Do You Believe in Fate?

by Jennimisk

Summary

"Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous." - Albert Einstein

Is there such a thing as a coincidence? Or do we create our own reality because of the choices we make and the people that we let into our lives? Regardless of what you believe, sometimes you just need to be open to what the universe is throwing your way.

This is a non-canon AU work based on Jughead and Betty during their college years. They have no prior relationship before meeting in Rome, Italy.

This is a story primarily about Bughead, with a bit of Varchie as it helps advance the plot. Other characters from Riverdale featured as needed.

Notes

Just to help set the stage: Betty, Veronica and Kevin are going into their Junior year. Archie and Jughead are going into their Senior year. Jason and Cheryl just graduated from college.
There are no murders in this story, but there will be some minor angst. That said, this is more a story about growth and discovery, friendships, falling in love and letting go.

Disclaimer: I do not own the rights to Riverdale (TV show), or any of the characters that belong to Archie Comics or any other intellectual property that exists in my work. I'm just a huge fan of Betty and Jughead with a big imagination.

Please excuse any errors, I don't have a Beta. If you like this work you can follow me on Tumblr for updates.
There she is, Jughead thought to himself, his pulse quickening, as she walked towards him. Her hair, brighter than the sun, was tied back into a high ponytail and her lithe body moved gracefully in a light blue sundress. As she moved through the crowd, both tourists and the locals, gave her an admiring glance. And why wouldn't they? She was stunning. In her right hand, she was holding what looked like a journal, or was it a diary? And a novel.

His observations this past week proved he was right. She preferred to wear her hair up and wearing shades of blue.

Today, she chose an outdoor table at Il Piccolo, three tables down from him. Jughead noticed that almost immediately after sitting, Antonio, a stout middle-aged server in this bustling Roman cafe approached her and asked, "Signora, your usual order? A cappuccino?"

She looked up and smiled, "You remember my order? Yes please, and thank you."

Antonio smiled back, "Uno momento, signora."

This cafe was one of his usual haunts, having discovered it shortly after arriving in Rome for his study abroad semester in January. The coffee was amazing, the staff friendly and welcoming. It was also a great place to people watch since it was only a few blocks away from the Trevi Fountain. Six months in, he was enjoying the Roman summer and the slower pace of a summer course load.

With fewer classes to take, he had more time to work on his novel and it was during a particularly bad bout of writers' block that he had noticed her.

He was hoping to write the next great mystery novel when he got stuck on a new character he was developing- a romantic interest, for his protagonist. He must have read the same paragraph over and over again for a half hour when he was startled by a very loud and obnoxious ringtone. It sounded like a snippet of a Lady Gaga song.

Irritated he thought, Am I the only one that has consideration for other people?

The perpetrator was adding insult to injury by actually having a conversation on her phone. Of course, it's an American, he thought hearing her accent. And as he turned around ready to glare at the offender, he felt the breath get knocked out of him.

Sensing his annoyance, she had lowered her voice and looked away- but not before he had gotten a good look at her: Lightly tanned skin, big hazel eyes, an expressive mouth and long, shapely legs. Always ready with a witty or sarcastic remark, he was knocked speechless.

Jughead was not a believer in love at first sight, but there was something about her that intrigued him- something about her reminded him of the sunshine and all the good things he missed at home.
Before he could collect his thoughts, she had ended her conversation, plunked some money down on the table and walked off.

He was about to run after her but then he lost sight of her in the crowd. Unsure of why he was so disappointed, he was immediately cheered by Antonio standing next to him and smirking, "Don't worry, she'll be back. That's the third time she's been in this week. She usually comes between 3-4 in the afternoon."

So while this cafe was a regular haunt for Jughead, he usually varied his routine- sometimes stopping by before a morning class or for an after dinner coffee. But for the past week he made an effort to come at the same time every day and sure enough, this was the third day he had seen her since that fateful first sighting a week ago and he still hadn't worked up the nerve to talk to her.

It was silly since he didn't know anything beyond the superficial about her- but he felt an attraction toward her that he couldn't ignore. It's not like he hadn't dated other girls before but something about her felt different.

On the first day, she sat drinking her cappuccino while writing postcards.

The second day she was sketching with pastels and wrote in her journal for awhile. It was during that visit that he noticed she was traveling with friends. A raven haired girl, named Ronnie and a brunette boy, Kevin- who by the conversation he had overheard, was definitely not either girl's boyfriend.

On the third day, she was reading an autobiography about Grace Kelly. Jughead found this ironic given her looks reminded him of a cross between the former Princess of Monaco and a Hitchcock blonde.

While what she read was interesting, that was the day he learned what her name was. Ronnie had stopped by to walk with her to dinner and he had overheard her calling her Betty.

Betty, he murmured the name softly. That seemed to fit the beautiful blonde.

Funny how his new character, named Bella, had been gifted with long golden waves and large eyes with the power to intoxicate and distract his private eye protagonist.

After Antonio dropped off her cappuccino with an extra biscotti, Jughead noted, he moved towards him.

"Well, foolish boy," Antonio said to Jughead in Italian, "what are you waiting for? Are you going to go and talk to her? This is crazy. Love is wasted on the young."

Jughead rolled his eyes, "I don't know what you are talking about."

Antonio chuckled, "Please, your admiration for her is obvious. You are lucky that I'm not 15-20 years younger or I would give you a run for your money. I used to be what do you kids call it 'a fox' back when I was young. Do you need a sign?"

"Fine," Jughead sighed. Who would have thought that he would be so nervous to talk to a girl? He had dated a lot of girls but he had never experienced emotions this intense and raw with someone he had never even spoken to. When he looked up to glance at her again, he finally saw the sign he was looking for.

A slow smile spread across his face as he watched her sipping her cappuccino. She had picked up her book and started reading. It was Alice and Wonderland, his sister, Jellybean's favorite book. He
wasn't big on fairy tales or fantasy, but out of love for his sister he had read the book to her aloud countless times.

Slowly, Jughead stood up and walked towards the blonde.

It was now or never.

He gave himself a quick pep talk the few strides it took to reach her table. When he stood before her, he tried to keep his voice low and even and said, "I'm not crazy, my reality is just different from yours."

The blonde looked up, her big eyes taking in the brunette haired boy in a gray, crown shaped beanie, who had startled her, "Excuse me?"

"'I'm not crazy, my reality is just different from yours.' You know, one of the Cheshire Cat's lines," Jughead said breezily.

She laughed, "You can quote 'Alice in Wonderland'?"

"Yes, but give all the credit to my little sister. She used to love that book and made me read it to her every night for about a year."

She smiled, her eyes he noticed fluctuated between hazel and green, "You must be a good big brother. My older sister, Polly only read it to me once growing up. It's one of my favorites. I like to pick it up every now and then when I need something that's familiar. Does that make sense?" She made a funny face and laughed as his heart raced a little faster.

"Do you mind if I sit down?" Jughead asked gesturing to an empty chair.

"Please," she patted the chair next to her, "It is so nice to meet another American. My Italian isn't as good as I thought it was, so it's nice to have a conversation with someone where I don't have to race ahead to figure out the words."

"I understand what you mean, I thought the same thing when I first got here. But now," he shrugged, "it's second nature. My name is Jughead, by the way. Jughead Jones, III."

"Jughead," she smiled. His heart tightened in his chest, he liked the way his name sounded when she said it, "is that really your name?"

He rolled his eyes, "It's a nickname of course, but it's better than the alternative." He could tell she was about to ask what that was when he interrupted her, "And your name is..." he trailed.

"Betty. Betty Cooper"

After their quick introductions, they fell into an easy conversation, chatting about their respective sisters and their hometowns (His: Riverdale, hers: Malibu) and the key themes and symbolism in Alice and Wonderland.

During a pause in their conversation, Betty asked,"How long have you been here?"

"Since January," he replied. "I'm doing my year abroad in Italy before starting Senior year this fall at NYU."
"That sounds wonderful," she sighed. "Italy is beautiful and I love Rome. I should consider doing that. I'm going to be a junior at Stanford in the fall." It figures he thought- that's as far from NYU as you can get.

"My best friend's family is here for the summer," She continued, "She invited me and another friend to keep her company."

As she finished her statement, her phone on the table vibrated angrily letting her know that a few texts had come in.

She glanced at her phone and read the message, "Shoot, I'm so sorry. I lost track of time. That was my friend, her parents wanted to take us to a new restaurant for dinner and apparently, it's a little dressy. I need to leave to get ready. It was nice meeting you Jughead," a wistful smile on her face.

She threw some money on the table and gathered her books. She was about to grab her phone from the table when Jughead abruptly placed his hand over hers. As soon as his hands brushed against hers he felt a jolt of electricity travel between them. He looked up at her startled, but based on the expression of shock on her face she had felt it too.

Neither of them moved for a minute.

Jughead looked Betty straight in the eye and said boldly, "I'd like to see you again."

Her eyes brightened before clouding over, "I... I," she hesitated.

Jughead frowned holding his breath, "I'm sorry, it just seemed that you enjoyed my company."

"I did, I mean, I do. it's just... I have a..."

"Boyfriend?" Jughead finished for her.

Betty paused thinking of the redheaded boy stateside "Sort of. It's complicated. We're on a break." Jughead felt his insides lighten a bit upon hearing this.

"I still want to see you," he persisted in a low voice, "Couldn't everybody use another friend?" He locked eyes with her again.

Betty paused looking down and said softly, "Yes, but it doesn't seem like that is all you want." She couldn't believe she was saying that to a boy she only just met an hour ago.

Jughead squeezed her hand, forcing her to look him straight in the eyes again. His hand still holding hers, he started slowly "You are right. But I'll take what I can get if it means I get to see you again."

Betty blushed and let out a soft sigh, "How about this? Meet back here in 2 days- say 3 o'clock? " she paused, "I-"

Jughead stopped her before she could change her mind, "It's just a coffee. So Wednesday at 3?" She nodded.

Reluctantly letting go of her hand, he reached out for the pen attached to her journal and quickly scribbled his phone number on a napkin, "in case you need to reach me" he said handing her the napkin and pen. As she reached out to grab it, their fingers brushed again and he felt a shiver go down his spine.
"Jughead," she said slowly a smile on her face, "until we meet again." And with a quick flick of her ponytail, she walked quickly away. It took every ounce of willpower for him not to ask her to walk her home. He wanted more time with her, but he needed to take a moment to collect his thoughts. He hadn't expected this visceral reaction to intensify around her. He wondered if he should have asked for her phone number, but deep inside he knew she would keep their Wednesday rendezvous.

His thoughts were broken by Antonio clearing the table and collecting her money, "Signor Jones, you've got it bad."

Pushing aside his worries about the immediate attachment he felt towards Betty, he had to agree.


Conflicted Emotions

Piglet: "How do you spell love?"

Pooh: "You don't spell it, you feel it."

From the Adventures of Winnie the Pooh

Without having to look over her shoulder, Betty was certain that his eyes were on her until she moved out of his line of vision. As she rounded the corner she paused and leaned against the wall of a little church to catch her breath.

'But I'll take what I can get if it means I get to see you again', he had said. It had taken every ounce of strength for her to not melt and swoop down to kiss him.

She had been half reading the book and half day-dreaming when Jughead first came to talk to her. His voice jolted her back to reality and when she looked up she was met by the bluest eyes she had ever seen. Eyes that seemed bluer and deeper than the Pacific Ocean- eyes that if she let her guard down she could get lost in.

She was surprised that she managed to keep her composure during their conversation. Not that Jughead wasn't easy to talk to, but the air seemed to crackle with electricity making her more conscious of each breath she took.

While they were talking, she allowed herself to study his features. There was no doubt he was handsome-wavy dark hair, chiseled features and deep blue eyes. But it was more than that. It was the way he carried himself, the way his face expressed his words and the way he looked at her- like he would gladly run through any gauntlet just to be by her side.

As she started back towards the Lodge penthouse, she mentally gave herself a shake. What was she doing? Shouldn't she first figure out what is happening between her and Jason before she started... whatever it was that was starting. Jason, she sighed.

Jason was a wonderful boyfriend. He was thoughtful and attentive, smart and handsome in an all-American sort of way.

Betty met Jason during a Greek mixer her freshman year. The Alphas were having a cocktail party with Kappa house and her sorority big sister and Jason's twin sister, Cheryl had introduced them.

At first they had bonded over their mutual enjoyment of athletic pursuits. They both enjoyed running and cycling but then Jason had asked her to his spring formal and shortly thereafter they became a couple.

She enjoyed spending time with him and he was very easy company. They had been dating for a little over a year and everything was great until Jason started to talk about his plans for after graduation.

With an economics degree, Jason was looking to move to Manhattan to pursue a job in financial services. Thanks to great grades, some prominent internships and his wealthy family's connections, he was being courted by some of the largest names in the field.
Right before the holidays, Jason had casually mentioned his NY plans one night, while they were lying in bed. It wasn't him moving to NY that had scared her but rather his intentions for their relationship. He started out with how much he loved her and how he wanted to get engaged after graduation- which since Jason and Cheryl were 2 years older was about 1/2 a year away.

This had caused Betty to bolt upright in his bed holding the sheet against her body, "But I'm only a sophomore!"

"We can wait until after you graduate for the wedding. We can do a fall wedding in Napa or near the beach near your parents. I've been thinking about it a lot" Jason sat up, reaching out for her hand, "I love you. And you know me. I'm a planner and when I know what I want, I go and get it. And look, I just want to make things more official, so that I know I have something to look forward to when I'm stuck working long hours and climbing the corporate ladder."

Betty hadn't realized until that moment how serious Jason was about her and instead of feeling excited she felt nothing but dread. She loved Jason but she hadn't really thought too much of their relationship past college.

When she started to retreat into herself to think about why she felt that way- after all any girl would be lucky to land a man like Jason- she realized that something was missing. In their relationship there was never that 'butterflies in her stomach' or the breathless rush she expected to have with a life partner, a soulmate.

She was starting to think she was harboring romantic delusions, after all she had never felt that with any boy- that is, until today. With Jughead.

So hoping to let Jason down easily, Betty had started to create some distance between them, which Jason fought against. When she took one step back, he would take two steps closer- making her feel suffocated. When he had brought up ring shopping, she had just burst into tears and it all came out. "I don't know if I love you in that way" she sobbed.

The expression on his face, broke her heart. Taking a big deep breath he said, "I love you Betty and I want you. I want you to be my wife, but if you need a little time to sort your feelings out- I'm okay with that. I know you'll realize we were meant to be together. And I'll wait for you."

Around the same time she had gotten a call from her childhood best friend, Veronica Lodge, who was also a sophomore but at UCLA.

Betty usually went with Veronica's family for a trip during the summer - usually 2-3 weeks in some exotic foreign locale- but this time Veronica had a different proposition. Multi-millionaire Hiram Lodge (Veronica's dad) needed to take care of some business in Europe over the summer, so they were looking to spend about 3 months living in Rome. Ronnie wanted Betty and Kevin (her best friend at UCLA) to come with them. Betty had jumped at the opportunity to get a bit of distance from Jason and live in a country rich in history and culture for a few months. And after getting her parents blessing, Betty ended up on an airplane to Italy- the day after Jason's graduation party.

He had taken her to the security checkpoint and gave her a deep kiss, holding her tight. "Have fun and know I'll be waiting for you. Who knows, NY is much closer to Italy than flying from San Francisco. Maybe I'll come out for a long weekend."

And 10 days later, there she was flirting with someone she just met. Betty sighed. That is not what she expected from this summer. Spending time in a fantastic country with dear friends was helping to recharge her internal battery. Veronica and Kevin were so much fun and always pushed her out of her comfort zone- in a good way. Jughead had not been on her travel itinerary...
She had been so deep in thought that she didn't even realize she had passed Veronica's building until she heard her friend's voice, "B? Hey, over here!"

Betty looked up, "Oops," Betty forced out a laugh, "I guess I'm still trying to figure out where I'm going."

Veronica studied her best friend closely, "You look upset. Is everything ok? Is it Jason?"

Betty sighed, "Yes."

Veronica looped her arm inside Betty's as they walked into her building, "Then maybe it's not the time to tell you this, but there's a package inside for you. We are assuming it's from Jason since it came by courier and it looks like it's jewelry, since it's from Cartier..."

Betty stopped and faced her friend, her eyes sad, "Really?"

Veronica gave her a quick hug, "I am so sorry, but I thought I'd warn you because Kevin and my mother are dying to see what's inside."

Betty took a deep breath as they went into the elevator, "Well, we can't disappoint the masses can we?"

"That's the spirit, my dear." Veronica laughed as the elevator door closed and started its ascent to the top floor.
"Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known."

- Carl Sagan

It was Friday morning and Jughead was lying on his back in bed staring up at the ceiling.

Since he formally introduced himself, he had met Betty twice. Both times at Il Piccolo over cappuccinos. He had noticed that she had kept as much physical distance from him as possible. All he wanted to do was reach out and find some excuse to touch her again, she had not provided the opportunity and he didn't want to scare her away.

She had also kept their meetings brief- staying no longer than an hour and a half. But at least he now had her phone number. Baby steps. Like he said, he would take anything she was willing to give him.

He thought back to their conversations. They talked about their shared love of the classics (literature and film), their sisters, their schools and Italy. He learned that she enjoyed running (it helps her clear her head) and sketching and that she was pursuing a degree in Politics and Public Policy with a minor in art.

He had thought the novelty of her would wear off a little or that the intensity of his emotions would soften, but the more he spent time with her- the hungrier he got for her company. He couldn't get enough of her funny expressions and big green eyes and her soft lips. He enjoyed her thoughts and opinions on what they had discussed and even enjoyed debating with her when their thoughts diverged. He felt a strong need to know everything about her- her hopes, her fears, her greatest desires. And he wanted to feel the softness of her skin and her lips against his.

During a comfortable pause in their conversation and to help him resist the urge to reach out for her hand, he had asked to see her sketchbook. Flipping through, he was surprised by how talented she was.

"These are fantastic, Betty, " Jughead looked up to emphasize how much he meant what he was saying. "Your landscapes are impressive but I really like how you've captured the energy of your subjects."

"You sound surprised," she laughed.

"Well, it's not often one meets someone who's both beautiful and talented," He said. She blushed and picked up her cappuccino to take another sip.

He continued to look through her sketchbook and he began to take note of some of her subjects. A few people appeared multiple times, but there was one redhead boy in particular who seemed to be a regular model for her. He felt a tightening in his chest and realized that he was very jealous of this boy he had never met.

He looked up and pointed out one of the images to her, "And is this the boy you are 'on a break' from?"

She looked up startled and glanced at what he was pointing at. "Yes. That's Jason." She let out a soft
sigh and started playing with a golden bangle around her wrist not offering any more information. It was the first awkward silence they had experienced.

"I was kind of hoping he resembled a troll but he is good looking," he said looking to lighten the mood.

It worked.

She let out a laugh and looked at her phone. "Jughead, I'm sorry I have to go." She started gathering her stuff to leave.

As she reached for her sketchbook from Jughead's outstretched hands, she was surprised when he didn't immediately relinquish it. "Have dinner with me tomorrow?" He asked, "I know a great little trattoria near the Spanish Steps. Their pastas and pizzas are out of this world."

She looked disappointed, "I'm sorry, I can't."

"Because of Jason?" He hated saying his name.

She shook her head, "I promised Ronnie I'd go out with her and meet some of her friends tomorrow night. And then we are going to Florence for the weekend."

"Oh," he let go of the sketchbook and started to gather his belongings.

"But I'll be free next week," she offered softly.

He looked up with a smile, "How about Tuesday night?"

"I'd like that."

He had offered to pick her up but she insisted on meeting him there, so they made plans to text next week to finalize the details. He had floated home after. But now he was lying in bed because he couldn't get the sketches of Jason out of his mind. Now he had a name and an image to give him some idea of who he was up against...

He closed his eyes. What in the world was he doing getting involved with someone who's heart might not be ready or even available for the taking?

He sighed loudly and got up from bed to see his roommate strumming his guitar in their flat's common room, "Morning, Arch."

His best friend since childhood looked up surprised, "You are up early. Everything ok?"

Jughead sprawled down on the couch across from Archie, "Yup, I just couldn't sleep."

"I'm sorry if my singing woke you up. I'm practicing a new song."

"No, just a lot on my mind."

"You know if you need to talk..."

"Thanks Arch."

Archie Andrews and Jughead Jones had been friends since they were babies in Riverdale and Jughead appreciated the strong bond that they shared. Their families were close and he considered Archie the brother he never had.
They had been excited to hear that Archie had gotten into the summer program and was able to join Jughead in Italy. With Archie pursuing a music and performance degree at UCLA and him getting his double degree in Literature and Anthropology at NYU, outside of holidays and summer vacation they hadn't had much of a chance to hang out since college started.

"Hey, I'm meeting a few friends from UCLA at a club tonight. Why don't you come with me?"
Archie said looking up from his sheet music.

"Maybe, you know I'm not really a clubbing sort of guy."

"Come on. It will be fun. And you can just hang out at the bar, if you don't want to dance."

"Fine." Jughead said not really wanting to argue, especially since he didn't already have plans tonight.

"Awesome. Because there is this girl I want you to meet."

Jughead smirked, "There always is."

Arch laughed, "I want to hear what you think of her. Her name is Veronica. Great girl. She's hot but she can get really pretentious sometimes. Her dad's apparently really rich and she is not afraid to remind people of it. Oh! And I think she has a friend with her. Bella or Beth or something? She doesn't go to UCLA, so I don't know her."

Jughead looked at Archie incredulously, "You are not trying to set me up again, are you?"

Archie snorted, "Of course not. I was just offering up information."

"Right? Did you forget about Ethyl Muggs in the 10th grade? I mean, really- what were you thinking?"

"Shit, Jug. Let it go already. How was I supposed to know that she'd literally handcuff you to her during the dance the whole night. How many times do I have to apologize?"

"It's fine. When you become a famous musician, I'll send you my therapy bills."

Archie threw a sofa pillow at Jug's head, "By the way about tonight... You need to dress up. Button down shirt, no T-shirts. Jeans are fine. But nice jeans."

Jughead rolled his eyes, "Great. This is just getting better and better. Any other good news for me?"

"Nope," Archie said returning to his guitar. "Just be ready to leave at 8."
"Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray."

-Rumi quote

Sitting in her and Veronica's room, Betty picked up the red box from Jason on her bedside table and opened it again. As Veronica had surmised, it was jewelry and it was Cartier. It's contents had caused a minor frenzy at the Lodge residence.

When Betty first opened the box, Kevin had gasped, "Oh my god! That's a Cartier Love bracelet."

Betty looked up, "A what?"

"A Love bracelet. My dad gave one to my mom for their 20th anniversary. That cost him over $5000 and it's supposed to be super symbolic. But it didn't have a diamond on it like yours does." Kevin turned the gold bracelet around in his hands, "4 diamonds, that is."

Kevin pulled out his phone and quickly googled it. "Here, listen. This is what it says on the Cartier website. 'This bracelet is a universal symbol of love and commitment. The LOVE bracelet, created in 1970s New York, has sealed the passionate romances of a host of iconic couples. The LOVE bracelet is a flat bangle studded with screws that locks to the wrist. Opened and fastened with a screwdriver, the piece serves to sanctify inseparable love.'"

"Lovely," Betty sighed.

"Honey," Veronica's mom came over to give her a hug, "I'm sorry, it's obvious he is very serious about you."

Veronica picked up the gold bangle, "I will say he has exquisite taste in jewelry. It is a classic.."

"I should probably call him. Mind if I use our room V?"

Veronica handed her back the bracelet and gave her a quick hug, "Of course not. Take your time. I'll wait for you and we can meet them at the restaurant after."

Betty quietly closed the door behind her and dialed his number.

"Betts" a familiar voice came through the line, "I was just thinking about you."

"Hi Jason. I just wanted to call you and tell you-" She said fingering the gold and diamond bangle.

"You got my present?" He interrupted.

"I did and it's beautiful. But Jason you shouldn't have."

"Why? I just wanted to spoil my girl. I only wish I was with you to help you put it on."
"But Jason it's too much, I can't keep this."

"Please," he interrupted, "I wanted to and it was nothing. Nana Rose was extremely generous with her graduation present. By the way, I found a sweet apartment in SoHo, you'll love it."

"But Jason, it's not just that." Betty said emphatically, "We agreed we were giving each other space this summer to explore and figure our relationship out. Plus, since I'm technically not your girl right now, I don't think giving me a 'Love bracelet' is appropriate."

"You are the one that wanted the space to explore and figure things out. I know what I want." She heard him let out a frustrated sigh on the other end, "You are in Italy for god's sake, you are getting your space. So what if I wanted to get you a small token to remember me by?

"Jason, this is not a small token and I don't need something like this to remember you."

"I'd love to see you." Jason said trying to change the subject. "Can you FaceTime?"

Betty sighed, "No, I'm already late. The Lodges are taking us out for dinner and I still need to get ready."

"Well, I'll just have to use my imagination. And let me tell you, my imagination is going crazy. I'm picturing you in your lacy pink bra and matching lacy panties, with the bracelet on."

"Jason!!"

"I'm sorry, what did you expect babe? A man's got needs."

Betty resisted to urge to laugh because she needed to impress upon him how serious this was. "Jason," she began firmly, "I need you to understand how important it is to me that you respect our agreement. I need the space to figure us out. And romantic gestures like this isn't helping."

"Betts-"

"No, really," she interrupted, her thumb absentmindedly stroking one of the diamonds "I'm probably crazy since you were such a wonderful boyfriend--"

"Were?" Jason interrupted. Betty continued, "Jason, I feel horrible enough as it is already. I know you were being thoughtful but we are supposed to be on a break. I can't accept this."

"Look, you are being ridiculous. I bought it for you. Regardless of what you want to call what we are right now- you are still an important person in my life. I'm not taking it back." He said stubbornly.

Betty sighed, "What am I going to do with you?"

"I have some ideas," Jason interrupted in a suggestive tone.

"Jason! Just promise me you will rein it in."

After she got Jason to reluctantly agree they hung up.

5 days after that conversation, she picked up the box again. Against her better judgment she had worn the bracelet twice, both times when she was meeting Jughead. She had hoped that the golden bangle would serve as a talisman against her feelings towards the dark haired boy.
Of course, it didn't work.

If anything her feelings towards Jughead had intensified. She sighed, it did work in a different way. When she wore it she felt trapped- like she was chained back... Holding her back from reaching out to Jughead and sitting closer and reaching out to touch his face or his hair under the beanie.

She shook her head, she needed to get him out of her thoughts. This was ridiculous. She couldn't remember feeling this way when she and Jason started dating. And maybe, she thought, that was the problem...

Jughead fascinated her. He was so articulate and their conversations were amazing. They seemed to agree on most topics and on the ones they didn't, she loved hearing his opinion and debating it with him.

Veronica stirred in her bed interrupting her thoughts, "Don't forget about tonight, B."

Betty tucked the box in a drawer, "I won't. I'm going to head out for a run soon. Want to join me?"

Veronica, "No thank you. You know I'm more a barre and Pilates girl. Anyway, I can't wait to hear what you think of Archie."

Betty laughed, "The infamous Archie Andrews. I can't wait to meet him, I've heard so much about him."

Veronica smiled, "I like him but you know how it is, I need my BFF's stamp of approval. Isn't it amazing we ended up in the same city for the summer?"

"Based on everything you and Kevin have told me about Archie, I'm sure that I'll love him. And from what I understand from your dad, you heavily influenced our current living situation."

"Please, who wants to live in London or Frankfurt for the summer? British and German cuisine are dreadful."

"Don't get me wrong, I'm perfectly content here in Italy." Betty's thoughts going right away to the beanie wearing boy, "What time are we meeting Archie?"

"8:30, but we need to be fashionably late, so we won't be leaving any earlier than 8:30."

"Ronnie!"

"What?" she smiled innocently, "I've got to keep him on his toes. I can't look too eager."

Chapter End Notes

I know you are all dying to see Betty and Jughead meet up at the club but I need to do a little set up first- specifically that Jason is incredibly persistent and that he's not really taking their "break" agreement too seriously.
Of all the gin joints in all the towns...

"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances, if there is any reaction, both are transformed."

- Jung

Jughead took a look at his watch: 8:55. He turned towards Archie, "I thought we were meeting them at 8:30?"

Archie rolled his eyes, "That's what Veronica wanted. I've noticed she likes to be late. I think she likes to keep me waiting."

Jughead took a sip of his bourbon neat. The club was pretty crowded when they got there and while Jughead didn't mind the crowds, the electronic dance music was driving him crazy. He had always been more of a classic rock or alternative type kind of guy.

Whatever, he thought, I'll meet Veronica. Make sure she's ok for Archie and then find a good opening to go home.

A little after 9, Archie nudged his friend, "Jug, she's here. That's her in the black top and red skirt."

Archie gestured to the entrance. Jughead looked up at the black haired girl and recognized her immediately.

That's Betty's Ronnie, he thought. Next to her he saw the boy they called Kevin. His heart started beating faster when he noticed a flash of blonde hair behind them and that is when he saw her.

Betty.

She was wearing her hair down, letting it flow in loose waves over her shoulders. She was wearing a bit more makeup than her normal daytime look. She looked beautiful, hell sexy, he thought in a navy lace mini-dress, which far from tight still managed to hug her in all the right places.

He couldn't believe she was here. He had been so busy checking her out that he missed the recognition that also passed over her face. They locked eyes as Veronica moved towards Archie.

"Archiekins!" Veronica smiled and gave him a quick kiss on the lips, "I hope you weren't waiting for us for too long."

"Sorry Arch," Kevin said, "You know Ronnie has a very loose concept of time."

"It's fine," Archie shrugged. "Veronica, Kevin this is Jughead." He said gesturing to his friend, "Jughead is my best friend from Riverdale."

Archie had now noticed Jughead staring at Betty and gave him a quizzical look. Archie gave him a nudge, forcing Jughead to look away from Betty and acknowledge Veronica and Kevin. "Nice to meet you," Jughead said shaking their hands.

Then Veronica turned towards Betty, bringing her up to the forefront, "Archie, Jughead- this is my best friend from California, Betty."
Archie reached out to shake her hand. He expected Jughead to do the same but when he didn't, Archie shot his friend another look.

What was going on with Jug?, he thought. Archie was not used to his usually witty friend acting so dumbstruck. Archie now noticed Veronica giving her friend a questioning stare as well.

"Jug?" Archie asked breaking the silence.

"We've met," Jughead said.

"Oh!" Veronica said looking at Betty, "Really? When?"

Betty blushed, "At Il Piccolo"

"That cafe you like to go to?" Veronica asked. Betty nodded. "Well then, now that everyone knows one another. Archie," Veronica asked, "can you please get us a drink? 3 vodka sodas."

"Ooooh, hot guy checking me out at 6 o'clock. Come girls, help me show off my moves." Kevin said, pulling both Betty and Veronica into the dance floor and giving Archie an opening to interrogate his friend.

Archie wasn't used to seeing his friend this affected by a girl before. Jughead usually played it cool.

Archie turned towards Jughead, "So, you've met Betty before?"

Jughead shrugged his question off in an attempt to seem casual, "On Monday."

"And maybe Wednesday. And yesterday."

Archie's eyes widened as he started to piece two and two together, "Would she be the reason you've had a lot on your mind lately?"

"Maybe." Jughead shrugged.

Archie groaned, "Come on Juggie, throw me a bone here! We aren't playing 20 questions."

Jughead ignored the inquiry, he didn't want to talk about it right now. He wanted to find Betty. "Later, Arch" he said, grabbing one of the vodka sodas from Archie and moving towards Betty on the dance floor.

"Wait! YOU are going to DANCE?" Archie yelled after him incredulously, well aware of his best friend's distaste for electronic dance music and clubbing.

Jughead stood about a hundred feet from her for a minute and watched her dancing with her friends. Her body swayed in tune with the music, her long legs keeping up with the beat. She looked hot dancing in that little blue dress.

Doing a quick survey of the dance floor he noticed he wasn't the only one admiring the pretty blonde. A few boys started to tentatively approach the girls when Jughead swooped in and stood in front of Betty.

Looking up at him, she took the drink he offered to her and smiled. "Thank you."

He started to move to the music and soon they were dancing together. "It's a small world, isn't it?"
She said loudly to be heard over the music.

He stepped towards her in order to hear her better, happy for the chance to lean in close. He took a deep breath in, she smelled like jasmine flowers.

"You mean Archie and Veronica? I know it's crazy. Your best friend and my best friend..." Jughead said, then reaching for her hand he locked eyes with her, "It's like we were meant to meet."

Betty drew in a sharp breath, her eyes widening. He was about to lean in for a kiss when Kevin ran to them and whispered something in her ear. Betty just laughed and nodded as Kevin headed back to the guy who had been checking him out. Then Archie and Veronica joined them on the dance floor. Their moment gone, Jughead silently cursed himself for not moving a little faster.

For about 2 hours, they alternated between dancing in a group and chatting with everyone at the bar, when Betty said turning towards Veronica, "I'm getting a little hungry, V. Gelato?"

Jughead's ears perked up at the opportunity to spend some alone time with Betty. "I know a great gelato place not far from here."

Ignoring the smirk on Archie and Veronica's face, he continued, "I can take you if you'd like."

Veronica looked from Jughead to Betty, "I think that's a great idea. I'm not much in the mood for ice cream right now anyway. When you come back we can taxi home togeth-"

"I can walk her home," Jughead interrupted.

Veronica shrugged and smiled at Betty, "Whatever you want, Betts. Just don't forget we are taking an early train tomorrow."

Betty looked at Jughead, then towards Veronica, "Sure, I'll meet you at home." She turned towards Archie, "It was finally nice to meet you." then she gave Veronica a quick hug and turned towards Jughead, "Lead the way."

Veronica watched as Jughead put his hand on Betty's back to help steer her out of the club.

Betty had seemed distracted this week. Her best friend usually told her everything so she was beyond surprised when she found out that Betty had been seeing the dark haired boy over coffee for the past week. She had just chalked up her mood to Jason but now she was starting to see a little more clearly. But first things first, she thought.

Veronica turned towards Archie, "Ok Andrews. I want to know more about Jughead. I mean first off, what kind of name is Jughead? Seriously?!"

Archie laughed, "No, his real name isn't Jughead. But, I've been sworn to secrecy. If I told you his real name I'd have to kill you. And what's with the attitude?"

"I'm just looking out for my girl." Veronica sighed, "Look Betty's going through a rough time right now and I want to make sure that he's good enough for her."

"Good enough for her?" Archie spat back, "Maybe she's not good enough for him!"

Veronica rolled her eyes, "Whatever. Betty is worth more than your weight in gold. So tell me more about Jughead." Veronica looked up at him through her long lashes and put her hand on his.

Archie softened at Veronica's touch, "He's the best friend a guy could ask for."
"Well, that's a start. And coming from you that's a high recommendation."

Archie smiled, "I will say one thing, I've never seen Jughead act like this around a girl before..."

Veronica raised one of her eyebrows, "What do you mean?"

"Look, I've seen Jughead with other girls but it's always been pretty one sided. Girls typically chase him and not the other way around. I have never seen him so attentive to a girl before. Well, outside of his mom and sister..."

Veronica took Archie's hand in hers.

Archie shook his head in disbelief and continued, "I mean, for god's sake, he was dancing with her. He doesn't like dancing and he isn't a huge fan of clubs but he stayed."

"Really?" Veronica asked.

"Yes, if I didn't know any better it's almost as if he's in love."

Veronica let out a sigh, "Swoon! If he is good to my girl, then he has my stamp of approval."

Archie turned to Veronica, "Ok. Your turn. What did you mean by 'Betty is going through a rough time'?"

Veronica sighed, "She's in the process of going through a break-up--"

Archie sat up straighter, dropping her hand "No, are you fucking kidding me?"

Veronica put her finger to his mouth, "Shush. Stop it. Look, long story short. Betty's ex was way more invested in the relationship than she ever was... Is really. He was trying to get engaged to her and that's when she realized that she didn't feel the same way. She got him to agree to a 'break' to get some space from him. If she wasn't so damn nice he would be out of her life by now. But he is having a hard time understanding the definition of 'space'."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, to start with he bought her a $10,000 bracelet this week that is supposed to stand for 'inseparable love'."

Archie choked on his drink, "A $10,000 dollar bracelet? Is he insane?"

"No, he's a Blossom."

"What do flowers have to do with anything?" Archie asked confused.

"No, a 'Blossom'. As in 'Blossom Investments'."

"OH!" Archie said finally understanding, "Wow. She turned down a chance to marry a Blossom?"

"Get the dollar signs out of your head. Betty isn't like that at all. I'm 99.7% sure that Betty has absolutely no interest or intent in getting back together with Jason again."

Archie put his arm around her shoulder to pull her closer to him, "For Jughead's sake, I hope that you are right."
“Shyness is nice, but shyness can stop you from saying all the things in life that you’d like to.”
– Morrissey

When they stepped outside into the warm Italian night, Jughead had kept his hand on her back and was a little disappointed when Betty twirled to the side out of his grip. But he perked up a bit when she flashed him a smile.

"So, what are you waiting for?" She said playfully, "I was promised gelato."

Jughead gave himself a mental shake. Pull it together, Jones, he thought. "You were. Right this way."

They walked a couple of feet in a comfortable silence until Betty said, "So, Archie seems like a nice guy."

"The best."

"How long have you been friends?"

"Since we were babies. Our dads own a construction company together, so our families have been friends for ages."

"Veronica has been talking about him non-stop since the holidays. I was hoping to go down and visit for a weekend last semester but between classes, lacrosse and my sorority it got kind of hectic."

Jughead laughed, "You are in a sorority?!"

Betty faced him feigning indignation,"And what's wrong with being in a sorority?"

"I don't know. You don't seem like the type..."

"And what type is that?"

"I don't know, the 'vacuous type'..."

"Vacuous?" Betty laughed.

"Completely. All they care about is shopping and parties and who's dating who..."

"That's such a stereotype!"

"Obviously, since you don't fit into that mold."

Betty blushed, "Thanks, I think."

"Definitely take that as a compliment. So why did you join a sorority?"
"I actually didn't really think it was my thing either but when my mom found out there was an Alpha House at Stanford she convinced me to pledge. I'm a legacy."

"And that means..."

"My mom was in Alpha House when she was in college."

"Ok. I didn't realize that was such a big thing."

"It is to my mom. She believes that the Alphas made her the woman she is today. But I was sold because they have a great philanthropy."

"Which is?"

"Planned Parenthood. As a house, we volunteer in the clinics, hold awareness drives and throw fundraisers for them. I think it's amazing in this day and age that we are even debating the need for women to have access to low cost reproductive services and family planning."

Jughead admired the determination in her face. Betty looked up, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get political. Or preachy."

Jughead should his head, "I think it's cute. It's nice to see someone so passionate about a great cause."

Betty looked relieved, "I applied for an internship with their policy and political strategy office in DC for next year. I'm supposed to hear soon."

"Well, my fingers are crossed for you." He said, showing her his crossed fingers on his right hand.

"Thanks, but enough about me. Tell me about you," she said with a smile.

"Let's see... You know I am a film buff, that I like to read classics and write and that I'm going to be a best-selling suspense novelist . What more do you need to know?"

Betty rolled her eyes, "Tell me something new."

"Fine, I'm a pretty good cook."

"Seriously?"

"I kid you not. I can flambé, sous-vide, bake - you name it. I make a great beef Wellington, Spanish paella and a delectable chocolate soufflé."

"You are making me hungry. Are we almost at the gelato place?"

"In fact we are," Jughead said steering her towards the order window.

They ate their gelato in a companionable silence, she got a double scoop of stracciatella and he got a double scoop of espresso.

"So where did your passion for cooking come from?" She asked.

"My mom and dad both had to work, so dinner responsibilities fell to me. Once I got the hang of a few basic recipes, I started to play around," Jughead shrugged, "I like being in the kitchen. I find it soothing."
Jughead was now following Betty's lead as they walked around Rome and they were just finishing their cones when they came upon the Piazza Navona.

"I love this place at night," she sighed, "I love the energy from the street artists and musicians and the bustle of the tourists contrasting with the sound of the fountains."

They strolled along, stopping here and there to check out the different street artists, vendors and their wares.

At one point they stopped to listen to a string quartet who were finishing a version of 'Over the Rainbow'. After some applause from the crowd, the quartet paused for a second before launching into an instrumental version of 'At Last'.

Betty closed her eyes and sighed taking in the music, "I love Etta James."

It only took a second for Jughead to decide what to do next and before he could talk himself out of it, he tapped Betty on the shoulder. Opening her eyes to look at him, he bowed and held out his hand to Betty, "Milady, can I have this dance?"

Betty looked around at the crowded Piazza, "You are crazy, Jughead Jones," she said before reaching out to take his outstretched hand.

"We all are," he laughed before putting his other hand on her waist and leading her in a waltz in front of the musicians.

"How did you learn to dance like this?" Betty asked amazed.

"Surprised?" Jughead asked.

"You have no idea."

"My mother wanted to take ballroom dancing lessons but my dad was too self-conscious to join her. So, I took her for her birthday."

When the music stopped, Betty moved away from him. They were surprised by the burst of applause aimed at them. Laughing, they took a quick bow.

Having another sudden inspiration, Jughead reached into his pocket and fished out a coin, handing it to Betty.

Betty looked at him puzzled, "You should make a wish." He said gesturing towards the fountains.

A slow smile spread over her features as she turned and skipped over to the Neptune Fountain.

He followed her and watched as she closed her eyes, kissed the coin and flung it into the water. When she turned around, he was less than a foot in front of her, "What did you wish for?" He asked, taking a step closer.

Her eyes widened and he wondered whether she could hear his heart beating in his chest. She placed one hand on his chest as if to push him away, "If I tell you, it won't come true." She said so softly he had to lean further in to hear what she was saying.

She made a move to remove her hand and take a step back, but her heel caught on the cobblestones. Jughead quickly reached out and grabbed her by her arms to steady her.

"Thanks," she said with a breathless laugh, "Now isn't it your turn to make a wish?" she said looking
"I don't need to," he said before pulling her in for a kiss. He felt Betty stiffen slightly before relaxing into the kiss.

She had lips softer than rose petals and she tasted like vanilla and chocolate. Jughead wished that he could freeze time and just relish this kiss. As they separated, Jughead let out a huge breath he didn't realize he was holding in. He opened his eyes and noticed a small smile on her lips- her eyes still closed.

When she didn't try and move away from him, he moved his hands to encircle her hips. Leaning back a bit so he could look into her eyes he said, "Wow. See? Wishes do come true."

Betty laughed, "Is that a line you give all the girls? Because that was horrible."

Jughead tilted her chin up so he could look her in the eye again. "I've been wishing for this moment since I first saw you." He said, before leaning in to kiss her again.

After the kiss ended, Betty paused and looked out at the fountain again. For a split second, Jughead was afraid he had acted too impulsively. She seemed to be debating something, but before he could say anything, she turned back towards him and said softly, "I want to remember this."

Letting out a sigh of relief, he took the phone that she was handing him.

He pulled her close again and held her phone out ready to take a selfie, "On the count of 3, 1-2-3."

Betty stood on her tip toes at 3 and brushed her lips quickly against his, his eyes conveyed his surprise.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to ruin the picture," Betty demurred, "One more time please and I promise I won't do that again."

With a wide grin on his face, Jughead took another picture of them, "That's a promise I hope you don't keep."

Betty laughed reached out and took one of his hands in hers, "Come on, you need to take me home before Veronica sends a search party after us."

Chapter End Notes

So, my dear reader- I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Though it went through several rewrites, I could have easily done more. It's as perfect as I can make at this point without becoming obsessed.

If you reread it and need something to help you get in the mood, listen to these string quartet examples for the songs that are listed in this chapter.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow
https://youtu.be/jImVRD2NEfY

And
At Last
https://youtu.be/EIUieegki7_i
Insecurities

"Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother."

- Kahlil Gibran

It was early in the afternoon and Jughead was replaying last night's events in his head. From their first few kisses, to the walk to her place, her hand holding onto his the whole time.

They walked most of the way in silence, which suited him fine as he relished the feel of her small hand in his. When they finally got to Veronica's he pulled Betty in for another kiss.

Before going through the door, she had given him a playful peck on the nose, saying "I'll see you, Tuesday? Pick me up from here at 7?"

He had taken the scenic route home, both hoping to avoid Archie and to allow him time to process the night's events. By the time he got home, a little before 1 am, Archie had fallen asleep on the couch.

Taking his phone out of his pocket, he noticed that Betty had sent him 3 texts.

'I thought you might like these -B,' the first text read, followed by the 2 pictures they had taken.

He reached for his phone to study the pictures again.

God, she was beautiful, he thought for the 100th time that day. And she liked him, at least he thought she did. The first picture captured her kiss and his expression of surprise and the second picture had them both beaming at the camera.

He sighed, this was unfamiliar territory for him and there were so many questions racing through his mind.

"Jug?" He heard Archie on the other side of the door, "Are you awake?"

Jughead steeled himself for what he knew would be a million questions, "It's almost 1, come in Arch."

Archie pushed the door open slowly, "Hey bud," he said sitting on the edge of Jughead's bed. Archie noticed Jughead's phone open to the picture of him and Betty. Archie picked up the phone and studied the picture, before saying, "So, you and Betty?"

"Yeah," Jughead answered trying to repress a smile, he swiped his phone to show Archie the picture of Betty kissing him.

Archie leaned over and put the back of his hand against Jughead's forehead, "I'm sorry, who are you and what have you done with my best friend Jughead?"

Jughead swiped Archie's hand away and pushed him off his bed, "Get off, dumbass."

Archie picked himself up from the floor chuckling, "Seriously Jug, I've never seen you like this with a girl."

"What do you mean?," Jughead asked, knowing what he meant but curious to hear Archie's
"How do I put this? Usually, you seem to have the upper hand with your dates. I have never seen you do something you didn't like doing, just because a girl you were seeing wanted to." Archie paused for a moment, "Last night, was the first time I have seen you in the role of, how shall I say this,'Pursuer'."

"And?"

"Jug, I thought for sure I'd have to bribe you to stay last night because I know you hate clubbing but not only did I not have to do that, you went out on the dance floor on your own volition. And you hate EDM."

Jughead groaned loudly, "I do hate EDM--"

"But you danced with her," Archie interrupted, "For much longer than I've ever seen you dance with anyone."

"I know! She is making me step way out of my comfort zone. I don't know what's wrong with me!" Jughead moaned stuffing his pillow over head mumbling something that Archie couldn't make out.

"Excuse me? Care to repeat that, Romeo?" Archie laughed.

"Arch," Jughead said sitting up and moving his pillow to his side, "She's like a drug in my system that I can't get enough of. I know we barely know each other but when I'm with her.. I.. this is going to sound so stupid, but I- it's like she completes me."

"Isn't that from 'Jerry Maguire'?"

"Shut up. I told you it was going to sound stupid. I couldn't think of anything else to say."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make fun of you." Archie said contrite.

"UGH! What is wrong with me?" Jughead lamented, pretending to hit his head against the wall.

"Wow," Archie said, letting out a low whistle, "I never thought I'd see the day that a mere mortal girl would reduce you into an incoherent idiot. You've got it bad."

"I know."

Archie paused, debating whether to bring up his conversation with Veronica yesterday.

Jughead looked up, "Just say it, Arch."

"Betty seems like a really, really nice girl-"

"But?" Jughead asked.

"You do know she is just getting out of a relationship, right?"

Jughead sighed eyes darkening, "A little. I know his name is Jason and they are on a break..."

"Well it's a little more complicated than that," Archie paused.

"How?"
"According to Veronica, he wants to marry her."

Jughead shrugged, "I don't see a ring on her finger."

"No, but Jug it is more than just wanting to marry her- he actually tried to get her to go ring shopping with him, but she turned him down."

"Arch, listen to yourself. You just said it, 'she turned him down'."

"Yes, but he's not letting up. Apparently, he's being really persistent, Veronica mentioned that he bought her a $10,000 bracelet as an expression of his love for her this week."

Jughead looked at Archie skeptically, "Seriously, a $10,000 bracelet? You are joking. Who do you know that's our age that could afford to do something like that."

"I thought you said you knew his name?"

"I do. It's Jason."

"Do you know his last name?"

"No."

"It's 'Blossom', as in 'Blossom Investments'."

"Oh." Jughead's mind went back to their meetings at il Piccolo and he thought back to the golden bangle that she had fidgeted with.

He didn't remember her wearing it yesterday...

Fantastic, he thought to himself, he was competing with someone who was good looking and a multi-millionaire or was it billionaire?

Archie studied his friend, the earlier elation he had witnessed, replaced with doubt and concern. Archie was starting to feel bad about bringing his friend down from his emotional high.

Archie stood up getting ready to leave, "For what it's worth, Veronica is pretty sure that you have nothing to worry about. But you are like a brother to me and I just want to make sure you don't get hurt."

"I know, thanks Arch."

"Want to head down to the Irish Pub and catch the football matches today? I think it's Ireland versus Germany," Archie asked changing the subject.

"Sure, I'm always up for a Guiness for lunch."

"Goofball," Archie chuckled leaving Jughead's room and closing the door behind him.

Fucking fantastic, Jughead thought, He would happily give Betty the world if he could but how the hell was he going to compete with a $10,000 bracelet? Who the hell gives someone they are on a break with such an extravagant present?

Jughead sighed, someone who was trying to win back the girl.

He picked up his phone and quickly googled Jason Blossom. Clicking on a few of the links he found
a few pictures that made his heart constrict with envy.

He had apparently stumbled onto some sort of campus life page and he counted 5 pictures of Jason, and 3 with the beautiful blonde. One looked like a tailgate party and the other two looked like different dances.

He tried to look at the pictures objectively. Did they look like a couple in love? He had to grudgingly admit that they looked good together. What if she was just going to go back to him at the end of the summer?

He had never met a girl he thought he could spend his whole life with, well before now... He mused.

He wondered what caused them to take a break. They had to have been pretty serious to almost get engaged...

Sighing he looked at the time and did a quick mental calculation. It was a little early back in Riverdale, but he needed to talk to someone who would make him feel better. He pulled out his phone and dialed a number,

"Hello?!" A girl's voice croaked sleepily.

"Good morning, sleeping beauty."

"Jug?!"

"Hi JB."

"Jughead, what the hell? Do you know what time it is? Why are you calling me now?"

"As if I need an excuse to call my favorite sister."

Jellybean snorted, "I'm your only sister."

"Details, details."

Jellybean sighed, "Fine. Now that I'm awake, what can I do for you, Juggie?"

Jughead hesitated, "I wanted your advice."

"My advice?"

"Well, there's this girl-"

JB laughed, "Wait, seriously? You are calling me for advice about a girl? You do know I'm only 16 right?"

"Oh, but you are a very wise 16 year old."

"True, but YOU want advice on a girl?"

Jughead sighed, "Yes." He could hear JB shuffling in the background and a door open.

"MOM!" He head JB yell, "JUGHEAD IS ON THE PHONE AND HE WANTS ADVICE ON A GIRL."

"Jellybean!" He yelled, "What the fuck-"
"Watch your language big brother, don't forget I'm an impressionable young teenager. Plus you are on speakerphone, " JB laughed.

Jughead heard his mom, "Forsythe, really. Your language!"

"Mom, I'm sorry. I'll get you later, JB."

"So honey," his mom said sounding amused, "You need advice about a girl?"

Jughead sighed, "I'm having dinner with a girl Tuesday and I just wanted to get her something a little special."

"Who are you?" He heard his sister say cackling in the background, "and what have you done with my big brother?"

He heard his mom hushing her, turning back to the phone, Gladys asked, "Honey, is it her birthday or some other special occasion?"

"No. I don't know. I'm just being silly, I guess. I'm sorry I called you guys so early."

He heard JB again, "Juggie, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to tease you. Look, if she really is worthy of you, she won't care what you get her because she'll want you for you and not for the stuff you get her. So I don't think you can really go wrong with what you choose. But i don't think you need to get her anything at all."

"Jellybean," he heard his mom say, "I'm impressed."

Jughead laughed, "See, don't sell yourself short Jellybean, I knew you'd know what to say."
The Heart Knows What it Wants

“Avoiding danger in the long run is no safer than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

– Helen Keller

Betty and Veronica were wandering around in the Ufizzi Gallery together, Betty stopping every now and then to crank out a quick drawing in her sketchbook.

They were in front of Botticelli’s “The Birth of Venus” when Veronica decided to take a closer look at her best friend.

Betty seemed happier than she had been the whole week. Veronica would have initially guessed that her mood was due to being surrounded by some of greatest art work Europe had to offer, especially since Betty typically geeked out at museums and art galleries. But after hearing her sing as she was packing this morning, she was pretty sure that her good mood wasn't just because of the Ufizzi gallery and most likely due to Archie's friend.

"Ron?" Betty asked not looking up from her sketching.

"Yes B?"

"Why are you staring at me?"

"I was just admiring your focus."

Betty snorted, "Liar. No, really."

"Well," Veronica started, "You know we've been best friends since preschool."

"Yes, how could I forget? It started when you defended my honor against Ginger Lopez."

"She deserved it."

"She called me a 'baby' because I was wearing pigtails and you retorted that her--"

"-backpack was only a knockoff Prada and that only Guess overalls are in." Veronica finished, smiling at the memory. "Right, which just shows that I've always had your back."

"I know that Ronnie."

"I know you know that and you usually tell me everything. But, you've been keeping things from me..."

Betty looked up from her sketchbook, "You are talking about Jughead?"

"Yes."

"Ronnie, I'm so sorry." Her eyes started to fill with tears, "It's not that I don't trust you. I've just been overwhelmed- between meeting Jughead and that bracelet Jason sent... I didn't want to overburden you further with my silly issues."
Veronica gave Betty a quick hug, "You my dear, are never a burden. Don't ever think that you have to keep things from me."

"Thanks Ron. To be completely open with you, I wasn't exactly sure what I was feeling myself."

"What do you mean?"

"Ronnie, I've only known Jughead for a week. A week! And already I'm feeling things that I've never, ever felt with Jason and we were together for a year and a half. That terrifies me."

"Why? Isn't that great news?"

Betty sighed, "It is and it isn't. I mean, I've always known deep down, ever since Jason mentioned getting engaged- that I was never meant to be 'Mrs. Jason Blossom'."

Betty paused for a moment, thinking, "I was just so afraid of hurting him. So afraid, Ronnie. So, what do I do instead? I've led him on to believe that my feelings would change. And now, I have to go and break his heart again."

"Oh honey," Veronica reached out and pulled Betty in for a long hug, "Are you going to tell him about Jughead?"

Betty paused. "I'd rather not."

Seeing the expression on Veronica's face, she quickly continued, "It's not that I don't want him to know about Jughead. It's more that I want him to understand that I don't and have never felt the same way about him that he does for me. The way I feel about our relationship occurred before I even knew Jughead existed. I don't want him to think that my feelings were influenced at all by another boy."

"And they weren't?"

"Not at all. If anything, it validated how I felt. I always knew that something was missing. But I couldn't figure out if I was just being too silly or too picky." Betty shook her head, "I didn't know it was possible to be so consumed with another human being. When I'm around Jughead, not only do I feel this incredible physical attraction to him but even our conversations are a turn on!"

"Wow Betts." Veronica said surprised.

"I know! With Jason, we just started dating because it seemed like the logical thing to do and we got along well. But I see now because of the way I feel around Jughead, that we would've been better off as friends." Betty sighed, "I also realize I should have always trusted my feelings."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I need to end it with Jason. And I should have done it before I left for Italy and now what am I supposed to do? Break-up with him over Skype or FaceTime?" Betty sighed again.

"I'm sorry, B. You'll figure it out and get through this. And, I'll be here for you every step of the way. If it's any consolation it seems that Jughead is just as over the moon for you, as you are for him."

Betty shot Veronica a huge grin, "Last night, when he kissed me it set my soul on fire. Do you know what he told me? That we were 'meant to meet'. I know it sounds super cheesy but think about it! If we didn't meet at Il Piccolo, wouldn't we have met eventually because of you and Archie?"
Betty went back to finish her sketch, the two girls sitting in a comfortable silence until Betty stood up and linked her arm through Ronnie's, "Come on, let's go find Kevin. I could use a gelato."

Veronica rolled her eyes and looked at Betty's lean body, "Only you would be hungry after that."

"Please I just poured out my heart to you, I need a little sustenance to recuperate."

***

When Veronica, Kevin and Betty walked through the door of the Lodge Penthouse in Rome Monday afternoon they were greeted by the sight of six dozen long stem red roses in the foyer.

Veronica turned towards her butler, Smithers, "Wow. Mom went a little overboard with the flower arrangements this week." She took a deep breath, "But it does smell heavenly in here,"

"No Miss Veronica, they came this morning for Miss Elizabeth." He pulled out an envelope from his jacket pocket and handed it to Betty.

Betty dropped her bags on the floor and opened up the envelope, Veronica and Kevin peering over her shoulder to read the note.

"Jason strikes again," Kevin said theatrically.

"Thanks for the commentary, Captain Obvious." Veronica said shaking her head, "So Betts, what are you going to do?"

Betty sighed, "Probably what I should have done at the start of the summer. V, I'll be in our room making a phone call. This may take awhile."
"She wasn't looking for a knight, she was looking for a sword."

- Atticus

Jason woke to the sound of his phone buzzing, he looked at the clock.

5:30am.

He rolled over and groaned loudly. His alarm wasn't supposed to go off for another half hour. He picked up his phone from his bedside table and saw Betty's image staring back at him.

"Hey babe," Jason answered the phone groggily, "Isn't it a little early to be calling me? Is everything ok?"

"No, Jason, everything is not ok."

Jason quickly sat upright in bed, "Betty" He asked, suddenly concerned, "What's wrong?"

"Jason, when we last spoke, didn't we agree to give each other space?"

"So you got the flowers..."

"More like the whole rose garden."

"Betty, I just wanted to send you something to let you know I was thinking about you. Didn't you like them?"

"Whether I like them or not is besides the point. Jason, you promised me last week that you would rein it in. Six dozen long stem roses is NOT rein ing it in."

"Betty, calm down. What's the big deal?"

He could hear Betty taking a deep breath on the other of the line, "The big deal is that we had an agreement. Which was, once we said 'goodbye' at the airport, we would take the time to give each other space."

"And I gave you space! For god's sake, you are in Italy instead of being in Manhattan with me!"

"Jason this was way more than just being physically apart. We agreed that we would pause our relationship so that we could figure out what we wanted from each other!"
"Betty, I know what I want."

"But I wasn't sure! You have not respected my wishes at all!"

"Betty-"

She cut him off, "You aren't taking this seriously at all."

"Betty, please calm down." Jason sighed, "I'm doing the best I can to take this break seriously but come on. Betty, I love you."

"Jason-"

"You are being way too sensitive over some small presents that I sent you. I like spoiling--" 

"Jason" Betty interrupted again, "First of all, they are not small presents, but that is neither here nor there. The point is that you are not listening to me!"

He could hear her start to cry on the other end of the line.

"Betty-" Jason began, trying to pacify her, "Please don't cry. I was trying to-"

"Jason, just stop. Please. I need to say something."

Betty took a deep breath, "You will always have a special place in my heart," she said her voice breaking.

"Betty-" He interrupted.

"No, please- let me finish. I can't do this anymore. I can't. I am really sorry. But I can't."

"Betts--"

"Jason, a relationship is supposed to be a two way street. Your actions this week though have proven that you have no regard for my feelings or what I want." Betty sobbed.

"Betts, can we please talk this over!"

"We are talking Jason. You just haven't been listening to me. I mean really, if you can't even respect my wishes with something like this..." she paused catching her breath, "If this is how you are going to be like, I can't even imagine what it would be like to be married to you! If we didn't agree on something would you just wave away my feelings?"

"Betty-"

"Would you tell me that I'm being silly or ridiculous? Or maybe you would just keep throwing presents at me in the hopes that I'll just give in?"

"Betty, stop this. You are acting hysterical. Let's talk in person. Why don't I fly out this weekend? You can have a chance to calm down and we can talk face to face."

"Jason, no. I don't think that's a good idea. What would change between now and then? You'd still think I'm ridiculous and I'd still think you were trying to suffocate me-"

"Suffocate you!" Jason stared at the phone incredulously.
"Jason, I really, really didn't want to do this over the phone"

"Do what?" Jason asked perplexed.

"Jason, I'm sorry- but I don't think we are going to be able to work this out. I think we need to just end this now. End us, our relationship."

"Betty-

"I am sorry," she said softly, "but I think it's the right thing for us to do."

"Betty, st-

"I do still want you in my life," she interrupted, "as a friend. And I'm sure we'll get there some day."

"Betty, please! If you'd just let me come out to see you."

"And I know that the right girl for you is somewhere out there-

"Betty, I don't want another girl. I want you."

"Jason, NO. Look, I'll be back in California at the end of August. I'll return your bracelet then or give it to Cheryl- whatever you are most comfortable with. And like I said, I would like to figure out how to be your friend."

"Betty!"

"Jason, please, there is nothing you can say right now to change my mind. I'm sorry, but I need to go."

"Betty!" She had hung up on him.

Jason was wide awake now. What the hell just happened, he thought. He hated that she was so far away versus just across campus.

If we were physically together, he thought, I could have calmed her down, convinced her to see it my way.

Damn it, he thought and flung his pillow angrily across the room. Pressing a button on his phone he said, "Siri, call Cheryl."

"Calling Cheryl Blossom," Siri said.

After a few rings, his twin answered.

"Jason, what the hell? Do you know how late I was out last night?," he heard Cheryl ask, "This better be important or I'll murder you."

"Cher, when was the last time you spoke to Betty?"

"When she first arrived in Rome, why?"

"Uh, Betty and I just had a huge fight."

He heard Cheryl sighing on the other end, "Oh Jay-Jay, what did you do?"

"What do you mean, 'What did I do'?"
"Because I know both of you well and I can guarantee that you did something to piss Betty off."

"Well whatever the fuck I did or didn't do, she called to tell me it was over."

"Ok, hold on." Cheryl said, "Start from the beginning."

Jason quickly brought Cheryl up to speed regarding the bracelet and the roses up to their recent conversation.

Cheryl sighed again.

"What?"

"Look Jay-Jay, you know I love you, but you really, really screwed this up."

"How exactly?" Jason asked defensively.

"Betty wasn't exactly a fan of your extravagant displays of affection when the two of you were dating. What makes you think she would be happy with a Cartier bracelet and six dozen long stem roses? Especially since you are supposed to be taking a break from your relationship?"

"But this whole break thing is ridiculous!"

"It's not to her, Jason. Look, we were all really disappointed when you and Betty didn't get engaged. You know how much I adore Betty - I would love to have her as a real sister. This was your opportunity to be supportive of her and give her the space she was asking for and you didn't do it."

"But-"

"Jason, no 'buts'. You goofed up."

"Shit, I need to call her-"

"No, that is the last thing you should do right now. Please show her that you are finally listening to her. I'll call her a little later to make sure she's ok."

After getting Jason to agree to follow her advice, Cheryl sighed and looked over at the pictures on her dresser. There was one of Betty and Cheryl together taken shortly after Betty had been initiated into Alpha House.

Even if Betty hadn't been a legacy, she would've had no issues being invited to pledge. She certainly looked the part - but she also had a great personality and an impressive list of extracurriculars as well. Cheryl had claimed Betty early as a little sister and the other upperclassmen were too afraid to get on her bad side to argue.

When Cheryl had introduced the two at the mixer, the last thing she had expected was for them to get together. Jason typically liked his women a little more malleable and unassertive, so she was quite surprised that he went after the feisty blonde.

The whole Blossom family had been charmed by Betty's intelligence and personality and agreed that she was a refreshing change from his past girlfriends. When Jason announced during a family dinner his engagement intentions, Cheryl and her parents, Cliff and Penelope Blossom, were thrilled.

Cheryl was heartbroken for them both when her dear friend ended up sobbing on her bed one night after coming home from Jason's. Betty had confessed what had transpired and was apologetic because he was her twin. Betty had sobbed that while she was sure she loved him, she didn't think
she loved him enough to become his fiancé.

She had urged Jason at the time to allow Betty the time to digest his feelings but Jason just couldn't help being Jason. He had showered her with all sorts of presents and trinkets, after all it had worked with all the other girls he had dated, but it only pushed Betty further away.

Cheryl sighed again, pulling out her phone to dial Betty. For someone who was supposed to be the younger twin, she sure had to clean up a lot of her brother's messes.
"The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly."

- Buddha

"Jughead, stop moving!" Betty said getting frustrated.

Jughead looked apologetically over at her from his spot on the bench, the Colosseum looming in the background.

"How am I supposed to draw you if you keep moving?"

"But I needed to turn the page," he said motioning to his copy of Dante's 'Inferno'.

"Really?" Betty said amused, "You needed to slouch lower on the bench and shift the position of your legs to turn the page?"

"I already told you I wouldn't be good at this."

Betty rolled her eyes, "I think I've gotten enough angles to work with."

Jughead pulled her close as she sat on the bench next to him. Putting his arm around her shoulder, she leaned against him, stretching out her long legs across the width of the bench.

"This is my favorite bench in all of Rome," she said.

"You have a favorite bench?" He asked amused.

"Are you making fun of me?"

"No, I'm sorry. Tell me, why is this your favorite bench? The people watching?"

She shook her head, "It's the view of the Colosseum. I remember coming here with my parents and Polly and being in awe of everything that happened in that one building- plays, gladiator contests, animal hunts, executions. Did you know that it's the largest amphitheater ever built?"

Jughead shook his head, smiling at the way her eyes lit up as she continued with her mini-history lesson.

"It's mind blowing to think that this building was built in the first century. That's what I love about Rome is that everywhere you walk, a king or a queen or an emperor or a pope has walked that path before you. It reminds me of how insignificant my problems and insecurities are in the grand scheme of things."

"You are not insignificant to me." Jughead said giving her a kiss on the forehead.

She leaned back against him and pulled out her sketchbook to draw again. Jughead sighed and marveled at how well her body seemed to fit tucked under his arm.

It had been 5 days since their first dinner date and he couldn't believe his luck. He thought back
He had arrived at the Lodge's building on the Via del Constantino, carrying a single long stemmed blush rose.

While walking towards the Piazza Borghese to pick up Betty, Jughead had passed a small florist shop and decided to buy her some flowers.

Girls like flowers, right?, he thought. Well, he knew his mom liked flowers.

The only other flowers he had gotten a girl before were corsages for prom and other high school dances only because Archie had convinced him that it would be criminal to miss out on an overrated high school rite of passage.

He stood before the buckets filled with colorful bouquets, when he noticed the long stemmed roses towards the back of the store. He settled for a single blush rose because it reminded him of the color that came into her cheeks when she was excited.

After checking in with the doorman, Jughead was cleared to proceed to the penthouse level. Riding the elevator up, Jughead gave his reflection a quick once over. He was wearing jeans and a nice button down shirt, but no matter how hard he tried he couldn't get that one curl to stay under his beanie.

As soon as the elevator door opened he was escorted by the Lodge's butler into the family's sitting room. He was greeted by Veronica, Kevin and an older woman who resembled Veronica.

Veronica gestured to a seat, "Betty will be right out. Jughead, this is my mom. Mom, Jughead."

After shaking Jughead's hand, Mrs. Lodge excused herself to check on dinner while he took the seat offered him.

Jughead took his first look around the room, noticing all the red roses. "Your mom must love roses, Veronica. I've never seen so many in one single room."

Kevin leaned over to smell the nearest bouquet, "Mrs. Lodge does but these are Bett-OUCH. VERONICA, why did you kick me?"

Veronica let out an exasperated sigh, "Sorry, it was an accident." She said in a voice that made it perfectly clear it was not.

Jughead took in the exchange and immediately understood why Veronica was trying to quiet Kevin. The flowers had to be from Jason, he thought. Jughead glanced down self-consciously at the lonely rose in his right hand.

Before he could say anything, Betty came out to join them.

She was breathtaking, statuesque in a long floral sundress, her hair arranged in a messy top knot. She smiled at him and he immediately felt his insides do somersaults.

"You look beautiful Betty." he said before he could stop himself.

Veronica and Kevin exchanged a look. Kevin pulled Veronica up to her feet, "Come on Princess, lets go see what's for dinner. Have fun, you two!"
She rolled her eyes at them as they moved towards the kitchen, "You look great yourself."

Jughead looked at the single rose he was holding and handed it to her, "This is for you. I'm sorry i just got you one..." he let his voice trail off as his eyes looked around at the red roses surrounding them.

Betty walked up to him, concern etched across her face. Taking the the rose from his hand, "They told you about the flowers?"

Jughead tried to casually shrug it off, "Not intentionally, but I put two and two together."

She brought the rose up to her nose and inhaled deeply, "Mmmm. Blush roses are my favorite." She paused looking down at the rose and he noticed a slight hesitation in her manner.

"What is it?" Jughead asked concerned.

Betty looked up and met his gaze. Their eyes locked, she said, "I ended things with Jason yesterday."

Jughead felt as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. "Really?" He asked.

Instead of answering him, she stood on her tip toes to give him a gentle kiss on the lips.

Since that moment he'd been moving around in a dreamlike state. They'd made it a point to spend a little bit of time with each other each day in between his classes and her excursions with Kevin and Veronica.

He smiled remembering when they first walked into Il Piccolo holding hands. Antonio had let out a loud cheer and kissed them both on each cheek Italian style. Afterwards, he brought them their regular orders and hoped they would be 'per sempre insieme', which translates into - forever together in Italian.

But of course, Antonio being Antonio, said to Betty, "If you get tired of Mr. Jones, I would be happy to take his place."

Jughead had tipped Antonio well that visit.

He gave her a quick kiss on her forehead and slouched back onto the bench pulling her closer to him.

He looked over at her, focused on drawing in her sketchbook again.

He was about to turn back to his book when his eyes fell upon the nape of her neck. They had stuck to hand holding and some relatively chaste kisses, but today was the first time she had snuggled against him.

He was trying to be respectful, after all she had just gotten out of a relationship. And he had no idea what to call what they were and he certainly didn't want to force her to put a label on it. But, he would be lying if he didn't admit that he craved more.

He decided to test the waters and leaned over and started to kiss the side of her neck.

"Mmmmm." She murmured. "Juggie, what are you doing?"

Leaving a trail of kisses from her neck to her exposed shoulder he said in between kisses, "Isn't this
what people like us who have done the things that we've done do?"

"What?" She said laughing turning to face him.

"You know whatever we have." He said blushing, fidgeting under her intense stare.

She leaned forward to give him a gentle kiss and after she ended it she took his hand.

"Juggie, I don't know what we have either. But I like it. Seeing you has become my favorite time of the day."

"Me, too."

She looked up at him through her thick lashes, "I know we've only known each other for a few weeks, but I feel a connection to you that I've never felt before- with anyone."

He looked into her eyes. "Me too," he said huskily, tracing her lips with his finger, "Do you remember what I told you the day I met you?"

Betty shook her head.

"I told you, that if you let me see you again, 'I would take what I could get'."

Betty flashed him a wide smile, "Well then, what do you say to just seeing where this takes us?"

Instead of answering her, he pulled her up into his lap for a deep kiss.
“The aim of life is to live, and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware.”

– Henry Miller

Kevin sighed, enjoying this lazy Sunday morning sitting in a lounge chair, the sound of the waves crashing, "Ronne, you have spoiled me. I don't think I'll ever enjoy traveling anything other than first class again."

Turning towards Archie and Veronica who were lying on a blanket on the sand next to him, Kevin said, "Have I ever mentioned how much I love traveling with you?"

Veronica chuckled, "Only about a hundred times today."

Kevin thought back fondly back to the first time he met Veronica at UCLA.

They had been paired together on a project for their fashion history class. They hit it off immediately through their shared love of Proenza Schouler, Balenciaga, and Jean-Paul Gaultier. Thanks to Veronica's dad's connections, they were able to interview designers from each fashion house- their inside access allowed their project to stand out from amongst their other classmates.

Kevin enjoyed Veronica's "tell-it-like-it-is" attitude. Their friendship was cemented when Veronica invited him to be her date for the Vanity Fair Oscar Party. They sat at one of the tables, sharing similar opinions on dresses and crushing on the same celebrities.

"Seriously, I think I'm going to have to convince your parents to adopt me." Kevin continued, "Doesn't every family need an heir and a spare?"

"Kevin, as much as I love you. I don't think my parents could handle more than one diva in the family."

Kevin sighed melodramatically, "Well, a boy can dream, right? I'll just have to marry rich."

Veronica had chartered a van to take them down to Sperlonga, a small coast-side town about a 2-hour drive south from Rome, for the day. They were currently camped out in a private beach cabana at one of Sperlonga's luxury hotels.

Archie smiled, "Yeah, I don't know how us peasants manage."

Veronica whacked his arm playfully, "Watch it, Andrews! Or this will be the last time I let you tag along."

Kevin sat watching Betty play in the waves with Jughead, thinking back to a few weeks ago when Betty had finally broken things off with Jason. Kevin had a soft spot for Veronica's other bestie. She was a lot of fun to be around and was usually the grounding force of reason when the three got together.

Both Veronica and Kevin had waited outside the bedroom door that day, ready barge in if needed.
And sure enough, after a half hour, they heard the blonde curse loudly and a loud thud against the wall. Flinging the door open they found Betty collapsed in a sobbing heap on the floor. Veronica ran immediately to Betty to scoop her up off the floor and hold her, while Kevin investigated the source of the loud thud. Lying on the floor against the opposite wall was the box from Cartier, the impact had knocked the bangle free from its moorings. After putting the bracelet back in the box, Kevin sat next to them as Betty recounted the conversation.

Watching Betty happily splashing around in the water so soon after that made him smile.

"I thought you guys were the OTP, but" Kevin gestured towards the water, where the blonde girl and dark haired boy were playing around in the water. Archie and Veronica turned to where Kevin was pointing.

"But," he continued, "I think you guys lost that title to them. We are going to have to give the 'Most Adorable Couple' award to those two. How long have they known each other again?"

Veronica and Archie sat up a little more to study their friends frolicking in the water.

"A month, I think?" Veronica said.

"And I think they've seen each other every day," Archie added, shaking his head, "Look, I know you guys don't know any differently but this is not how Jug usually acts..."

"You keep saying that..." Kevin said.

"Could have fooled me," Veronica added.

They watched as Jughead picked up Betty who was squealing and trying to wiggle out of his grasp and continued watching as he tossed her into the water.

"Yeah, someone definitely body-snatched Jughead and replaced him with that Romeo you see over there." Archie laughed, "I don't think I've ever seen him this happy. He's even happier than when he got Hot Dog in the fourth grade."

"A Hot Dog?" Kevin asked.

"Hot Dog is Jug's sheepdog," Archie said.

"He named a dog, 'Hot Dog'?" Veronica asked.

Archie shrugged, "Jughead likes food."

Kevin snorted, "So does Betty. Now we know what drew them together..."

The three of them watched as the pair stood waist deep in the water, the dark haired boy pulling the blonde into a close embrace.

"She's positively radiating Nicholas Sparks," Veronica said sighing.

"Do they know we are watching them?" Kevin asked.

"Probably," Veronica said.

"Then we should stop watching them, shouldn't we?" Archie asked the other two.

"But it's just getting good!" Kevin interjected.
Veronica threw her floppy sun hat at Kevin, while Archie laughed.

Out in the water, Jughead watched as Betty resurfaced laughing, "Will you please stop throwing me into the waves?" She adjusted her bikini bottom, "I think I'll find be finding sand in places I didn't know existed tomorrow."

He smiled at her and sent a silent thanks up to whoever invented bikinis. Her white floral two piece hugged every curve and highlighted her tan skin.

Since all of their meetings had taken place in public venues, while their kisses had become pretty intense, they had been pretty limited to handholding and cuddling. He was trying really hard to control himself, but thanks to the bikini, it was hard to not come up with excuses to reach out and touch her bare skin.

And she was acting incredibly hot and irresistible today, Jughead thought.

He watched as Betty looked out towards the horizon, "I've missed the beach. I think that's the problem with being a California girl. The beach is engraved on your soul."

"I've never been to California before."

"It's the best state in the union. You are missing out, Jones."

"Well, no one has ever invited me before." He said fishing.

Betty flashed him a wicked smile, "Well, we will have to get Archie to ask you."

"Why you..." He started before making a move to chase her again.

Realizing that he was going to throw her in the water again, she tried to swim away, but he was too fast for her. With one arm under her knees and one arm under her back, he tossed her in again.

Emerging again from underwater, Betty swam towards him and took his outstretched hand.

He pulled Betty closer to him, his hands now resting around her waist, enjoying the feel of her bare skin against his.

"Are they still watching us?" He asked in a low tone.

Betty stole a glance to her right, "Definitely."

"Then let's make it worth their while," he said pulling her in for a passionate kiss. She immediately reciprocated. He groaned softly as she ran her hands through his wet hair.

She pulled away from him and reached out to run her hand through his hair again. "I was starting to wonder if you were hiding some sort of deformity under your beanie," she said teasing, "Like maybe a third eye, or a large scar, or maybe a tattoo of your real name..." she made him turn around so that his back was to her, "Or Voldemort..."

He quickly whipped around to face her, laughing, "You thought Voldemort's face was on the back of my head?"

"What else would explain why you wear a wool beanie in the hot summer sun?" She smiled and moved forward to kiss him.
As the kiss ended, Betty made a move towards the shore, but Jughead held onto her hips, "So I was thinking..."

"Yes... Thinking is a good thing..." She teased.

"You goofball, let me finish. So I was thinking I haven't had a chance to show off my culinary expertise to you yet."

"And?" She smiled expectantly.

"Come over to my place tomorrow night? I'll cook you dinner and then we can stream a movie after?"

She smiled, "A man who cooks... You have no idea how sexy that sounds."

"That's the reaction I was hoping for," he said, putting his forehead against hers, "Is that a yes?"

"It depends on what's on the menu," she teased.

"You are killing me, Cooper! How about I start us off with a porcini mushroom risotto, Ossobuco for our main course and a peach panna cotta to end?"

"You had me at porcini."

"I've always said it's important to know your target audience." He kissed her again.
The Way to a (Wo)man's Heart is Through the Stomach

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."

- Anais Nin

Jughead stood in the kitchen, his phone balanced between his cheek and shoulder, chopping shallots.

"Classes are fine mom. I think you'd really enjoy the way the professor is taking us through 'The Divine Comedy'. For the final paper, we're focusing on the seven deadly sins."

"All seven deadly sins or do you get to focus on one or two?"

"Just one. I was leaning towards ‘pride’ or ‘sloth’, I still need to figure it out."

"I can't wait to hear about it, honey. And how is your history class going?"

"Great, our professor has a special contact in the Vatican, so we were given a private tour last week."

"That sounds amazing. I can't believe it's only 5 weeks until you come home. I know I should be used to it already but home isn't the same without you here."

"I can't wait to see you, dad and Jellybean either, mom." Jughead said as he sautéed the mushrooms and shallots in the pan.

"And how's your novel coming along?"

"It's coming ... I haven't had a chance to work on it too much these last few weeks."

"Oh really?" Jughead heard his mom ask.

When Jughead didn't answer she continued. "So, Jellybean was showing us your pictures on Instagram... She's really pretty Forsythe."

"Mom, stop fishing."

"Hon, you know I love you and I just want to know about the people in your life."

"I know, mom."

"So, if you ever want to talk about it..."

"Gladys! Stop giving Jughead a hard time!" Jughead heard his dad interrupt and take the phone.

"Don't mind your mother," FP said, "She's just being nosy."

"FP!" He heard his mom say in the background.

"It's ok, dad. I don't mind." Jughead said.
"So, you really like this girl, Jughead?"

"Yeah, I do."

"I was just a couple of years older than you when I met your mother. It was the best day of my life."

"Ah, honey," he heard his mom say in the background. Jughead paused. "Dad?" He asked tentatively, "How did you know that mom was the one?"

"I just knew. I remember meeting her and thinking that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with this woman."

"You just knew?"

"I think maybe you understand what I'm saying."

"Thanks, dad."

"All right, son. Just remember to always be a gentleman."

"FP," He heard his mom say, "He always is, after all he takes after his father."

Before Jughead could say anything, he heard JB saying in the background, "Ewww, aren't you guys too old to be making out?"

After saying goodbye, Jughead continued with the task at hand. He started to brown the rice and add the liquid. He stood stirring the Risotto, adding liquid about every three minutes, alternating between the mushroom water and chicken stock.

The repetitive movements, allowed Jughead a chance to process what his dad had said, ‘I think maybe you understand what I’m saying’. He thought about how his feelings for Betty overwhelmed him.

He couldn’t believe he would be going home in five weeks. While he was excited to see his family, that also meant that in five weeks he would also be leaving Betty. NYU was 2,497 miles away from Stanford. Jughead sighed, worrying like this wasn’t his style.

Giving himself a mental shake, he focused back to getting dinner ready, checking first to see how the panna cotta was setting in the fridge and then opened the oven to look at the lamb shanks.

After making sure everything was okay in the kitchen, he went to go check on the table. He had set two place settings down and laid out a few votive candles to help set the mood. The Barolo he had purchased earlier from the corner vintner had been opened earlier to allow it time to aerate.

Lighting the candles, he thought back to his earlier conversation with Archie.

"Hey Jug," Archie said, not bothering to look up from his guitar when Jughead walked into the room.

"Morning. Arch, any chance I can have the place to myself until midnight tonight?"

Archie looked up from his guitar, "What's going on?"
"I promised Betty I'd cook dinner for her tonight."

Archie raised an eyebrow suggestively, "'Dinner'? Is that what they call it here in Italy?"

Jughead rolled his eyes, "Andrews, get your mind out of the gutter."

Archie laughed, "Of course, I can stay out. You can just text me if you need more time."

"Thanks Arch."

"And Jug?" Archie said, picking up his guitar and walking to his room.

"Yeah?"

"Don't forget the walls are thin."

"Mind out of the gutter, remember?" He repeated, flinging a couch pillow at Archie's retreating figure.

Jughead had to admit he was curious about what tonight would bring. It was the first time they would be alone in a private setting. Every time they met it was either at Il Piccolo, a restaurant or some other public place.

He couldn't get the thought of Betty in a bikini yesterday out of his mind. He had taken advantage of every opportunity to touch the exposed parts of her skin, which only served to further drive him wild with desire for her.

Yup, he thought, his longing to be a little more intimate with Betty had definitely driven this dinner invitation.

To be fair, Jughead reflected, he didn't think he would be this captivated by her if it was just about her looks. He found her sharp wit and intelligence incredibly sexy. He loved their easy banter and the way she threw herself into a debate when they didn't agree on something.

While checking the risotto again, he heard a knock at the door. Jughead lowered the heat under the burner and adjusted his beanie before calling out, "I'll be right there."

When he opened the door, Jughead felt his mouth drop open.

Betty stood radiant in the dingy hallway of the student apartment building, dressed in white pants and a low cut teal camisole, her blonde hair loose and flowing over her shoulders. In her hands, she was carrying her purse and a bottle of bubbly.

She looks delectable, he thought.

Betty smiled, "It smells wonderful. Aren't you going to invite me in?"

Jughead shook himself out of his trance, "Why Diana," he said referencing the Roman goddess of the hunt, "If you would be so kind as to honor me with your presence."

Betty smiled, "It would be my pleasure, Lord Apollo." She responded and stepped into his apartment.

Betty took a quick look around, it was neat and cozy, with some movie and band posters decorating the walls.
She walked over to him and handed over the bottle of sparkling wine she had brought. "Thanks for inviting me to dinner. I brought a bottle of my favorite Prosecco."

As he took the wine from her outstretched hands, he pulled her closer to him, holding her by the waist. Betty had wrapped her arms around his neck and they just stood there for a moment eyes locked, hips pressed together.

"You look amazing." He said breathing in her jasmine perfume.

"You are no slouch yourself," Betty said before pulling him in closer for a deep, languid kiss. He felt a slight thrill as her tongue ran across his bottom lip before meeting his.

He let out a slight groan, "Stop being so tempting, or I may end up burning your dinner," he said between kisses.

"Since I'm starving, that would be a huge crime," Betty said giving him one last kiss before letting him go.

He walked over to the stove. "Another two minutes and this would've been a goner," he said adding more liquid and stirring again. He scooped some risotto into the ladle and held it out for her to taste.

"Mmmm, porcini" she moaned almost sensually, "This tastes amazing."

Aroused, he pulled her close for a lingering kiss and putting his forehead against hers, "You are right, it does taste amazing."

Chapter End Notes

Don't worry, you'll see more of this scene in the next chapter- from Betty's point of view :)
"To burn with desire and keep quiet about it is the greatest punishment we can bring on ourselves."

- Federico Garcia Lorca

Betty let out a soft sigh as she wandered around the Via del Boschetto, exploring the shops with Kevin and Veronica. Thinking back to yesterday at the beach, she had to suppress a smile. She loved the way his eyes lingered on her and how utterly sexy his gaze made her feel. She felt a blush spread over her cheeks as she remembered the way his gaze had seemingly caressed her body.

Betty was pleasantly surprised to discover that under Jughead's loose fitting shirts, he was built like a soccer player. She inwardly swooned remembering his strong muscular legs and arms and the way his lean muscled torso felt underneath her hands.

While she had no doubt Jughead wanted to cook dinner for her, she also understood what was implied by the invitation. He was inviting her over to his place, where they could be alone- for the first time- without the company of their friends or the summer crowds in Rome.

Their kisses had increased in intensity and the sexual tension between them, always palpable, was reaching a new high. Never had she so wantonly craved to touch and be touched by another human being.

"Earth to Betty? Betty, hello? Are you there?" Kevin asked interrupting her thoughts.

Betty shook her head, "What? Oh, hi Kev. Sorry, I was distracted."

"Understatement of the century," Kevin said chuckling, "Let me guess. Are you thinking of someone tall, dark and built?"

Betty looked up at Kevin as she stood fingering a sea green dress on a mannequin, "Just wondering if I should buy something new to wear for tonight..."

Veronica who was studying a leather purse nearby looked up and chimed in, "Why bother? Especially if it's just going to end up in a crumpled heap on the floor anyway."

Before Betty could say anything, Kevin interrupted, "Ew, Ronnie. TMI."

Veronica rolled her eyes, "Please, why do you think he invited her over for dinner? Cooking for her was just a pretense."

"No," Kevin disagreed, "I think he's just being strategic. After all, this is Betty we are talking about. The surest way to her heart is through her stomach." Tilting his head to side Kevin gave Betty's body a once over, "Though I don't where she puts it all."

"Guys, you do realize I'm right here and I can hear everything you are saying, right?, Betty asked.

Veronica walked to over to a table and held up a fire engine red lace teddy, "Maybe you show up in
"Veronica!" Betty said, pretending to be offended before smiling slyly, "You know red is not really my thing..."

Back at Veronica's, she had taken special care with her appearance that day, choosing a silky, low cut teal camisole and her white skinny jeans. On her way out the door she grabbed her toothbrush, tucking it into her purse. 'Always be prepared,' she thought with some amusement, recalling the motto her childhood troop leader had drilled into her head.

And now, she was here, standing in the middle of Jughead's kitchen, his forehead pressed against her own.

"I can't believe you went to all this trouble for me," she began, feeling her heartbeat quicken.

"You are worth it," kissing her softly on the nose, a look of adoration in his eyes.

Oh god, she thought, he is so sexy. Carpe diem.

Feeling emboldened, Betty put her hands around the back of his head, eyebrow raised, and asked, "Why stop there?" before drawing him in for another kiss.

Her tongue finding his, she moved her hands up to run her fingers through his hair, knocking his beanie to the ground.

Jughead groaned with pleasure as he felt Betty suck on his tongue. "You are irresistible," he growled, before picking her up and placing her on the kitchen counter. Betty wrapped her legs around him pulling him closer to her as he responded to her kisses with an urgent need she had never felt from him before.

As Betty leaned towards him, she sighed with pleasure as his lips found her neck. Jughead slipped his hands underneath the silky fabric of her top to caress her back, shivering with anticipation when he realized that she wasn't wearing a bra.

As Betty continued to collapse into his touch, one camisole strap slipped down her arm, exposing one perfectly round breast.

Betty let out a gasp of pleasure as Jughead reached up to cup her exposed breast, his tongue encircling and flicking her nipple. "OH, Juggie, that feels amazing" she moaned, as he cupped her other breast in his other hand and pressed his mouth against hers.

Betty slipped down from the counter, her hands grasped his shirt pulling him closer to her. She pulled the hem of his shirt up his body and over his head, pressing his bare chest against her camisole clad one. She had just placed one hand in the back pocket of his jeans when they were suddenly jolted back to reality.

The kitchen timer dinged angrily signaling that the ossobuco was ready.

"God damnit!" Jughead swore, "Hold that thought, let me just turn off the oven."

Betty laughed and adjusted her camisole.

Jughead quickly turned off the timer, then the oven. He threw on oven mitts to pull out the pot with
the lamb shanks and place it on the counter.

When Jughead turned around again to face her, Betty smiled as she saw Jughead's jaw drop.

"I was thinking, if dinner can wait for a minute, I haven't gotten the grand tour yet..." She said standing before him in only her camisole and blush lace panties before him, her pants folded neatly on the dining room table.

"And I think I know where we should start." Jughead said. Pressing his lips into hers, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her to his bedroom, their lips never breaking contact.

Kicking his door closed, they stood, lips still connected, as he helped her slip her top over her head, while she unbuttoned his jeans. Running her fingers through his hair, Betty pulls him closer to her, pressing her lower half against his. Looking down, Betty did a double take and laughed, "Are those hamburgers on your boxers?"

Jughead laughed with her, "Wow. That's what you are thinking of in the middle of our moment?"

Betty shook her head, eyes locked with his, "I'm focused on this," she said stepping out of her panties and standing fully naked in front of him.

"Holy hell, you are so fucking sexy." He said, pushing her onto the bed and covering her body with his. Her hips bucked up against his, the only thing coming between them were the thin fabric of his boxer shorts.

Cupping her head with both hands, Jughead locked eyes with her asking, "Do you want to do this?"

In response she, pulled down his boxers and pressed her lips against his. He started to return her kiss when he felt her suddenly sit up, "Wait!" She cried.

"What?" He asked startled.

"I want to know your real name first."

Jughead laughed and pulled her down onto the bed again, "Forsythe Pendleton Jones the third."

Pulling his ear to her lips Betty whispered breathlessly, "Well, Forsythe Pendleton Jones the third, what are you waiting for? Make love to me now."

Chapter End Notes

Believe it or not, this was actually done before the finale. Imagine my surprise when they had B&J make out in his kitchen...
"Hell is empty because all the devils are here."

- Shakespeare

"Can i get you guys another round of drinks? Your desserts will be right up," Their server said.

"An Old Fashioned," Jason told the waitress.

"I'll have a pear martini, please," Cheryl added.

The rest of the table added their drinks to the order as well. Brittany, one of Betty and Cheryl's Alpha House sisters, and the last to order looked suggestively at Jason, "A dirty martini for me, please."

Jason inwardly rolled his eyes. He had known that Brittany had a thing for him for ages. She was so damn obvious, he thought.

They were having dinner at a new hot spot in Midtown with other Stanford Alumni. They agreed it would be nice to meet up every few weeks since they were all living in the Manhattan area.

Jason studied Brittany from across the table.

He was used to Brittany's behavior towards him. Even when he had started dating Betty, Brittany had no qualms with openly flirting with him right in front of her. Betty always laughed Brittany's behavior off. He would have liked for her to show some jealousy, and it really annoyed him that Betty never did.

It's not that Brittany wasn't good looking- most of the Alpha House girls could have moonlighted as models. And, he thought objectively, she was the type of girl that he would have dated- that is, if he hadn't met Betty.

Betty. God damn it, he thought.

He hadn't spoken to her since she broke up with him about three weeks ago. Cheryl begged him to wait until the end of the summer to contact her and against his better judgement he had agreed. He still thought that Betty was being ridiculous. And while he didn't tell his twin this, he considered her advice part of the broader strategy of getting Betty back. There was no doubt in his mind that they would be together once she was back stateside.

The mention of Betty's and his name brought him back to the conversation at the table.

"Excuse me," he said, "I missed that."

Brittany looked at Jason sympathetically and put her hand on his saying, "I was just saying, that I was really sorry to hear about you and Betty breaking up."

Jason could see Cheryl rolling her eyes at Melissa across the table.
Brittany continued, "And I just want to say that I can be there for you if you need someone to talk to you."

"Thanks Brittany," he said, turning to Tom, one of his fraternity brothers. He was about to start a conversation about yesterday's Red Sox vs. Yankees game when Brittany interrupted.

"It looks like Betty's having a great time in Italy," Brittany began.

He felt Cheryl stiffen beside him. "She's having a blast," Cheryl interjected, "She's traveling with the family of one of her high school friends, the daughter of Hiram Lodge, of Lodge Industries. I'm sure you have heard of him."

"Oh, I have." Brittany said, "So nice of them to invite Betty along with them. It looks like she's meeting new people and making new friends."

Jason looked at Brittany puzzled. What the hell was she talking about?, he thought. He noticed that Brittany's smile had widened.

"I wanted to do some traveling this summer," Cheryl continued quickly, "But mother insisted I stay and help her with her charity events for the summer." She turned to Melissa and Harry on her right and said, "Are you guys heading anywhere this summer?"

Melissa started to say, "Just the Hamp-

Brittany interjected, "Haven't you seen the pictures of Betty on Instagram?"

"What pictures?" Jason asked, he quickly opened the Instagram app on his phone and went to her account. He saw a few pictures of the Colosseum and other monuments and art works that Betty had posted.

"Click on the folder icon." Brittany said, ignoring Cheryl's evil eye.

When Jason clicked on the icon, he noticed a bunch of images of her taken by other people. There were photos of her with Veronica and Kevin, which were fine. There were a few of her out and about at various sites, sitting at a cafe and on a bench drawing.

As he continued to scroll through he noticed one particular boy was showing up in quite a few photos with her.

What was that ridiculous hat he was wearing?, Jason thought. It looked like a crown.

He continued to scroll through the pictures- one looked like they were sitting together in a car, a few eating dinner in a group, and a few of them on a beach. In most of the pictures, he was usually right next to her.

He felt his blood starting to boil as he noticed that this boy had his arm around her in a few of them and when he got to what looked like a selfie of Betty and the boy beaming at the camera he had reached the end of his rope.

He clicked on the photo tag and the name 'jjonesiii' appeared on the image. When he clicked through to jjonesiii's account it was marked private.

"You know what, I'm sorry," Jason said standing up abruptly, "I forgot I have an early meeting tomorrow." He opened up his wallet and threw a few hundred dollar bills on the table, "This should cover Cheryl and me."
Cheryl shot Brittany a dirty look, "Wait, J, I'll go with you. Thanks for a lovely evening everyone." She paused and said in icy voice, "And Brittany, you will be hearing from me later."

The table sat in a shocked silence as they watched Jason storm out of the restaurant, Cheryl chasing after him.

Brittany cocked an eyebrow and looked around the table shrugging, "Was it something I said?"

Cheryl ran after Jason as he stomped quickly down 5th Avenue. "Jason, wait! I can't run in these heels!" She called after him.

Jason abruptly turned around, causing Cheryl to slam into him. "Goddamnit, Cheryl? Did you know? Is Betty seeing someone else?"

Cheryl sighed, "Look, Betty did mention something. But Jason, you guys are not togeth-"

"Just tell me this- is HE the reason she broke up with me."

Cheryl shook her head, "No. I think that decision was a long time coming."

"What's his name?" Jason asked.

"Who cares? Anyway-"

"WHAT'S HIS NAME?" Jason roared.

Cheryl looked at him angrily, "Look, I know you are upset but you can NOT yell at me like that."

Jason took a few deep breaths, "I'm sorry." He said in a low voice, "How long have you known?"

"A few weeks."

"And how did they meet?"

"He's a friend of Veronica's boyfriend."

"God Cheryl, why the fuck didn't you tell me?"

"Because I knew you'd act like this."

"And is he her boyfriend?"

"No, I think they've just gone on a couple of dates."

He let out a sigh of relief. She was probably just lonely he thought and just got carried away with the romance of being in Italy for the summer.

"I need to call her." He said.

Cheryl put her hands on her hips, "You can't. If you do that, you will have lost any chance with her that you may have had."

"Cheryl, I can't believe you didn't tell me!"

"Jason-"

"I'm your fucking twin brother, where is your loyalty?"
Cheryl paused looking wounded at his last remark, "I love you Jason. You know that. And I'm sorry, but I knew you wouldn't agree with me and I didn't want to hurt you more."

"What wouldn't I agree with you on?"

"That maybe it's a good thing if you both move on from each other. Your heads are in completely different places right now. If you guys were meant to be- it will happen."

"Stop it with all the 'If it was meant to be' crap. You don't sit back and let things happen- you need to make things happen. And why do you always take her side?"

"This isn't about taking sides! I want what's best for you."

"Betty is what's best for me-"

Cheryl looked him square in the eye, and put her hand on his shoulder, "But Betty doesn't feel the same way you do about her."

Jason pouted, "She just doesn't know it yet. And stop projecting what happened between you and Cedric. It's not the same thing."

Cheryl looked at her brother and sighed. "I'm not projecting. But you can't force someone to feel something they don't. As you just pointed out, I know that intimately. Promise me you won't call her. Give her space."

Jason thought about it, "Fine. I won't call her, but I want to know what his name is."

"Why does that matter?"

"It matters to me."

Cheryl sighed, "It's 'Jughead'."

"No, really."

"It's 'Jughead'." Cheryl repeated.

"What kind of name is 'Jughead'? You've got to be joking."

"I'm sorry dear brother, I kid you not." Cheryl took a look at her brother but for once she could not read his thoughts. She sighed, "Jason, promise me you won't call her."

He looked his twin straight in the eyes, "I did already, remember?"

"Ok, good. Did you want to get coffee somewhere?"

Jason shook his head, "No, I think I'm just going to head home."

"Are you sure?" Cheryl asked.

"I just need to calm down."

"You'll be ok?"

"Yes."

"And you won't call her?"
"I promised that already, remember?"

"Fine, remember you promised." Cheryl gave her brother a quick kiss on the cheek before hailing a cab to go home. Once she was safely tucked away in the cab, Jason pulled out his phone.

He found the number he was looking for, "Gertrude, hi," he said to his father's personal secretary, "It's Jason. I need you to book me a first class flight out of JFK to Rome, Italy please for Saturday morning or afternoon, leave the return date open-ended and a suite at the Rome Cavalieri, please."

He listened to Gertrude repeat back the plans, "Thanks Gertrude, I'll follow up later this week if I need anything else."

As Jason hung up the phone he thought, I promised I wouldn't call her, but she didn't say anything about visiting.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comments appreciated :)

"If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves."

- Thomas Edison

"Ugh, I hate this part," Betty said, putting down her plate and leaning her head into his shoulder to block her view of the laptop.

They were sitting on his bed streaming Pulp Fiction and had reached the part where John Travolta's character revives Uma Thurman from her overdose by plunging a hypodermic needle in her chest.

He laughed, and taking advantage of the situation, held her closer.

"That is so gross!" She cried.

"I'm going to take a wild guess and say that you are probably not a huge fan of gore either."

"It depends. Like I can watch 'Scream' or 'Alien' level gore but real life violence like what's in this or 'Saving Private Ryan' is sometimes hard for me to watch. I don't know why we couldn't watch 'Romeo & Juliet'." Betty pouted.

"I thought we agreed that the cook gets to choose the movie. Plus, how could you not want to watch a Quentin Tarantino movie? You know he's the--"

"godfather of modern indie cinema" Betty said finishing his sentence for him.

"Have I said that a lot?"

"Only about a thousand times."

"Heh. How about if I let you choose next time?"

Betty looked at him, one eyebrow raised, "Oh, there will be a next time?"

"Only if you play your cards right?"

Taking his plate and setting it on his bedside table, Betty slipped out of the sheets, still naked and facing him, straddled his boxer clad lap.

"Would this be an example of 'playing my cards right'?" Betty asked, slowly gyrating her hips against him.

Feeling his boxers tighten, Jughead let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding. "I would definitely say that this would qualify." He said, before removing his boxers and pulling her close to him again.

*** *** ***
Jughead woke up the next morning a few minutes before his alarm was set to go off. Taking care not to wake Betty, who was curled up against him, Jughead got up from his bed and got dressed. He smiled to himself, as he took the two dinner plates out from his room into the kitchen. Leaving a note in case she woke up before he got back, he walked to the corner cafe, and picked up two cappuccinos and sfogliatelle pastries to go.

When he quietly let himself back into his room, he was pleased to see that Betty was still in his bed sleeping, her blonde hair fanning out like a halo around her head.

When he sat down on the bed, she started to stir. He leaned down to kiss her on the forehead, "Good morning Sunshine. Did you sleep well?"

Betty smiled at him sleepily, "Like a baby. How long have you been up?"

"About a half hour. I didn't want to wake you." He handing her a coffee and a pastry.

"Thanks," Betty said and taking a bite of the sfogliatelle, "Mmmm, chocolate. I'm starving!"

"I had a nice time last night," Jughead said softly, moving some of her hair behind her ear, "I have to leave for class soon, but I was wondering..."

"Yes?" Betty asked, curious.

"I thought it would be fun if we went away for a night this weekend. Just the two of us..." He said starting to blush.

"Where would we go?"

"I know just the place..."

"Where?"

"I'd like to surprise you, is that ok?" he said looking at her hopefully.

Putting her coffee and pastry down, Betty cupped Jughead's face with her hands and pulled him in for a deep kiss, "I'd like that."

"Really?" He said a wide smile spreading over his face.

"After last night, how could you possibly doubt I'd say 'yes'?"

He gently guided her to lie down and leaned over her. "Why don't I show you how happy I am?" he asked, running his hands through her hair.

Betty laughed, "I thought you said you had to leave for class soon?"

"As if I would've been able to focus after the way you rocked my world last night." Jughead said said before removing his belt and covering her mouth with his.

*** *** ***

"It's the bottom of the seventh inning here at Yankee stadium and the score is tied 3-to-3. The Red
Sox have the bases loaded. Their first basement is up to bat and...

Archie yelled at the screen, "God damnit! They are only 2 games ahead in their division, they can't afford to lose the series!"

Archie looked over at Jughead, "Do you think they'll put in a pinch hitter if Moreland doesn't advance a runner? Jug?"

They were watching the Red Sox versus Yankee game at a bar owned by a Boston expatriate who liked to broadcast MLB games.

Normally, Jughead would be cursing at the television alongside him but Archie sighed, these were not normal times for his best friend.

Since they were young, Archie had always exasperated Jughead with his girl crazy antics. For the life of him, Archie couldn't remember a time when Jughead had ever obsessed over a girl.

Archie looked at his friend, "Earth to Jughead. Hello? Look, they are putting in Hot Dog to pitch..."

Jughead looked up at Archie and at the TV before turning back to Archie again, "Ha. Ha."

"All ok?"

"Yeah." Jughead said with hesitation.

"What's wrong? I mean, last night's 'dinner' went ok, didn't it? Betty spent the night..."

Jughead couldn't stop the smile on his face as he remembered the way she had made the first move. Or how their hands and tongues impatiently explored each other's bodies.

He felt his face flush when he remembered the ecstasy he felt when he first slipped into her and the urgency they both expressed as their bodies moved together as one.

After they made love the first time, Jughead went to fetch them some dinner from the kitchen to bring back to his bed, as they were both ravenous from their physical exertion. He remembered looking down at Betty, his sheet wrapped around her, leaning against him and balancing her plate on her knees as they watched the movie, wondering what he had done to meet a girl like her.

Last night's order of events was very different, from what he had envisioned - not that he was complaining. While there was no arguing that she was sexy, he wasn't expecting her to be that seductive or insatiable...

"Jug?" Archie asked, waving one hand in front of Jughead's face to get his attention.

With an effort, he tried to tear his mind away from the feel of her warm smooth skin, her perfect round breasts and the memory of the way she had called out his name. He flushed remembering how sinful his birth name had sounded on her lips...

"Jughead Jones!"

Jughead turned to his friend "Sorry, what Arch?"

Archie rolled his eyes, "I was just saying dinner must have been great since she spent the night."

"It was." Jughead said hesitantly.
"Did you guys-"

"Arch!" It was now Jughead's turn to roll his eyes. "Not that it's any of your business but that's not the issue."

Archie looked at Jughead perplexed, "Then if that's good - what's the problem?"

Jughead looked down at his hands, "We only have a month left in Italy until we go back home to New York."

"So?" Archie asked taking a sip of beer.

"Archie, I think I love her."

"WHAT?!" Archie said, spitting out what he just drank.

"I love her. I'm pretty sure that's what I feel." Jughead gave a hollow laugh, "I've never felt this way about a girl before and in four weeks she is going to be almost 3,000 miles away from me."

"Juggie," Archie said, putting his hand on Jughead's arm, "I didn't realize you were this serious about her. Does she feel the same way?"

"I don't know," Jughead said shrugging, "Part of me thinks she does, but I'm not sure. I don't want to scare her and she just got out of a relationship-"

"But according to Ronnie, Betty is completely done with Jason."

"She says she is," Jughead said hesitating, "But when I try and bring it up in conversation she laughs it off or changes the subject."

"Do you think she's trying to hide something from you?"

"I don't think so. And I haven't tried to push the topic."

"It's obviously bothering you- why don't you just be honest with her?"

Changing the topic Jughead said, "I'm taking her on a 'road trip' this weekend."

"Where are you guys going?"

"It's a surprise."

"You can tell me."

Jughead scoffed, "No I can't. You are horrible at keeping secrets. You'd tell Veronica or Kevin and then the surprise will be ruined."

"Whatever, why don't you try and talk with her then?"

Jughead sighed, "I don't know. I don't want to upset the status quo."

"Status quo?"

"You know, what we currently have."

"And that is?"
"I don't know- we haven't really put a label on it yet."

"So? Why won't you ask her?" Archie asked, as if it was the most simple thing in the world.

Jughead sighed, "Because I'm scared. I'm afraid she won't feel the same way. Or what if she rejects me? What if I'm just a summer fling for her? Who wants to date someone who lives 3,000 miles away--"

"Jug," Archie interrupted, placing his hand on Jughead's arm, "you won't know until you ask her."

Jughead flashed Archie a wry smile, "I can't believe I'm getting girl advice from you."

"Yeah, I am totally weirded out by it too, bud." Archie said flinching as Jughead punched him on the shoulder.
A Perfect Day

"Remember, remember, this is now, and now, and now. Live it, feel it, cling to it. I want to become acutely aware of all I've taken for granted."

- Sylvia Plath

Bystanders threw envious glances at the attractive couple as they walked past the park at Sant'Elena. The dark haired boy in a wool hat sitting upright on the blanket, a beautiful leggy blonde girl in the peacock blue maxi dress lying down with her head in his lap. Oblivious to the world around them, the boy focused on feeding bits of cheese and prosciutto to the blonde drawing in her sketchbook.

Betty sighed and smiled looking up at him, "Juggie, you are amazing. I can't believe you planned this whole day on your own."

Jughead leaned down to kiss her full on the lips, "I'm glad you liked it- but it's not over yet."

They were watching the sun set in a park outside of a 12th century monastery enjoying unobstructed views of the Venice Lagoon. They had a small picnic laid out next to them consisting of olive bread, cheese and charcuterie. Jughead popped the cork on his bottle of bubbly and poured some prosecco into two plastic tumblers before handing one to Betty.

Sitting up, Betty lifted the glass in a toast, "Here's to Venice and beautiful sunsets."

Jughead lifted his glass to meet hers, "And here's to us."

Betty leaned over to kiss him, "I'll toast to that." She said as they clinked their glasses together.

Gently taking the glass from her hand and placing it on the blanket, Jughead pulled her in for a kiss. Betty sighed again, Jughead tasted like sparkling wine and Pecorino Romano.

As the kiss ended, Betty picked up her sketchbook and leaned against Jughead again, reflecting on the day's events.

Jughead had been pretty mysterious the days leading up to their surprise rendezvous. She had tried to extract hints or clues from him but he had remained frustratingly tight-lipped.

He had shown up at 6:15am that morning to pick her up, blindfold in hand.

Betty looked wearily at the blindfold, "Is that really necessary?"

"How else am I going to keep it a surprise? I promise you won't be wearing this for long." He smiled and gently secured the scarf around her eyes, "How many fingers am I holding up?"

"Thirteen."

"Ha. Ha." Jughead said sarcastically.

"What did you expect? I can't see anything."

"Great! Because here comes our taxi."
After a 10 minute ride, Jughead gently helped Betty to her feet and started walking while holding their backpacks and her hand.

"I feel like I'm going to crash into something." Betty said nervously, her gait slower than usual.

"Just trust me. We are almost there," Jughead said mysteriously, walking ahead and pulling the nervous blonde by her hand.

"Sopresa!" Jughead said 'surprise' in Italian, while removing the blindfold.

Betty blinked a couple of times, allowing her eyes to adjust to the light. They were standing on a platform at the Rome Termini train station. The placard above them revealing their destination: Venezia.

"Venice!" Betty squealed with delight, "I went once with my family in high school and I've been dying to go back." Betty threw her arms around Jughead and gave him a quick kiss to show her appreciation.

Tired due to the early morning hour, both napped during the 3 hour express train ride. Betty was thankful they had a chance to catch up on sleep because Jughead had planned a day packed with back-to-back activities.

Their first stop after getting off the train was the Gallerie Dell'Accademia. They had walked hand-in-hand through the halls admiring the works of artists that included Titian, Paolo Verenese and Giovanni Bellini. In her element, Betty dragged Jughead from artist to artist- pointing about different techniques and spouting facts about the piece or the artist. Betty sat for awhile sketching the 'Penitent Magdalene' by Giambattista Pittoni, fascinated by the expression of agony the 17th century painter was able to capture.

After the art museum, they toured and admired the architecture of the Pallazo Ducale and the Museo dell'Opera and chased pigeons around the Piazza San Marco. Jughead had thought of everything and after lunch they enjoyed a gondola ride through the canals of Venice.

Leaning against him in the gondola, Betty sighed, "I should let you plan every outing, Jones."

"Anything for you," he said nuzzling her neck.

As they approached the Bridge of Sighs the gondolier paused mid song and said, "Legend has it that people who kiss at sunset as they pass under that bridge will love each other forever. But I think for you two, it will work even though it isn't sunset yet."

Jughead looked down at her, "Shall we give it a try?"

Betty smiled, "I think you are just looking for another excuse to kiss me."

Leaning down to kiss her, their boat seconds from passing under the bridge, Jughead said, "Guilty as charged."

After the gondola ride, they continued wandering around the alleyways and canals of Venice, stopping occasionally to take pictures and walking in and out of shops. Despite his distaste for shopping, Jughead waited patiently while Betty admired the Murano glass, tried on Venetian masks and perused other touristy knick knacks. In preparation for their sunset picnic, they had stopped at different artisanal food shops to sample charcuterie, cheese, pastries and chocolates.

Bringing her mind back to the present, Betty lay content in Jughead's arms watching as the sun
seemingly disappeared below the lagoon, Betty wondered if there was anyone else in the world that was as happy as she was in that moment. She hoped so, she thought, because everyone should feel this way at least once in their life.

*** *** ***

Later that evening, after dinner, they stood in the middle of the Piazza San Marco, their arms wrapped tightly around one another swaying to the music of a pianist stationed inside a café. Betty leaned her head against his shoulder and felt Jughead's arms tighten around her.

"Remember the first time we danced together?" She asked looking up at him.

"How could I forget?" Jughead said smiling down at her.

"I almost didn't take your hand that night at the Piazza Navona," she said softly, "when you asked me to dance."

Jughead held her tighter, "Well, I'm glad you did."

Betty kissed the underside of his chin, "So am I."

When the song ended, Jughead kissed her tenderly on the lips and while it was sweet, Betty craved more. Grasping his shirt collar in both hands she pressed herself closer to him returning his kiss with an urgency that she didn't realize she had repressed. She felt his lips curl in a smile as she pulled him harder against her.

"Betty" Jughead whispered breathlessly into her ear, as Betty moved her hands up to caress his hair, knocking his beanie to the ground.

Still holding onto to his shirt, Betty pulled him closer, looking at him with half-lidded eyes and whispered, "Let's go back to the hotel."

"Why," he asked huskily.

"Because Jughead Jones, I need you to make love to me now."
Warning: Heavy smut at the start of the chapter, if it's not your thing, pick up after the asterisks...

"There I was, way off my ambitions, getting deeper in love every minute."
- F. Scott Fitzgerald

"Betty," he groaned softly, as she bit his shoulder and moved up to run her tongue against his Adam's apple, "You are so fucking sexy right now," he growled into her ear, "but can you please wait until we are in the room?"

Pressing against the bulge in his pants, she giggled seductively and kissed him deeply before moving to the side to let Jughead open the door.

Thoroughly aroused by the seductive siren standing next to him, Jughead fumbled with the keys before finally pushing the door open and quickly pulling Betty inside behind him.

Closing the door, he pushed her against the wall, his mouth devouring her neck and shoulders while his hands roamed wildly against the contours of her body. "Why are you so fucking sexy?" He groaned, while Betty writhed and moaned sensually, pushing her pelvis harder into his erection.

Pinning her against the wall, he ran his hands through ponytail, freeing her hair so it landed in soft waves around her shoulders. Holding her hands above her head, Jughead hungrily covered her mouth with his, while unbuttoning the front of her sundress with his free hand.

Pressing her tongue against his, she freed her hands from his grip and reached down to deftly unbuckle his belt. Without breaking their kiss, Betty unbuttoned his jeans, causing them to pool around his ankles on the floor, allowing one hand to slip into his boxers. Jughead felt his breath hitch as her four fingers grasped his shaft, while her thumb gently massaged the head of his penis.

"Fuck, Betts," Jughead growled as he felt his erection spasm against her touch. Encouraged, he lifted her up, propping her against the wall, her dress opening to expose matching black lace panties and a bra. Betty responded by wrapping her lean, long legs around his torso. With one hand behind the back of her head, he started kissing her neck while teasing her nipples still trapped under the lace of her bra.

She made a move to remove her underwear, but he stopped her, pulling her hand once again above her head. Locking his eyes with hers he said hoarsely, slightly out of breath "Don't. It. Looks. Hot. Keep. Them. On."

"But I want you in me," she pleaded, increasing his desire for her.

Without breaking eye contact, he reached down and moved the bottom of her panties to the side to
expose her sex. He felt Betty shudder against him, calling his name and begging for more as his fingers grazed the warmth between her legs. Kissing her again, he steadied his grip on her thighs and bottom. He locked eyes with her again as he pulled down his boxers and heard her emit a little gasp as he entered into her.

Sheathed with her warmth, he felt his eyes roll back into his head as they moved together, Betty softly chanting his name like a mantra, "Juggie. Juggie. Juggie."

"Betty," he answers, her arms clinging tightly around his neck, before meeting her lips, their kisses drowning out each other's moans. His hands gripping her bottom, Jughead continues to push into her as she cries out in pleasure.

Jughead then moves his mouth to her chest, burrowing under the lace to bite and lick her nipples.

"Jug- Juggie, please don't stop." Betty begged and he smiled, reveling in his ability to bring her pleasure.

He continues to thrust into her, until he starts feeling overwhelmed by his emotions - the lust for her body, awe and disbelief that she chose him and adoration for this perfect goddess making love to him. He knows he is close, but before he surrenders to his desires, he reaches down and gently massages the warmth between her legs as Betty cries out in pleasure. Once he begins to feel her climax he pumps faster and faster into her until together they fly over the edge.

*** *** ***

Laying in bed, wrapped in each other's arms, Betty leans over him, brushes the hair from his eyes and kisses him gently, "You are amazing. This day was amazing."

"I wanted to do something special for you," Jughead pauses and feels his next words catch in his throat, "I always thought Venice was a place to visit when you lo-- care deeply about someone."

Betty sighed as she lay her head down on his chest.

"Do you remember when I first approached you at Il Piccolo," he began.

"How could I forget?"

"That wasn't the first time I saw you there."

"Really?" She asked intrigued, "When was the first time?"

"About a week before."

"Seriously?"

"Yes, you were sitting behind me and your phone went off. It was some horrible pop song and I was turning around to glare at you."

"I remember that!" She said, "That was you?"

"Yup."
"I had forgotten to put my phone on vibrate and it was super loud from my run that morning. I was so embarrassed by the attention it caused."

"By the time I worked up the nerve to talk to you, you had gone. But Antonio told me that you had taken to dropping by regularly..."

"Antonio?"

"There's not much that escapes Antonio's notice."

"Apparently not."

"So, I dropped by around the same time Antonio said you did, hoping to run into you again."

"Good ol' Antonio. So the next time you saw me, you decided to talk to me?"

Jughead hesitated, "Not exactly."

Betty looked at him puzzled.

"I don't know," Jughead continued, not looking her in the eye, "It might have taken another 2-3 times."

Betty sat up surprised, "Why didn't you approach me sooner?"

Jughead shrugged, "Despite what you may think of me, I'm not the type to go and just strike up a conversation with someone I don't know."

Betty paused for a moment, "I'm actually glad you didn't approach me sooner."

"Why?" Jughead asked curious.

"I don't think I would've been ready to meet you yet."

"Because of Jason?" He asked tentatively.

"Yes," she said softly.

"Betts-" Jughead began.

"What Jiggie?"

"Nothing."

"Jughead?"

"It's nothing," he said kissing her on the forehead.

"Are you sure?" She asked, her green eyes studying him closely as he absentmindedly plays with her hair.

After about a minute he started speaking again, "Today was fantastic."

"It was," she agreed, laying her head down on his chest again.

"And I've never felt the way I do when I'm around you before. And... and, Betts, right now is so fantastic."
She sat up again sensing the seriousness in his tone.

He looked at her, "So fantastic- like a dream almost. I really enjoy spending time with you and getting to see you everyday."

Betty looked at him concerned, "I sense a 'but' coming..."

"But.. but we are not going to be here forever. I go home in a month. And at the end of the summer you will be 2,497 miles away from me."

When he noticed Betty's gaze softening he continued, "I have never felt this way about anyone before. I've never had a long term girlfriend."

"And?"

"And I've never really wanted one, until now. I must have done something really wrong and really right to have you come into my life yet live so far away from me."

She kissed him gently, "What are you thinking, Juggie?"

He took a deep breath, I love you, he thought, but instead said, "I really like you and I really like being with you and I don't want whatever we have to end just because we won't be physically together."

"You know they have things like Skype and FaceTime."

"It's not the same."

"No," she agreed, "But it's something. And if I get the internship in D.C. next semester, I will only be 4 hours away."

"Yes, but," Jughead began, "I-" He stopped when he realized what she was saying. "Wait! You want... you want what I want?" He looked at her hopefully.

"Well, I'm not a hundred percent sure what you want," she said laughing, "But I know I want to be with you- whether you are a four hour drive or five hour flight away."

Jughead felt his relief wash over him, "You have no idea how glad I am to hear you say that." He said rolling over, so she now lay under him. He felt himself get hard again as he kissed her on the neck and lips again. She responded by wrapping her arms around his neck and pressing her bare chest against his.

"I thought you wanted to talk about it a little more, " she said, breaking their kiss.

"We have a few more weeks to iron out the details and right now I have more 'pressing' things on my mind." He said kissing the side of her neck and moving down to her chest.

"Oh really?" She asked amused.

"Where'd you put the blindfold again?" He asked joking, looking up around the room.

"Shut up and make love to me," Betty laughed, moving her hips up to meet his.
"In the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter and sharing of pleasures. For in the dew of little things the heart finds its morning and is refreshed."

- Khalil Gibran

"What time is the student showcase tomorrow?" Veronica said, speaking into her phone.

Betty sat curled up against the side of the couch on the balcony, enjoying the warm Italian evening. She had just gotten back from Venice a few hours ago and was patiently waiting for Veronica to finish her call with Archie. Kevin had gone out with a group from UCLA, so they were taking advantage of the situation by catching up on some much needed girl time.

"Mmmhmm. Of course, we want to go Achiekins," Veronica said giving Betty a quick wink, "How about this? My dad wants to invite you and Jughead over for drinks tomorrow. Why don't you guys head over at 7 and we can all walk together after?"

Slowly sipping a Campari cocktail, Betty smiled to herself, remembering the last 36 hours. She flipped fondly through her sketchbook taking a look at some of the drawings she had done of Jughead while they were in Venice. There was one of him making silly faces at the pigeons in Saint Mark's Square, one where he was lounging outside Sant'Elena and another reading on a bench while they were waiting for their train. Her favorite were the ones she had done this morning while he was still sleeping, a small smile playing across his lips, as if he was in the middle of a good dream. The bustle outside of their hotel this morning had startled her and since she didn't want to wake him up, she took advantage of the situation. Betty had just finished her sketching when he started stirring.

Opening his eyes, Jughead's smile broadened when they landed on Betty. "Good morning, Sunshine," his voice slightly hoarse from sleep.

"Good morning to you," she said putting some finishing touches on her sketch.

Realizing what Betty was doing, Jughead pulled the pillow over his head, "No fair!"

"Completely fair, plus you weren't all fidgety like you normally are." She said smiling before closing her sketchbook, "Hide all you want, I was done anyway."

Pulling the pillow off his head, he focused on Betty again, "Is that my T-shirt you are wearing?"

Betty nodded.

"I'm going to need that back, Betts."

"If you want it, come and get it from me." She said, making no effort to move away from him as Jughead pulled her back under the bed covers.

She blushed thinking back to the way Jughead's hands, lips and tongue felt on her body. She was continually astounded by how much she craved being around him - talking to him, seeing him, feeling his touch...

"Betty? Earth to Betty, come in space cadet..." Veronica sighed and snapped her fingers twice in
Startled, Betty glared at Veronica, "Jeez, Ronnie. You almost made me drop my drink!"

"Well aren't you cranky... I'm assuming you didn't get your usual quota of sleep last night, my dear?" Ronnie said with a smirk.

Betty blushed.

"Well, tell me all about it!" Veronica said, plopping down on the couch across from Betty.

"It was amazing, Ronnie," Betty sighed, "We did everything. We went to the Gallerie dell'Accademia, went on a gondola ride and kissed under the Bridge of Sighs, watched the sunset at Sant'Elena, danced in Saint Mark's Square-"

"I was going to get to that part," Veronica said wryly, "But I meant 'tell me about the sex',"

"You would," Betty said with mock indignation, then feeling her cheeks start to color, as she remembered being propped up against the hotel wall. Refocusing on the conversation, she continued "Let's just say it's amazing. Our bodies meld together so perfectly it's insane."

"I wanted details but that will do for now."

Betty rolled her eyes, "I don't ask about you and Archie."

"You can."

"Ewww. Thanks, but no thank you."

"So then- back to you and Jughead," Veronica began.

"Well, he started talking about 'us' and 'what next?'" Betty offered up.

"You mean beyond the summer?"

Betty nodded.

"And he brought it up?" Veronica asked.

"He did."

"That's great and?"

"He wants us to continue seeing each other when we go back to school."

"And what did you say?"

"That I want the same thing."

"Wow."

"Wow?" Betty asked.

"A long distance relationship with a boy you've only known for a little over month."

Betty looked at Ronnie, "Do you think I'm crazy?"
"Ha, I've always known you were crazy."

"Ha. Ha." Betty said sarcastically before becoming serious again, "Veronica, you'd be honest with me right? Am I making a mistake?"

"Not at all- it's just very uncharacteristic of you, Betty."

"What part?"

"The part where you let your heart lead instead of your head."

"Explain..." Betty asked curious.

"All your previous boyfriends- Frankie, Sayid and Jason just sort of happened because to you it was the next logical step to take-"

"You make me sound like a robot." Betty said, raising one eyebrow.

"Look- I didn't mean it that way. You had real feelings for them, I know you did. It's just I've never seen you express this kind of excitement or passion for any of them. I remember I first found out about Jason being your boyfriend when I went up for a visit one weekend- and it was from that bitchy sorority sister of yours."

"You mean Brittany?" Betty laughed, "She's harmless. Anyway, I already explained to you that I hadn't really realized that we were dating exclusively at that point."

"See, that's how I know this is different- you are actually telling me about it versus it being some sort of after thought."

Betty considered what Veronica said for a moment and thought back to her conversation with Jughead yesterday, "Speaking of Jason... I got the sense that Jughead was going to ask something about him yesterday but then he changed the subject."

"What about Jason?"

"I don't know."

"Has Jason not come up in conversation before?" Veronica asked.

"A little in the beginning but I never went into too much detail."

"Why not?"

Betty shrugged, "There just seemed to be better things to talk about when we are together. There's so much I still don't know about Jughead that I didn't want to waste my time talking about someone who didn't matter to us."

Betty paused and took a sip of her cocktail before asking, "I'm just curious, V- but what do you think of Jughead? Do you like him?"

"From the time I've spent with him- he seems nice enough. Archie thinks the world of him and he is obviously head over heels for you- so that alone speaks volumes about him. Plus if you like him, that's enough of an endorsement for me. But it doesn't matter what I think. What does your heart tell you?"

"That I'm in love with him- I'm in love with Jughead Jones," Betty said without hesitation, her eyes
"There's your answer," Veronica said smiling.

Betty was about to say something when she noticed her phone started ringing, looking down she saw it was her mom calling, "Hey V, it's my mom. Do you mind if I take this?"

Veronica gave her a quick hug and walked back inside to give Betty some privacy.

"Hi mom." Betty said answering the phone.

"Hi sweetheart, it's so nice to hear your voice. How are you?"

Betty felt a pang of homesickness upon hearing her mother's voice. As the baby of the Cooper family, Alice and Betty were very close.

"It is so nice to hear your voice too, Mom."

"Before we catch up, I did have a reason for calling you."

"What's going on, mom?"

"You got a letter from Senator Harris' office offering you an internship in the spring in her San Francisco office."

"That's great - but nothing yet from Planned Parenthood?"

"Not yet, love. I know that's the one you are waiting for. As soon as anything comes in the mail, I'll let you know."

"Well at least I have a back-up plan if that doesn't work out. Thanks mom."

"Chic mentioned that he called you last week," Alice said, referencing Betty's older brother. Eight years her senior, the eldest Cooper sibling, was working for the United States Embassy in Singapore.

"He did, we couldn't talk long but it was nice to catch up with him. And Polly sent me a picture of the flowers for her bouquet and the final cake design." Betty said, referencing her older sister Polly who was 6 years her senior and getting married in October.

"Look, I'll deny it if it ever comes up but Polly is acting like a real Bridezilla and she is driving me and your father crazy. She is so indecisive."

"I can feel how stressed she is just from her texts. It is less than three months away. How is Ben handling it?" Betty asked referring to Polly's fiancé.

"Well, he hasn't called off the engagement..."

"Mom!" Betty said laughing.

"Speaking of Polly's wedding..." Alice began.

"Yes mom?"

"Polly mentioned that you have a date for her wedding..."

"I do, assuming he can and wants to go."
"Is it the boy you met at that café? The one who goes to NYU?"

"If you mean Jughead, yes mom."

"I think it's the name I can't get past. Just promise me you won't name any of your children after him."

"Mom!"

"I'm just kidding, honey. So, are you and Jughead really serious?"

"Enough to want to try and have a long distance relationship."

"Then your dad and I can't wait to meet him."

"Thanks mom- you are the best."

"That's what I like to hear," Alice said before saying her good-byes.
"Yes, everything is simple. It’s people who complicate things."

- Albert Camus

"I'm taking two courses this summer, sir." Archie said nervously. Despite having met Hiram on multiple occasions in Southern California, Archie still felt uncomfortable being in Mr. Lodge's spotlight. "One class in Global Business and Entertainment and the other in music composition."

Hermione smiled taking a sip of her Pinot Grigio enjoying Hiram's company in between his business trips to London and Frankfurt. Veronica was daddy's little girl and it always amused her when he went into 'Interrogation' mode with any boy that Veronica brought home. They had invited the kids over for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres on their terrace before they went out for the night and Archie was in the middle of telling them about his summer courses.

"So what are you learning about the business of global entertainment, Archie?" Hiram pressed as Veronica rolled her eyes at Betty and Kevin.

"So, Mr. Lodge," Archie said clearing his throat, "We are learning about the management and entrepreneurial challenges of music and digital media internationally- as well as international trademark and copyright law as it relates to music."

"Ahhh, yes- in today's world, understanding the global challenges are important and could be the key between failure and success. I hope you are paying close attention, Archie," Hiram said somewhat sharply.

"Daddy," Veronica interrupted, "Archie is taking his class very seriously."

"I hope so Veronica. Archie, this is an opportunity that you should be taking advantage of, as you are well aware." Hiram said.

"Yes, Mr. Lodge," Archie said, nodding vigorously.

Turning to Jughead, Hiram asked, "And you, young man? Jughead, is your name, right?"

Jughead, sitting on the couch with his arm slung around Betty's shoulders, looked up startled. Hermione suppressed a smile. Hiram considered Betty part of their family and her heart swelled with love for the man as he proceeded to move onto his next 'victim'.

Jughead sat up straighter, sending a panicked glance at Betty, who was trying to hide her smile. "Yes sir."

"That's a very unique name."

"It's just a nickname, sir."

"Very well and you are from Riverdale like Archie?"

"Yes sir."
"And you don't attend UCLA, right?"

"No, sir. I go to NYU."

"NYU? That's a great school. In a fabulous city," smiling at his wife, he continued, "Hermione and I met in Manhattan before moving to California. And what are you majoring in?"

"I'm doing a double major in Literature and Anthropology."

"Hmph. And what are you planning on doing with that major?"

"I'm hoping to become a writer, sir."

"Interesting. And Jughead, what do your parents do for a living?"

"My dad co-owns a construction company with Archie's dad, Mr. Andrews and my mother is a high school English and creative writing teacher."

"Ah, I see- you must have caught the writing bug from her. Betty mentioned you were writing a novel."

"Yes sir."

"What classes are you taking here in Italy this summer?"

"I'm taking an Italian history class and one on the writings of Dante Alighieri."

"Ah, the Inferno. I remember dissecting the Inferno and the nine circles of hell at Harvard. My professor-" Hiram said, puffing on his cigar.

"Daddy," Veronica interrupted exchanging an amused smile with Betty. Both girls were used to Hiram and his line of questions, "I think that's quite enough, anyway we should get going."

Hermione stood up to stretch her legs, "Where are you guys headed again?" She asked.

"Le Mura," Archie answered, "We're doing an open night mic with the kids in the university program. It gives us a chance to play a few of our original songs and then it opens up into anyone who wants to sing or perform."

"Excellent, you girls should go up and sing." Hiram said looking over at Betty and Veronica.

Jughead looked over at Betty, "You can sing?"

Veronica smiled, "She has the voice of an angel. We were in an acapella group in high school and Betty was one of our lead vocalists-"

"As were you, V." Betty interrupted.

"Betty is just being modest. She's fabulous." Veronica said.

Jughead looked over at Betty, "I'd love to hear you sing sometime."

Archie checked his watch, "I hate to interrupt, but we should get going, I'm supposed to help set the line-up."

After they ushered the kids out the door, Hiram turned to Hermione.
"Veronica is really stuck on Archie, isn't she?" Hiram asked.

Hermione smiled at him, "Archie is a sweetheart, Hiram. And he has been good for Ronnie- he knows how to deal with her when she gets into ones of her 'moods'."

"I guess," Hiram said with a loud sigh.

"Really, darling, he's a good kid." Hermione said putting her hand on Hiram's arm.

"I know. But his friend, Jughead... What a name!"

"Hiram..."

"He seems nice enough, but he's not Jason Blossom."

Hermione turned to look at Hiram surprised, "What do you mean?"

"Jason is a boy who is going to go places in the world. And he would have provided a very comfortable lifestyle for Betty."

Hermione tilted her head to the side, "Money isn't everything Hiram and the Coopers are pretty well off financially. Hal just opened another dealership in Santa Monica."

Hiram sighed again, "I guess you are right. But Jason's family are billionaires, Hermione!"

"Hiram!"

"Fine, I'll drop it."

Hermione gave Hiram a quick kiss on the cheek, "I'm going to go out to the veranda and call Alice, ok?"

"Fine," Hiram said, filling up his glass with more scotch, "Be sure to tell them that we will need to go out to dinner together once we are back stateside."

Stepping back out into the warm summer night, Hermione reached for her phone and after a few rings, Alice answered.

"Hello? Hermione, how are you?"

"I'm great Ali, thanks. How's the wedding planning going?"

"You know I love my children, but I'm about ready to drive Polly and Ben to the closest chapel in Las Vegas so they can just elope already!" Alice said dramatically.

"Who would have thought that Polly would be a crazy bride-to-be? It's always the quiet ones. You are I are definitely doing a girls trip to Palm Springs after Polly leaves for her honeymoon."

"Hermione, that sounds fabulous. How's everything over in Italy?"

"Wonderful, thank you again for letting Betty spend the summer with us. You know how Ronnie can get when she's bored."

"Please- thank you for inviting Betty."

"She's so easy to have around. Speaking of which, we had the kids over for some cocktails."
"So..." Alice began, "Betty and I caught up yesterday. And it sounds like she is getting pretty serious with this boy, Jughead..."

"I think so."

"Oh."

Hermione continued quickly, "I like him Alice. When he's been over for dinner he has been very polite and comes across as very intelligent. And he worships the ground your daughter walks on."

"I guess," Alice said hesitantly, "it just seems so soon after Jason. I was hoping she would catch her breath a bit before jumping into another relationship."

"I really think you'd like him, Ali. And Hiram met him tonight for the first time..."

"Oh lord," Alice said chuckling, "Did Hiram give the poor boy the third degree?"

"Yes," Hermione giggled, "He didn't see it coming..."

"Well tell Hiram that Hal will be pleased"

"Seriously, Ali- Betty has a good head on her shoulders- I know it's hard, but don't worry too much about her." In the background Hermione heard the doorbell chime and then the door open.

After hearing all the latest about Polly's upcoming wedding and other Malibu gossip from Alice, Hermione hung up the phone. Walking towards the living room, she could hear Hiram conversing with another man.

I wonder who that is, Hermione thought puzzled. As far as she knew they weren't expecting company.

When she turned the corner, Hermione stopped in her tracks, as she came face to face with their visitor.

"Hermione," Hiram boomed at her, "Look who it is!"

Jason Blossom was sitting in their living room drinking a glass of scotch with Hiram. Upon seeing her, Jason smiled and stood up to greet her, "Mrs. Lodge, so nice to see you again. Mr. Lodge was kind enough to invite me in and offer me a drink."

Years of entertaining Hiram's more colorful associates allowed her to recover quickly. "Jason, what a pleasant surprise! When did you get in?" Hermione asked taking a big sip of wine.

"Late yesterday afternoon."

"And what brings you to Rome?"

Hiram interjected, "We were just starting to talk about that. So what are you doing here, Jason?"

Jason flashed a boyish grin, "Lucky for me work needed someone to personally reinforce some of the negotiations going on."

"That sounds important," Hiram said, looking impressed.

"It sounds more important than it actually is- I'm basically a glorified courier but very happy it took me here."
"There's no such thing as a job too small, m'boy. I always knew you'd go places," Hiram said.

"Thank you Mr. Lodge."

"And how long will you be in town?" Hermione asked while pouring a bit more wine into her glass.

"As long as they need me to be—but likely two weeks. I'm going to have to do some trips to Milan, Zurich and Frankfurt but they've allowed me to use Rome as a base."

"That's great, Jason," Hermione said taking a long swig of wine.

"Mrs. Lodge, I was hoping to say 'hi' to Kevin and the girls. Are they around?" He asked looking around their penthouse.

Hermione shook her head, "You missed them by a little over a half hour. They left to go to some music lounge or bar for a student music showcase."

"That's too bad, I think I'll try and catch up with them."

"Do they know you are here?" Hermione asked.

Jason shook his head. "No, I was thinking it would be fun to surprise Betty. I've missed her quite a bit."

'Surprise' is not the word I'd use, Hermione thought. "Jason, I'm so sorry, I actually don't remember the name of the club they went to. Why don't you call Betty?" She lied.

"No need," Hiram interrupted, "I remember where they went. It was a place called Le Mura."

Jason picked up his phone to google the address, "It looks like a 30 minute walk from here." He said standing up again, "Thanks for the scotch Mr. and Mrs. Lodge, I hope to see you around."

"Actually Jason, I always like to help out young people getting into business like yourself. Why don't you come over Sunday for brunch and you can tell me a little bit about your company's hedge funds?"

Jason beamed up at him, "That would be great Mr. Lodge."

"Call me Hiram. And see you Sunday at 10, m'boy." Mr. Lodge said, ushering him out the door.

When Hiram walked back into the living room, he was surprised by the anger Hermione directed towards him, "Hiram! Why did you tell him the name of the bar?!"

Hiram shrugged, "I didn't realize it was a secret."

Hermione sighed, "It's not, but I don't think this is a surprise that Betty is going to enjoy. I better try and get a hold of Ronnie."
"To err is human, to repent divine, to persist devilish."

- Benjamin Franklin

"I wasn't expecting to get the third degree tonight," Jughead grumbled, walking hand-in-hand with Betty, a comfortable distance behind the rest of the group.

Betty laughed and squeezed his hand, "Mr. Lodge is a giant softie."

"You could have warned me."

"What would have been the fun of that? He interrogates all the boys that Veronica and I introduce him to. I think it's kind of sweet that he thinks of me like a daughter."

"He's met your other boyfriends?" Jughead asked.

"Juggie, Ronnie and I have been mostly inseparable since we were four years old. There aren't many important people in my life that Mr. Lodge hasn't met."

"Oh."

"Jug, he met you didn't he?"

Jughead brightened upon hearing that, "Will your dad be as bad?"

Betty looked up at him, an eyebrow raised, "You think you are going to be meeting my parents?"

Jughead flushed, "I mean- I um, I."

Betty stood on her tip toes and gave him a swift kiss on the lips, "I'm only teasing. I would love for you to meet my parents."

Jughead looked at her hopefully, "Really?"

She kissed him again, "Really. And my dad isn't as bad as Mr. Lodge, but that's because Chic plays the overprotective big brother role well."

Jughead pulled her a little closer to him, "Well, I personally can't wait until you meet my family. My parents are going to love you and I think you'd really hit it off with Jellybean."

"I'm sure we would, especially since she has such impeccable taste in books."

"You have no idea how happy I am to hear you say that. I think our families getting to know each other is important, don't you think?"

When Betty nodded, Jughead pulled her in for a deeper kiss. The immediately jumped apart when
they heard a voice yell, "Hey!"

Startled they turned around to see Archie rolling his eyes at them, "A little less kissing and a little more walking you two!"

Jughead looked at his phone, "Arch, relax. We're about 10 minutes away and you don't need to be there until 9:45. We have plenty of time." But they picked up the pace to appease Archie.

When they finally got to Le Mura, the group settled themselves at a centrally located table, while Archie joined in on the backstage preparations.

Jughead sat comfortably with one arm around Betty's waist, sipping a Negroni, occasionally letting go of her to clap after each student's exhibition. Jughead smiled as he felt Betty burrow closer to him. He leaned down to give her a quick kiss on her forehead.

"And last up, before we start the open mic portion of the night is Archie Andrews from UCLA playing an original song that he wrote and composed called 'These are moments I remember.'" A short blonde with a thick southern accent announced.

"Go Arch!" Jughead cheered.

"Go Archiekins!" Veronica called out, when Archie walked on stage clutching his guitar.

Shortly after getting situated, Archie started strumming, singing into the mic:

"Every moment we're together
Is a moment I remember
I'll take the good, the bad, the better
And the smell of your favourite sweater
These are moments I remember
These are moments I remember

My love, my heart
I wanna share it with you
Tough breaks, new starts
I wanna share it with you
I wanna share it with you"

"Wow," Betty whispered leaning towards Jughead, "He's good."

Jughead smiled with pride, "Yes he is. He's been making up songs since he could string sentences together."

When Archie finished he stood up to acknowledge the applause and flashed a grin at his friends who were giving him a standing ovation.

Taking the mic, Archie addressed the audience, "Now most of you know what comes next. It's the open mic portion of the night. It's a chance for all of us to just get up and have fun performing. Come up, choose a song- preferably one that we know and we will play the accompaniment for you. Now who's first?"

Jughead took the opportunity to tickle Betty's side, causing her to squeal and raise one of her hands involuntarily. "Arch," he called, "Here's your first taker!"

Veronica turned towards her and smiled encouragingly, "Go B!"
"Jug!" She said turning around and glaring at him, "I'm not that good."

Jughead smiled, crossing his arms in front of his chest, "I will be the judge of that."

Kevin laughed, "Betts, just go up there already."

Shooting Jughead a death stare "Fine," Betty huffed and walked towards the stairs leading to the stage.

Archie laughed, "All right everyone give us five minutes to get situated."

Veronica turned towards Jughead, one eyebrow raised, "She is never going to forgive you for that."

Jughead smiled, "I'll take my chances." He said leaning back in his seat as he watched Archie and Betty talking animatedly on stage.

After a few minutes, someone handed Archie some sheet music. Taking the mic, "I'd like to introduce Betty Cooper from Malibu, California and she will be singing," Archie said flashing Jughead a pointed look, one eyebrow raised, "'Can't Help Falling in Love' by Elvis Presley."

Jughead felt his heart jump into his throat. He noticed out of the corner of his eye, Veronica and Kevin turning to gauge his reaction, but he only had eyes for the blonde on stage before him. Dressed in a white jumpsuit, the spotlight reflecting on her blonde hair she looked like an angel.

As Archie started playing the opening chords, he saw Betty, close her eyes and take a deep breath before singing, "Wise men say, only fools rush in, but I can't help falling in love with you."

When Betty opened her eyes, she locked her gaze with his, "Shall I stay? Would it be a sin, if I can't help falling in love with you."

Jughead felt his lips part slightly in surprise. While he had no doubt she sang well, he had not been prepared for how rich and hauntingly beautiful her voice was. Despite being in a crowded club, he felt like they were the only two people in the room and that she was only singing to him. He felt his heart beat quicken as he realized just how much he was in love with her.

"Like a river flows surely to the sea
Darling so it goes
Some things are meant to be
Take my hand, take my whole life too
For I can't help falling in love with you
For I can't help falling in love with you"

As Betty sang her last note, the room exploded into applause, many giving her a standing ovation. As Betty took her bows, Jughead beamed with pride, he couldn't wait to take her into his arms and compliment her mesmerizing voice.

"isn't her voice amazing?," Kevin leaned across the table directing his question at Jughead.

"I told you she had the voice of an angel," Veronica chimed in, pulling out her phone.

"I'm starting to wonder if there's anything Betty can't do," Jughead said, looking towards the stage to find Betty.

"Oh no," He heard Veronica say with concern beside him.
"What's wrong Ronnie?" Kevin asked, as Jughead turned towards them to see what was going on.

"I don't know how I missed this, but my mom tried to call and text me about twenty times." As she scrolled through her phone, he heard her gasp and grow pale. She then proceeded to hand her phone to Kevin so he could see for himself.

"Oh shit!" Kevin said, "we need to warn Betty."

Jughead's ears perked up at Betty's name. "What's wrong? Warn her about what?" He asked suddenly alarmed.

"It's too late!" Veronica said looking towards the stage and bringing a hand to cover her mouth.

"Too late for what?" Jughead asked getting frustrated as they continued to ignore his questions.

"Kevin stay here," Veronica ordered, as she bolted from her chair towards the stairs leading to the stage.

"Kevin? What's going on?" Jughead asked as their eyes followed the brunette rushing towards Archie and Betty who were laughing and walking down the stairs to join them.

When Archie and Betty reached the bottom of the stairs he saw a tall figure step out from the shadows and walk over to join them. When he reached them he saw Betty freeze and her eyes widen in what appeared to be shock. For a moment, it looked like she was about to fall backwards, but Archie was quick to help steady her footing. Veronica, about thirty seconds too late, gave the tall figure a hug and immediately put her arm around Betty's shoulders- as if to steady her. He saw Archie's eyes widen in surprise as the boy offered him his hand to shake, before the stranger leaned over to kiss Betty on the cheek.

"Kevin? What is going on?" Jughead asked, standing up and making a move to join the others.

"Wait. Jughead, please stay here. Please. Let Veronica and Betty handle this." Kevin begged, putting his arm out as if to keep Jughead at the table.

"Why? Kevin, who is that?" Jughead asked, still poised to join the others.

Kevin took a deep breath, "That's Betty's ex-boyfriend, Jason Blossom."

Chapter End Notes

When Betty sings "Can't help Falling in Love"- while you can't top Elvis Presley's version, I had the Haley Reinhart cover in mind.
"I was never insane except upon occasions when my heart was touched."

-Edgar Allen Poe

Stepping into the dimly lit club, Jason easily spotted Betty's trademark blonde ponytail amongst the sea of attendees.

He had opted to walk versus taxi over, it gave him the opportunity to think things over. He was guessing based on Mrs. Lodge's reaction that his sudden appearance would not be welcomed. He hoped that she hadn't had a chance to contact Veronica or Betty yet- he wanted a chance to observe the situation before they were aware of his presence. It was obvious that she hadn't wanted to give him their location- but thank goodness for Mr. Lodge.

When he got to the club, they were still in the middle of the student showcase and with most eyes on the stage he had entered unobserved. He found a spot at the corner of the bar, partially obstructed by a column and tucked away from the main action. It gave him the perfect angle to view the stage and study Betty without drawing attention to himself.

Thanks to the Instagram pictures, although he could only see his profile, he was able to spot Jughead right away. Jughead's chair was up against hers and from this angle, it appeared he had his arm around her waist. Betty seemed relaxed, sipping her drink and conversing every now and then with Veronica and Kevin who were seated next to her. Based on the cheering that came from their table, he easily ascertained that the redhead on stage was Veronica's boyfriend.

Jason sat there for awhile drinking a whiskey, alternating between watching the acts on stage and watching Betty when the open mic portion of the night started.

His grip tightened on his glass when he saw Jughead lean down and kiss Betty on the forehead. Jason was immediately struck by the ease in which Jughead expressed his affection for her and he felt nauseous when he saw her look up at him and give him a quick smile in return. Jason was in the middle of trying to figure out the best way to approach Betty alone when Jughead did it for him. While he didn't like how Jughead had tricked her into volunteering to go on stage, he was grateful that it separated them. It would be much easier to approach Betty on her own.

He was attempting to formulate a plan for how he would approach her when Veronica's boyfriend's announcement brought him back to the present.

Wait, what was she going to sing?, he thought.

Turning to give Betty's performance his full attention, he felt his heart flutter when Betty sang the opening verse. Bathed in the glow of the spotlight, she was quite a vision and her voice was lovely as usual.
Following her gaze, he gritted his teeth as he noticed that she had locked eyes with Jughead.

What the fuck? Was she serenading him?, He wondered. Why the hell was she singing 'Can't Help Falling in Love'?

He felt his body start to shake with anger and had to physically restrain himself from his urge to pull the mic out of her hands and drag her off the stage when he noticed the looks passing between them.

Jughead looked completely captivated by Betty singing on stage. Who could blame him, Jason thought as he looked around the room. It was easy to see that Betty had the whole audience under her spell. Knocking back the rest of the whiskey in his glass, he held back the urge to go and punch Jughead in the face.

He inwardly cursed his twin for not letting him know about this sooner. Thank god work had agreed that it would be beneficial for him to come out and visit their European branches. He understood fully that he was being granted a privilege that would not have been extended to others that didn't have 'Blossom' as a last name.

Damn Cheryl! I could have flown out sooner, he thought. If he had visited her earlier he could have had the chance to fix things with Betty before they got out of hand. At the very least he thought, he could have spared himself from the current 'eye fucking' that was going on between them.

Ordering another whiskey, he thought, that there was no point in prolonging his agony by observing them further. He needed to make his presence known.

The bartender handed him his drink as the song was coming to a close. He counted to 20 slowly to get his emotions under control. He recognized that he wouldn't be doing himself any favors by going in angry or possessive. There was obviously more going on between them than Cheryl had let on. His goal was to win back Betty and he needed to be really smart about his approach if he wanted to succeed.

He quickly polished off his second drink quickly as the applause for Betty died down. He took a deep breath and placed his empty glass on the bar. He could see Betty starting to make her way down the stage, laughing and talking with Veronica's boyfriend.

It was time to win Betty back, he thought as he stepped out from behind the column and met Betty at the bottom of the stairs.

"Hey Betts," he said. She had been so preoccupied that she hadn't noticed his approach until he started speaking. Upon hearing his voice, her eyes widened and she appeared so startled that she almost fell backwards, but Veronica's boyfriend thankfully reached out to steady her.

Based on her reaction, he was pretty sure that Mrs. Lodge hadn't contacted the girls about his arrival. He was about to say something when Veronica came running up to him.

"Jason! What a surprise! I was wondering if that was you, so I had to come and see for myself" Veronica said, reaching out to hug him, "It's so nice to see you!" Gesturing towards Archie, she said, "Jason, this is my boyfriend, Archie Andrews. Archiekins, can I introduce you to Jason Blossom?"

Jason noticed Archie's eyes flicker in recognition as he reached out to shake his hand. It was clear that Archie knew exactly who he was, which meant Jughead would as well.

"It's very nice to meet you Archie." Jason said, before turning to Betty and leaning over to kiss her cheek, "Betty- that was beautiful."
At least she didn't recoil or pull away, he thought. As he watched her closely, she still appeared to be in a state of shock. Before Betty could respond though, Archie gestured towards their other friends, "We should move out of the way of the stage. Let's continue this conversation at our table."

He noticed Veronica exchanging a look with Archie before she linked her arm with his and led him to the table. Meanwhile Archie trailed behind, guiding Betty by the crook of her elbow and gently seated her between Veronica and Kevin. Walking towards their table, Jason steeled himself for meeting his rival.

Jason greeted Kevin warmly and reached out to shake his hand, speaking a few pleasantries to delay the moment when he would have to acknowledge Jughead.

When he finally turned towards his rival, Jason paused for a second, taking a moment to study the boy he had only seen in the photographs on Instagram. He was about his height and he supposed he was reasonably attractive- dark, where Jason was fair, but he definitely didn't understand what was going on with that stupid grey hat.

He noticed that Jughead was also studying him intently with equal curiosity. They stood in silence facing one another for awhile, tense before Jason extended his hand, "Jason Blossom, I'm Betty's- I'm a good friend of Betty's."

"Jughead Jones." The dark haired boy said looking him straight in the eye, before taking his hand and gripping it tightly before letting go.

"Jughead is my best friend from Riverdale." Archie added quickly as they all sat down.

"So Jason, what brings you to Rome?" Kevin asked quickly to help ease the tension.

"Work," Jason said leaning back in his chair, "They needed someone to check on a few things in person and here I am."

"And how long will you be in town?" Kevin asked.

"A few weeks or however long they need me to be" Jason said, leaning back in his chair. Taking a quick glance at Betty he could tell she was beginning to recover, the color coming back to her cheeks, but based on the look on her face she clearly wasn't happy.

"Excuse me," Betty said standing up abruptly, "I need to get another drink."

Everyone at the table stood up immediately, eager to accompany her but Jason was first to offer his company.

"Betty, if you don't mind, I'll go with you." Jason offered. Watching Jughead's reaction from the corner of his eye, he was pleased to see his knuckles whiten as he gripped his chair waiting for Betty's response.

Veronica looked at Betty, "Want me to come along B?"

Betty shook her head. "It's ok, Ronnie. Thanks," she said before looking at Jason and nodding curtly. "If you want," she said leading the way to the bar, hands clenched at her side, her ponytail flying behind her.

"Anyone else want anything?" Jason offered to a chorus of 'no, thank yous' before following Betty to the bar.
When they got there, Betty ordered a vodka tonic from the bartender before turning towards him, her green eyes blazing, "Jason! What the hell are you doing here?"

"I told you, I'm here for work-"

"And why didn't you tell me?" She interrupted.

Realizing how angry she was, he did what was necessary to diffuse the situation, "I'm sorry, it was a last minute trip." Jason lied, "I didn't really have time to think before they shipped me off on a plane to Europe. Plus I wasn't sure you would want to see-"

"You could have called or texted me!" She interrupted.

He shrugged, "Work was dictating my schedule, I wasn't even sure I'd have the time to see you."

Betty looked at him suspiciously, "This seems a little too coincidental Jason."

"See, that's why I didn't want to tell you in advance. I knew you wouldn't believe me."

"Jason," she sighed.

"Look Betts, I'm really sorry if you don't want me here."

"Jason, it's not necessarily that-"

"Betty, I will leave you alone if you want me to but when I found out I was coming here for work I just had to tell you something in person."

Betty looked at him suspiciously, "You are really here for work?"

"Yes, I told you that. And like I said, since I was going to be here anyway, I wanted to come and tell you how sorry I am."

"Sorry?"

"Yes, I didn't mean to hurt you a few weeks back and I am truly sorry for any pain I caused you."

"Jason, I know you never meant to hurt me but I wish you had told me you were coming," she said. She looked at the table quickly before turning back to him and saying, "because there's something I should tell you, it's-"

"You mean about Jughead?" He said, keeping his voice as light as possible, his clenched fists hidden in his jacket pocket.

She looked at him closely, "You know?"

"Cheryl told me." He said as nonchalantly as he could.

She looked at him as if she was trying to piece something together.

"Look, I get it Betts," he said, "We aren't together, you are free to see whoever you want."

"Jason," she began, looking puzzled.

"I'm just sorry that I didn't take our break seriously."

"You are?"
"Yes, I see how frustrating that must have been for you now."

"You do?"

"Yes and I want to earn your trust back by showing you how good a friend I can be." He said wondering if his performance was Academy Award worthy.

He saw her expression soften, "Jason, I need you to know that Jughead had nothing to do with our breakup."

"Bett, I know. Cheryl told me. And I believe you. No further explanation is necessary," He took a deep breath, "If Jughead is important to you - while I'm in town, I'd really like to get to know him."

'Keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer', he thought.

"Jason," Betty said studying him, "I have to admit I'm kind of surprised by how well you are taking everything."

"You breaking up with me gave me perspective that I didn't have before" Jason said pulling fodder from his conversation with Cheryl, "I realize that I wasn't giving you what you needed. I still want to be a part of your life and if that means being your friend, I'm happy to comply."

Jason saw the relief visible on Betty's face as she impulsively threw her arms around him for a quick hug, "I'm so relieved to hear you say that!"

Jason savored the feeling of Betty's arms around him, her chest pressed against his. He wanted nothing more than to breathe in her scent and hold her close but he gave himself a quick mental shake, before breaking from the hug first.

Stick with the game plan, Blossom, he reminded himself.

"Betty?" Jason turned toward the voice and saw Jughead had come to check on them.

"Betty?" Jughead said again, looking at Betty with an expression of hurt and concern, "Is everything ok?"

He saw Betty look Jughead in the eye as she walked towards the beanie clad boy, "Everything is fine." She said, reaching over to hold his hand.

Jason studied their interaction closely and noticed Jughead's expression soften with Betty's reassurance.

Was Jughead worried about them interacting? Jason wondered. Why did Jughead check on them only after she hugged him? If Jughead wasn't completely confident in their relationship, what could he do to further his insecurity?

Jason extended his hand out to him. "Look Jughead- I know this is weird, my showing up here but I want you to know that any friend of Betty's is a friend of mine. I'm looking forward to getting to know you better." Jason said smoothly.

Jughead looked at him puzzled but returned his handshake, "Thanks Jason. Shall we go back to the table?"

"Lead the way," Jason said gallantly, smiling as he followed them back to the table.
"You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever."

- Steve Jobs

"Juggie, penny for your thoughts?" Betty asked.

It was their first time together alone since Jason's unexpected arrival two days ago. Jughead had just returned from a 2-day history class excursion to Pompeii while the girls and Kevin had gone on an overnight in Siena.

Betty reached across the table at il Piccolo to put her hand on top of his, a look of concern in her eyes.

"It's nothing," Jughead said shrugging his shoulders and refusing to meet Betty's gaze.

Betty squeezed his hand tighter, "Juggie, please?"

"Is Signor Jones cranky today, Elizabetta?" Antonio asked, bringing them their usual cappuccinos with extra biscotti.

"Hey!" Jughead said crossly, glaring at Antonio "I don't need you both ganging up on me!"

Betty exchanged a look with Antonio. "It's ok, Antonio. I can handle Signor Jones." She said as she let go of Jughead's hand. He looked up hurt, about to protest when she moved into the chair next to him.

"Juggie," she said, reaching up to massage the nape of his neck, "please talk to me?"

"That's not fair," He said softening a bit against her touch.

"It is completely fair. Now tell me why you are being so distant..." she said playing with some curls at the back of his head.

"You are a smart girl Betty, take a wild guess." He said sharply, instantly regretting it when he saw the look of hurt in her eyes.

"Jason." Betty said pulling her hand away and taking a sip of her cappuccino.

"Yes," he said softly, reaching over and attempting to pull Betty back into his arms.

Pulling herself out of his grip, she looked him straight in the eye and said, "Jughead, you do know that I'm with you now, right?"

"Yeah."

"And that Jason knows about us?"

"I guess." Jughead said reluctantly.
He thought back to the other night and how he had initially at Veronica's urging consented to watch Jason and Betty argue from afar. While he couldn't see Betty's face, he could tell by the way her hands had moved on her hips that she was angry, while Jason's stance had been defensive. He quickly grew tired of sitting on the sidelines when to his surprise (and it appeared to Jason's surprise as well) Betty hugged Jason. He instantly went to see what was going on, but was instantly mollified when Betty had reached to hold his hand.

To his credit, Jughead had to admit that Jason had been perfectly pleasant, asking him about his time in Rome and his dining recommendations based on his stay. But as nice as Jason was acting, he couldn't quite shake the uneasy feeling in the back of his mind.

"Look," Betty said, "Given the circumstances, I am surprised by how well Jason's taking everything."

"It is surprising," Jughead agreed.

"And I'm really happy he wants to get to know you."

"I know."

"Juggie," Betty said exasperated, "Cheryl is one of my best friends. And I know she's said she's ok with this- us, but the reality is that as long as Cheryl's in my life, Jason will be as well. If not directly, somehow in the background. Jason being accepting of us makes it a little easier."

"I guess and he seems nice enough..."

"But?"

"How did he go from wanting to marry you to wanting to get to know your new boyfriend? It doesn't make sense."

"Maybe he finally realized that we weren't going to work out."

"Maybe."

"You know, our breakup was a long time coming."

"So you say."

Betty raised one eyebrow at him but didn't say anything.

He reached out for her hand, "Betty, look I am sorry but I have a really, really hard time believing him. If I found out that there was another guy I'd go crazy."

"Juggie, we were on a break."

"I get that. If I were in his shoes though, I'd still have feelings for you."

"Jug, I'm flattered that you think I have this effect on guys but like I said, maybe Jason realized I'm not the one for him."

"Maybe."

"Juggie, I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt- and I'd like you to as well."

"Betts-"
"Look- the jealous boyfriend thing is really cute, but you really have no reason to be jealous."

"Betty-"

"Don't you trust me?," she interrupted him and when he didn't respond, she asked again, "Jughead, look at me. Don't you trust me."

He looked her in the eyes, "Betty, I trust you. But I don't trust Jason."

"Jughead, what Jason wants or doesn't want- doesn't really matter. What matters is that I want to be with you and that we are together. Please just trust me."

He sighed, "Fine, I'll go along with it for now."

"Good. Then stop worrying please " she said as she kissed him gently, "So now that you aren't grumpy any more, are we still on for dinner tonight?"

Jughead leaned his head over and started nibbling the side of her neck, "Maybe we should start with dessert before dinner again..."

"I think you are just trying to get out of buying me dinner!" She laughed as he pulled her to him for a lingering kiss.

Betty and Jughead were oblivious to the tables around them until someone cleared their throat behind them, "Am I interrupting something?"

Startled, they broke apart and turned around to find Jason standing there, his face flushed. 

"Jason!" Betty said, straightening up and smoothing her hair into place.

"I didn't mean to bother you guys," Jason continued, "You had recommended this place the other night Jughead and I thought I would give it a try. Mind if I join you?"

Betty looked at Jughead for his consent. "Of course not," Jughead said, the reluctance obvious in his voice, as he immediately put his arm around Betty.

Betty rolled her eyes as she felt Jughead's arm tighten around her as Jason sat down.

"If I'm intruding on couple time- you can let me know." Jason said.

"It's fine." Jughead said shrugging.

After Antonio came to take Jason's order they settled into some small talk.

"So Jughead," Jason began, "You mentioned the other night that you go to NYU. Do you live in the city?"

"Yes, I live in off campus student housing in the East Village."

"We are practically neighbors," Jason drawled, "I just bought a sweet 2-bedroom flat in SoHo. It's on Greene midway between Blue Ribbon Brasserie and Balthazar."

"Mmmm, I love those places. The chicken, spinach and arugula salad at Blue Ribbon is one of my favorites," Betty said.

Jason chuckled and flashed an affectionate smile at Betty, "Remember when we went to NY last
year for mom's charity gala? You dragged me there every day."

She laughed along with him, "Cheryl made us get her one too, don't forget. I'm so sorry, you know how I get when I'm obsessed with food."

"Don't I know it, I can't decide which was worst- your açai bowl phase or when you were obsessed with Sushirrito!" Jason teased Betty.

"Sushirrito?" Jughead asked trying to insert himself in the conversation.

"It's as foul as it sounds," Jason began looking at Betty, "Don't even try and convince us otherwise."

"I never knew why you didn't take to it," Betty said, "it combines two of your favorite foods- sushi and burritos. Total win-win, if you ask me."

Jughead listened silently, feeling slightly left out as he watched them banter back and forth. After a few minutes, Jason brought the conversation back to Jughead.

"So Jughead, do you share Betty's love of art?"

"I don't mind it." Jughead said, smiling at Betty.

"What he means," Betty interjected, "Is that he mostly tolerates it for me."

"I see," Jason said, "If you have a chance to visit Manhattan in the fall you should go to the MoMA, They are opening an exhibit to showcase the kinetic art movement. Jughead- do you go to the MoMA at all in NY?"

Jughead shook his head, "I'm not really a fan of modern art."

"I'll bet you just haven't had a proper introduction to modern art," Betty said smiling at Jughead, "We'll have to work on that."

"Well that's a shame," Jason said, "Remember when we took that private tour of the Frank Lloyd Wright exhibit?"

"How could I forget? I was so grateful to your mom for arranging it." Betty said gushing.

"My family donates quite a bit to the art scene in New York." Jason explained to Jughead.

"How wonderful." Jughead said, the sarcasm in his voice barely perceptible to the group.

"How's your mother Betty?" Jason inquired.

"She's great, thanks for asking. Apparently, Polly is driving her crazy with the wedding."

"Wow, Polly must be bad if your mom is complaining." Jason turned to Jughead, "Mrs. Cooper has the patience of a saint."

"That she does," Betty agreed.

"Have you heard from Planned Parenthood yet about the internship?" Jason asked.

Betty shook her head, "Not yet. I'm getting a little anxious, I was supposed to hear by now."

"I'm sure there is nothing to worry about Betts," Jason said.
"In any case, I do have a back up plan if it doesn't work out." Betty said.

"You heard from Senator Harris' office?"

Betty nodded, "Yes, they offered me an internship with their San Francisco office."

Jughead turned to Betty, "You never mentioned that."

"With all the excitement over the past couple of days, I kind of forgot." Betty said apologetically.

"I'm sure you have nothing to worry about, but in any case I will be sure to keep my fingers crossed for you." Jason added reaching the end of his espresso. He made a move to get up, throwing some bills on the table, "This should cover your cappuccinos as well."

When they started to protest, Jason waved their concerns away, "It's the least I can do since you were kind enough to let me join you. Anyway, I'm in Milan for some business until Friday night but I was wondering... I would love to have you both and Kevin, Veronica and Archie over for cocktails Saturday night. I have a large suite at the Rome Cavalieri. It has a great view of the surrounding streets."

"Thanks for the invite," Betty said, "I'm pretty sure we can make it. Can I let you know?"

"Of course. See you both around." He said his gaze resting on Betty for a second before giving them a slight wave and walking away.

"So what do you think, should we go?" Betty asked Jughead.

"If you'd like to."

"He's just trying to be nice."

"I guess." Jughead.

"Jug?"

Jughead sighed, "We can go if you want to."

"Oh Juggie," she said, putting one hand on his cheek, "Stop worrying about Jason."

"Betts, I can't help it. He knows so much about you and he's met your mom and-"

"Jughead," Betty interrupted, "Stop"

"You know, I'm just envious that he knows so much about you."

"Oh Juggie. Don't worry, we'll figure out a way to catch you up." She said smiling and leaning forward to kiss him again.
Interrupting

Chapter Notes

Warning, there is some heavy smut at the end, in case that's not your thing.

If it isn't your thing, I recommend that you stop reading after Juggie quotes Shakespeare...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ignorantly is how we all fall in love; for it is a kind of fall. Closing our eyes, we leap from that cliff in hope of a soft landing. Nor is it always soft; but still, without that leap nobody comes to life.”

—Salman Rushdie, 'The Moor's Last Sigh'

Streaming on Jughead's laptop:

Leonardo DiCaprio:

*It is the east and Juliet is the sun!*
*Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,*
*Who is already sick and pale with grief*
*That thou her maid art far more fair than she.*
*Be not her maid, since she is envious;*
*Her vestal livery is but sick and green,*
*And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off.*
*It is my lady, O, it is my love!*
*O that she knew she were!*
*She speaks, yet she says nothing; what of that?*
*Her eye discourses, I will answer it.*
*I am too bold: 'tis not to me she speaks.*
*Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,*
*Having some business, do entreat her eyes*
*To twinkle in their spheres till they return.*
*What if her eyes were there, they in her head?*
*The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,*
*As daylight doth a lamp. Her eyes in heaven*
*Would through the airy region stream so bright*
*That birds would sing and think it were not night.*
Betty fixated on the screen sighed, "I love this part."

"You do know that they both die at the end, right?" Jughead asked dryly.

Betty whacked him with his pillow, "Way to spoil the movie."

"As if you haven't seen this a hundred times." Jughead said smiling.

"Maybe a hundred and one- but who's counting." Betty said, "Shh! The balcony scene is my favorite!"

"Betty, I hate to break it to you but I think it's every girls favorite."

"SHHH!"

---

_Claire Danes:_

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

_Leonardo DiCaprio:_

_Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?_

---

"So, I'm starting to question why I agreed to watching this movie..." Jughead said.

"Why?" Betty asked not taking her eyes off the screen.

"I didn't realize you'd be ogling Leonardo DiCaprio the whole entire time. I'm starting to feel jealous of all the attention you are giving him."

"Whatever."

"You know he's aged a lot since he made this movie."

"Stop it!" Betty said rolling her eyes, "He is still definitely on my Top 5 list, though."

"Top 5 list?"

"I saw it on an episode of 'Friends'- Ross and Rachel put together a list of five celebrities they got a free pass with?"

"A free pass?"
"A free pass to sleep with anyone on their list without the other getting angry."

"You think Leonardo DiCaprio is just going to call you up one day and ask you to go to bed with him?"

Betty looked at Jughead and rolled her eyes, "No, but it's still fun to put your list together."

---

*Leonardo DiCaprio:*
I take thee at thy word.
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptis'd;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

*Claire Danes:*
What man art thou that, thus bescreened in night,
So stumblest on my counsel?

*Leonardo DiCaprio:*
By a name
I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee.
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

"I want to hear more about your top 5 list." Jughead asked interrupting the movie, slowly caressing her shoulder.

"Let me think." Betty said, tilting her head to one side, eyes still glued to the screen, "Leonardo DiCaprio, Ryan Gosling, Chris Pine and Milo Ventimiglia."

---

*Leonardo DiCaprio:*
I take thee at thy word.
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptis'd;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

"That's only four." Jughead pointed out.

"Give me your top 5 and that will give me time to think of my last one." Betty bargained.
Claire Danes:
What man art thou that, thus bescreened in night,
So stumblest on my counsel?

Leonardo DiCaprio:
By a name
I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee.
Had I it written, I would tear the word.


"So predictable," Betty scoffed.

"Whatever."

Claire Danes:
My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words
Of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.
Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?

Leonardo DiCaprio:
Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

"Ok, now who's your fifth?" Jughead asked pausing the movie.

"Guess." Betty demurred.

"How about the twins from that Disney Channel show?"
Betty looked up at him puzzled, "Which show?"

"'The Suite Life of Zack and Cody'."

"The Sprouse twins? Cole and Dylan?"

"Yeah."

"Wouldn't that be cheating since I'm only allowed to choose one more?"

"You are right- it would be cheating and I don't know how I'd feel about you engaging in a threesome." Jughead said.

"Wow!" Betty laughed, "Mind in the gutter much?"
"Only when it involves you. So tell me who your fifth would be then."

"Kit Harrington."

"Really?"

"You know how much I love 'Game of Thrones'... Plus there's something about dark-haired brooding characters that get to me every time."

"Well that explains why Milo Ventimiglia is on your list."

"Team Jess. What can I say? Now can we please get back to the movie?" Betty asked pressing play.

Claire Danes:
How cam'st thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

Leonardo DiCaprio:
With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do, that dares love attempt:
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

Claire Danes:
If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

"You do know that they couldn't stand each other, right?" Jughead asked.

"What do mean?" Betty asked.

"Apparently Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes didn't get along that well."

"No!" Betty said her eyes wide.

Leonardo DiCaprio:
Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords. Look thou but sweet
And I am proof against their enmity.

"I'm sorry to burst your bubble. But apparently they really didn't get along..." Jughead said pausing
"No way! They have such great chemistry. How did you know that?"

"I like to read movie trivia on the IMDB app," Jughead said shrugging and pulling it up on his phone to show Betty. "It's right here," Jughead said pointing to a blurb.

"Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio initially did not get along well on set," Betty read, "Danes accused DiCaprio of being immature, while DiCaprio said Danes was just uptight" Betty closed the app, a big frown on her face.

Jughead pulled her in for a hug. "You look like someone just told you that Santa Claus isn't real." He said laughing.

Betty turned to him abruptly, green eyes wide, her bottom lip trembling, "He's not?"

"I mean, um, well..Santa was a real, um-" He said stumbling on his words.

Betty burst out laughing, "You didn't really think that-"

Jughead flushed, "You looked so convincing..."

Betty kissed him, "Well that piece of trivia was a total buzz kill."

"Speaking of buzz kills," Jughead said, "Archie is fine with going to Jason's for cocktail tomorrow night."

"That's great because Ronnie and Kevin are in too."

Jughead sighed, "You know I'm only going because it's so important to you."

Betty looked up at him, "I know and I appreciate it."

"And why do you want us to go again?"

"Maybe it's selfish but it makes me feel less guilty about us if I know he's moved on."

"I can see that but I still don't trust him." Jughead grumbled.

"I understand."

"And what happens if I'm right and he's really just interested in winning you back." Jughead asked.

Betty sighed, "First off, I am not a prize to be won or lost-

"I'm sorry," Jughead interjected, "You are right. I just meant that I'm sure that he still has feelings for you and would be happy to have you go back to him."

"I know." Betty said softening, "But he doesn't have a say in the matter, remember?"

"I guess." Jughead said reluctantly.

"Now can we get back to the movie?" Betty asked pressing play again.
Claire Danes:
I would not for the world they saw thee here.

Leonardo DiCaprio:
I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes,
And, but thou love me, let them find me here;
My life were better ended by their hate
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

Jughead looked at her in mock disbelief, "Woman, what do I need to do to get you to stop watching this movie and pay attention to me?"

Betty paused the movie again, and slipped out of the covers and straddled Jughead dressed only in her blue lace bra and thong. She started with a few soft kisses before increasing the intensity, her tongue probing his, while playfully grinding against his boxers.

"Would you count this as paying attention to you?" Betty asked breathlessly, looking up at him from under her long lashes.

Jughead swallowed, his heart racing, "I think this counts."

"Good!" Betty said, before sliding off and moving the laptop back into her lap.

"'O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?'" Jughead growled pulling Betty back onto his lap.

Betty looked at him wide eyed, a small smile playing on her lips, "Did you just quote Shakespeare?"

Instead of answering, he undid the clasp of her bra and flipped her so she was lying face up on the bed. Leaning over her he kissed her lightly along her jaw line before allowing his tongue to run from her neck to her breasts.

Removing her bra, he placed his mouth over one breast and then other, his tongue gently circling her nipples, as Betty moaned in pleasure.

Smiling, Jughead moved up to place another kiss on the base of her neck. He buried his face in her hair and whispered into her ear, his hands caressing her nipples "Are you ok?"

He felt Betty's breath catch, "Yes, Juggie." as she bucked her hips up against his errrection.

Jughead kissed Betty deeply, pushing his tongue further into her mouth before licking a trail from her neck to her belly button. He gently pressed his thumb against her clit as Betty squirmed underneath him. He kissed her belly button again before slowly removing her thong, his fingers caressing her folds before bringing his lips down onto her clit.

"Juggie!" Betty gasped panting, her hands reaching down to grasp his hair, as his tongue continued to dart against her nub. Ignoring the painful throbbing from his errrection, he let his tongue run up and down her folds, while his hands massaged her nipples.

"Fuck Juggie!" Betty hissed pulling him up to kiss her, "That feels amazing."

Using her full strength Betty quickly maneuvered it so that Jughead was now lying beneath her. She slowly made a trail of kisses down from his neck to his stomach until she reached the waistband of his boxers. Pulling his boxers off, his errrection sprung free. Betty ran her tongue from the base to the
tip of his cock, smiling as Jughead shook against her touch.

Jughead groaned as Betty's tongue danced around his shaft before taking him fully into her mouth. "Fucking hell Betts," Jughead croaked out as he watched her blonde head move up and down his cock.

Close to climaxing, he pulled her up and kissed her deeply.

"I want to finish in you," he growled, sitting up and gripping her hips as he plunged into her from behind.

"Juggie," Betty panted as he brought his fingers to massage her folds, while continuing to thrust into her.

"Harder Juggie," Betty begged, "Harder. I want you deeper in me."

Jughead further aroused by her pleading and her desire for him continued to pump faster and faster into her. He kept burying himself deeper, enjoying the sensation of her wrapped around him until he felt her start to climax. Having helped her reach her peak, he felt his eyes roll back in his head as he erupted in her.

Overwhelmed, they lay panting, still connected as Jughead brought his lips to hers.

"Still want to watch the movie?" Jughead asked his eyes meeting hers, one eyebrow cocked.

"What movie?" Betty asked as she leaned in for another kiss.

Chapter End Notes

I know the title was misleading but I wanted to really show the playful banter between my babies and give Bughead one last sexy time before the shit really starts to hit the fan...
“Move swift as the Wind and closely-formed as the Wood. Attack like the Fire and be still as the Mountain.”

— Sun Tzu, The Art of War

"What a breathtaking view," Kevin said, looking off the balcony at the Vatican before them.

Jason smiled looking up, "You are right, it is nice. I haven't really had a chance to enjoy it this week." He said, handing Kevin, Betty and Veronica a champagne cocktail, while Jughead and Archie each enjoyed a bottle of Peroni lager.

Veronica took a sip, "Mmmm. This is amazing. What is this?"

"A Bellini, but the peach is freshly puréed." He looked over at Betty, raising one eyebrow, "If I remember correctly, this is one of your favorites."

Betty, who was sitting on a chaise lounge chair with Jughead's arm around her looked up and smiled, "Yes, it is."

"I'm glad you are enjoying it. Everyone- please help yourself to any of the h'ors d'oeuvres as well." Jason said waving at the small buffet of appetizers to the side.

Archie looked around at the balcony and the interior of the suite, "I don't think I've ever seen a hotel room this big before."

Jason shrugged, "It's a King suite- 1 master bedroom, an additional bath with a living room, dining room, bar and entertaining space. Would you like a tour?"

"Sure," Kevin and Archie said simultaneously.

"Great," Jason said standing up obligingly. Everyone except Betty stood up. Jason looked over at her, "Are you coming Betty?"

She shook her head, "I'm fine- thanks. I think I'll stay out here and enjoy the view a little longer."

Jughead, who was standing up, looked from the group back down at Betty again, "Why don't I stay here with you then."

For a second it seemed like Jason was about to protest but he merely shrugged. "Sure, I can just give you two the grand tour later." Jason said, leading the way through the French doors back into the suite, the other three following.

Once the group left, Betty stood up and walked to the edge of the balcony, Jughead close behind, "It is an amazing view, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it's amazing." Jughead said softly looking at her. She was wearing blue jeans and a copper colored halter top that brought out the gold in her blonde hair.
Betty turned around to catch Jughead staring at her. She smiled and shook her head at him, "Silly, I meant this view." She waved her arms out towards the cityscape behind her.

"You look amazing Betts," he said taking a step closer to her and putting his arms around her waist, "Spend the night with me again?"

Betty smiled up at him, "I'd like that, but I don't think I can tonight."

He leaned over and started planting small kisses on her neck and exposed shoulder, "Why not?"

Betty sighed and leaned into his kisses, "I don't know... Maybe because I was just there last night?"

"Details, details," he said, cupping her face in both hands and bringing her in for a kiss, the intensity increasing with each kiss until they heard someone clear their throat behind them.

They both turned around to find the other four, plus a hotel employee staring at them, "Get a room, you two." Archie said rolling his eyes.

"Just not mine." Jason interjected quickly, flushing slightly.

"Anyway," Jason continued, "This is Martina," he said gesturing to the hotel employee standing with the group, "She's part of the concierge team and since you are an art aficionado, Betty- I asked if they would give you a private tour of the Cavalieri's art collection."

Betty's eyes lit up, "Really? That's great. I heard you had a canvas of 'The Judgement of Paris' and Antonio Tantardini's 'The Kiss'."

Martina smiled at her, "You've done your research."

Betty blushed, "It came up when I googled the hotel."

"If it suits you," Martina said, "I can take you on the tour now."

"I'd love that!" Betty said. She looked up at Jughead, "Do you mind?"

"Of course not," he said kissing her on the forehead, "Have fun."

"Anyone else want to join us?" Martina asked as Betty walked over to join her.

"I'll come with you," Kevin said.

After Kevin and Betty left, Archie and Veronica settled into a lively conversation leaving Jason and Jughead alone together.

Jason broke the silence first, "So Betty..."

Jughead looked over at Jason cautiously, his guard immediately up "Yes?"

"I was just about to comment that she seems happy," he paused, "With you."

Jughead looked up noticing the tension in Jason's jawline. Taking a long swig of beer, the two sat awkwardly for a few minutes before Jughead, deciding to ignore Jason's comment, said, "It was nice of you to arrange the private tour of their art collection."

Jason shrugged, "It wasn't a big deal and Betty loves that sort of thing. Back in California we used to go to art museums all the time."
"Oh."

"Yeah. It used to be our thing. We'd drive up to the city, visit the new exhibits and find a new restaurant to try."

"I've never been to California before," Jughead said, trying to change the topic.

"When I first heard that you guys were a thing," Jason said, "I was surprised."

When Jughead didn't say anything, Jason continued, "I thought maybe it was just a summer thing."

"It's not," Jughead said through clenched teeth.

"So, I've gathered," Jason said before taking a swig of his beer, "It's a shame you don't share Betty's passion around art."

"And you do?" Jughead asked.

"My mother used to volunteer as an art docent in her spare time. She made sure that Cheryl and I grew up with a peripheral knowledge of the all the major art movements and art periods."

"Well, we can't all be as lucky to have had the upbringing you had." Jughead said sarcastically.

Jason raised an eyebrow, "I didn't mean to sound like I was bragging, I was just stating a fact about how I was raised."

"What is this fixation with you using 'art' and your appreciation of art as a point of comparison between us?"

Jason studied Jughead closely. "I didn't mean to offend you," he said slowly, "I was just trying to figure out what brought you two together."

"You know Betty has many interests besides art that we share."

"Like?"

"I don't need to defend our relationship to you."

"I was just looking out for Betty."

"There's really no reason for you to be concerned, I'll take good care of her."

"I don't think you quite understand how much she means to my family."

"No, I get it," Jughead said firmly, "but what we have is none of your business."

Jughead and Jason sat staring each other down when Betty suddenly reappeared.

"Hi guys," Betty said, coming to stand between them, a look of concern on her face, "What are you guys talking about?"

"Just this and that," Jason said shrugging.

"It looked intense." Betty persisted.

Jason shook his head, "How was the private tour?"
"It was great. The hotel has a fantastic collection of paintings and sculpture."

"Well I was happy to help you indulge in something you enjoy so much." Jason said pointedly glancing at Jughead.

Betty, who had caught the glance Jason shot Jughead, said a perturbed look on her face, "Martina said I could come and bring my sketchbook one afternoon."

"I forgot to tell you to bring it tonight." Jason said.

"It's not a big deal. What were you guys talking about?" Betty asked again.

"This and that." Jughead said, while Jason said, "You."

"What about me?"

"Just about how you like to go to art exhibits and museums." Jason said.

"Okay," Betty said, one eyebrow raised.

"So Jughead," Jason asked, "Have you modeled for one of Betty's sketches?"

"Yeah," Jughead answered wondering where this was going, "I'm not the best subject. She thinks I fidget too much."

Jason paused before saying, "I use to complain all the time about having to sit still or pose or repeat a motion, too. Looking back, I should have reveled in the moment more."

He said turning towards her, as her eyes grew wide, "Betty, I should have just appreciated that time. Realized for those few minutes, I was the center of your attention."

Jughead felt his anger rise at Jason's words but he focused his attention on Betty's reaction. He watched as the color drained from her face, her eyes wide and mouth slightly agape.

"Why are you saying this now?" Betty whispered.

"I think about what I could have done different all the time." Jason answered.

"Jason, stop." Betty said softly.

Jason still holding Betty's gaze, shrugged and answered his voice soft but steady, "The things you think about when something you once had is lost."

For a moment it looked like she was about to cry as she looked from Jason to Jughead back to Jason before turning to Veronica, "Ronnie!" Betty cried, her voice sounding slightly strangled.

Hearing the anguish in Betty's voice, Veronica, Kevin and Archie walked quickly over to join the other trio.

"What's up B?" Veronica asked as she surveyed the scene.

"I need to take a walk." Betty said, starting to gather her things. Turning to Jason, "Thanks for the cocktails, but I need to go."

Betty reached a hand towards Jughead's arm, "Jugger..."
He looked at her concerned. "Go. I'll catch up with you. I just need a minute." Jughead said kissing her forehead as his eyes met Jason's.

Jason and Jughead stood in silence as they watched Betty, Veronica and Kevin leave the balcony area, while Archie stayed behind with Jughead.

Once they heard the hotel door close, Jughead turned towards Jason his arms crossed. "What the fuck was that about?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know what I mean. Betty is with me now. What are you doing hitting on my girlfriend?"

Jason rolled his eyes and laughed, "You think I was hitting on Betty? I think I'd have played it more smooth than that and I certainly wouldn't have done it in front of you. I was just sharing a revelation that I've had since we broke up."

"That's such bullshit."

"No it's true, you never realize what you have until you don't have it anymore."

"Admit it, Blossom. You still have feelings for Betty."

Jason considered Jughead's question for a moment and took a sip of his beer, "If she wanted to get back together, you better believe I'd be there in a heartbeat."

Jughead had been expecting Jason to dodge the question, so he was startled by Jason's honesty.

Jason looked at him an amused smirk on his face, "You weren't expecting me to be honest? Look man, you ask and I answered."

"She's dating me now."

"You've made that abundantly clear."

"Great," Jughead growled, "I just wanted to make sure we understood one another."

"I understand," Jason said a small smile playing on his lips, "But do you?"

Jason raised an eyebrow, "You're together for now. But what will it be like when your not together day after day- when you aren't living in the same city? You've only known her for about a month? Is that enough of a foundation to build a relationship with a girl who lives 3,000 miles away from you?"

"You don't know anything about what Betty and I have." Jughead answered heatedly.

"You are right, I don't.," Jason agreed, "But I do know what it's like to date her."

"So?"

"You'll figure it out. When you date a girl like Betty, you get used to the fact that there is a long line of guys waiting to take your place."

"With you being one of them." Jughead spat out.

Jason shrugged, "Like I said, I wouldn't turn her away."
Jughead felt his breathing quicken as he clenched his fists to his side, holding back the desire to punch Jason in the face.

"Jug?" a voice said startling Jughead back to the present. Jughead had forgotten that Archie had stayed behind.

"Jug," Archie repeated, "Let's go and catch up to the girls."

Jughead turned to Jason again, "Stay away from her."

"Feeling threatened Jones?" Jason asked.

"Just stay away from her." Jughead said taking a step towards him.

Jason raised his hands in mock-surrender, "If you are so sure about what you two have, why do you care about what I do?"

"Jug," Archie said a little more forcefully, "Let's go."

And with one final look at Jason, Jughead allowed his friend to lead him out of the hotel room.

Chapter End Notes

Comments appreciated :)
Guilt

“We have all hurt someone tremendously, whether by intent or accident. We have all loved someone tremendously, whether by intent or accident. It is an intrinsic human trait, and a deep responsibility, I think, to be an organ and a blade. But, learning to forgive ourselves and others because we have not chosen wisely is what makes us most human. We make horrible mistakes. It’s how we learn. We breathe love. It’s how we learn. And it is inevitable.”

- Nayyirah Waheed

Betty paused for a second on the Viale dell’Uccelliera, bending over to help even out her breathing and to stretch out her calf muscles. Although she had been running for about twenty minutes, she still didn't feel warmed up enough, primarily because she was running at a slower pace to accommodate Kevin and Veronica.

Betty suspected that after the events of last night they had waived their distaste of running in favor of keeping a close eye on her. While she felt better, she appreciated the company and had chosen a more scenic route around the Villa Borghese Gardens.

As her two friends caught up to her panting, Betty smiled inwardly to herself, guessing that they weren't all that impressed with the running route she had chosen.

"You know," Veronica said, slowing down and fanning herself with one hand, "You have an unfair advantage. Your legs are way longer than mine."

Betty rolled her eyes. "I'm only about three inches taller than you, V. Don't tel me you've gone soft since our cheerleading days?" Betty teased before turning to Kevin, "And what's your excuse?"

"I'm supposed to be on vacation," Kevin said indignantly.

"Whatever." Betty said, finishing up her stretch "Let's do a loop through the park, will that work for you guys?"

Betty watched Veronica and Kevin exchange horrified glances.

"How big is this park again?" Veronica asked.

Betty chuckled, "How about I run a short lap around the park and meet you guys at the top of the Spanish Steps? You can get a coffee while you wait for me."

Kevin smiled, "Sounds like a plan."


Betty felt herself start to relax as she increased her pace, a Chainsmokers mix, blasting in her ears.

After getting into a groove, soothed by the rhythm of her feet pounding against the pavement, Betty finally allowed her thoughts to turn back to last night.
Returning to the balcony, the tension between Jason and Jughead was palpable. A quick glance at Veronica and Archie showed them to be preoccupied with one another, so after exchanging a quick glance with Kevin, Betty went over to see what was going on.

As she walked to stand between them, Betty sought to diffuse the tension. Unfortunately, it appeared that Jason had other intentions.

"Betty, I should have just appreciated that time. Realized for those few minutes, I was the center of your attention."

"I think about what I could have done different all the time."

"The things you think about when something you once had is lost."

Betty felt her heart wrench remembering the pain present in Jason's eyes as he held her gaze. And it had been all her fault. She recognized now how ridiculous it had been to agree to a break and give Jason any hope that her feelings would change. If she had been brave enough to trust her instincts, she could have spared Jason's feelings.

And Jughead, Betty thought, had seen things clearly from the start.

The walk from the balcony to the elevators was a complete blur to Betty, who overwhelmed with guilt, sought to increase the physical distance between her and Jason. As soon as the elevator reached the ground floor, Betty had bolted through the lobby and out of the hotel.

Betty's mind raced as she thought her many missteps. Starting with when she should have ended things through how she had wrongly interpreted his overtures as him being okay with her relationship with Jughead.

Caught up in her thoughts, Betty had temporarily forgotten that Kevin and Veronica were with her until she heard Veronica call out.

"Betty! Slow down." Veronica panted, chasing after her unsuccessfully, with Kevin by her side, "Please, wait! I'm breaking in my new Ferragamos!"

Betty spun around abruptly, her blonde hair flying, causing Kevin and Veronica to almost slam into her.

"I'm sorry!" Betty sniffed, plopping onto a nearby ledge, her eyes and nose red from crying.

"Betty, what happened?" Kevin asked.

"I've been so stupid! So gullible!" Betty sobbed.

"You are not stupid!" Veronica said exasperated.

"Jughead was right. Why didn't I listen to him?" Betty gasped out.

"What did Jason say?" Veronica said, sitting next to her friend and hugging her close.

"Basically that he 'wonders all the time what he could have done differently' and that he 'didn't realize what he had until it was gone'." Betty sobbed.

Kevin eyes grew wide, "He said that? Right in front of Jughead?"
Betty nodded.

"And what did Jughead say?" Kevin asked.

"I don't know," Betty said, "Because that's when I decided I needed to leave."

Veronica hugged her closer, "Honey, I am so sorry but you had to know that Jason still had feelings for you."

"Maybe I did, deep down. But I really wanted to believe he was okay with being friends. And I chose to believe he wanted to get to know Jughead..." Betty said, "It was selfish of me to think that he would be okay with me moving on with someone else. It was stupid, I know."

"It's not stupid to want to believe his intentions were good." Kevin said gently.

Veronica pulled out her phone which was vibrating, "Speaking of Jughead, it's Archie."

Betty's eyes grew wide, "Oh god, Jughead is going to hate me!"

Veronica rolled her eyes, as she moved to accept the call, "He definitely doesn't hate you."

"But he tried to warn me." Betty said.

"He doesn't hate you," Veronica repeated firmly to Betty before turning her attention to the phone, "Arch, yes we are with Betty. Mmmhmm. No, we are not that far away. Of course he does, let me check with Betty."

Moving the phone away from her head, Veronica turned towards Betty, "Can the boys meet up with us? Jughead is really worried about you."

Betty nodded, and leaned against Kevin's shoulder, for support.

"Arch, we are less than a quarter of a mile away from the hotel. We are on Viale Tito Livio, towards the direction of Vatican City. Mmmhmm, yes. See you soon."

"They are on the way," Veronica updated her friends.

The trio sat in silence for a few minutes while Betty composed herself.

"Betty, honey " Veronica said gently, after Betty's tears had subsided, "You've got to stop blaming yourself."

"But Ronnie this whole thing is my fault." Betty insisted.

"And why would you think that?" Jughead said appearing suddenly, out of breath, his eyes wild. His expression softened upon seeing Betty and he immediately went to kneel in front of her, his arms resting on her jean clad thighs. Archie arrived a few second behind him, his face flushed.

"That was fast." Kevin commented.

"Jughead basically sprinted over here," Archie said bending over and trying to catch his breath, "I think the only time I've ever seen you move that fast was when you found out that Pop's was giving out 2-for-1 burgers on National Hamburger Day."

"Betts," Jughead said tenderly, looking up at her, "Are you ok?"
"You must hate me." Betty said softly, avoiding Jughead's gaze.

Gently cupping her chin, Jughead forced her to make eye contact with him, "Why would I hate you?" He asked softly.

"Because you were completely right about Jason and I just didn't want to see it." Betty said softly, averting her gaze again.

"Betty, I could never hate you." Jughead said.

"That's what I tried to tell her," Veronica said standing up, "Can we please continue this somewhere else? I think we should head back to the hotel and catch a cab back to our flat."

Betty shook her head, "I'm going to walk back."

Jughead looked at Betty then at Veronica, "You guys go ahead, I will walk her home."

"Fine." Veronica said before putting a hand on Jughead's shoulder, "If she needs anything..."

"You will be the first to know," Jughead offered as the others walked back towards the hotel.

Getting up from kneeling on the ground, Jughead stood up and pulled Betty to her feet, enveloping her in his arms for a tight hug. As Betty leaned her head against his shoulder, he could feel her tears as they fell against his neck.

He leaned a bit away from her so he could brush away her tears and asked, "Why are you still crying, Sunshine?"

"Juggie," Betty said as they started walking hand in hand northwest towards Vatican City, "I feel horrible. This whole mess is all my fault."

"Why do you think that?" Jughead asked gently.

"If I had just ended things with Jason when I should have, it would have saved everyone a world of hurt."

"You know," Jughead asked softly, "I've always wanted to ask you - if you thought it was the right thing to do- why didn't you break up with him sooner?"

"I didn't want to hurt his feelings, which was stupid, I know. Especially because it would have had to happen eventually. You have to understand that while we were dating, I didn't realize how serious Jason was about our relationship."

Seeing the skeptical expression on Jughead's face, she continued."I mean, before he proposed, obviously."

Betty sighed and they walked along in silence for a few minutes.

"I knew that after college," Betty continued, "Jason had big plans to move back to New York. I never thought that I was going to be a part of those plans. I just assumed that he wouldn't want to continue dating me from so far away and that him moving to New York would be the end of us. I was so, so wrong."

Jughead squeezed her hand for support as she continued, "I should have had the courage to end things after he initially proposed."
"Why did you stay with him then?"

"Jason begged me to give him, us a try, really. He argued that we would be perfect together and that I was just scared because it was such a big leap. And he was right, I was scared but not for the reasons he thought."

"Why did Jason think you were perfect together?" Jughead asked curious, already knowing the answer.

"I don't know," Betty said shrugging, "You know- we both like running and sports, we both enjoyed the art scene- going to museums and the theater, we ran around in the same circle of friends, we were both very active on campus, things like that."

"Did you believe that?"

"No," Betty shook her head, "Shared interests is one facet of a relationship but it's not the only thing."

Jughead felt himself breathe a small sigh of relief that she didn't put stock on the fact that he didn't share those particular interests.

"So what are you going to do now?" He asked.

"I don't know," Betty said softly, "I need to fix this mess that I made-"

"Betty," Jughead said, "You didn't make this mess."

"But I did," Betty insisted, "And I need to fix things somehow, but I don't know how to- at least without hurting him again."

"Do you, I mean, did you love him?" Jughead asked, holding his breath, dreading her answer.

"Juggie," Betty said stopping and making him turn and face her, "I wouldn't have been with him for so long if I didn't."

"Oh," Jughead said softly, his heart falling into his stomach.

"But Juggie," Betty said, making him look her in the eye, "Remember, I started dating him my freshman year. My concept of love has evolved so completely since that time."

"What made it change? Jughead asked softly.

"You." Betty said, cupping Jughead's face and bringing him closer for a deep kiss.

Bringing herself back to the present, Betty thought back to her walk home with Jughead. Despite her persistence, Jughead had refused to tell her what had transpired with Jason after she left the hotel room. But apparently some things were said that had made Jughead very against her talking to him again. She tried to get him to understand how important it was to finally have that conversation with him and provide Jason with some closure.

While Jughead didn't agree, he understood it was something she personally needed to feel less guilt about their relationship. He had been adamant however that she promise to notify him before she saw
Jason.

Betty sighed. There was no way around it, in order for everyone to move on, she had to break Jason's heart again.

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"And as you can see, Mr. Lodge, based on the growth trajectory and the return on investment, these would be the optimal funds to invest in for someone with your risk tolerance." Jason said concluding the PowerPoint presentation he had put together for their meeting.

They were sitting in the dining room, Jason's iPad Pro between them with an array of pastries, fruit, and a pancetta and tomato strata laid out for brunch.

"Jason, I must say I'm very impressed. You've obviously done your homework on my interests and what my vision is for Lodge Industries. Like I said, I like to support ambitious young men like yourself get a leg up in the business world."

"Thanks Mr. Lodge."

"Jason, please call me Hiram. Why don't I start with an initial investment of $250,000? And tell your firm I am only making that investment if you have sole responsibility for my account."

"Mr. Lodge, I mean, Hiram. I appreciate your confidence in me-" Jason paused interrupted by Betty, Veronica and Kevin walking into the room.

It looked like they had returned from a morning run. Betty, her face flushed, sweat glistening on her skin from the physical exertion looked radiant as she teased her two companions, "Kevin, Ronnie-didn't you say something about running laps around me?"

"Betts," Ronnie panted, "I told you I'm not a runner! I don't know why we agreed to join you to begin with."

"Um, I wouldn't exactly call sitting in a café for a half hour running."

"Whatever," Veronica said dismissively, "We ran back here didn't we?"

"Hi kids," Mr. Lodge interrupted, "Why don't you guys freshen up and join us for breakfast?"

Betty, Veronica and Kevin turned around startled not realizing they had an audience behind them.

"Jason!" Betty gasped out surprised, not expecting to see him so soon after last night. "What are you doing here?"

Jason was about to answer when Hiram explained, "Jason and I are conducting some business together."

"Daddy?" Veronica asked suspiciously.

"I'm just trying to help Jason get a foothold in the business world. Not that he needs it. Jason is a bright young man." Hiram boomed.
Veronica rolled her eyes at Kevin and Betty, "Is mom back from Milan yet?"

"Not until tomorrow," Hiram said.

"Ok- We will come out and join you as soon as we have a clean ourselves up." Veronica said.

"Yeah, a shower is definitely in order. It's hot out there today," Kevin piped up, heading towards his room.

Betty drifted back for a second, looking like she wanted to ask something, before heading with Veronica to their room.

Jason turned back towards Mr. Lodge, "I was just about to say Mr. Lodge-"

"Call me Hiram."

"Yes, Hiram. What I was saying is I appreciate you having the confidence in me to manage your account."

"Nonsense, Jason. I meant everything I said. You are a bright boy- you will go places." Mr Lodge took a sip of his Espresso before continuing, "Jason, do you mind if I ask you something personal?"

"No, of course not, Mr.-, Hiram."

"What's going on between you and Betty?"

Jason paused and studied Mr. Lodge carefully, wondering if he had heard about what had transpired the night before, "Why do you ask, sir?"

"I've known Betty for about 16 years now and she's like another daughter to me."

"And I know that Betty thinks very highly of your family as well, sir."

"I was sorry to hear about your break-up." Mr. Lodge said looking sharply at Jason. He took another sip of his coffee before continuing, "I could tell by the way you were looking at her now, you still have feelings for her."

"Well, our break-up wasn't mutual, sir," Sensing an ally, Jason continued, "But I haven't given up hope yet."

"I'm glad to hear that, Jason." Mr. Lodge said, "Jughead is a nice enough boy but I don't really think he and Betty are suited for one another."

"I think that Betty would disagree with you sir." Jason said.

"I don't think that Betty has truly thought her decision through yet." Hiram said dismissively, "Like I said, Jughead is a nice enough boy, but he has no ambition. He wants to be a writer! Do people even buy books anymore? Anyway, you are a much better match for her. Betty needs someone who can appreciate her drive and her vision. In fact, I'd like to give you a bit of hand."

"Sir?" Jason asked curious.

"Jason, this is between you and me, understand? This can't get back to Hermione or the girls."

"I completely understand. This is between you and me." Jason affirmed as he leaned in to hear what Mr. Lodge had to say.
"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

- JK Rowling

A quick glance at his watch confirmed that he was running about fifteen minutes late. Jughead hadn’t slept well last night, so he allowed himself a late morning nap to compensate for staying up late to talk with Archie.

"Hey," Archie said from the common room, as Jughead slipped in through the door at half pass midnight, "I was waiting up for you. Is everything ok?"

"Yeah," Jughead said sounding tired, "Betty is doing much better. We walked around the Piazza del Popolo for awhile and got some gelato before I walked her home."

Archie chuckled, "Gelato? Is that her thing."

"She has a sweet tooth." Jughead said.

"That doesn't explain why she's dating you," Archie teased.

"Ha. Ha." Jughead said dryly, the first real smile Archie had seen that night crossing his face.

"Anyway," Archie began, handing him an ice cold beer, "I'm glad Betty is doing better, but I want to know how you are doing."

"Thanks," Jughead said taking the beer and proceeding to take a long drink before answering "I'm fine."

"Are you sure?," Archie asked, looking at him closely, "That 'showdown' between you and Jason was intense."

Jughead tried to shrug it off but Archie persisted, "No really, Jug- do you want to talk about it?"

"What do you want to talk about Arch?" Jughead asked in a slightly antagonistic tone, "How in the span of less than 10 minutes Jason managed to name all of my insecurities when it comes to Betty? Or how I don't think he's done trying to win her back?"

Archie eyes grew wide, "Well, either really. But first, are you ok?"

"Not really." Jughead admitted, "And I won't be until he leaves Italy and is as far away from Betty as possible."

"Jug, I'm sorry man." Archie said, "Look. You know I was a little skeptical about you dating Betty-especially because she had just broken up with Jason."
Jughead looked up at Archie, tensing in anticipation over his next words.

"But I'm glad you ignored me." Archie said, "She wants to be with you. And it is so obvious she
doesn't care for Jason that way at all."

"You think so," Jughead asked relaxing slightly.

"Yes. I have to give him credit, he certainly wasn't holding back. But you have to ignore him.
Remember, he's just bitter that you have something he wants."

"I know. And I guess the one good thing is that Betty is now aware, too. But Arch, I can't shake this
funny feeling I have about Jason." Jughead said sighing.

"What are you worried about?" Archie asked.

"Betty blames herself for tonight. She thinks that to make things right she needs to give him some
sort of closure, whatever the fuck that means."

"Closure?"

"Yeah... She thinks she needs to have a bug conversation with him to help him move on."

"Well that's nice of her," Archie offered, not sure what else to say.

"Too nice." Jughead added, "The last thing I want is for him to be alone with her at all right now. I
know he'll figure out a way to manipulate her guilt or find some other way to fuck up what I have
with Betty."

Dodging the summer crowds near the Trevi Fountain brought Jughead's mind back to the present
and within a few minutes he arrived at il Piccolo. He felt his heart lighten upon seeing her, dressed in
a pink sleeveless top and jean shorts, sitting at their usual table conversing with Antonio.

"Has Antonio talked you into running away with him yet?" Jughead asked, sitting in the empty chair
next to her.

Jughead felt his insides lighten further, as Betty's face lit up in a greeting. "Almost," Betty said, "But
you got here just in time."

"You are going to break my heart Elizabetta," Antonio said with a wink, before leaving to get their
usual order.

"Sorry, I'm late." Jughead said, leaning in to give her a quick kiss, "I took a late morning nap and
slept through the alarm."

"Not a big deal. Antonio kept me company."

"I bet he did," Jughead grumbled jokingly.

Betty giggled, "Feeling threatened Jones?"

Jughead froze at her words. Hadn't Jason said the exact same thing to him last night?, he wondered.

Noticing the change in his demeanor, Betty put her hand on Jughead's arm and asked, "What's
wrong? Did I say something?"
"Nothing," Jughead said shaking his head as Antonio came back to the table with their usual order.

"Jug," Betty said, a hint of anxiety in her voice, "I know you said you didn't want me to see Jason without you knowing-"

"But?" Jughead interrupted.

"When we got back from our run this morning, he was having breakfast with Mr. Lodge."

Jughead felt his heartbeat quicken and his jaw tense, "Was he there to see you?"

Betty shook her head, "No, apparently he was having a business meeting with Mr. Lodge. Veronica said that her dad was going to have Jason manage some funds for him."

"Lovely," Jughead said sarcastically.

"Anyway," Betty continued, "by the time we had showered and changed, he had left."

"So you didn't talk to him at all?" Jughead asked.

"Outside of 'hi' - no."

"Good."

"Juggie- what happened between you and Jason after I left the room last night?"

"Nothing that bears repeating." Jughead said firmly.

"Fine," Betty sighed, "I'll drop it for now. You know, I'm going to have to talk to him sometime."

"So you say," Jughead sighed heavily, "but it doesn't mean I have to like it. But enough about him..."

"Yes?" Betty said, sipping her cappuccino.

"Do you want to go out to dinner with me tonight?" Jughead asked.

Betty looked up, the disappointment visible in her eyes, "I wish I could Juggie but Mr. Lodge gave me a ticket to an event at the MACRO tonight. The head docent is giving a lecture on the Arte Povera movement."

Antonio, who overheard the conversation stopped by, "Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma? Che grande! You must check out Giancarlo Limoni's works - they are fantastic!"

Betty flashed him a smile, "Thanks Antonio, I'll be sure to check Giancarlo Limoni out and let you know what I think."

Antonio smiled down at Betty, "Are you sure you don't want to be with me instead of Signor Jones? Free cappuccinos and biscotti for life." He teased as Jughead rolled his eyes at him.

Betty smiled, "As tempting as that sounds... what will your wife say? I think it's safer if I stick with Signor Jones for now."

"Sei proprio... un ragazzo furtunato, Signor Jones." Antonio sang before walking away.

"Don't I know it," Jughead said smiling at Betty, "That lecture sounds like it's right up your alley."
Are Veronica and Kevin going with you?"

Betty shook her head, "Mr. Lodge only had one ticket. Veronica is going out with Archie and I think Kevin is going out with some other friends from school."

"I guess this will give me more time with my paper then." Jughead said.

"How is that coming along?" Betty asked referring to his final paper on the Inferno.

"It'd be coming along a lot faster if you weren't such a distraction," Jughead said affectionately.

Betty raised an eyebrow, "So, I'm a distraction now?"

"Betts, you are the best type of distraction, but it's probably a good thing you can't do dinner tonight. I really need to focus on this if I'm going to have it completed by Friday."

"I understand," Betty sighed, "I assume this means you won't join us for the opera tomorrow night either?"

"I'm afraid not," Jughead said, referring to the Lodge's invitation to attend the opening night cocktails and premiere of La bohème from a private box. He was secretly relieved that he didn't have to spend the night dressed up listening to people sing extremely high notes in Italian.

"Maybe you'll need a study break tonight?" Betty asked hopefully.

"Sounds like a plan. Why don't I pick you up from the MACRO after? We can get some gelato and I'll walk you home?"

"I would love that." Betty said smiling, The event is supposed to end at 9."

"I'll be waiting for you outside."

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Looking down at his laptop, Jughead took a quick glance at the page count.

Not bad, he thought, five pages in three and a half hours. He stood up to stretch and took a look at the time. He had a little over a half hour until he had to meet Betty. If he walked over now, he thought, he would just make it.

After saving his paper, Jughead shut off his laptop and walked out into the warm Roman night. Even though he had only seen her earlier today, he couldn't wait to tell Betty about the progress he had made on his paper and get her opinion on some of his main points.

Jughead was coming up on the MACRO when he froze. It was a few minutes past nine and Betty was walking through the museum doors deep in conversation with none other than Jason Blossom.

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Jason smiled as he looked down at the ticket Mr. Lodge had given him earlier. It was nice to have
someone on his side, Jason thought. Knowing Betty's penchant for being punctual, he arrived a few minutes after the start time so he could grab a seat in the back. He arrived just before the lecture and easily spotted Betty in the front row, sketchbook in hand.

Typical, he thought smiling as he found a seat in the back out of her line of vision.

Jason looked at the art installations and displays around him and wrinkled his nose in displeasure. While Jason appreciated a wide range of art styles and techniques he found it hard to find anything pleasing about this particular art movement. Arte Povera literally meant 'Poor Art' and was a style using everyday objects adopted by some artists in the 1960s as a way to show their distaste for the government and cultural establishment.

Ugh, Jason thought to himself while the talk droned on, I've seen more impressive art work under the bridges and in the alleyways of New York City.

As the lecture drew to a close, the docent invited the crowd to take the time to tour the gallery and ask the staff questions. He watched as Betty predictably joined the crowd around the head docent. Jason had decided earlier that he would wait for Betty to come to him, so to occupy himself he went to go talk to one of the gallery staff. They were in the middle of discussing the symbolism of one of the installations when he heard Betty behind him.

"Jason?"

Feigning surprise, Jason turned around to face the beautiful blonde, "Betty, what are you doing here?"

"I was just about to ask you the same thing." Betty said suspiciously.

Jason shrugged, "You know how much I enjoy going to galleries. Martina mentioned the event in passing, when I had asked for the private tour, and she got me a ticket."

"Oh." Betty said, relaxing slightly.

Jason took the opportunity to introduce Betty to the guide he had been conversing with and after a short conversation they moved to the side to look at some of the other works.

"Alone tonight?" Jason asked around the gallery.

"Yes, Mr. Lodge gave me my ticket. And honestly, I don't think Arte Povera is everyone's cup of tea."

No kidding, Jason thought to himself but said, "I think you are right. It's a shame that not everyone can appreciate how everyday objects can be used for artists to express their feelings and express their point of view."

Betty agreed, "It does take a certain level of appreciation and understanding of the time period."

They walked around companionably for awhile looking at the different displays and pausing to give Betty a chance to sketch things that caught her eye. Their conversation stayed safely around art until Jason said, "I wouldn't recommend using this art movement as a means to get Jughead to appreciate modern art."

Jason watched Betty draw in a loud breath at the mention of the beanie wearing boy.

Leave it to Jason to immediately address the elephant in the room, Betty thought. Before she could
say anything Jason started speaking again.
"I'm really sorry about last night."
"Jason, it's fine."
"Betty-"
"It's fine." Betty said interrupting him.
"You didn't seem that happy to see me this morning."
"I was just surprised."
"I could tell."
"Is that why you left before we came out."
"Yeah," he said, trying to gauge her reaction, "I was there to conduct some business with Mr. Lodge and I didn't want to intrude on your personal space."

When she didn't respond, Jason continued. "Look Betts," he said softly, looking her in the eyes, "You do know I would never intentionally cause you any pain."

"Jason, I do know that." Betty said looking down.

Jason paused for a second. "You know, when I found out I was coming to Italy for work," he lied, "I questioned whether I should go and see you. Especially since Cheryl had mentioned you were maybe dating someone else."

"Jason," Betty began, "please- not here."

"But Betty, I need you to understand why I said what I did last night."

"I understand Jason, but please not here."

"Fine," Jason sighed, looking at his watch, "it's 9 o'clock right now, how about we grab some dinner and talk?"

Betty's eyes grew wide and she swore, "It's nine already?"

Jason nodded.

Betty started to head towards the door, "I'm sorry, I have to go. I'm supposed to meet someone."

"Jughead?" Jason asked catching up to her and matching her pace.

"Yes, I agreed to meet him after the lecture."

"I'll walk you out," Jason said, "But Betty, we really do need to talk at some point."

"Jason, I completely agree- but I need some time to collect my thoughts." Betty said as they went through the front doors.

"I'm leaving to go back home early next week." Jason said, looking up at the street and seeing Jughead staring at them angrily from across the street.
He flashed a smile at Jughead before reaching for Betty's arm to get her to stop and turn towards him, "You promise? Before I leave?"

Betty took a deep breath, oblivious to Jughead watching their conversation, "Yes, Jason- I promise."

"Great," Jason said his smile widening before he turned to face Jughead.

"Jughead," Jason said jovially, to the dark haired boy stomping towards them, "So nice to see you again."

"Juggie!" Betty said surprised, "I didn't see you there!"

"Jason," Jughead said curtly, coming to stand by the pair and putting his arm around Betty, "I didn't realize you would be here tonight."

Jason shrugged, "It was a nice surprise to run into Betty. I should head back to my hotel, I have a busy day ahead of me tomorrow. I'll see you both around."

After Jughead and Betty had walked out of ear shot, Jughead turned to Betty his eyes flashing angrily, "What the hell was that about?"

Betty surprised by the anger in Jughead's tone, took a step back from him saying, "What do you mean?"

"Did you know he was going to be here tonight?"

Betty's eyes grew wide as she followed Jughead's train of thought, "Didn't you hear what Jason just said? We just ran into one another."

"I highly doubt that," Jughead said heatedly, "Betty- it is way too much of a coincidence for him to show up at the same place as you."

"Jughead, he got the ticket from the Concierge desk. They recommended it to him when they found out about his interest in art."

"So he says, but isn't it weird that he had breakfast with Mr. Lodge this morning and somehow he's at the same exhibit as you?"

Betty laughed, "You think Mr. Lodge is scheming to have Jason and I run into one another?"

"Maybe," Jughead said, "I had a feeling that Mr. Lodge didn't like me."

"You are being ridiculous!" Betty said, "Just because he was grilling you a little bit doesn't mean he dislikes you!"

"Betty it totally makes sense! Why would he only have one ticket to the gallery?"

"Jughead, he said he got the ticket from a client."

"Betty-"

"Juggie- you are being paranoid and letting your imagination runaway from you. Are you going to waste our time together arguing or can we have a nice night and just enjoy each other's company?"

Jughead drew a deep breath in, "Fine, I'll drop it."
"Good," Betty said.

"It's just that Jason is driving me crazy. I don't know if I can take any more surprises from him."

"Again, babe- you are being paranoid."

"Maybe, but you are right. I don't want to waste my breath talking about him for another minute." Jughead said, as they walked in the direction of the Piazza Borghese, unaware that Jason, tucked in alleyway, had overheard the conversation.
"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;  
It is the green-ey'd monster, which doth mock  
The meat it feeds on."

- William Shakespeare, Othello

"First off, I look like a penguin. And second, It's 90 degrees outside, I'm going to melt in this goddamn tuxedo. Why did I let Veronica talk me into this?"

Jughead looked up amused from the kitchen, where he was making dinner. Archie was standing in the middle of their common room fidgeting in a tuxedo.

"How in the hell did you get out of going again?" Archie grumbled.

"I have a paper due Friday. Remember?"

"Bullshit!" Archie said, "I saw your face when Veronica mentioned the words 'opera' and 'tuxedos'."

"Yeah," Jughead agreed, "I'm not going to lie, I could have tolerated sitting through La bohème, but there's no way in hell you were going to get me to wear a tux for that."

"Veronica said that for the opera her family only does 'black tie'." Archie sighed.

"I'm sorry man," Jughead chuckled, "As much as I'd like to see Betty today, you won't get me in one of those. But better you than me."

"You didn't have any 'Betty-time' today?" Archie asked surprised.

Jughead shook his head, "Between class, this damn paper, and the girls prepping for the Opera our schedules didn't match."

"Prepping for the opera?"

"Betty said they needed to go shopping for dresses to wear for tonight."

"Seriously?"

"Yup."

"Girls." Archie said rolling his eyes, "So come meet us after."

"Nah," Jughead said, "To be honest, I'm not really in the mood to see Veronica's dad tonight."

"You still think he orchestrated Jason and Betty meeting at the MACRO yesterday?" Archie asked skeptically.

"Yeah, I don't know- it's a feeling I have."
"Ok, I get Jason being a little shit but Mr. Lodge?" Archie asked before getting distracted by the hamburger Jughead had in front of him.

"That looks good." Archie said his mouth watering.

Jughead raised his burger to his mouth and took a big bite, "It's not the same as Pop's bacon double cheeseburger but it will have to do."

Archie eyed Jughead's burger hungrily, "How about you make me one to go?"

"And have you ruin your tuxedo?" Jughead asked, "I wouldn't dare inflict Veronica's wrath. I'll make you one tomorrow."

"Fine." Archie grumbled and looked at his phone, "Ugh. I need to go downstairs anyway. Veronica's sending a car to pick me up. It's your last chance to join us..."

"But what would I wear?" Jughead asked flippantly.

Archie shot a mock glare at his friend, before heading out the door.

*** *** ***

Archie stood in the main hall of the Teatro Dell'Opera, drinking a flute of sparkling wine, sandwiched between Veronica and Betty listening to Mr. Lodge talk about the history of La Bohème.

Kevin seemed to be in his element tonight dressed in a tuxedo and admiring the dresses on all the attendees. Archie had to admit that the girls all looked stunning in their formal evening wear. Veronica was stunning in a deep red sequined gown.

Archie who stood fussing with his collar, let his mind drift a bit from the conversation when Betty turned towards him and said, "Those aren't very comfortable are they?"

"Huh?" Archie asked, turning towards Betty.

"Tuxedos." Betty said looking at him sympathetically, "They aren't very comfortable, are they?"

Archie shrugged, "They are okay. I think it's the way I tied my bow tie but I feel like it's strangling me."

"It does look a little off, mind if I give it a try?"

"Be my guest- it can't get any worse." Archie offered.

"My dad," Betty said reaching up to undo his tie, "hates tuxedos, he calls them monkey suits. Unfortunately for him, my mom likes formal events."

"So what does he do to make it more tolerable?"

"He invested in his own tux." Betty continued as she re-tied his bow tie. "He amortized the cost and figured out in the long run it would save him money, plus it was created for his specific measurements. But I know that solution doesn't work for everyone. How does that feel?" She asked giving it one final adjustment.

Archie stretched his neck around, "That is much better. Thank you. How did you learn to do that?"
"My dad taught me at a young age. It was my job to help him and my brother with their ties."

"It came in handy tonight. Thanks again."

"How's Jughead's paper coming along?" Betty asked.

"Well, I think. He said he was over halfway done."

"That's great," Betty said wistfully.

Archie flashed her a smile. "I wish he was here too, at the very least it's someone to commiserate about having to wear these things with." Archie said, waving at his attire.

Betty was about to respond when they heard a voice come up from behind them.

"I'm sorry I'm so late, I rushed over as soon as I finished my call with New York."

Turning around Archie was surprised to come face to face with Jason Blossom and judging by the look on Betty's face she was surprised. Archie caught Betty and Veronica exchange a puzzled look.

"Jason, my boy," Mr. Lodge boomed, "I'm so glad you could join us."

Mrs. Lodge looked at Jason in surprise as he went to greet her, "Jason, what a nice surprise. Hiram, you didn't mention that Jason was going to join us tonight."

"Yeah dad," Veronica added looking at her father suspiciously.

"I invited Jason to join us when Jughead said he couldn't go. I didn't want the ticket to go to waste." Hiram waved over one of the servers who was passing around the glasses of sparkling wine and grabbed one for Jason. Raising his glass in the air, Mr. Lodge, "To a wonderful night in Rome with friends and loved ones."

Did Mr. Lodge just wink at Jason?, The heat and the alcohol must be playing tricks on my brain. Archie thought until he heard Mr. Lodge say, "It's so nice to have someone who appreciates the arts here with us tonight. Now Jason, doesn't Betty look fantastic in that dress."

Jason gave Betty, who was dressed in a floor length black halter gown, an admiring glance and said, "Well all the ladies look fantastic this evening."

Archie could feel the blonde tense up beside him as Jason came to stand on the other side of her.

"You look amazing Betts," Jason said complimenting her, "But then again, you always do."

Archie inwardly rolled his eyes at Jason's compliment.

"Thanks," Betty said warily, "Why didn't you mention last night that you were coming?"

"It completely slipped my mind until Mr. Lodge sent me my ticket this morning."

Betty was about to say something when the lights flashed and chimes played signaling that people should take their seats. Hiram looked at the group around him, "Shall we?" He asked, before turning and leading the way to their seats.

"Hey Ronnie," Archie said softly, pulling her back a bit from the rest of the group.

"Archiekins?" Veronica asked.
"This is going to sound weird- but what's going on between your dad and Jason?"

"I was just wondering the same thing," Veronica said. Walking together into their private box, they witnessed Mr. Lodge orchestrating the seating so that Jason sat between him and Betty. Veronica opted to sit on the other side of Betty, while Archie chose a seat behind Veronica which gave him the perfect angle to observe Jason.

Although Archie appreciated the technical aspects of the Opera, he wasn't a huge fan. He wasn't sure if he was half grateful or just plain pissed about the distraction Jason provided. Archie wasn't sure if it was because he had prior knowledge or whether Jason didn't really care who knew anymore but it was obvious that he still had very strong feelings for Betty. Jason divided his time between watching Betty's reaction to the Opera or leaning over and sharing his thoughts during the pause between numbers.

At one point, Jason put his hand over hers, but Betty shifted in her seat in a way that forced him to retract his hand. Which was good because Archie had been about to get up and smack Jason's hand away. By the time intermission rolled around, Archie was thankful since minding Betty was proving exhausting.

He excused himself from the group and found a quiet nook to call his best friend.

Jughead picked up on the third ring. "Arch, the opera must be all kinds of fun if you are taking the time to call me now." Jughead joked.

"Jug," Archie said, "You were right."

"Arch?" Jughead asked now on edge by the tone in his friend's voice, "I was right about what?"

"Mr. Lodge. He gave Jason your ticket."

"What?" Jughead asked, "He's there?"

"Yeah," Archie said, "I thought you'd want to know."

"That bastard!" Jughead swore.

"I've been keeping an eye out on him for you."

"Thanks Arch. How much longer is left?"

"We are at intermission now and I think the second half is 60 minutes long. We are heading to the Lodge's for cocktails after- why don't you meet us there?"

"Great Arch, I'll see you soon." Jughead said.

*** *** ***

After hanging up, Jughead tried to work on his paper again, but he couldn't focus, so he started pacing around his flat. Thankfully he had churned out another 5 pages throughout the day.

Goddamn it, he thought, I should have known that this was a possibility.

He alternated between cursing Mr. Lodge and feeling guilty about it since he was also the reason Betty was in Italy for the summer.
Lacking the distractions to keep his mind occupied, he left his flat to get some fresh air. The walk helped soothe him and eased his mind, so he took a longer route to the Piazza Borghese.

When the Lodge's building came into view, he could see their party walking up the stairs. Approaching them, he felt his anger drain away when he laid eyes on Betty. She had on a long black halter dress that hugged every curve of her body. A long slit on the right hand side of her dress showed off her impossibly long, lean legs. She wore her hair pinned in loose waves to one side and a bright red lipstick which completed her sexy look.

She had been walking next to Veronica when he saw Jason reach out for her hand and pull her back. Out of their direct line of vision, Jughead watched as Betty startled walked over to see what Jason wanted. He was in ear shot as he watched Jason take a step closer to Betty.

"Hey you two, am I interrupting something?" Jughead called out, walking up to them. Jughead felt a real smile spread across his face when he saw Betty's eyes light up in recognition.

Jughead saw Jason turn towards him, his expression darkening at the sight of him.

"So nice of you to join us." Jason said insincerely.

"Jugger!" Betty said, throwing her arms around his neck for a quick hug, "What are you doing here?"

"Did you miss me, Beautiful?" Jughead asked, putting his arms around her. Noticing Jason's scowl out of the corner of his eyes, he pulled her closer and kissed her full on the lips. When their kiss ended, he kept one arm around her waist.

Betty looked up at him, her cheeks flushed from their kiss, her green eyes sparkling, "I didn't think I'd get to see you today."

"Yeah, Archie said you were working on your final paper." Jason said in a sullen tone.


"Oh stop it," Betty said rolling her eyes but clearly enjoying the attention.

"I'm not kidding. You look like a hybrid of Grace Kelly and Lana Turner- only sexier." Jughead said.

"Funny, I would have said Ingrid Bergman and Lauren Bacall." Jason said inserting himself into the conversation."Shall we head upstairs? We don't want to keep Mr. Lodge waiting."

"Funny, you didn't seem to have a problem keeping Mr. Lodge waiting when you kept Betty back to talk to you right now," Jughead shot back.

"Jugger," Betty said in a conciliatory tone, putting her hand on his arm.

Jason threw Jughead an angry look before stomping towards the door and saying, "I'll see you guys inside."

Jughead waited for the door to close behind Jason before turning back to Betty.

"What was that all about?" He asked.

"I don't know," Betty said, "You got here before he had a chance to say anything."
"Betty, I'm sorry but I really don't like him."

"Jughead, is that why you are here?"

"No," Jughead lied, "I needed a study break and I wanted to see you."

"Ok, because I can handle Jason."

"He really pushes my buttons."

"I can see that," Betty said, "I should talk to him already."

"Betts, I don't think that is a good idea."

"Jug, I think I really need to."

"But I don't agree." Jughead said stubbornly.

Betty rolled her eyes and let out a deep sigh.

"Have I mentioned how happy I am to see you here?" Betty said, trying to change the subject. She pulled his arms around her so that they circled her waist.

"Betts, don't change the subject."

"I'm not changing the subject, I'm merely stating a fact," Betty said standing on tip toe to kiss him, her hands moving up to caress some locks at the base of his neck.

Jughead felt the tension within him dissipate at her touch.

"If I had known what I was missing," Jughead said waving at her and her dress, "I may have actually donned a tuxedo and joined you tonight." As Jughead ran his hands over her dress from her hips to her bottom, he did a double take.

"Uh Betts," Jughead asked, his eyes widening.

"Yes Juggie?" Betty asked, a coy smile on her face.

"Ummm, are you wearing any underwear?"

Betty shook her head, a mischievous smile on her face, "I didn't want any panty lines."

"Holy hell, Betty! How about we just go back to my place and skip the party?"

"Jughead, we can't. They are expecting us to join them."

"You better make it up to me," Jughead grumbled.

"I promise." Betty said giving him another kiss before pulling him into the building.

*** *** ***

Jason scowled at the pair seated together on the terrace. He had been hoping for a chance to speak to Betty privately and was frustrated by the dark haired boy's arrival. Predictably, Jughead hadn't left Betty's side since they came upstairs and was now sitting with his arm draped possessively over her knee. He fumed inwardly at the sight of Jughead's arm draped on Betty's bare leg and was having a
hard time focusing on his conversation with Mr. Lodge.

A little before one in the morning, Jason excused himself to go back to his hotel and was surprised when Jughead said he would walk down with him.

They walked together in silence to the elevator, down through the lobby and out the front door, the tension between them palpable.

Once outside and a short distance from the Lodge residence, Jughead finally turned to Jason and in a low tone laced with anger, "I know what you are up to."

Jason raised an eyebrow and smirked at the beanie wearing boy, "I don't know what you are talking about."

"That's such bull and you know it."

"I'm afraid, I'm still not following your train of thought," Jason said flippantly.

"You expect me to believe that you coincidentally just showed up at the MACRO yesterday? And the Opera tonight?"

"Coincidence has nothing to do with it." Jason drawled, "You chose not to go to the Opera tonight and Hiram Lodge, who is a client of mine kindly offered me your seat. And about the MACRO, why isn't it conceivable that an interest that I share with Betty bring us together?"

Jason paused and studied the dark haired boy who stood scowling opposite him, "Or maybe you are right Jones. Maybe it was a coincidence. Maybe the universe is conspiring to bring us together." Jason said mockingly.

"She is with me now." Jughead said livid.

"For now," Jason said insolently.

Jughead counted to ten twice, in an effort to keep his rage under wraps. Once he was in control of his emotions Jughead said, "Think what you want Blossom, but Betty is with me now. She chose me." Jughead paused and said a smirk on his lips, "And tomorrow, when she is making love to me, I guarantee it won't be your name she'll be calling out."

Jason turned bright red but before he could say anything Jughead continued, "It's been a pleasure, Jason. But you'll have to excuse me, I have a paper to finish."

Jughead promptly turned around and started walking away.

"You'll be sorry Jones," Jason yelled at Jughead's retreating figure.
"It made you wonder: How much of our lives was just luck or good timing, and how much was actually choice? How could it be that tiny serendipitous events could change everything? And if lucky events could change everything, could minor mishaps have the same power?"

— Aditi Khorana, Mirror in the Sky

"Hello. Am I speaking with Elizabeth Cooper?" An unfamiliar voice asked on the other end of the line.

"Speaking."

Betty was just starting to stir from her nap, when she heard her phone buzzing. The 212 number that popped up looked familiar, so she had answered the phone.

"Elizabeth," the voice continued, "My name is Kristi Warner and I'm calling from Planned Parenthood."

Betty felt her hand heartbeat quicken. Finally, she thought, news on my application for the D.C. internship.

"I run our corporate internship program and I wanted to talk to you about your application. Is now a good time?"

"Of course," Betty said, sitting up on the bed and crossing her long legs underneath her.

"First off, I just want to confirm that you are applying for a position during the upcoming spring semester."

"That is correct," Betty confirmed.

"Wonderful. Elizabeth," Kristi continued, "I must say that we were very impressed with your resumé and your letters of recommendation."

"Thank you," Betty said.

"Now I know you applied for a position in our D.C office, but we actually feel that your talents would be better served elsewhere."

"Oh," Betty said, feeling slightly disappointed.

"Did you know that your Alpha house chapter this year raised the most money out of your whole national organization? In fact, your chapter fundraised double what other college organizations did for us this last school year and from what I understand, we have you to thank."

"Thank you, I'm flattered but I didn't do it all alone."

"Of course not, but you led and organized the effort. So, based on your resumé and accomplishments, we actually feel your talents would be better utilized under our donor cultivation group."
"Donor cultivation?" Betty asked, "Your fundraising arm?"

"Correct. The position would entail assisting the team with fundraisers, helping Planned Parenthood build and maintain relationships, as well as helping us create fundraising programs that can be implemented at the local level."

"So a lot of what I did at Alpha House?"

"Yes. Is this something that interests you?"

"Definitely. But this position isn't in D.C?" Betty asked, slightly disappointed. She had been looking forward to being within driving distance to Jughead in New York.

"I'm afraid not, your placement would be here in our headquarters in Lower Manhattan."

"Excuse me?" Betty said in shock, "In New York?"

"Is this a problem?"

"No, no, not at all!" Betty said excited, "That's even better."

"Great!" Kristi said sounding pleased, "I believe Stanford has an exchange program with Columbia University, so you'll have to start the process to study in New York for the semester but we will contact your advisor, because you will be getting course credit for the position. How does that sound to you, Elizabeth?"

"It sounds fantastic."

"I'll send you an email with an internship agreement/contract by tomorrow. I just need you to sign it and return it to me as soon as possible so we can get the ball rolling." Kristi continued with some other administrative information before hanging up.

After a quick call to her parents to share the good news, Betty bounced happily from the room, in search of Kevin and Veronica. She found Veronica lounging on the terrace and lazily turning through the latest issue of 'Vogue'.

"Veronica!" Betty squealed plopping herself down next to her friend on the chaise lounge, "I got the Planned Parenthood internship!"

Veronica sat up and hugged her, "That's great! So when do you move to D.C."

"I don't. I didn't get the position with their policy and political strategy office."

"You didn't?"

"No they want me to intern with their donor cultivation team". Betty said, a wide grin spreading over her face, "I'll be based in their New York Headquarters!"

Veronica's eyes grew wide, "Seriously? That is awesome! I am totally coming to visit you every month. Ooohhh and you'll be in the same city as Jughead for a whole semester."

"I know!" Betty said bursting with excitement, "I can't wait to surprise him!"

"He'll be thrilled Betts! But you also realize that you'll be in the same city as Cheryl and Jason too."

"I was just thinking about that," Betty said, "I think it's time that Jason and I have a real heart-to-heart
"talk. I really shouldn't avoid it anymore."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. Although I don't love him the way he would like me to, I do care deeply about his happiness and well-being." Betty said, "I haven't been completely transparent with my feelings to him and it's given him false hope."

"Yeah, I can see why you think that. What will you tell him?"

"What I should have told him from the very beginning."

*** *** ***

Jason was in the middle of processing Mr. Lodge's account when he heard his phone buzzing. He looked down to see Betty's picture smiling back at him on his screen.

"Hey Betts, what can I do for you?" Jason said.

"Hi Jason. I know we need to talk, so I was wondering- are you free after work tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow? Wednesday? Sure. My last meeting ends at 3:30."

"Great," Betty said, "Are you familiar with the Villa Borghese Gardens?"

"Yes."

"Let's meet at the Temple of Aesculapius at 4:30?"

"I'll be there."

"Thanks Jason. See you tomorrow."

*** *** ***

After hanging up with Jason, Betty started to pack her overnight bag. She was thinking about the best way to approach the topic of Jason to Jughead, when she noticed the beanie wearing boy calling her.

"Hi Juggie," Betty said picking up the phone, "I was just getting my stuff together to head over."

"About that Betts-

"Oh no," Betty said, sitting down on the bed, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. It's just my paper."

"It's going well?"

"Very- I've hit a groove and I think I can get this done by tomorrow."

"That's great," Betty said.

"It is. But it means I'll have to take a rain check on tonight."
"I understand. There will be other nights."

"I guess," Jughead said, "But I head home in about two weeks."

Betty smiled thinking about her semester in New York, "There will be lots of other nights, Juggie. I promise."

"So you're not mad that I have to cancel?"

"Not at all, can at least I stop by and bring you dinner?" Betty asked.

"I'd like that."

"Great, I'll grab some pizzas from Da Pasquale and head over in about two hours." Betty smiled. Surely pizza from Jughead's favorite place would soften him up so she could talk about her upcoming meeting with Jason.

*** *** ***

Jughead opened the door and let out a loud laugh at the sight in front of him. Betty was standing in his doorway balancing three pizza boxes and one large brown paper bag.

"Are you feeding an army?" He asked quickly taking the boxes from her and setting them down on the dining room table.

"I couldn't decide, plus everything smelled good and I was starving." Betty said following him in.

"What did you get?" Jughead asked, salivating in anticipation.

"I got a Margherita pizza, a prosciutto one and one Amatriciana and there is some tiramisu and cannoli in the bag."

"I should just let you order all the time." Jughead said sitting down, opening a box and pulling out two slices of the prosciutto pizza. "Mmmm, why does pizza taste so much better here?" Jughead asked in between bites.

"My mom says it's the tomatoes." Betty said taking a big bite out of a slice of the Amatriciana pizza.

"Do you know how happy I am that you aren't afraid of eating?" Jughead said.

"Why would I be afraid of eating?" Betty asked.

"I've gone on dates with girls where we go to dinner and they order a small salad and dressing on the side and that's it. I mean what's the point of going out to eat?"

Betty laughed, "I couldn't agree more. So, are you almost done with your paper?"

"I'm close," Jughead said. I just need to tie all my main points together and move onto my conclusion."

They sat for a few minutes in a companionable silence eating when Jughead said, "I'm really glad you stopped by- I missed you."
"You just saw me last night," Betty said smiling.

"Don't remind me. Speaking of which, don't even try and deny that Mr. Lodge is trying to push you and Jason together."

"Because Mr. Lodge invited him to the Opera?"

"Yes."

"Juggie, does it matter?"

"It does." Jughead said stubbornly,"And he makes me so angry." Jughead said shredding his napkin, "I am done talking about him. So what did you do today?"

"Not much. But about Jason," Betty said about to tell Jughead about her meeting with Jason the next day.

"Don't tell me you had another run-in with him."

"No, but-"

"Good, now let's stop talking about him. I'm sorry I brought him up."

"But," Betty began.

"Seriously, talking about him more is going to give me writer's block."

"But Juggie-" Betty said starting to get frustrated. Jughead walked towards her and put his finger on her lips in an effort to silence her.

"Why waste our time talking about some jackass, when we can spend our time doing this." Jughead said leaning down to kiss her neck, his hands moving to the hem of her t-shirt.

"Juggie," Betty said feeling her resolve weaken as Juggie's fingers moved up under her shirt, "don't you have a paper you need to finish?"

"But I want to take full advantage of your visit."

"Juggie!" Betty said trying again, "I thought you didn't want to be distracted." She gasped in pleasure as Jughead's hands brushed against the lace cups of her bra.

"Just shut up and kiss me already, woman!" Jughead said pressing his lips firmly against hers, his hands moving to undo her bra clasp.

The sound of the door opening caused them to break apart abruptly. Archie, walking in and taking note of his friends quickly attempting to adjust their clothing.

"Impeccable timing Archie," Jughead grumbled.

"Am I interrupting something?" Archie asked amused.

"Yes," said Jughead dryly, adjusting his beanie "But its probably a good thing. I should be focusing on my paper instead of Mata Hari over here."

"Mata Hari?" Betty asked, raising one eyebrow.
"Sorry guys," Archie said sheepishly, "I was just going to drop off my guitar before heading to Ronnie's."

"It's fine. And actually that works out perfectly because you can walk Betty home." Jughead said.

Betty looked up at Jughead, "I was hoping to stay and talk with you a little longer."

"Betts- I know, but this is perfect. You can walk with Archie and I won't have to worry about you going home on your own." Jughead said.

"But-" Betty said.

Jughead pulled Betty close and said softly, "I'd love to have you stay longer but I really should work on my paper and as I've just demonstrated- I have absolutely no self-control when it comes to you."

"I get it Juggie but-"

"Hey, I hate to interrupt" Archie said loudly, -"But I'm already running late to pick up Ronnie. Betty are you coming with me?"

Jughead pulled Betty in for a quick kiss and gently pushed her towards Archie, "C'mon go with Arch and thanks for making sure I didn't go hungry. I promise I'll call you tomorrow when I'm done."

Betty hesitated for a moment before a final push from Jughead, made her follow Archie out the door.
A Resolution

“Closure. We all seek it. We seek the end of things and also the beginning of new things. Those things we can’t find closure on, they haunt us. They pop up in our dreams, and creep into our thoughts in idle moments - like a mind bender that’s beyond our mental capacity, a mystery that just won’t be solved.”

- Lisa Unger

Jason spotted her immediately, her blonde hair practically glowing in the late afternoon sun. She was dressed simply in jean shorts and a white button down shirt. A short distance from the Temple of Asclepius, Betty stood watching tourists maneuver their boats on the man-made lake. He paused for a moment, to admire the blonde beauty before calling out, "Hi, stranger."

At the sound of his voice, Betty turned around and flashed him a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

"For you," Jason said handing her a single long stemmed red rose and bending low to kiss her.

Betty took the rose and turned her head in time so that Jason's lips only brushed her cheek.

"Jason," Betty sighed, twirling the rose in her hand, "I asked you to meet me here so we could talk. This isn't a date."

"I understand that," Jason said, "But you know me, I just wanted to bring you something. " Jason looked around for a moment and said, "You know this place reminds me a little of the Pulgas Water Temple."

Betty looked around, "I can see why you'd think that."

"Remember that time we biked over there to have a picnic?" Jason said smiling at the memory.

"Yes," Betty said, "That was before we started dating."

They stood quietly for a moment, watching the boats float by, before Betty broke the silence, "I got the Planned Parenthood internship."

"That's great!" Jason said, "I knew you would."

"Thanks." Betty said, "I was starting to get a little anxious about it."

"They would have been fools to reject you. So, when do you move to D.C.?"

"I won't be moving to D.C. They want me in their New York office."

Jason's eyes lit up, "New York? That's great, Betty."

"Yes, it is. But not for the reasons you are thinking." Betty said, looking Jason straight in the eye.

"What do you mean?" Jason asked.
"Jason, I'm not stupid." Betty began, "I know what you've been up to."

"I don't know what you're talking about..." Jason said avoiding eye contact.

"You being in Rome? The 'coincidental' run-ins we've had..." Betty said, making quote marks with her fingers for emphasis.

"Betty, I told you- I'm here for work."

"Really? Because haven't you been spending most of your time in Milan? Why would they base you here in Rome instead of there?"

Jason shrugged.

"And why didn't you just tell me you were going to be at the Opera? I had just seen you the night before at the MACRO? It's not like you to just forget things."

"Betty-"

"I actually believed that you had moved on." Betty interrupted, "Or at least I really, really wanted to believe that you were moving on from us and that you were interested in getting to know Jughead."

"Betts-"

"Jason, no more lies, ok? No more stretching the truth. No more games. I think I've been extremely tolerant of your behavior because I know your heart is generally in the right place- regardless of how misguided some of your actions may have been."

"Misguided?"

"And," Betty continued, ignoring Jason's question, "I have given you the benefit of the doubt because I think highly of you- and I value our relationship- as friends. But I can't pretend that what you are doing is okay anymore. It is starting to affect my relationship with Jughead."

"That's why you brought me here?" Jason asked angrily, "For Jughead? To talk about your relationship with him? Did he send you to tell me to lay off? Can't he defend himself?"

"He didn't ask me to do anything." Betty sighed, "And he actually doesn't know I'm talking to you right now."

"How nice of him to let you out of his sight for a minute." Jason said sarcastically.

"It's not like that. Stop." Betty said shaking her head, "I didn't ask you to meet me here to talk about Jughead."

"What then?"

"I want to talk about you and me. But first, I want to make it clear that whatever is going on between you and Jughead ends now."

"You are joking right? For fuck's sake Betty- please put yourself in my shoes. Did you really expect me to welcome him with open arms? 'Why hello Jughead, it's so nice to meet you. I'm so glad you are fucking my ex-girlfriend.'"

"Jason, please don't be crass." Betty said angrily.
"Betty- what did you expect? Do you know how much it hurt when I found out that you were with someone else? That you had fallen for someone else? I was so excited to come to Rome to see you. How do you think I felt when I had to watch you sing 'Can't Help Falling in Love' to some guy that's not me? I don't think you ever did any grand romantic gestures like that when we were dating."

"Jason," Betty said, reaching for his arm to pacify him.

"It fucking kills me seeing you with Jughead. To have to watch him kiss you or put his arm around you. To see him doing things that I should be doing with you. Every time I see you guys together I just want to punch his fucking lights out. It's not fair." Jason ranted, pulling away from her touch and taking deep breaths to calm himself.

Betty sat quietly watching him, her expression pained, "You are right Jason. It's not fair. I haven't been fair to you at all."

"Betty?" Jason asked surprised. He hadn't expected her to be so quick to agree with him.

Taking a deep breath Betty said, "I owe you an apology. When you started talking about getting engaged after graduation, I didn't really handle things the way I should have. I was scared and instead of dealing with it directly, I ran away from it instead."

"Betty," Jason said, "Of course you were scared. Getting engaged is a big step."

Betty shook her head. "It is. But that's not why I was scared. That was the first time I truly understood the extent of your feelings for me. And it's the first time I realized that I didn't feel as strongly about 'us' as you did."

"But I thought we were great together."

"We had a lot of fun, Jason. But I never thought you'd want to continue dating me after graduation."

"You didn't think I was serious about you?"

"I knew you loved me, but I didn't think we were anywhere close to being engaged."

"So what did you think was going to happen when I graduated?"

"That you would want to just be friends."

"Seriously?"

"I didn't think you'd want to have a long distance relationship. I still have two years left at Stanford, maybe more if I get my Masters in Political Science."

"So why'd you agree to a break then?"

Betty sighed. "That's the thing... I shouldn't have. You were so upset and I wanted to spare your feelings. Of course, I ended up doing the exact opposite of what I wanted to do."

"Which is?"

"I led you on to believe that my feelings could change."

"Betty, here's what I don't understand." Jason said running one hand through his hair frustrated, "You don't want to be with me but you are willing to take a chance on a long distance relationship with someone you just met? How can you develop such strong feelings for Jughead? You've only
known him for a month or two - at the most. Didn't you - don't you love me?"

Betty took a deep sigh, "That's why I wish I had done this sooner. Jason, I wouldn't have been in a relationship with you for so long if I didn't love you. And I do love you - as a friend. But I'm not in love with you."

"But you are 'in love' with Jughead?" Jason spat out bitterly.

"Jason, this is about you and me. Let's leave Jughead out of this, please."

"But it is relevant to the conversation," Jason insisted.

"No, Jason, it's not. I've been trying to tell you for months now, before Jughead came into the picture, that I don't love you that way."

"But you love Jughead that way?" Jason asked anguish, "What did I do wrong?"

"Jason, you didn't do anything wrong."

"Then why don't you feel that way about me?"

"I wish I could answer that Jason, but I don't know why." Betty paused, her expression thoughtful, "I don't think we really ever understand why we fall in love with some people but not others."

"Betty, please think about what we had for a minute. You said we had fun. We get along well, don't we? Why isn't that enough?" Jason pleaded.

"Jason, we do get along well, really well," Betty said softly, "but we're better suited to be friends and not lovers."

"So whatever is missing between us, isn't missing between you and Jughead?"

"I need you to know that it was never my intention to fall for someone else." Betty said avoiding the question, her eyes sad as she looked up at Jason, "I tried to fight it."

"You did a pretty shitty job," Jason said gruffly making Betty burst out laughing.

"It's not funny Betts-" Jason said, trying to fight a smile.

"Jason," Betty said, her tone serious, "you were an amazing boyfriend. Really. Any girl would love to be with you."

"But not you," Jason said with a sad smile on his face.

"Please," Betty said dryly, "You'll see. There are much better girls out there other than me."

Jason leaned over and put one hand over hers, "Maybe, but in my heart you'll always be the one."

Betty turned towards Jason and stood on her tip toes and kissed his cheek, whispering into his ear, "I am sorry that I can't be that girl for you. I still want you in my life as a friend, when you are ready."

"If that's the only option you are giving me..." Jason asked, pulling Betty in for a big bear hug. They stood holding onto one another for a few minutes, allowing this shift between them to sink in before letting go of one another.
As their hug ended, Jason kept one arm draped around Betty's shoulder saying, "Betts, I'm going to need some time. This isn't easy for me."

"I know. Oh! And I almost forgot, "Betty said moving out from under his arm and reaching into her bag. She pulled out a red leather box and held it out to him, "I believe this belongs to you."

Jason took a deep breath and took the Cartier box from her. He opened the box and looked at the bracelet sadly, "I guess this is really it."

"It's the end of one chapter, yes. But I'll always be your friend."

They stood in silence for a few minutes before Jason asked, "And Jughead really makes you happy?"

"He does."

"If things don't work out with Jughead, you know where to reach me." Jason said only half joking.

"Jason," Betty said exasperated.

"You can't fault me for trying."

"You aren't the worst." Betty said affectionately. "Goodbye Jason," she said, giving Jason another quick kiss on the cheek before walking away.
Warning: These next two chapters will be very angsty. I'm legitimately scared to post this but know that I have a plan and that Bughead will always be endgame.

"My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy told the alchemist one night as they looked up at the moonless sky.

"Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams..."

- Paulo Coehlo, from The Alchemist

"Forsythe, I am impressed." Gladys Jones said over the phone, "I really enjoyed your insights on how Dante would have modernized the use of the deadly sins, if he had written 'The Inferno' today. I thought your argument was completely on point."

"Do you really think so?"

"This is definitely one of your best papers."

"Thanks mom for the second opinion," Jughead said stifling a yawn, "I kind of pulled an all nighter to just finish it already."

"You must be exhausted."

"Yeah, I'm not really thinking straight."

"You know I'm always happy to help out." Gladys said, "It must be such a relief to have it out of the way. You just have to do your bibliography and you are done."

"Yeah, that won't take too long." Jughead said, "I'm going to save that for tomorrow."

"I can't believe you'll be home soon. We can go to Pop's for your homecoming dinner."

"That's great mom."

"I know how much you miss his bacon double cheeseburgers."

"Yeah, I can't wait." Jughead said quietly.

"Honey, what's wrong? I thought that going to Pop's would make you happy."

"It's not that mom."
"Then what is it?" Gladys asked before the realization of what was bugging Jughead hit her. "Oh! I understand now."

"What mom?"

"How are you and Betty doing?"

"She's fine," Jughead said hesitantly, "She's good... We're good... I think."

"Jughead?"

"It's going to be hard not being able to see her every day."

"But haven't you guys talked about visiting each other? And honey, you'll see her in October at her sister's wedding."

"I guess, but it's not the same mom..." Jughead paused, "Mom... Maybe it's a mistake trying to date long distance."

"Did she hear about that internship in D.C. yet? If she gets that she'll only be a few hours away by train or bus."

"No, she hasn't heard yet."

"Honey, I'm sure it will work out."

"I guess."

"Forsythe, I know you. And I know that this scares you- a lot. And it won't be easy being far away from someone you care about, but you need to try and not worry about things that are beyond your control. If you guys really care about each other and it sounds like you both do, you will find a way to make your relationship work."

"Thanks mom... You know me well."

"I was just thinking, we would love to meet her. Why don't you invite her to spend some time with us on her way back to California? She can stay in our guest bedroom."

"Really?"

"Of course, you know I'm being selfish- JB and I are dying to meet her. So, will you ask her?"

"Only if you promise to stop calling me Forsythe in front of her."

"We'll see." Gladys chuckled before saying goodbye and hanging up.

Jughead sat staring at his phone for a moment, thinking about what his mother said. He was starting to feel anxious about their impending separation. While he never doubted his love for her, the idea of being separated by thousands of miles scared him. Jughead was a confident and assertive individual in most aspects of his life, but when it came to Betty, he was shy and hesitant. The strength of his feeling for her scared him and their relationship had definitely pushed him way outside his comfort zone.

Jason's arrival especially has unnerved him, as it was a trial he didn't think he'd have to deal with this early in their relationship. Every interaction with Betty's Ex shook his confidence in her feelings for him. It infuriated him that Betty seemed so naive and that she, who was well aware of Jason's
intentions, didn't do more to repel him away. He had wondered more than once if he was in over his head.

His heated exchanges with Jason only helped to fuel his insecurities. And one thing Jason said bothered him more than he liked to admit.

"When you date a girl like Betty, you get used to the fact that there is a long line of guys waiting to take your place."

He sighed and tried to push his anxieties to the back of his mind.

He looked at his watch, it was a quarter to 4. He considered taking a quick nap, but the idea of inviting Betty to visit his home was starting to grow on him. In his mind he could picture Betty at Pop's drinking a milkshake, or sitting around the dinner table talking and laughing with his family.

Stanford didn't start classes until late September, having Betty come and meet his parents sounded like a great idea. His excitement increasing at the thought of Betty visiting Riverdale, Jughead shut down his computer and left to go find Betty.

*** *** ***

Arriving at the Lodge Villa, Jughead ran into Kevin who just leaving the building, backpack in hand.

"Hey Jughead," Kevin called out, "was Betty expecting you?"

"No," Jughead said, shaking Kevin's hand, "I wanted to surprise her. Is she inside?"

Kevin shook his head, "You just missed her. I actually thought she was leaving to meet you."

"Nope, not me. Do you know where she went?"

"Yeah, I overheard her telling Mrs. Lodge that she was going to the Temple of Asclepius at the Villa Borghese."

"Thanks Kevin," Jughead said, "Betty likes to go there sometimes with her sketchbook."

"I'm headed to Bologna for the night with some friends but I'll see you tomorrow night, right? At Archie's student showcase?"

"Definitely, I wouldn't miss the opportunity to support Arch." Jughead said before walking towards the Villa Borghese.

Jughead was almost at the Temple of Asclepius when the sight before him made him stop in his tracks. Standing near the water's edge were Jason and Betty, a long stemmed red rose in her hand, side-by-side, deep in conversation. He stood confused, his mind racing. He knew that their talk was imminent but why hadn't Betty mentioned that it was happening that day? Hadn't he had explicitly asked her to let him know if she was going to see him?

He started walking towards them again until he saw Betty stand on tip toe and kiss Jason. He felt his heart drop to the pit of his stomach as he watched Jason pull her into his arms.

Jughead felt his anger rise at the affection Betty was showing Jason. After everything that Jason had put him through this week - he expected Betty to put him in his place not shower him with hugs and kisses. How could she have forgiven Jason so easily for all his past transgressions?
This is bullshit, he thought and paused. He wondered if he was getting too carried away over nothing. After all Betty wanted to be with him right? But a small voice in the back of his head told him that Betty's actions would only encourage further bad behavior from Jason. This would only embolden Jason to continue to pursue Betty. Jughead didn't think he could deal with having to parry Jason's advances and innuendo any more.

Or what if Betty deep down inside still had feelings for him? Jughead thought, letting his imagination run away with him. Maybe Betty actually enjoyed the attention- which would explain why Betty didn't mind all the coincidental run-ins... He wished he knew what the hell Betty was saying to him. Jughead gave his head a quick shake willing himself to calm down. Another glance at the pair only increased his agitation, as Betty was still in Jason's embrace, an expression of contentment on her face.

Fuck it, he thought, pivoting on his heels and walking quickly back towards the park entrance. He knew he was being irrational but it didn't stop him from being angry at Betty. He needed time to calm down and collect his thoughts.

*** *** ***

Betty hummed to herself as she walked back to the Lodge residence, a quick glance at her phone showed no missed calls or messages. Her conversation with Jason went better than she expected. While Jason didn't get the resolution he was hoping for, Betty was confident that Jason would keep his promises.

She felt a little guilty that she hadn't had a chance to tell Jughead about her meeting with Jason. He had been so adamant about her informing him of any meetings that they had but she was sure that he would understand once he heard about the outcome.

Betty considered calling or texting Jughead, there was so much she wanted to share with him- the Planned Parenthood internship, moving to New York and her talk with Jason. She decided against it though. He promised he would call her and since she didn't want to distract him, she would wait patiently for him to contact her.

*** *** ***

After leaving the Villa Borghese, Jughead had walked around aimlessly before settling at a small table in the Il Calzino Rosso, the bar Archie and he frequented to watch baseball. A few hours later and two beers and four whiskeys in, he was absentmindedly watching the Angels versus Red Sox game on the screen.

He was starting to feel a little lightheaded- thanks to a combination of having had little to eat and sleep, but the whiskey was helping him forget about Jason and Betty. He looked at his watch and noticed that it was almost 8. He was debating whether to get another whiskey or head home when he heard an unfamiliar female voice asking, "So are you an Angels fan or a Red Sox fan?"

Surprised Jughead looked up to see a girl with curly red hair smiling down at him. She looked a little familiar but he couldn't quite place where he had seen her before.

"So are you an Angels fan or a Red Sox fan?" She repeated with a smile.

"Red Sox," Jughead mumbled.
"Same here! I've seen you around. You are Archie Andrews friend aren't you?" The girl asked her eyes flicking back and forth between Jughead and the empty chair next to him.

Jughead nodded.

"My name is Joani- Joani Jumpp. I am in Archie's business and entertainment class. My friends over there," she pointed at the bar, "are Angels fans. Do you mind if I sit down here?"

Jughead wasn't really in the mood for company but he didn't want to appear rude so he nodded.

"Thank you." Joani said sitting down before launching into a rant about the Red Sox most recent line-up. Jughead was only half listening as she droned on about school and classes. After Joani put her hand on his arm for the third time, Jughead finally picked up on the fact that she was flirting with him.

He leaned back in his seat, his head spinning from both the day's events and the whiskey. He took a moment to study the overly chatty girl in front of him. She was cute with long curly red hair. But now that he understood what she was doing, he enjoyed the ego boost. He let his mind wander for a minute when Joani's question brought him back to the present.

"Excuse me?" Jughead asked.

"I was just wondering if you wanted to get another drink."

The last whiskey was starting to really affect his brain, so he shook his head to try and clear the fog in his mind.

"What I really need is to get a cup of coffee," Jughead said.

Joani smiled over at him, "I'll come with you."

Jughead shrugged, "Sure, there is a place I like to go to..." Jughead said standing up and leading the way out the bar.

*** *** ***

Betty was sitting out on the terrance reading and enjoying the warm night. Veronica was out with Archie and Kevin was away for the night.

She took another look at her phone and was surprised that Jughead hadn't reached out to her yet.

Poor guy, she thought, he must be going crazy stuck with his paper.

She checked the clock and decided it wasn't too late for her to walk over and surprise Jughead with some late night treats.
“There is no intensity of love or feeling that does not involve the risk of crippling hurt. It is a duty to take this risk, to love and feel without defense or reserve.”
— William S. Burroughs

"Amore mio!"

"Good evening Antonio," Betty responded smiling.

"Elisabetta, where is Signor Jones? Or maybe you have come to pledge your undying love to me?" Antonio teased.

"Not tonight, Antonio." Betty said smiling, "Signor Jones is working on a paper, so I wanted to surprise him. Can I get some biscotti, Amaretti cookies and a slice of the ricotta cheesecake to go? Oh! And two cappuccinos, please."

"Anything for you, Elisabetta," Antonio said, rushing away to get her order already.

After a few minutes, drinks and treats in hand, Betty set off in the direction of Jughead's flat.

*** *** ***

Jughead's was exhausted and his head throbbing by the time they got to the il Piccolo. Despite the hints he had thrown, Joani hadn't stopped talking the entire walk over. And if that wasn't enough, he had ticked off Antonio.

Antonio had barreled over as soon as he spotted Jughead, bursting with news to share, but paused when he noticed the redhead girl. While speaking in rapid Italian, Antonio threw suspicious glances at Joani who was now clinging to Jughead's arm for dear life. Antonio explained that Betty had just left and was headed to his place with some treats. After Jughead uttered some curt response, Antonio stomped away muttering under his breath. For the first time since he had been coming to that café, Antonio sent another server to attend to their table.

When their coffee came, Jughead studied his drink closely wondering if Antonio was angry enough to spit in his cappuccino when he felt his phone vibrate. A quick look at his screen showed a text from Betty.

*Stopped by to surprise you but you must be out... Left some treats outside your door. xoxo B*

Jughead felt a pang of guilt, but quickly brushed it away distracted by Joani's incessant chatter. After about an hour, Jughead was tired of Joani's company and still smarting from Antonio's snub. He tried
to excuse himself and head home but unfortunately, since Joani was heading in the same direction he couldn't dissuade her from tagging along.

He was in front of his flat, trying to convince Joani to go home when Archie and Veronica walked up.

"Jug?" Archie asked, both him and Veronica taking stock of the scene in front of them.

"Hi Archie!" Joani said cheerily, quickly grabbing onto to Jughead's arm.

"Joani?" Archie said failing to suppress the surprise out of his voice, "What are you doing here?"

"I was trying to convince Jughead to let me come upstairs so we can hang out some more, but he says he's too tired." Joani said pouting.

Veronica raised one eyebrow and put her hands on her hips, lips pursed. Jughead shot a pleading look at his friend, while trying to shake Joani's grip off of him. Archie shot his friend an angry look but stepped in to rescue him.

"Joani, tonight's probably not a good night. I know Jug has a lot of work he still has to do on his paper..." Archie said, slowly helping his friend untangle himself from her grip.

"You call him 'Jug'. That's so cute." Joani giggled, "Ok, fine. I'll go. But you need to make it up to me."

"Whatever." Jughead said lamely, his headache increasing, when he considered the line of questioning awaiting him from his two friends. After making sure that Joani was actually leaving, he bolted into his building, taking the stairs two at a time. When he got to the front door, he moved aside the treats Betty had left behind and let himself in, throwing himself on his bed, fully clothed. The last thing he heard before closing his eyes and passing out was Veronica's voice from their common room asking loudly, "What the fuck was that?"

*** *** ***

Archie groaned inwardly. This is not how he planned for the night to go when he asked Ronnie to stop at his flat. He was currently standing in front of Jughead's bedroom door in an effort to keep Veronica from barging through and getting to his friend. He silently cursed Jughead as he faced off against the brunette staring angrily at him with her hands on her hips.

"Archie Andrews," Veronica said, her eyes narrowing, "I'm going to tell you to step aside one more time or I swear to god that you'll regret it."

"And what are you going to do if I move aside Ronnie?"

"Archie Andrews, I'm warning you." Veronica said, her voice menacing.

Archie felt his resolve to shield Jughead waver as he tried to figure out what to do next. He could literally feel the her rage reverberating towards him. He had never seen her this worked up before and he made a mental note to himself to make sure he never ever did anything to make her angry again.
"Ronnie, stop it, please. I'm telling you that there is nothing going on between Joani and Jughead."

"It didn't look like that to me. What did she say again? Oh! I remember... 'But you need to make it up to me'." Veronica said mockingly, "WHAT THE HELL IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?"

"Ronnie," Archie said starting to panic, "Keep it down please!"

"I will do no such thing! Isn't Jughead supposed to be working on a paper? What the hell is he doing out with another girl? Did you see the way that she was flirting with him? She was hanging all over him!"

"Veronica- it was obviously very one-sided. I know Jughead and he has no interest in Joani. I didn't even realize that they knew each other until tonight."

"Exactly! What if he is just toying with Betty?"

Archie laughed, "That is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. Jughead playing Betty? Haven't you been listening to anything I've been saying this summer? I don't know what is going on but Jughead is very much into Betty. I guarantee you that he is completely, one-hundred percent into Betty."

"And why should I believe you over what I saw with my very own eyes? In fact, when I tell Betty-"

"No!" Archie said quickly interrupting her, "You can't tell Betty."

"And why not?" Veronica asked indignant.

"Because I promise you there is nothing to tell. I have known Jughead for my entire life and Jughead isn't a player. You are just going to cause unnecessary drama!"

"Are you calling me a drama queen?!"

"No! No," Archie said immediately back-tracking, "I just meant that we don't have all the facts yet."

Veronica alternated between looking at Archie and Jughead's door, her lips pursed tightly, "Fine. I won't say anything for now. You've got 24 hours. But I'm not staying here- with him. Walk me home. NOW." Veronica said haughtily as she walked towards his front door.

Archie sighed, looked wistfully at his bedroom door, thinking about what could have been before following Veronica outside.

*** *** ***

Jughead groaned as he started stirring the next morning. Tentatively opening one eye, he quickly shut it again as the sun mocked him with its bright rays. He sat up slowly, feeling like elephants were tap dancing in his head.

A glance at the clock almost gave him a heart attack until he realized that he had to get to class in 15 minutes, but he remembered his professor had canceled class in favor of having office hours. Opening the door to his flat, he made sure that Archie was out before stumtowards the bathroom. Reaching for some ibuprofen, Jughead avoided his reflection as he walked to the kitchen for a glass of water. He took a few slow slips and allowed his mind to drift back to yesterday.
Jughead knew he was overreacting, but maybe this was happening for a reason. The idea of being separated from Betty in a few weeks bothered him and made him extremely anxious. How could he go from seeing her every day to only seeing her during holidays and breaks? Perhaps it would be easier to circumvent future heartbreak by avoiding a long distance relationship.

His thoughts in a jumble, he decided to busy himself with doing another read through of his paper. He was in the middle of starting to check his sources and start his bibliography when he heard a knock on his door. Assuming it was just Archie, Jughead ignored the tapping when a female voice made him tense up.

"Juggie?" The voice asked tentatively, "Juggie, are you awake?"

Taking several deep breaths to calm his nerves, he got up to open his door.

"Hey stranger," Betty beamed as he swung his door open. "I was out running and decided to stop by and bring you lunch." She held up a white paper bag. "Archie let me in. I hope you don't mind."

Jughead looked past Betty's shoulder to see Archie in the kitchen closely watching their interaction, "No. No, it's fine," Jughead said coldly, leaving the door open for her.

Betty, slightly confused by his tone, tentatively stepped into his room and handed him the bag. "I got you a caprese sandwich and a prosciutto and mozzarella one as well."

Jughead took the bag, without opening it and sat down wordlessly at his computer.

As Betty sat on his bed, Jughead pretended to occupy himself with his computer screen.

"So, how's your paper going?" Betty asked lightly trying to break the silence.

Jughead shrugged.

"I stopped by yesterday to see you," Betty said, "Did you get the treats I left?"

"Yeah. They are in the fridge," Jughead said curtly before staring to pound angrily into his keyboard.

"Jughead, you seem stressed... I can come back later," Betty said starting to get up from the bed, "There's a lot I wanted to talk to you about."

Jughead slammed his laptop shut and turned to face Betty angrily, "I said it's fine. Now is as good a time as any."

"As good a time as any?" Betty asked, "For what?"

"To talk," Jughead said taking a deep breath, "I have some things I wanted to talk to you about too. In fact, I was just thinking that maybe we are making a mistake."

"A mistake?" Betty asked taken aback, by Jughead's words and demeanor.

"Yeah, a mistake." Jughead said emphatically, "I mean, we've only known each other for a few months and in two weeks we will be on completely different sides of the country."

"Yes, I know that," Betty said, "But who cares about the distance? We can make it work. We talked about it. You'll come out in October and in January I'll--"

"Yeah, about your sister's wedding, I don't know if I should go anymore. I'd have to take a few days off from school and--"
"But you were so excited about it when we talked about it last week!"

Jughead shrugged.

Betty looked at him closely, "Did I do something to upset you? Because I feel like I'm suddenly in the 'Twilight Zone'."

"Look, we've had a lot of fun this summer. I just don't know if I'm ready for more than that right now." Jughead said quickly before looking down at his computer and avoiding her gaze.

"Is there something you're not telling me?"

Jughead shook his head, "It's just something I've been thinking about."

"And this is just coming out now?"

"I'm not allowed to change my mind?" Jughead asked angrily looking up at her.

Betty stood up and put her hands on her hips, "You know, I'm going to give you a pass and chalk this up to you being stressed. So, I'm going to leave you now, so you can focus on your paper. Maybe, assuming you'll be up for it, we can pick this up tonight after Archie's thing?"

"Whatever," Jughead mumbled, turning away from her and opening up his laptop again. He was rebooting his computer when he heard his bedroom door slam, followed by the front door slamming. He put his forehead down on his desk, about to replay the interaction in his head when his door swung open, making him jump. He was half hoping Betty had come back so he could beg her for forgiveness, but turning around, he was surprised to see Archie standing furious in his doorway.

"Don't do this, Jughead." Archie said stepping into his room and sitting down on his bed.

"Do what?" Jughead asked glaring at his redheaded friend.

"Whatever self-sabotage you are doing."

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Bullshit." Archie said, "I know you. And I know you are scared- but this is not the way to handle it."

"I don't know what you are talking about." Jughead said stubbornly.

"BULL. SHIT," Archie repeated, "What are you doing, Jug? What was going on between you and Joani last night? I know you don't care about her. And why did Betty, the girl who you actually care about, run away from you right now?"

Jughead looked at his computer, refusing to look at Archie.

"Jug," Archie said pleading, "come on. It's me, Archie. You know that I've got your back right?"

Jughead looked up at Archie. "Yeah, I do." He said gruffly.

"Then listen to me now. Don't fuck this up. I know the idea of being in a relationship scares you." Archie said while Jughead started straight ahead at his screen, "And I know it scares you not having full control over the situation. But based on what I've seen, I know she makes you happy. And I would hate to see you lose something that could mean something to you- that does mean something for you."
Jughead turned to face Archie, a scowl on his face, "Are you done? Because if you don't mind, I have a paper I should finish."

Archie stood up abruptly and said before leaving the room, "Suit yourself. But I can see where this is going and it ain't pretty."

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Betty sat at the bar, a short distance from Veronica and Kevin's booth. She had been feeling a little on edge since her interaction with Jughead and didn't want to ruin their night with her mood, so she went to the bar to get some space. She was absentmindedly stirring her drink when an unfamiliar voice brought her back to the present.

Betty looked up "Excuse me?"

"I didn't mean to interrupt your thoughts." A girl with bright red curly hair said apologetically, "I was just saying that I think I remember you."

Betty shook her head, "I don't think we've ever met."

The girl laughed, "No, we haven't but I do remember you. Weren't you the girl who sang 'Can't Help Falling in Love' during the last open mic night?"

Betty nodded.

"Oh my god!" The redheaded girl squealed sitting in the stool next to Betty, "You have the most amazing voice. I wish I could sing but when I try I sound like a frog croaking."

"I'm sure you sound fine," Betty said trying to reassure the redheaded girl.

"You are so sweet- but no I can't sing. I'm Joani, by the way."

"Betty." She said shaking her hand.

"Are you planning on singing again tonight?"

"I don't think so. I actually didn't mean to volunteer last time. I was tricked into it." Betty shrugged, remembering the night when things started to become more complicated.

"Well, you were amazing! You should sing again. Are you in the music program too Betty?"

Betty shook her head, "I am just here supporting a friend."

"Same here! But truth be told, I'm actually just waiting for this guy I went out with the other night to show up. He's friends with someone performing tonight and I think he's really into me." Joani confessed.

"I'm sure he is." Betty said politely to the overly chatty girl.

"Yeah, he's pretty hot. I met him through a friend in my Business Entertainment class."

"That's great." Betty said automatically.
"And- Oh look! He's here!" Joani said pointing towards the back of the club and waving like a mad man to get this boy's attention.

Betty turned around, her mouth dropping open as she locked eyes with Jughead, who after spotting her, looked like he wanted to be anywhere other than that club.

"Jughead Jones?" Betty asked surprised.

"Yeah, do you know him?" Joani asked.

"I thought I did." Betty said softly.

"Excuse me?" Joani asked.

"I said," Betty spoke up clarifying, as Jughead walked towards them "I know him a little. Archie is dating my best friend."

Jughead had not quite reached the bar when a voice on stage announced that Archie was next on stage. Betty quickly excused herself from Joani as she wordlessly brushed past Jughead on her way back to the table. Cursing loudly, Jughead turned around to follow Betty to the table and took the empty seat next to Kevin. Veronica looked like she was about to say something when Archie appeared on stage.

"Hi everyone, for this performance I'll be singing an original song that I wrote and composed titled 'I'll Try'," Archie said before sitting down on a stool and strumming his guitar and singing:

"Can you hear me?  
Am I drowned out in the crowd? Are you listening?  
Or is everyone else too loud for you to hear anything  
Are you just gonna walk away?  
Cause there are so many things I can do but instead I'll say  
I'll try  
I'll try  
To let it go, let it roll right off my back  
Yes, oh I'll try  
I'll try  
To let it go, let it go and never look back this way  

Do you wanna be the one who points and blames?  
Makes us feel many things  
Cause in a word I can't explain  
Why it hurts so much, you see  
We weren't born with all this pain, I guess that's anything  
That keeps living day by day"

How appropriate, Betty thought dryly listening to Archie sing on stage. She stole a quick glance over at Jughead and saw that he was also looking back at her. Not for the first time that day, Betty wondered what he was thinking. Betty was slightly confused by what Joani had told her but she was sure it was a misunderstanding. What bothered her was the complete change of heart Jughead's feelings about their relationship had gone through. What had happened since Tuesday night to cause
this abrupt change? She hadn't seen him since then, so it couldn't have been something she did.

I'll try
I'll try
To let it go, let it roll right off my back
Yes, oh I'll try
I'll try
To let it go, let it go and never look back this way

As Archie's song came to a close, Betty stood and clapped with the rest of the audience. She turned towards Jughead's direction and saw that he was trying to catch her eye.

"Can we talk?" He asked gruffly.

Betty nodded and followed Jughead out of the club. They stood facing each other awkwardly for a few minutes until Betty spoke up, "So you wanted to talk?"

"Yeah," Jughead said.

"Then talk." Betty said irritated.

"What's with the attitude?" Jughead asked defensively.

"Are you serious?" Betty asked flabbergasted. "Don't you remember anything you told me today? I think you owe me an explanation."

"I think you are the one who owes me an explanation." Jughead said throwing it back to Betty.

"About what?" Asked Betty puzzled.

"Did you have your talk with Jason?" Jughead spat out.

"I did," Betty said.

"And why didn't you tell me?" Jughead asked accusingly.

"I tried to tell you Tuesday night," Betty said, "But you wouldn't let me!"

"You should have tried harder." Jughead said angrily.

"How could I? You told me to stop talking about him and you were practically shoving me out the door! Anyway, Jason and I did speak and it's all fine now."

"It's all fine now? I bet it's all fine now." Jughead said sarcastically.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Betty asked, then paused. After a few seconds her eyes widened, "Oh! Don't tell me this is all about my talk with Jason."

"No," Jughead said lying.

"No? Then what?"
"I really appreciate you slumming around with me these past few months. But I just have our doubts about us working out."

"Slumming with you? What are you talking about?"

"Look, I don't have to explain myself. It's been fun but I don't think I want anything more serious. Let's enjoy the rest of the summer and then we can each go back to our respective lives."

"Is that what you really want?" Betty asked unable to mask the hurt in her eyes, "You don't want to try anymore?"

"I think it will be much easier this way. After all, it's my senior year. I need to focus on graduating, my novel, getting a job after college. I won't have time for a relationship."

"If that is what you want, why bother waiting until the end of summer then? Why don't we just end things now?" Betty asked her heart beating rapidly.

Jughead looked at her wordlessly, his expression unmoving.

"Am I interrupting something?" a voice asked behind Betty.

Betty turned around to see Joani standing behind her.

"Jug-Jug," Joani said looking back and forth from Betty to Jughead, "I was looking all over for you."

Betty took a deep breath. "No Joani, you are not interrupting anything. He's all yours." Betty said before turning around and walking back into the club where a couple were doing a duet of 'Islands in the Stream'.

"B!" Veronica said as Betty sat back down at the table. "Is everything ok?" She asked studying her blonde friend.

Betty shook her head, blinking rapidly to stem the flow of tears threatening to come out.

"Oh Betts," Veronica said sympathetically and pulling her into a hug. "You deserve better anyway."

Betty was about to say something when Archie stepped onto the stage again to ask for another volunteer. Spying Jughead with Joani at the bar, Betty stood up, saying, "I'd like to go next."

"Oh shit." Veronica said, "Betty are you sure about this?"

Betty nodded and walked towards the stage. When she got there, Archie quickly greeted her, "Hey Betty," Archie said tentatively, "So what are you going to sing?"

"Can you play 'Wicked Game' by Chris Isaak?" Betty asked.

Archie raised one eyebrow, "It's one of the first songs I learned how to play on guitar."

"Great." Betty said, "Let's do this shall we?"

Archie stepped up to the mic, once again locking eyes with his best friend, "Here to grace us with her lovely voice again is none other than Betty Cooper singing 'Wicked Game' by Chris Isaak."

Taking the mic, Betty waited until Archie finished strumming the intro before taking a deep breath and singing, "The world was on fire and no one could save me but you. It's strange what desire will make foolish people do. I'd never dreamed that I'd meet somebody like you. And I'd never dreamed
Finding Jughead in the crowd, she locked eyes with him and continued singing, her voice beautiful but thick with emotion, "No, I don't want to fall in love. No, I don't want to fall in love. With you. What a wicked game you played to make me feel this way. What a wicked thing to do to let me dream of you. What a wicked thing to say you never felt this way. What a wicked thing to do to make me dream of you."

Midway through the song, a new thought entered Betty's stream of consciousness. I can't believe I didn't think of that sooner, she thought to herself as she went into the last verse. When Betty sang her last note, the crowd immediately gave her a standing ovation.

After taking a bow, she felt Archie's hand on her shoulder, "That was fantastic Betty. If you want, I can walk you down again."

Betty shook her head, "Thanks Archie but I'm good, I'll see you in a minute." As Betty started to make her way to the side entrance she spied a door backstage and decided that she didn't want to wait anymore to test the validity of her theory. Walking to a busy intersection, she quickly hailed a cab. After she gave the driver the address, she went back in her mind to reflect back onto her conversation with Jughead. When she put two and two together in her mind it made perfect sense. When the taxi reached her stop, Betty quickly walked to her intended destination.

Taking a deep breath, she knocked loudly on the door. After waiting a minute with no response, she knocked even louder. After a minute of two, she heard a shuffling on the side of the door, before it opened.

"Betty?" Jason asked looking surprised but not displeased. His hair wet, clad in a plush white hotel robe, it looked as if he had just stepped out of the shower. "This is a surprise." He said before opening the door a bit wider to let her step in.
Confrontations

Chapter Notes

We start back in Le Mura where you get to see Jughead's POV... I could have broken it up into 2 chapters- so be forewarned- it's long.

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

- Anais Nin

Jughead stopped in front of Le Mura, anxious and on edge, despite the long walk over. Eager to avoid any awkward conversations with, he had based his arrival time on Archie's performance. Archie's lecture and subsequent warning had left him agitated and he considered going home, but his loyalty to his best friend, forced him to enter the club. Stepping inside, it took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the dim lighting, but he immediately spotted Betty. Dressed in a black top and white jeans, she was standing at the bar conversing with someone he could not initially see. He was headed over to join her when the person Betty was talking to suddenly turned around and started signaling him over.

Fuck, he thought recognizing Joani immediately. His first instinct was to turn around and walk back out the door but the look of astonishment on Betty's face, as his eyes met hers, drew him towards her.

Halfway to the bar, he noticed Betty say a few words to Joani after a voice announced that Archie was next on stage. Leaving the bar, he thought Betty was headed towards him, but she just brushed past him avoiding eye contact on her way to join Veronica and Kevin.

"Fuck," Jughead said loudly, ignoring Joani's calls and immediately turned around to follow Betty to the table. There were two open seats left when he got there, but spotting him, Veronica immediately stretched her legs out on the seat next to her. The choice made for him, he took the empty seat next to Kevin, Veronica attempting to stare him down the entire time. Veronica looked like she was about to say something when Archie's appearance on stage offered him a brief reprieve.

"Hi, for my performance I'll be singing an original song that I wrote and composed titled 'I'll Try'," Archie said before sitting down on a stool and strumming his guitar.

Can you hear me?
Am I drowned out in the crowd? Are you listening?
Or is everyone else too loud for you to hear anything
Are you just gonna walk away?
Cause there are so many things I can do but instead I'll say
I'll try
I'll try
To let it go, let it roll right off my back
Yes, oh I'll try
I'll try
To let it go, let it go and never look back this way

Do you wanna be the one who points and blames?
Makes us feel many things
Cause in a word I can't explain
Why it hurts so much, you see
We weren't born with all this pain, I guess that's anything
That keeps living day by day

Thanks to the angle of their table, Jughead had the perfect view of Betty and wondered what she was thinking. Betty and Joani had obviously been talking before he got there and based on her reaction it must have been about him. He hoped that Betty didn't get the wrong idea about what transpired between them. Jughead had been fully aware that Joani had been flirting with him and his only crime was to allow her to shower him with her attention. Wanting to bang his head on the table, Jughead knew there was no one to blame but himself if there was any misunderstanding.

Letting his mind drift a bit, he thought back to the last time they had been here. How different that night seemed in contrast to now, when Betty had been snug at his side. They had been happy and hopeful about the future until Jason showed up.

Jason, he thought darkly. If Jason had never come to Rome would he still be feeling so anxious about pursuing a relationship with Betty?

I'll try
I'll try
To let it go, let it roll right off my back
Yes, oh I'll try
I'll try
To let it go, let it go and never look back this way

As Archie's song came to a close, their table stood and cheered with the rest of the audience and when the opportunity presented itself, Jughead took the opportunity to catch Betty's attention.

"Can we talk?" He asked gruffly.

Betty nodded and Jughead lead the way out of the club. Jughead stood facing her, his thoughts still in a jumble. He was embarrassed about his earlier outbreak but he didn't know where to begin. Should he even mention Joani? Or should he start with his anxieties about their relationship? Maybe he should admit seeing her talk with Jason. The thought of Jason increased his irritation with his current situation. He tried to calm his anger before opening his mouth when he heard Betty ask, "So you wanted to talk?"
"Yeah," Jughead said.

"Then talk." Betty said sounding irritated.

"What's with the attitude?" Jughead asked surprised by her tone.

"Are you serious?" Betty asked flabbergasted. "Don't you remember anything you told me today? I think you owe me an explanation."

"I think you are the one who owes me an explanation." Jughead said throwing it back to Betty, thinking about her talk with Jason.

"About what?" Betty asked looking puzzled.

"Did you have your talk with Jason?" Jughead spat out, baiting her a bit.

"I did," Betty said.

"And why didn't you tell me?" Jughead asked accusingly.

"I tried to tell you Tuesday night," Betty said, "But you wouldn't let me!"

"You should have tried harder." Jughead said angrily, remembering that night. Betty should have been more insistent and made him listen, he thought, especially given how sensitive he was about their interactions.

"How could I? You were practically shoving me out the door!" Betty said her green eyes flashing. "Anyway, Jason and I did speak and it's all fine now."

"It's all fine now? I bet it's all fine now." Jughead said sarcastically. Jason was probably laughing at him given how easy he had gotten off. Jughead felt himself bristle when he remembered the affection that passed between them.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Betty asked, then paused. After a few seconds her eyes widened, "Oh! Don't tell me this is all about my talk with Jason."

"No," Jughead said lying.

"No, then what?"

Thinking about the bracelet and the roses, Jughead said, getting riled up,"I really appreciate you slumming around with me these past few months. But I just have our doubts about us working out."

"Slumming with you? What are you talking about?"

"Look, I don't have to explain myself. It's been fun but I don't think I want anything more serious. Let's enjoy the rest of the summer and then we can each go back to our respective lives."

"Is that what you really want?" Betty asked looking up at him, her eyes betraying her, "You don't want to try anymore?"

"I think it will be much easier this way. After all, it's my senior year. I need to focus on graduating, my novel, getting a job after college. I won't have time for a relationship." Jughead said quickly verbalizing one stream of consciousness.
"If that is what you want, why bother waiting until the end of summer then? Why don't we just end things now?" Betty asked.

Jughead looked at her wordlessly. NO!, his heart yelled out above the noise in his head. This is not what I want. But before he could say anything he saw Joani peak her head around the corner. Not now, he thought, please not now.

"Am I interrupting something?" Joani asked.

Jughead cringed when he heard Joani say, "Jug-Jug, I was looking all over for you." He looked quickly at Betty but her head was turned so he could not gauge her reaction.

"No Joani, you are not interrupting anything. He's all yours." Betty said looking quickly from Joani to Jughead before turning around and walking back into the club.

Jughead stood frozen, cursing himself and cursing Joani.

Joani stood looking at him closely and Jughead braced himself when she started talking.

"I did interrupt something didn't I?"

"Um, well, uh-" Jughead began hesitantly.

"There's something going on between you and Betty, isn't there?"

Jughead nodded.

"So what were you doing with me the other night?" Joani asked looking at him puzzled, but to Jughead's relief, not angry.

"I'm sorry Joani. I didn't mean to lead you on." Jughead said.

Joani sighed, "It's fine. How about this, buy me a drink and we'll be even?"

Jughead let out a big sigh of relief. "Thanks for letting me off the hook so easy."

Joani tilted her head and looked up at him closely. "No offense Jughead, but based on what I heard, I think I'm the one that dodged a bullet." Joani said leading the way inside and to the bar before Jughead could respond.

They were in the middle of ordering their drinks when Jughead heard Betty say, "I'd like to go next."

He turned around and watched as Betty walked towards the stage and disappear momentarily before reappearing next to Archie. After a brief conversation, Archie stepped up to the mic and after finding Jughead in the crowd said, "Here to grace us with her lovely voice again is none other than Betty Cooper singing 'Wicked Game' by Chris Isaak."

Jughead felt his heart beat start to quicken as Betty started singing into the mic, "The world was on fire and no one could save me but you. It's strange what desire will make foolish people do. I'd never dreamed that I'd meet somebody like you. And I'd never dreamed that I'd lose somebody like you."

After initially letting her gaze pan over the audience, she locked eyes with him, her voice once again beautiful but tinged with a hint of sadness and pain.
No, I don't want to fall in love. No, I don't want to fall in love. With you.

What a wicked game you played to make me feel this way. What a wicked thing to do to let me dream of you. What a wicked thing to say you never felt this way. What a wicked thing to do to make me dream of you.

He felt his heart wrench when he realized what he was putting her through all because of his fears.

Jughead let out a sigh as Betty sang her last note. He needed to tell her he loved her, Jughead thought, joining the crowd that stood up to cheer for her.

He turned towards the red headed girl standing next to him, "Joani, again, I am so sorry, but I need to go."

Joani raised her glass as if to toast him, "Good luck. After that song choice I think you'll need it."

Hoping that Joani was wrong, Jughead walked towards the stage only to have Veronica block his way. Warily surveying the brunette in front of him, Jughead was surprised that someone so petite could come across as so menacing. Jughead made a mental note to warn Archie to never cross his girlfriend.

"NO. Stay away from her." Veronica hissed, striking an imposing figure with her hands on her hips.

"Veronica, please get out of my way!" Jughead pleaded, looking over her shoulder and waiting for Betty to emerge.

"¡Vete a la mierda!" Veronica seethed.

"Wait? What did you say?" Jughead asked, pretty sure that she just cursed him out in Spanish.

"Let me put it in terms you'll understand," Veronica said her voice dripping with sarcasm, "FUCK OFF."

"Veronica!" Kevin said coming to see what the ruckus was about, "What the hell is going on? I just get back from Bologna and I come back to you cursing Jughead out in Spanish? And why did Betty just sing that song?" He looked back and forth from Jughead to Veronica, "Oh! Jughead what did you do?"

"What did I do?!" Jughead said disbelievingly.

"Eres un estúpido idiota! Aléjate de mi amiga o te mataré!" Veronica said.

"Hey guys," Archie said joining the group, "I think we should take this outside since you are distracting from the main entertainment right now."

Jughead turned and looked at Archie, "Wait a minute? Where's Betty?"

Archie looked back at him confused, " Didn't you see her? She came out before I did."

Veronica turned around and faced Archie momentarily distracted, "That's impossible. We haven't seen her come down from the stage yet."

The foursome exchanged a quick glance.
"I'll check again backstage." Archie offered.

"And I'll look in the girls' bathroom." Veronica said.

"I'll check outside." Kevin offered.

"And where will I go?" Jughead asked looking around the main floor of the club and not seeing the blonde anywhere.

"Considering how much help you've been already... how about home?" Veronica said flashing him a fake smile.

"Veronica!" Archie said scolding her.

"Fine. Jughead stay here in case she resurfaces. Everyone else meet back at the bar in 10 minutes." Veronica said.

The group reconvened in less than 10 minutes.

"I looked all around outside but I couldn't find her." Kevin said apologetically.

"She's not in the bathroom and she's not answering her phone." Veronica added worried.

"She's not backstage either." Archie said, "But there is a door that leads outside that I hadn't noticed before. So maybe she went out that way?"

"But where did she go?" Kevin asked.

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Taking a deep breath, she knocked loudly on the door. After waiting a minute with no response, she knocked even louder. After a minute of two, she heard a shuffling on the side of the door, before it opened.

"Betty?" Jason asked looking surprised but not displeased. His hair wet, clad in a plush white hotel robe, it looked as if he had just stepped out of the shower. "This is a surprise." He said before opening the door a bit wider to let her step in.

"Jason, what did you do?" Betty asked angrily charging into the room, her green eyes wild.

"Whoa, Betty! What are you talking about?" Jason asked confused.

"What did you tell Jughead?! I need you to be honest with me."

"What are you talking about? Tell Jughead when?"

"I don't know. Yesterday or today?"

Jason raised his hands up in a defensive stance, "Betty, I haven't seen or spoken to Jughead since Monday. What's going on?"
Betty stood to face him, her green eyes searching his blue eyes, "Jason, please tell me the truth. Have you seen or spoken to Jughead since we met at the Villa Borghese?"

Jason shook his head, "Nope. I was in Milan yesterday."

"You swear?"

"On Nana Rose."

"Oh god, please don't swear on Nana Rose." Betty said flinging herself on his couch and putting her head in her hands

"Betty, what happened?" Jason asked sitting on the other end of the couch.

Realizing where she was, Betty stood up clearly upset, "Jason, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to come barging in like this and accusing you of crimes you didn't commit. I should go. You don't want to hear about my problems with Jughead."

Jason made a move to block her path to the door. "Not yet. Not until you calm down a bit," Jason said trying to soothe the troubled blonde. He handed her the remote control, "Here. Find something to distract you for a minute while I put on actual clothes. And then you can decide whether you want to tell me what's bothering you or not."

After a few minutes, Jason reemerged from his bedroom wearing a Stanford cardinal shirt and pajama bottoms and took his seat on the couch. Betty had ignored his advice about the television and was sitting on the couch nervously playing with her hands. When he sat down, Betty spoke up again, "Jason, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to come blasting through here like a tornado. But I was so sure you said something to piss Jughead off..."

"Betts- it's fine," Jason said softly. "And to be fair, I have said a lot of things to 'piss' Jughead off. Just not since Monday night."

Betty sighed, "I believe you. I just don't have another explanation for his behavior then."

"Betts, you know, you can tell me what happened. If you want."

"Jason, you don't want to hear about what's happening with Jughead and me." Betty said shaking her head.

"You are right." Jason agreed, "I don't want to hear about Jughead, but I do want to hear about what's bothering you."

"I don't know," Betty began blinking back tears, "One minute we're fine and then today he said he was rethinking us and that he doesn't think it's going to work out."

"That asshole!" Jason standing up and getting angry, "I told you he wasn't good enough for you!"

"Jason," Betty said, "I appreciate your indignation on my behalf but -"

"Not helpful?" Jason offered calming down.

Betty shook her head.

"Would it be helpful if I offered to knock some sense into him?" Jason asked.

Betty laughed, her first real laugh that evening."Thanks, but no thanks. I wish I knew why he is so
angry with me but maybe I just have to face the facts and realize I was wrong about him."

A knock on the door made Betty jump.

"It's just room service." Jason said standing up to open the door. Following Jason back to the room was a server wheeling a giant table stacked with a collection of cookies, cakes and different pastries. "I figured these might come in handy," Jason explained.

Betty shot Jason a grateful smile, "Thanks, but I'm not hungry."

"That's a first." Jason teased sitting down again, "More for me then. So have you tried to find out what's going on inside that small brain of his?"

"Jason," Betty said exasperated.

"Fine. I'm sorry. Let me try that again... So, have you asked him what's bothering him?"

Betty nodded, "He just said he changed his mind."

"What can I say... He's a fool, Betts."

Betty gave him a weak smile before stifling a yawn. "I didn't realize how tired I am. I should go, but I don't want to go and face anyone quite yet." Betty said sheepishly.

"So don't," Jason said, "Stay here for the night."

Betty raised an eyebrow, "No, I should go."

"Betty, I'm being serious. You can hide here for the night."

"Jason, I don't know if that's such a great idea."

"Why?"

"You know.. you and me..."

"Because we dated? Come on. No funny business- I promise. You can even have my bed and I'll sleep on the couch... Unless you need a warm body to keep you company..."

"Jason!"

"I'm kidding."

"I don't know..."

"Betty, I am still in love with you. And I'd be lying if I didn't say a part of me is thrilled that this is happening, but first and foremost I care about you. The invitation to stay here for the night comes from a place of friendship. I promise I won't do anything to jeopardize your trust in me tonight."

Betty bit her lip, debating the offer, "No funny business?"

"Scout's honor."

"Ok, thanks for the invite. I'll let Ronnie know."
Jughead lay paralyzed in bed the next morning staring at the ceiling and replaying last nights events in his head. He had barely managed to sleep recalling everything from Betty's song to Veronica's anger to Archie's sympathetic looks. They had parted ways shortly after their unsuccessful search for Betty, with Jughead going home and the other three headed back to the Lodge Villa. Looking down at his phone he saw that his calls and texts to Betty had gone unanswered.

A quick check of the time told him he needed to be in class in 45 minutes. He decided that he would stop at the Lodge Villa after class and beg Betty's forgiveness then.

Betty woke up to the smell of bacon the next morning. After she had spoke to Ronnie, Jason spent the rest of evening trying to cheer her up with stories about their friends and Cheryl back home. After indulging in a large mug of hot chocolate, Betty excused herself for the night and retreated alone into Jason's bed. Exhausted, it didn't take long for Betty to fall asleep.

Stepping out of Jason's bedroom clad in one of his Stanford shirts and boxers, she saw that Jason had spent the night on the pullout couch. She was starting to feel guilty about having commandeered his very comfortable bed when a voice said, "How did you sleep last night?"

Betty turned to see Jason at the dining room table, a big breakfast spread laid out in front of him.

"Like a baby," Betty said going over to join him, "I woke up to the smell of bacon."

"It's the best way to wake up," Jason said pouring her some coffee.

"I'm starving," Betty said reaching out for a strip of bacon.

Jason laughed, "Glad you are feeling more like yourself."

They sat together, eating in a companionable silence until Betty spoke up, "Jason, thank you so much for everything. I really appreciate it."

"Like I told you last night, I'm just concerned for your wellbeing and happiness. I'm glad you slept well. You are welcome to stay here as long as you like."

"Thanks," Betty said, "But I've been thinking..." Jason looked at her curiously. "When Veronica first invited me to spend the summer with her family," Betty continued, "I had grand plans to take some day trips and overnight trips on my own."

"But it never happened?" Jason asked.

"No," Betty said shaking her head, "I was sticking around to spend time with Jughead before he left but now... Mr. Lodge is planning on taking us to Sicily for a few nights on Tuesday but maybe I'll just meet them there."

"That sounds like a plan. Do you want company?" Jason asked.
Betty shook her head, "I've always enjoyed exploring on my own and it's just what I need right now."

"And where will you go?"

"I was thinking I'd just head over to Rome Termini and see where trains were going today."

Jason looked at the blonde before him, looking impossibly cute in his shirt and boxers with her messy bed hair. He had a thousand things he wanted to tell her, but practicing self-control, he said, "Why don't I call a car service for you? It can take you to the Lodge's first to get your stuff and then you can take it to the train station."

Betty's eyes lit up as she smiled over at him. "I'd love that!"

Jason felt his insides do somersaults at the smile she flashed him, but he just reached out and quickly squeezed her hand. "Great. Finish your breakfast and I'll call the concierge after you get dressed."

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A few hours later, after gently turning down Veronica's offer to accompany her and promising to meet her in Sicily in a few days, Betty stood in front of the departures board, backpack in hand. She stood quietly looking at the trains leaving soon and debated the options. One destination in particular jumped out at her and it left in a half hour. Showing her Eurail pass to the station attendant, she took her ticket and walked to the right platform to catch her train.

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Walking in the Lodge Villa, Jughead started heading towards the elevator when he was stopped by the lobby attendant, "Sorry Signor Jones, but I have strict orders from Signorina Lodge to not let you pass through."

"Oh for chrissakes," Jughead said before turning around and going back out into the street. Jughead was trying to figure out his next steps when he saw Kevin walking towards the Villa in the distance.

"Kevin!" Jughead said running to his friend, "Veronica won't let me in to see Betty. Can you please let her know that I'm downstairs and I need to talk to her?"

Kevin's eyes widened, "I don't know if Betty's back yet, but if she is I'll let her know."

"Is she out for her morning run?" Jughead asked.

Kevin looked at him sympathetically and shook his head, "Maybe. But she never came home last night."

Jughead looked at him confused, "Never came home? Where did she go?"

Avoiding eye contact, Kevin looked down and said, "I don't think you want to know." Kevin patted Jughead awkwardly on the back before walking away towards the Lodge's.

Putting two and two together, Jughead felt his heart drop to the floor.
So, so you think you can tell
Heaven from hell
Blue skies from pain
Can you tell a green field
From a cold steel rail?
A smile from a veil?
Do you think you can tell?

Jughead sat on the edge of his bed, his head in his hands listening to 'Wish You Were Here' by Pink Floyd on repeat, a myriad of 'What Ifs' running through his head.

Did they get you to trade
Your heroes for ghosts?
Hot ashes for trees?
Hot air for a cool breeze?
Cold comfort for change?
And did you exchange
A walk on part in the war
For a lead role in a cage?

Jughead was in the middle of checking his phone for the hundredth time that day when he heard a tentative knock on his door.

"Come in," Jughead mumbled. Looking up he saw Archie step through the door, "Oh, have you come to gloat?"

How I wish, how I wish you were here
We're just two lost souls
Swimming in a fish bowl
Year after year
Running over the same old ground
And how we found
The same old fears
Wish you were here

Archie came in and stood in the middle of the room letting the song come to an end before turning off the music player and saying, "Jughead, you know that I love Pink Floyd right?"

Jughead nodded.

"But," Archie continued, "if I have to listen to this song one more time I think I might throw myself out the window."

"You tried to warn me," Jughead said agitated, running his fingers through his hair, "I can't believe how much I fucked things up. I should have just talked to her to start with."

"Why didn't you?" Archie asked softly.

"Because I'm masochistic." Jughead said dryly.

"No, really."

"Because the idea of not being with her all the time scared the shit out of me. The whole idea being in a relationship scared the shit out of me."

"Well... that's one way to not have to deal with being in a relationship." Archie said.

"Not helpful Arch."

"Sorry," Archie said sheepishly, "Have you had lunch yet? I was going to run out and get some pizza if you want me to get you something."

Jughead shook his head, "I'm not hungry. Thanks."

Archie stood up and put his hand on Jughead's shoulder. "If you need anything, let me know." Archie said leaving his room.

Think Jones, he thought, what should you do next? Jughead took a deep breath when an idea hit him. He looked at the clock and did some mental calculations before pulling out his phone. He needed to talk to someone that could give him advice without judgment.

After a few rings a deep voice asked, "Jug?"

"Dad," he said his voice breaking, "I fucked up."

*** *** ***

Looking out the train window, Betty felt her heart lighten a bit at the thought of exploring a city that had always been on her bucket list. After booking a hotel on her phone she quickly texted both Veronica and Jason, as promised, to let them know where she was headed and her hotel information.
FP listened silently until Jughead finished talking, "Jughead, I'm sorry son but we all fuck up sometimes. That's life. No one is perfect. But what separates the men from the boys is how we deal with our failures. Do you still want to be with her?"

"Yes."

"Do you still love her?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you doing talking to me? You've wasted enough time, son. Go find her. Apologize. Fight for her and for your relationship."

"And what if it doesn't work? What if she doesn't want me anymore?" Jughead asked.

"Then at least you tried and you'll know where you stand." FP said, "C'mon Jug, this isn't how I raised you. Man up and go get your girl."

"Thanks dad, I needed that."

"And Jug-" FP started to say.

"Yeah dad?"

"Whatever happens... know that your mom and I love you." FP said gruffly.

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Disembarking from the train, Betty made the decision to walk the mile to The Grand Hotel Des Arts, reciting as she walked through the city that gave birth to Romeo and Juliet, "Two households, both alike in dignity, In fair Verona, where we lay our scene...."

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While Veronica was less than forthcoming about Betty's whereabouts, Archie was able to ascertain for Jughead that she was still not at the Lodge's. That only meant one other place...

On the walk over to the Rome Cavelleri, Jughead ran through a multitude of scenarios, each one more improbable then the next. Giving himself a quick pep talk as he walked down the hall, he willed himself to stay calm and to not let Jason make him lose control.
Finally arriving at Jason's door, Jughead took a deep breath and banged loudly on the door. After a minute he heard Jason fumble with the lock before flinging the door wide open. The red headed boy stood, his arms crossed a smug look on his face. Jughead felt his blood boil over at the swagger in Jason's demeanor.

"I'll have to have a talk with hotel management," Jason said his voice heavy with disdain, "Their standards are dropping if they let you come upstairs."

Jughead stood for a few seconds glaring at the boy before him, a thousand different retorts running through his head.

Fuck it, he thought, before swinging his right hook into Jason's jaw.
Hope is itself a species of happiness and perhaps the chief happiness this world affords.
- Samuel Johnson

Surprised, Jason stumbled backwards, propelled by the force of Jughead's fist.

"What the hell, man?!!" Jason yelled looking at the angry dark haired boy and massaging his jaw. He quickly ducked to the side, barely avoiding Jughead's left hook.

"Where is she?" Jughead growled pushing Jason to the side as he stormed into the room.

"She's not here." Jason said massaging his jaw again.

"You are lying!" Jughead said looking around, "Betty! Betty?"

"Go ahead and look around," Jason said motioning around his hotel suite, "and you can see for yourself."

"But Kevin said she was here last night... And she's not back at the Lodge's yet."

"Well she's not here now."

"But she was here last night?"

"Yes, she was here. She left this morning."

Breathing heavily Jughead studied Jason closely figuring out how to ask the question he desperately wanted to know the answer to. "Did you, did she-" Jughead began then stopped.

Jason watched him knowingly, "Go ahead. I know what you want to ask me."

Jughead scowled at him, a long pause before he broke the silence, asking, "Did you sleep with her?"

Jason cocked an eyebrow and looked at him silently a smirk on his face.

"ANSWER ME!" Jughead roared, "DID YOU SLEEP WITH HER?"

Ignoring Jughead's question, Jason calmly walked over to his bar and poured two glasses of brandy, offering Jughead a glass. Jughead eyed the glass suspiciously, wondering what the drink offering meant.

"Take it." Jason chuckled, "I didn't poison your drink." Jason said forcing the glass into Jughead's hand and raising his own.

"What are we toasting to?" Jughead asked warily, Jason's calm and almost theatrical manner driving him mad.

Jason shrugged. "You look like you needed a drink. If I wanted to be a total ass, I would propose a toast...To you."
"Me?" Jughead asked confused.

"Yes. To Jughead Jones, the boy who pushed away Betty Cooper, giving all the rest of us hope." Jason said with a smirk, "If I had known that you would fuck things up without my help, I would have never flown to Rome."

"So I was right!" Jughead said, "You didn't have to be here for work!"

Jason shook his head, "Not really. I convinced them that it would be valuable as part of my training."

"So you just came all the way to Italy just to try and get Betty back?"

"You know the answer to that already. For fuck's sake, I wanted to, want to marry Betty- you didn't think I'd really give up without a fight, did you?" Jason said rubbing his jaw again, "It seems you also understand that Betty is the type of girl you fight for."

"So what...did you get her back? Since apparently Betty went running to you last night for comfort?" Jughead asked darkly.

"No," Jason snorted, "Seriously? You think that Betty came running to me for comfort? After the talk she had with me Tuesday? She came over to get answers. She thought I did something to make you angry at her."

"Oh." Jughead said trying to digest Jason's words.

"Yeah. She was pretty upset last night." Getting another drink, Jason paused before asking, "So why did you tell Betty, who you obviously still care for, that it wasn't going to work out?"

"She told you?"

"She didn't want to at first, but I got it out of her."

"Oh."

"Let me guess," Jason continued, "You got scared didn't you? Didn't have enough confidence in Betty's feelings for you?"

Jughead looked at him incredulously, "How did you know?"

"Because you asked me if I slept with her. If you had full confidence in your relationship, you would know that Betty would never do something like that." Jason said, finally answering Jughead's question.

"Oh."

"So what made you push her away?" Jason asked as the two boys eyed each other.

"I started to get paranoid about being so far away from her." Jughead confessed grudgingly, feeling the weight starting to lift from his chest.

Jason looked at him puzzled, "Why? I mean, especially if she's going to be living in New York in the spring?"

Jughead looked up startled, "Wait? What? She's going to be in New York?"

"Yes."
"Don't you mean D.C? She got the Planned Parenthood internship?"

"You didn't know?" Jason asked genuinely surprised, "She did get the internship but they want her in their New York headquarters instead."

Jughead felt like his head was about to explode. Betty living in the same city as him for a semester... "When did you find out?" Jughead asked.

"When we met Tuesday. Since she'll be living in New York, Betty wanted to make sure I was clear on the status of our relationship."

"Which is?" Jughead asked.

"You certainly have a lot of questions tonight, Jones."

"Stop playing around and just answer me." Jughead demanded.

"Don't you already know the answer to this?" Jason asked disdainful. "I was 'friend zoned'. Apparently, she is in love with you." Jason said bitterly.

"She told you that she was 'in love' with me?" Jughead asked his spirits lifting further.

"I'm not here to reassure you, Jones."

"So why are you telling me this?"

"Because I still love her. And while I'll admit that I would like nothing more than to see you guys broken up... I hated seeing her so upset last night. I don't like you at all, but Betty... I would give her the world if she let me."

Jughead let Jason's words sink in before standing up and walking to the door, "I have to find her."

"Good luck with that."

"Why?" Jughead asked frozen mid-stride.

"Because she's not in Rome anymore," Jason said.

"Wait? What?" Jughead asked turning around, "Where is she?"

"She wanted to go somewhere for a few days to clear her mind her. Veronica and I offered to go with her, but she wanted some time alone. I had a car take her to Rome Termini this morning."

"Where did she go? You know, don't you." Jughead said suddenly regretting his initial hostility. Jason studied Jughead closely, "I do."

"And will you tell me?" Jughead asked.

Jason stared at him wordlessly, his arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Forget I asked," Jughead said turning around towards the door.

"You know what really pisses me off about this?" Jason said, causing Jughead to stop and turn to face the redheaded boy, "The whole entire time I was with Betty, I never did anything to intentionally hurt her or break her heart. It makes me sick to think that you have and you'll still end
"If she takes me back, I will try my hardest to never hurt her again." Jughead said and took a step towards the door before Jason interrupted him.

"I'll give you a hint..." Jason called out, pausing before saying, "It's where Romeo would go if he wanted to find Juliet."

Jughead's eyes widened realizing where she went. "Wait... You just told me that you still love her... And that you are pissed that I hurt her... Why are you helping me now?" He asked suspiciously wondering if Jason was planting a red herring.

"Haven't you heard anything I've been telling you? I don't give a shit about your feelings, but unfortunately you make Betty happy. I'm doing this for her. Not you."

"Thanks," Jughead said gruffly starting to walk to the door.

"One more thing... Can I give you some advice, Jones?" Jason called out.

"Yes?" Jughead asked warily, turning around.

"If you happen to get her back, don't let her go. Because I promise you, if you fuck up again, I won't be this nice next time."

Looking Jason in the eye, he nodded. "I understand." Jughead said before walking out the door.

*** *** ***

On his walk home to get his stuff together, Jughead had an epiphany. Picking up his phone he quickly dialed Archie.

"Hey Arch," he said when his friend picked up, "I know where Betty is and I have a plan. But I need help. Can you meet me at our place in a half hour?"

*** *** ***

Jughead was rushing around his room throwing things in his backpack when a commotion drew him out into the living room. Veronica and Archie stood facing off in the common room with Kevin looking back and forth between the two like a spectator at a tennis match.

"Ronnie, be reasonable." Archie pleaded.

"I don't know how Jughead found out where Betty is but the only way he's going to be able to get to her is over my dead body."

"Betty has enough that she needs to forgive me for without adding 'the murder of her best friend' to the list." Jughead added dryly, interrupting their shouting match.
"YOU!" Veronica growled, about to charge at him until Archie blocked her path.

"Veronica, you have every right to be pissed off at me. I fucked up big time. But love makes you do stupid things and and I have wasted enough time. I need to make things better with Betty."

"And what if sorry isn't good enough?" Veronica asked, one eyebrow raised.

"Maybe it isn't. But shouldn't Betty be the judge of that?" Jughead asked.

"He's got a point there, Ron." Kevin said.

Veronica rolled her eyes but didn't answer.

"I have a plan," Jughead said, "And now that I think about it... it won't work unless I have the help of everyone in this room."

"And why should I help you?" Veronica asked disbelievingly.

"Because everyone deserves a second chance and I promise that if Betty forgives me, I won't fuck it up again."

Veronica considered Jughead closely for a moment, "Fine. But you better not screw it up again."

"I won't." Jughead said letting out a breath he didn't realize he was holding in.

"So what's the plan, Romeo?" Archie interjected.

Suppressing a smile at the feeling of hope that was slowly building up in him, Jughead said, "I'm still working out the details but in order for my plan to work we need to be on the 6:45 train tonight to Verona. That only gives us a little over an hour to get to Rome Termini."

"Kevin and I will head home to pack and we'll meet you at the train platform in 45 minutes."

Veronica said. "By the way, how did you find out where Betty went?"

"Jason." Jughead said, wishing he had a camera so that he could capture the look of utter disbelief on both Veronica's and Kevin's face.

*** *** ***

The next morning, Betty studied her reflection in the mirror and gave herself a tentative smile. She looked well rested, despite having gone to bed in tears. She was about to reach for her toothbrush when a shuffling at the door made her jump.

Investigating the source of the noise, Betty found a note saying that the free continental breakfast was unavailable this morning but to show this card at the Caffé Al Teatro as a substitute. Looking up the address on her phone, she saw that the Caffé was on her way to Castelvecchio where she planned to spend the morning.

*** *** ***
Sitting at an outdoor table, Betty was struck by the similarities in ambiance between Caffé Al Teatro and il Piccolo, as she sipped her cappuccino. The only thing missing Betty thought wistfully was Antonio and of course Jughead. Betty sighed as she reached for her sketchbook and started flipping through, pausing to study one of her first drawings of the beanie haired boy. She had ignored his multiple texts and calls Thursday night and his last communication yesterday morning remained unanswered. She wondered if he was thinking about her and was in the middle of debating whether to call him when her thoughts were interrupted.

"Signorina," her waitress said, handing her an envelope and a single long stemmed blush rose, "This is from an admirer."

"Grazie." Betty said taking the items, her heart stopping when she saw the familiar handwriting that simply said 'Open Me' on the envelope.

Betty,

I have been a fool. I let my fears and insecurities consume me and dictate my actions this past week.

You've probably been wondering what caused my Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality recently...

I have a confession to make. I saw part of your conversation with Jason at the Villa Borghese. And while I knew what you were telling him, seeing you hug him and seeing his arms around you drove me crazy with jealousy.

Meeting Jason, someone who intimately knew you and loved you with an intensity that rivals my feelings for you, is not something I was prepared for. And even though you tried to reassure me, I was not confident about us or your feelings for me. I started to push you away because I believed it was easier to not be with you then to have to face future heartbreak- but I was wrong, so very wrong. I would much rather face dealing with potential heartbreak than face not having you a part of my life.

Even though I've only known you for a short time, you've become a part of my life that I don't think I can live without. I just didn't realize that until now and i hope it's not too late.

Please give me the opportunity to prove that I am worthy of you.

Yours (if you will have me), Jughead

P.S. If you are intrigued, please use the enclosed ticket and head over to The Madonna of the Quail.

Her heart beating rapidly, Betty put the note down and looked around, but there was no sign of the beanie wearing boy. Jughead, here in Verona? And asking for a second chance? Feeling her spirits
soar, Betty quickly finished her cappuccino and headed towards Castelvecchio.

*** *** ***

Normally a vast art collection housed in a restored medieval castle would have Betty in raptures, but the anticipation of seeing Jughead left her distracted. When she finally found Pisanello's Madonna della Quaglia, Jughead was nowhere to be found. To help calm her nerves, she pulled out her sketchbook. She sat there for about a half hour getting lost in her drawing when she felt a tap on her shoulder. Startled, she turned and saw a museum employee standing there holding a single rose and envelope. Thanking the employee, she carefully set the rose down and opened the note.

Betty,

I have loved you since the moment I first saw you. I know that it sounds trite and clichéd- but it's true. At first I thought it was just a silly infatuation and that the intensity of my feelings for you would subside, but they've only grown the more I'm with you.

While I was initially drawn to your beauty, it was obvious that you were so much more than a pretty face. I'm grateful that you let me in so I could discover how wonderful you truly are.

I love how passionate you are about the causes you believe in. I love how even though you don't agree with my point of view, you'll listen to everything I have to say before making your counter argument. I love the little wrinkle that pops up between your brows when you are concentrating on your drawing. And I especially love the humming noises you make when you are enjoying what you are eating. But my favorite thing about you? I love that being with you and wanting to be worthy of you has challenged me to be a better version of myself.

Please give us another chance.

My heart is, and always has been, yours for the taking.

Jughead

P.S. If you want to hear more please head to the Vittorio Emanuele statue at Piazza Bra in an hour.

Folding the note, Betty tucked it into her bag. After making some quick edits to her sketch, Betty wandered around the museum, before heading towards the exit.
Walking through the bustling piazza, Betty was oblivious as she weaved past the street musicians, artists selling their wares and tourists. Easily spotting the next meeting point, Betty made a beeline towards the Vittorio Emanuele statue, keeping an eye out for anyone carrying a blush rose. Betty stood admiring the statue of the Italian king on top of his horse, half listening to a nearby string quartet play 'The Girl from Ipanema'. After the song ended, Betty was about to head towards a nearby bench when she thought she heard the Cellist call out to her. Startled she turned around and saw that he was holding a single blush rose and envelope.

"Signorina, we have been commissioned to play this next song for you. If you would be so kind as to read this note while we play." The cellist said giving her a big smile as she took the items he was holding out to her.

After the cellist got situated, he counted to three and Betty felt a small smile spread over her face as the quartet started playing the opening notes of 'At Last'.

Opening the envelope, Betty pulled out a postcard of the Piazza Navona and turned it over and started reading.

B,

Do you remember the night we heard this song and I asked you to dance? Do you remember our first kiss? I do. Even though I was completely hooked after our first encounter, that night at the Piazza Navona was when I began to fall in love with you.

Never in my life did I think I would be as happy as I have during these past few months with you. I never realized that my life was missing something, until I found you. Do you believe in fate? I do. I believe that the universe conspired to bring us together.

Maybe this time in Italy will just be the start of our adventures together, rather than the end?

J

Betty read and reread the postcard a few times before realizing that this note didn't contain any instructions for her to follow, when she felt a tap on her shoulder. Turning around she was surprised to come face to face with her best friend.

"Ronnie?" Betty said startled, but glad to see a friendly face. "What are you doing here?"
"Hey B," Veronica smiled giving her friend a quick hug, "I'm under orders to take you to lunch."

"From Jughead?"

"Were you expecting Leonardo DiCaprio or Ryan Gosling?"

"Veronica!" Betty said, rolling her eyes, "Where is he?"

"All will be revealed in good time, my dear. But first you have a date with some osso bucco at La Griglia. Follow me." The brunette said before leading the way.

*** *** ***

"I will say that your boy knows how to apologize." Veronica said after they gotten situated at their table. Their osso bucco arriving minutes after they sat down and they alternated between enjoying their meal and catching up.

"No kidding," Betty said waving at the three roses that were now lying on the table.

"You know that i have been pretty anti-Jughead these past few days, but I will say he won me over."

"You were angrier than I was." Betty said affectionately, "How'd he even manage to get a word in edgewise?"

Veronica chuckled. "Yeah, I know I can be a piece of work when I'm angry. Can you blame me? No one messes with my best friend."

"And I appreciate that you look out for me, Ronnie."

"He's just lucky that Archie and Kevin were on his side."

"So after he won you over, you told him where I was?"

"Actually that's the funny part. I didn't tell him. I thought he had deduced it from your Instagram feed or something."

"I haven't posted anything on Instagram yet... So how did he guess I was in Verona?"

"Jason." Veronica said a smirk on her face.

Betty sat mouth agape, across from Veronica, her half eaten osso bucco in front of her. "Jason? Jason is the one who told Jughead I was in Verona?"

"I know right?" Veronica said incredulously.

"Seriously?" Betty asked disbelievingly, "I wish I was a fly on the wall for that conversation."

Veronica nodded, "Me too. Crazy isn't it?"

"These last few days have been crazy." Betty said with a sigh.

"So what are you going to do now?" Veronica asked softly studying her friend.

Betty smiled, "Am I crazy for wanting to be with him?"
Veronica gave her a reassuring smile, "Not if that's what you want."

"So what next?" Betty asked.

"I am sworn to secrecy. Jughead just didn't want you to have lunch alone." Veronica looked at her watch. "I do have to go now, but it looks like you don't have to wait to long for an answer." Veronica said standing up and looking at something behind Betty.

Turning around Betty saw one of the servers heading towards their table carrying three long stemmed blush roses and an envelope. After giving Betty a quick hug, Veronica made her way towards the exit.

Sitting back down, Betty opened the envelope. She pulled out a postcard that contained a few sentences:

You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever.

Betty smiled recognizing the passage from Jane Austen's Persuasion, but there was no additional clue or postscript.

Where am I supposed to go next? Betty wondered looking at the card. Flipping it over her eyes grew wide when she realized where she was expected to go next.

Of course, Betty thought as she pulled out her phone to map out the best route.
“There's no use trying,” she said, “one can't believe impossible things.”

“I daresay you haven't had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

- Lewis Carroll, from 'Alice in Wonderland'

Clutching six long stemmed blush roses, the statuesque blonde stopped at a storefront to reconfirm her route. According to Google Maps it was only an eight minute walk from the Piazza Bra. Tucking her phone back into her bag, Betty made her way out of the Piazza, past the Arena di Verona and turned left onto the Via Giuseppe Mazzini.

Walking past the stores and restaurants, Betty allowed her mind to wander, oblivious to the hustle and bustle of the crowds surrounding her.

Given where she was being directed to go, she was 99% sure that Jughead was waiting for her at this next destination. Her heart was racing and she felt a nervous flutter in her abdomen as she inched closer to her stop.

It had only been two days since she had seen the beanie wearing boy, but it was the first time she had seen them since their first real argument outside Le Mura.

Betty wasn't enough of a romantic to believe that their relationship would be free of conflict or drama, but she hadn't expected Jughead to close himself off like that and be so non-communicative. She obviously hadn't realized how insecure Jughead was about their relationship.

Thinking about her role in the fray, she realized that she could have been more forthcoming about the details of her talk with Jason. It's not like she had been hiding anything and she had every intention of telling Jughead all about it. She had just been waiting for the right opportunity presented itself. She understood now that she needed to be more assertive in sharing information that Jughead considered critical.

Dodging the summer crowds, the line from Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' popped into her head: 'the course of true love never did run smooth'. The bard definitely knew what he was talking about, she thought ruefully.

Betty thought back to Jughead's note...
Did she believe in fate?

She had always like the idea of it, but she wasn't a hundred percent sure. She was certain though, that they had been intended to eventually meet- especially since their best friends were dating. If they hadn't met in Italy would they have eventually crossed paths while visiting their friends at UCLA? Or maybe it would have happened when Veronica came to visit Betty in New York.... If they hadn't had their initial run in at il Piccolo, Betty mused, would they have perhaps run into each other in a café in Manhattan? Maybe.

Reaching the end of Via Giuseppe Mazzini, Betty made a right at the Via Capello and found herself at the archway leading into Juliet's House.

Visiting Casa di Giulietta had been on Betty's bucket list since watching Baz Luhrman's 'Romeo + Juliet' and Polly told her that the place existed. While she understood that Romeo and Juliet were fictional characters, she was enamored by the idea of visiting the house and imagining where the scenes between the star-crossed lovers could have happened.

Stepping into the courtyard, Betty felt her breath catch as she saw the infamous balcony. Unable to spot a familiar face in the crowd in the courtyard, Betty opted to find a more isolated spot where she could sit down, take in the scene and sketch the balcony.

*** *** ***

Jughead circled the courtyard, weaving in and out of the crowds in an effort to distract himself and ease his nerves. He had been able to observe Betty's reactions undetected at both the Caffé Al Teatro and Piazza Bra. He had watched with bated breath as she read the notes he had painstakingly written.

He could have written novels about the breadth of his feelings for her and how sorry he was but time had not been on his side. He hoped that his short, but heartfelt notes were able to convey all that he wanted to communicate to Betty. Based on the smile that spread through her features while she read his words, it seemed she was at least receptive to hearing from him.

Thank god, he thought, his friends were more than willing to help him execute his plan- there's no way he would have been able to do this on his own.

He was lost in thought, when a tap on his shoulder made him jump.

"Veronica!" Jughead said startled as he turned around to face the brunette, "I'm already on edge, no need to take any more years off my life."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Veronica said sarcastically, "Did I shave ten years off your life?"

"Maybe 5."

"Well, that's too bad." Veronica said dryly, before changing the topic, "So, I just came from lunch with Betty and they were delivering your note as I was leaving. I'd say that you have about 15-20 minutes until she gets here."

"And?" Jughead asked.
"And what?" Veronica asked, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"How is she? What does she think of me? Of this?" Jughead asked.

"Whoa Romeo, calm down." Veronica said, "You'll find out soon enough, won't you?"

"Thanks for being so helpful," Jughead grumbled sarcastically.

"I'm plenty helpful," Veronica retorted, handing him a piece of paper, "I spoke to the estate manager and we are clear to have the music and hijack the balcony for 30 minutes maximum without interruption."

Jughead looked at Veronica, a grateful expression on his face, "Thank you! How'd you manage to do that?"

Veronica smiled, "Let's just say that Hiram Lodge made a very generous donation today."

"Will he be mad?" Jughead asked curiously.

"It will be fine," Veronica said with a shrug, "The way I see it, my dad owed you for his part with the whole Jason debaucle."

"Thanks Veronica." Jughead said, starting to get a little less nervous and more excited.

"So, what's the plan?"

"Let's find Kevin and Archie and I'll let you know what I had in mind." Jughead said, a smile on his face.

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Jughead felt his insides tighten as he caught site of the beautiful blonde, entering the courtyard. Using a large tour group for cover, he watched as she wandered around the courtyard, looking around for a familiar face. Dressed in a simple floral sundress that showcased her long legs, Jughead once again thought about how lucky he was to have come across someone who was so beautiful inside and out.

He felt his phone vibrate and quickly checking his text messages he saw that everyone was in position. Jughead was about to head to his place when he realized that he had forgotten to designate a messenger for his next communication.

Scanning the courtyard his gaze fell upon a little blonde girl in pigtails doing pirouettes in the courtyard. Perfect, he thought, as he went to go talk to her parents.

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Satisfied with her initial drawings, Betty was about to shift positions when she looked up to find a little blonde girl with pigtails standing in front of her.

With a shy smile, she held out two long stemmed blush roses and an admission ticket. "Miss, I was told to give these to you and to tell you that you should go directly up to the balcony." She said shyly in a British accent.

Taking the flowers and ticket from her outstretched hands, Betty thanked the girl and watched as she ran back excitedly to her parents. Taking a deep breath, Betty gathered her stuff together, and made
her way into the Villa.

Weaving through the crowds milling about, Betty smiled when she saw Kevin and Veronica standing like guards at the entrance to the balcony, each holding a long stemmed blush rose. Seeing the blonde approach, Veronica quickly spoke to one of the Villa workers who promptly went out to the balcony to hurry the tourists along. Coming out again, he nodded at her friend before smiling at Betty and gesturing towards the balcony. Stepping forward, Veronica and Kevin handed Betty the roses they were holding.

"It's all you Betts," Kevin said, while Veronica nudged her outside.

Stepping onto the balcony, Betty saw a single blush rose on the ledge. Taking the rose, Betty looked down at the crowd below, searching for the beanie wearing boy, when she heard someone familiar call her name.

Looking to the side, she saw Archie standing below, guitar strapped on, ready to play. She had been so focused on finding Jughead that she hadn't noticed Archie there.

Seeing that he had her attention, Archie smiled up at her saying, "He didn't have access to a boom box, so Jughead wanted me to play this song for you."

Playing the opening melody, Archie started to sing, his voice strong and carrying despite the noise in the courtyard.

"Love I get so lost, sometimes
Days pass and this emptiness fills my heart
When I want to run away
I drive off in my car
But whichever way I go
I come back to the place you are"

Betty smiled as she immediately recognized the song 'In Your Eyes' by Peter Gabriel from 'Say Anything'.

"All my instincts, they return
And the grand facade, so soon will burn
Without a noise, without my pride
I reach out from the inside
In your eyes
The light the heat
In your eyes
I am complete
In your eyes
I see the doorway to a thousand churches
In your eyes
The resolution of all the fruitless searches
In your eyes
I see the light and the heat
In your eyes
Oh, I want to be that complete
I want to touch the light
The heat I see in your eyes"

How fitting, Betty thought, that Jughead who considered himself a film buff would choose this song from an iconic scene in a classic romantic comedy.

"Love, I don't like to see so much pain
So much wasted and this moment keeps slipping away
I get so tired of working so hard for our survival
I look to the time with you to keep me awake and alive
And all my instincts, they return
And the grand facade, so soon will burn
Without a noise, without my pride
I reach out from the inside"

While Archie sang, Betty scanned the crowds looking for Jughead but without success.

"In your eyes
The light the heat
In your eyes
I am complete
In your eyes
I see the doorway to a thousand churches
In your eyes
The resolution of all the fruitless searches
In your eyes
I see the light and the heat
In your eyes
Oh, I want to be that complete
I want to touch the light,
The heat I see in your eyes
In your eyes, in your eyes"

As Archie's serenade came to a close, the crowd clapped and cheered. Betty continued to scan the
crowd for Jughead when a low voice behind her made her jump, "Hey there, Juliet."

Startled, Betty spun around and felt her insides do somersaults, as her green eyes met a familiar pair of blue ones.

"Juggie!" Betty said breathlessly.

Jughead stood beanie-less before her, holding a single blush rose and said, "Hear my soul speak: The very instant that I saw you did

My heart fly to your service, there resides
to make me slave to it, and for your sake
Am I this patient log-man."

Betty smiled as she recognized the lines from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', "You have the right playwright, but I think you are quoting from the wrong play."

Jughead shook his head, his blue eyes holding her gaze. "No, I am quoting from the right play. Betts, we aren't star-crossed lovers. I needed to choose a comedy because unlike Romeo and Juliet- you and I, Betty are going to have a happy ever after."

Betty felt herself blush at the intensity of his gaze, "You think we will have a happy ending?"

"Betty- you and I are endgame. I was a fool to ever doubt it, because I've known since the moment that I laid eyes on you that we are meant to be. But we will only get our happily ever after if you give me a second chance." Jughead said.

Betty stood considering his words for a moment. Starting to feel overwhelmed by her emotions and the intensity radiating off Jughead, Betty turned around. Looking out over the balcony, she noticed that a small crowd initially drawn by the serenade was now tying to follow the action on the balcony. Slightly distracted by the unexpected attention, Betty was brought back to the present by Jughead's voice.

"I love you, Betty Cooper." The dark haired boy said softly to Betty's back, the blonde's eyes widening in surprise, as she turned back around to face him.

His expression soft and adoring, Jughead looked Betty straight in the eye and said, "I love you. I am in love with you. And I know I don't deserve someone as wonderful and compassionate as you but I hope you feel how great we are together. I-"

Betty stepped closer to Jughead so they were less than a foot apart and put one finger over his lips to silence him, "I love you, Jughead Jones."

Cupping her face with his hands, Jughead pulled Betty closer, crushing his lips against hers, oblivious to the cheering and wolf whistles coming from the crowd below.

Chapter End Notes

Only one more chapter left before wrapping this up- but don't worry, I have more tales planned within this AU.
“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

- Lao Tzu

Betty stood in the crowd, backpack slung over her shoulder, waiting at the luggage carousel. Slightly disoriented by her trans-Atlantic flight and trying not to draw too much attention to herself, Betty moved slowly side-to-side, stretching her legs. Looking around the room, Betty smiled as her eyes focused on the the "Welcome to JFK" sign. While she was only here for a few days before heading home to Malibu, she had to remind herself that she would be back in about four months for her internship. As the crowd continued to gather at baggage claim, Betty placed her earbuds on, to curb her impatience.

Betty lifted an eyebrow, a slight smirk on her face as Peter Gabriel's 'In Your Eyes' started to play, instantly transporting her back to Casa Di Giulietta in Verona.

The crowd cheering below them, Betty tried to pull away, only to have Jughead pull her back to him.

"Not yet." He growled, "I was so afraid I wouldn't be able to do this again."

"But Juggie," Betty said breathless, her forehead pressed against his, "Maybe we should continue this elsewhere?"

Jughead looked over her shoulder at their captivated audience. "Let them watch," he said shrugging his shoulders and pulling her towards him again.

Temporarily sated, Jughead allowed Betty, face flushed to pull away from their embrace. Blushing, Betty headed towards Kevin and Veronica, while Jughead, a smug smile on his face, turned and waved at the cheering crowd below.

Their small group moved through the Villa and into the courtyard where Archie rushed over to meet them, a huge smile on his face.

"I made over €200 for just playing that one 3-minute song!" Archie said disbelievingly, "I should have started playing at tourists spots earlier in the summer. Think about how much money I could have made!"

"What do you need the extra money for?" Veronica asked confused.

"Do you think dating you is cheap?" Archie asked only half joking, as Veronica punched him on the arm. Turning to face his best friend, "Looks like you were successful with your mission."

Pulling Betty closer to him, Jughead looked around the group, a grateful expression on his face, "I couldn't have pulled it off without you. Thank you for all your help."
Betty looked up at Jughead, "This whole thing was your idea?"

"You don't think I can be romantic?" Jughead asked, pretending to be offended.

"You better not make Betty mad again," Kevin piped in.

"Why?" Jughead asked.

"Because we don't think that you could ever top this apology." Veronica said.

"I think Juggie's learned his lesson," Betty said, a sly smile on her face as Jughead planted a kiss on the top of her head.

"Yeah, I'm not planning on doing anything I'll need to apologize for soon." Jughead added in.

"Smart man," Archie said, patting his friend on the back.

Veronica took a look at her watch and turned towards Kevin and Archie, "Well, I think we've done our good deed for the day. Shall we head back to Rome now?"

"Definitely. The lovebirds need time to talk and make-up." Kevin said with a knowing smile.

"Make-up? I'm just glad I'm not staying next door to you." Archie said dryly, an eyebrow raised.

"Andrews!" Jughead scolded, "Mind out of the gutter!"

"What?" Archie asked, feigning innocence, "I tried to tell you that the walls in our flat are thin."

*** *** ***

Suitcase in hand, Betty stifled a yawn as the custom's line she was standing in continued to move at a snail's pace. Looking for a distraction, Betty allowed her mind to drift back to Verona.

"You've been holding out on me," Jughead said with a mock accusatory look at the blonde walking alongside him, happily indulging in a scoop of strawberry gelato.

"What do you mean?" Betty asked puzzled.

"You didn't tell me that you got the Planned Parenthood internship."

"Oh!" Betty said, "I almost forgot. Did Veronica tell you?"

Jughead shook his head. "Jason was a veritable treasure trove of information." He said wryly.

"I told you he wasn't that bad..."

"No, he definitely was helpful- but don't expect us to become best friends anytime in the near or distant future... Is it true... Do they really want you in their New York office?"

Betty nodded, "Isn't that crazy? Their donor cultivation department is headquartered in lower Manhattan, so I'll be studying at Columbia for the semester."

"That is amazing. So just a few months apart and then I'll get to see you everyday?" Jughead asked
as they walked through the Piazza Bra.

"That sounds about right. You are coming to Polly's wedding in October and then I'll be in New York in January." Betty said grinning over at him, "Are you sure you want to put up with me?"

"Don't even joke about that. Haven't I already told you that I'm madly and deeply in love with you? I'm never, ever letting you go again." Jughead said reaching for her free hand, as she finished up her cone, "By the way... I was thinking..."

"Ouch," Betty interjected, teasing, "Did it hurt?"

"Har har," Jughead said, rolling his eyes and giving her a quick kiss on the nose, "You think you are funny, don't you?"

"Hysterical." Betty agreed.

"Well, let me finish this thought before you decide to burn me again... I was thinking... what if you did a quick trip to New York for a few days on your way to back to California? You could meet my family... and I could show you around Riverdale..."

"Seriously?" Betty asked, her eyes widening, a small smile on her lips.

"Only if you want to... Fair warning... I've never really brought a girl home before but I really want my parents and Jellybean to meet you. You could stay in our guest room and we could have burgers and Milkshakes at Pop's..." Jughead said quickly.

"Would your parents be okay with that?"

"I'm ashamed to say that it was my mom who suggested it."

"In that case, I'd love to come and visit. I'll call my parents later, but I'm sure they won't mind if I stop in New York for a few days."

"Great! My mom will be thrilled." Jughead said.

"Juggie?" Betty said soberly.

"Yes?" Jughead asked, surprised by her change in tone.

"I know we are still getting to know one another and I doubt that this will be our last disagreement..." Betty began tentatively.

"Yes?" Jughead said encouragingly.

"Look... I don't expect you to tell me everything, but promise that you'll at least talk to me next time? Don't let your insecurities or negative feelings fester like that again. Okay?" Betty asked, stopping mid stride, her tone serious.

Jughead let out a sigh of relief, "Is that all?" Giving the blonde a kiss on the tip of her nose, "I promise. Plus Veronica is right- I don't think I'll ever be able to top this apology."

"Good," Betty said, tucking herself under his arm as they sat down on a bench overlooking the Arena di Verona.

The beanie clad boy looked down at the blonde tucked under his arm and let out a sigh of contentment. Pulling Betty onto his lap, he laid his cheek down against her hair. "Have I ever told
you how much I love you?" Jughead whispered into her ear.

Betty turned to look at him and smiled impishly, "Not recently, but please feel free to tell me again."

Moving Betty off his lap, Jughead stood up from the bench and pulled the blonde up to her feet. He spun her around once, before pulling her into his arms, "I love you Betty Cooper. 'Doubt thou the stars are fire, Doubt the sun doth move, Doubt truth to be a liar, but never doubt thy love.'"

"Hamlet." Betty said immediately.

"Well, we are in Verona after all." Jughead said, arching an eyebrow.

"Do you mean that?" Betty asked, turning serious once again as her green eyes met Jughead's.

"I do." Jughead said, before leaning over and planting a gentle kiss on her lips. Enjoying the feel of her soft lips pressed against his, Jughead's hands caressed the curve of her sides to rest on her hips as he drew her closer. Wrapping her arms around his neck, Betty moaned, pressing her mouth hungrily against his, until they parted a few minutes later, panting and out of breath.

Keeping his lower half pressed against hers, Jughead leaned back to take a good look at the beautiful blonde. "I was afraid that I wouldn't get to do that again." He said as he leaned in for another kiss.

Betty's phone started to ring, pulling her out of her reverie. Smiling, she answered the phone.

"I was just thinking about you." Betty said to the caller on the other end of the line.

"Only good things, I hope?" Jughead asked.

"Of course. Great timing, I just landed thirty minutes ago."

"I saw. I got your flight notification." Jughead said, "Have you cleared customs yet?"

"No," Betty said with a sigh, "Not yet. And based on the length of this line, I may not leave this airport until tomorrow evening."

Jughead chuckled, "Exaggerate much?"

"Ok," Betty conceded, "Maybe tomorrow morning."

"I hope not. I've been counting down the days until I get to see you again."

"And you think I exaggerate?" Betty teased as it had only been a little under two weeks since she had last seen him, "How are you going to survive until October?"

"I'm not exaggerating. I've missed you." Jughead said softly.

"I've missed you, too."

"And you know what I've missed doing to you?" Jughead said mischievously.

"Jug-" Betty said a smile, "You are seriously not going to do what I think you are going to do? I'm standing in a really crowded customs line!"
"May as well make it worth your while..." Jughead drawled cheekily, "Remember what I did to you back in your hotel room in Verona?"

Betty felt her face flush as she remembered Jughead's fingers running skillfully up and down her body, "I do." Betty whispered, painfully aware of the people around her and wondering if they could hear any of this phone exchange.

"And you know that thing I do with my tongue..."

"Jug-"

"Now imagine my tongue running up from your navel, up your toso and circling your left nipple and moving to your-" Jughead said.

"Juggie!" Betty interrupted, feeling her face flush, "That's not fair. You very well know I can't reciprocate right now."

"I'd much rather make sure that you are satisfied first." Jughead said in a low voice. "Now imagine me-" Jughead began before being interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Forsythe! Are you still napping? Don't forget you need to make the bed in the guest room." Betty heard a female voice ask in the background.

"Foiled by my own mother," Jughead said with a sigh. "Hold on Betts. No mom. I'm awake- I was just checking to see how Betty's flight was. I'll be there in a minute."

"Jug, I should go anyway. It's almost my turn." Betty said, "I'll see you soon anyway."

"I can't wait." Jughead said, "I wish you had let me pick you up- you know, we haven't done it in a car yet..."

"Juggie!"

"I was only kidding...sort of."Jughead said laughing, before saying goodbye.

A minute after hanging up with Jughead, Betty finally reached the front of the line and a female custom's agent beckoned her forward.

"Welcome to JFK." The customs agent said, a kind look on her face as she took Betty's forms, "Italy. I've always wanted to go there. Did you have a nice time?"

"I did. You should go sometime. It's a life changing experience." Betty said with a smile.

*** *** ***

Stepping out past security into the arrivals greeting zone, Betty scanned the crowd, when her eyes came to a familiar face carrying a bright yellow poster board with the words "Welcome Home from Prison" scrawled in big bright letters.

Choking back a giggle, Betty noticed that the sign as well as the person holding it were attracting quite a few curious stares.

"Betty!" Cheryl squealed, dropping her sign in her excitement and haste to hug her friend.

"It's nice to see you, too." Betty said, returning the hug, "Nice sign."
"I thought you'd appreciate it. Based on the looks we got, I think people were expecting you to to be larger, more muscular and completely tatted out," Cheryl said laughing as she wheeled Betty's suitcase towards the short term parking garage.

*** *** ***

Sitting in the passenger side of Cheryl's lipstick red Audi Cabriolet convertible, Betty enjoyed the feeling of the wind whipping through her hair.

"Thanks for offering to pick me up," Betty said.

"And miss a chance to spend time with my little sister and favorite Alpha? I wish you were staying longer."

"Polly and Mom want some help with the wedding before I head back to Stanford. Plus, I'll see you at Polly's wedding. And, I'll be in New York starting in January anyway."

"Speaking of which... do you have a place to live yet?" Cheryl said, turning to face Betty while at a stoplight.

Betty shook her head, "I need to review the paperwork but I think I can probably just apply for a dorm room through Columbia's university housing program."

"Screw the dorms!" Cheryl said, stepping on the gas once the light changed to green, "Live with me."

Betty turned to Cheryl startled, "Cheryl, that's really nice of you but I don't know if that's such a great idea."

"I think it's perfect. You can stay in my second bedroom and my condo is only a half hour walk to Columbia."

"Cheryl-" Betty began.

"Plus it's free," Cheryl said in a singsong voice.

"Cheryl, that's very generous of you," Betty began, "But-

"It's about Jason, isn't it?" Cheryl interjected.

"Yes." Betty admitted, "Don't you think it'd be weird for me to have Jughead over to visit if I'm living with you?"

"God no." Cheryl said dismissively. "Yes, you dated my brother but we were friends before that. I think that living together would be a lot of fun. Plus, I already asked Jason what he thought of the idea and he said it was fine."

"He did?" Betty asked.

"He did." Cheryl said, "So what do you say?"

"If you are sure that I won't be a bother..." Betty said warming up to the idea.

Cheryl let out a gleeful squeal, "Yay! I'm so glad. I'd hug you but I don't think I can do that without
taking my hands off the steering wheel."

"Thanks for valuing my life. I'll take a rain check on the hug for now," Betty said dryly.

"So speaking of Jughead... I can't wait to meet him."

"You don't know how happy that makes me." Betty said, "I think you guys will really get along well."

"I'm sure we will. Even Jason grudgingly admitted that he seemed like a good guy. So are you excited to meet his family."

"Yes. But I'm a little nervous... Apparently, I'm the first girl he's brought home to meet his parents."

"Seriously?" Cheryl asked, taking the next exit on the expressway.

"Seriously. Don't you think that's a lot of pressure?" Betty asked.

"Whatever," Cheryl said dismissively, "If anyone can handle it- you can. Please- if you were able to win over the famously haughty Penelope Blossom- I think you can handle Jughead's parents."

"Please- your mom is an angel."

"Says you." Cheryl retorted.

"How long until we get there?"

"Well based on Google maps, we are about a half mile away." Cheryl said, making a right turn onto Greendale Avenue.

"What!" Betty squeaked, "We're almost there?"

"Actually," Cheryl said, pulling in front of a two story gray Colonial style house, "We're here."

"I can see that," Betty said, feeling her nerves start to surface.

"Seriously, Betts- what are you worried about? They're going to love you." Cheryl said looking at her friend affectionately.

Taking a few deep breaths to steady her nerves, Betty opened her door and stepped outside the car. Facing Cheryl, Betty rolled her shoulders back and stood a little straighter, "You're right. I guess it's now or never."

"Hey there, Stranger." A male voice called out from behind her.

Turning around at the sound of the familiar voice, a big smile spread over Betty's face. The front door was wide open and Jughead was there standing on the front porch.

She felt her heart beat wildly in her chest as her green eyes met a familiar set of blue eyes.

"I'm so glad you are finally here," Jughead said, a wide smile on his face, "Welcome to Riverdale."
Thanks for going on this journey with me. I appreciate everyone of you that read this tale. I know I left it as a bit of a cliffhanger... but I have a few codas planned within this AU (including Betty meeting the Jones Family)- so be on the lookout for those!

I'm also on tumblr as jennimisk.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!