives it to them. They examine it.)*

So you've been using the animals to develop this? And this, what, accelerates the body's natural healing process somehow? Is it painful? Healing that quickly? I mean, that must be a lot of changes for the body to go through, really fast.

VERONICA

You believe me?

HADLEY

Of course I believe you.

VERONICA

Other people might ask for proof.

HADLEY

Are you lying?

VERONICA

No.

HADLEY

Okay. So is it painful?

VERONICA

The healing process could be extremely painful, originally.

Especially if you were as messed up as poor Lizzie. So I solved that problem too.

HADLEY

How? Don't tell me you have a stash of anesthesia up here because that's definitely illegal.

VERONICA

Of course not. But I do have a stash of Vicodin, which I do not have a prescription for.

HADLEY

Ronnie.

VERONICA

But that's not what I'm talking about. I mean, it's part of what I'm talking about. I do use the Vicodin as part of the, uh, cure.

HADLEY

As part of the accelerated healing?

VERONICA

No, to treat the pain from the accelerated healing.

HADLEY

You give the pigeons Vicodin?

VERONICA

I give them a prescription of my own creation. Which contains, among other things, a little bit of Vicodin.

HADLEY

You're not just an urban wildlife vet; you're an urban wildlife *drug dealer*. You're gonna get the city's pigeons hooked on opioids.

VERONICA

It's just a few doses and then that's it. The painkiller isn't

something that they need to continue over the long term. Three doses and then they're set for life.

HADLEY

Set for life how?

VERONICA

No pain. Or way less pain. I haven't been able to block it off entirely, but it drastically expands the pain tolerance in both animals and humans.

HADLEY

And humans?

VERONICA

And humans. Do you want to see?

HADLEY

What?

VERONICA

Well, pigeons and mice aren't exactly the most talkative of subjects. Not really very communicative, you know what I mean? I can monitor them all I want, but, at the end of the day, they can't actually *tell me* how they feel. So...

HADLEY

You didn't.

VERONICA

Who else was going to be my test subject?

*(Beat.)*

I haven't had a bruise in three months. I haven't had a single cut or scrape that lasted more than a day. It works, Hadley. I broke my finger—

*(She holds up a little finger.)*

—and it was fine in less than a week.



HADLEY

What happened to it?

VERONICA

I smashed it with a wrench.

HADLEY

Jesus, Veronica, you broke it on purpose?

VERONICA

It was fine.

HADLEY

It didn't hurt? Because of your new painkiller?

VERONICA

Well, actually, I did the broken finger test before I'd finished the painkiller.

HADLEY

So you broke your finger. On purpose. And you felt all of that. And it was "fine."

VERONICA

Yeah, it hurt, but it *worked*.

HADLEY

And now you don't feel pain.

VERONICA

Sort of. I feel a lot less pain.

HADLEY

This is sort of unbelievable, Ronnie.

VERONICA

I know. So let me show you. Let me give you firsthand, undeniable evidence.

*(She gets a scalpel and offers it to Hadley, handle-*

*first. She also holds out her other hand, open and palm up.)*

Go ahead. Just stab my finger.

HADLEY

What?

VERONICA

Fingertips are so sensitive. All those little nerve-endings. Over three thousand each. So sensitive to pain, right? Or maybe not. Give it a stab.

HADLEY

I'm not going to stab you. I'll—

*(They take the scalpel.)*

I'll do a little cut. Like a papercut. Nothing worse.

VERONICA

Coward.

HADLEY

Papercuts are very painful.

VERONICA

Fair enough. Fine.

*(HADLEY takes a deep breath. Then they slice shallowly across Veronica's fingertip. VERONICA does not react at all.)*

HADLEY

Did that really not hurt?

VERONICA

I mean, it did, like, a tiny bit. But nothing at all like it would have before. More like a memory of pain.

HADLEY

It's incredible.