Teenage Talk

by darlingdearestdead

Summary

At Riverdale High's ten year reunion, Betty and Jughead are thrust together when a former classmate turns up dead.

It’d been five years since Betty last set foot in Riverdale which – in the grand scheme of things – wasn’t that long, but it felt longer, like the Betty Cooper that crosses the border was an entirely new person, from the tip of her blond hair down to her suede boots. She read somewhere once that all the cells in your body are replaced every seven years and, even if that wasn’t true, which scientifically is more likely, she felt it anyway.

She went to Yale, which had been her dream all those years ago, as a child imagining the perfect future that everyone envisioned for the perfect little girl. And even years later when she realised it was a lie, the perfection, the happiness, all melting away around the time Jason Blossom washed up on their shores, she still wanted that for herself. It wasn’t easy, the hours in the library, the SATs and the pure luck that got her in, but it didn’t hurt that investigating and catching a murderer made a killer personal essay.

Veronica cried when Betty showed her the email, the acceptance and her scholarship, grabbing her and pulling her into a fierce grip. Betty had been in too much shock at first when she’d shown her Mom but, with Veronica, she started to laugh, and then let her tears fall.

And, when she got there, she did the opposite of all her classmates, she relaxed. It didn’t matter to her that she wasn’t number one in the class, that she didn’t became editor of the newspaper, she wasn’t going to be the valedictorian there, not with all those kids who were geniuses, or could buy their way to the top. It didn’t matter, because she was happy. She loved her classes, talking about and learning things she’d never dreamed of, doing well in class, just well and not perfect and that being enough. And of course there were snobs, who judged her for being a good girl small town cheerleader, but there were friends. There was no Veronica or Archie or Jughead or Kevin but she hadn’t been expecting that anyway, and the people she met were nice enough.

It was her final year of college when Jughead’s book was published and, with it, her world exploded just slightly. Okay, that was an exaggeration, but for a while that’s what it felt like. But not necessarily in a bad way, in way that made her feel a little looser, free. She’d known, of course, that it was going to be published, because Jughead himself had reached out to her, called up after a year
of self-imposed silence and asked her permission, and she opened her mail to a manuscript that day. She’d sat up all night in bed, devoured her past by lamp light, and cried at the end when her life was laid bare. It couldn’t be denied that she was a main character, that her and Jughead’s almost-but-never-quite relationship and detective partnership was a huge plot point, and the Betty/Veronica/Archie/Jughead childhood love entanglements were painfully explored. But it also couldn’t be denied that it was beautiful and horrible, painful and profound, that it painted a picture of their town that was as damning as it was true. It needed to be seen, so she sent it back to Jughead with a note of approval, and a request for them to hang out soon.

They never did hang out, not properly, something that smarted just a little even though she expected it, but the book was published and it made a huge splash. The world was hungry for true crime, the success of so many documentaries and podcasts proved that, and Jughead’s book hit the perfect formula. It had the golden boy dead, his mourning twin sister, a gang tangled up with the family that founded the town, corruption, teen pregnancy, and a twist ending. All of it written down by the outsider who, with the help of the girl next door, cracked the case. When it reached number one on the bestseller list, Betty started to see copies of it pop up in her fellow students hands, used to scurry through campus with her collar up, feeling the eyes of everyone follow.

After a freshman accosted her in the library to ask if she was the Betty Cooper, to which she reluctantly confessed, she sat down at her desk and wrote her own version of events, which appeared the next week in The Yale Daily News. And, when it went semi-viral, she gave the New York Times permission to reprint it.

That was what landed her in a whirlwind, after her graduation, and a summer in Riverdale catching up with Kevin, Archie, and Veronica, in a dingy New York City apartment with her college roommate. That article led to an unpaid internship at the New York Times, and then a low paying entry job, and another, until she was back in Riverdale for their ten year reunion with an assignment under her belt, to pen a follow up to her original article, to revisit the tragedy that marked all her classmates’ high school years.

She wasn’t sure how five years had passed since she’d last gone home, which had been a quick Thanksgiving trip, but somehow it had happened. It wasn’t on purpose, a conscious act to avoid her childhood, but as time passed there had always been something in the way. First, Polly and the twins had moved out of town, and then it didn’t take much to convince her Mom to visit her in the city instead the other way around, until Alice Cooper herself had packed up and took herself elsewhere. That left her with less and less reasons to re-tread her old stomping grounds. And her life got hectic too, she had her job, an ill-advised full fringe for a while that she’d – thankfully – grown out, and, for a short time, she’d had a fiancé. Ben was a lawyer she’d met when they were in line at a coffee shop, they’d dated for two years before he proposed, and then a further three months until she’d called it off. He’d been kind to her, a good cook, and a guy who’d be a brilliant husband to someone else. But she’d started to realise that she couldn’t see that future for them, began to worry that after marriage they’d run out of things to say. It was little things, like he wasn’t great at making her laugh, or how he didn’t read her articles but pretended that he had, so she’d broken their engagement. They’d both cried when it happened, but it had been for the best, a few months ago she’d looked him up online and seen he’d found another pretty blond to hold, and she sincerely hoped that it would work out for him.

But that didn’t change the fact that she was uncomfortable and sort-of-newly single, about to enter her childhood world again. As she approached the bright lights of Pop’s she felt a disconcerting mix of unease and comfort wash over her at the sight of the neon glow. She pushed the door open, and the little ding made a familiar face look up from where she’d been tapping on her phone.

“Betty!” Veronica called out, slipping her phone into her cashmere cape – despite all the people
she’d known in her life, Veronica was still the only person she’d met who could pull off a cape – stood up to approach her.

“Ronnie!” She replied as they met half way in a tight embrace.

“God, I have missed you B.” Veronica said as she pulled away grinning.

Betty slipped into the booth her friend had been occupying, shivering at the strangest déjà vu. “I know. It’s been too long.”

“Far, far too long.” Veronica said, sliding into the seat opposite her, pushing the plate of fries she’d already bought towards the other girl. “How long has it actually been?”

She snagged a fry. “I don’t know. I think six months? You were in town for business.”

“It’s always business.” The dark haired girl sighed. “One of these days, you and I are going to hit up New York for strictly pleasure.”

“Does this not count as pleasure?”

“Last week, I was sunning myself on Richard Branson’s private island.” She took a sip from her lukewarm cup of coffee. “So no, a high school reunion is not my idea of pleasure.”

“Have you seen anyone else yet?” Betty asked.

“I saw Kevin and Ravi last night.” She replied. “They seemed fine, Kev says they’re thinking of getting a dog.”

“A dog? But what about the hair shedding everywhere?”

“I said the exact same thing. But some people sacrifice anything for a cute face. As we well know.”

“You haven’t seen Archie yet then?” She asked.

“Unfortunately not, Archiekins isn’t in town until tomorrow. Actually,” She slipped her phone out of her pocket and tapped the screen a few times. “Yep, he just finished playing a gig in Austin. He’ll be flying out in the morning.”

“And Jughead?” Betty asked, wondering why she felt a pang of something undefinable but sad when she said his name.

Veronica gave her an undecipherable look, and Betty couldn’t help but feel she’d heard that note of something in her voice. “Is he even coming?”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged, leaning back. “I hope so.”

“I haven’t see him for years.”

“Me either.” Betty looked down at the table, examining the various scratches on the surface. “If he hadn’t written a bestselling book, I’d have thought he’d vanished.”

“That’s Jughead.” Veronica sighed. “But, if he does come, I hope he comes prepared for the angry mob and pitchforks that are going to greet him at the gate.”

“People can’t hold a grudge for that long, his book was published years ago.”
“And became a worldwide phenomenon.” She pointed out. “He painted a picture of this town that was less than pleasant.”

“He told the truth.” Betty said defensively. “This place wants to pretend it’s still somewhere where nothing bad ever happens, but it isn’t, and it never will be again.”

“Hey,” Veronica raised her perfectly manicured hands up. “I know that. It’s just the rest of this town that doesn’t.”

The blond let out a hum of agreement.

“I do wish there were some things he was a little less forthcoming about. Did the world really need to know all about our many, many, awkward adolescent fumblings?”

“It added some color.” She laughed.

“Please,” Veronica scoffed. “It was embarrassing. It was like Glee but without all the singing.”

“Oh God,” Betty cringed, remembering the drama that had dogged all their high school relationships. “I guess it was.”

“At least we know we’ve matured in some areas.” She sighed.

“Speaking of,” Betty said. “How’s Violet?”

“I don’t know or care.” Veronica sniffed, tossing her silken black hair over her shoulder.

“You broke up?”

“I saw her kissing some girl in a bar and I let her know that is not how you treat a Lodge.”

“Sorry Ronnie.” She said sympathetically.

“Whatever.” She shrugged. “She used to go by V too and that’s way too ‘Swift and Lautner’ for me. And now I can force everyone we went to school with to focus on my kick-ass career instead of my love life.”

“Good luck with that.” Betty sighed, resting her chin in her hand. “I’m sure I’ll be lucky to get one quote for my article, the rest of the time it’ll be ‘Sorry about your engagement Betty! Sucks to be you Betty!”

“Yeah, because getting hitched at sixteen and never leaving your home town is so much better than being a world renowned journalist for the New York Times.”

“I’m not world renowned.” She blushed.

“You interviewed the President like last week.”

“I asked her one question.”

“B, it’s been ten years, learn to take a compliment already.”

“Fine.” She sighed, leaning back against the plastic booth. “Thanks. I think being back in Riverdale is bringing out all my childhood bad habits.” She tensed her shoulders. “Last week, the President said I was ‘insightful’ and I didn’t even flinch, here I can’t even listen to you say something nice. It sets my skin on edge, I keep expecting my Mom to came around the corner and catch me out or
“First of all, I get it, being back here is weird, but your Mom isn’t even in town, you’re safe. Second, the President anecdote is totally what you’re leading with tomorrow.”

“Okay.” She laughed, relaxing a little. “I will.”

“I’m going to open with a fake British accent a la 90s Madonna.”

Betty wrinkled her nose. “Please don’t.”

“But I want to make sure everyone knows I’m a glamorous, cosmopolitan ex-pat.” She joked, shaking her head dramatically on her last words.

“I think they know that from your Facebook already.”

“Kevin thought it was a good idea.” Veronica pouted.

“You trust Kevin more than me?”

“When Kevin agrees with me? Yes.”

She laughed, looking away from her best friend towards the counter, where she spotted Pop’s familiar head turned away from her, grey now but still recognisable, and she felt a sudden rush of affection for this place where she’d spent so much of her youth, dating Archie and then not dating Archie, studying, gossiping with Kevin, conspiring with Veronica, and figuring things out with Jughead. “V, you want a Milkshake?”

“Betty Cooper,” Veronica grinned. “I thought you’d never ask.”

The sun streamed through the flimsy window shade early the next morning as Betty jolted awake. For a few moments she was confused, thought she was in her own comfy apartment bed, instead of the dingy hotel in her hometown. She stayed in many worse places in her career, in tents, and hostels where cockroaches climbed up the wall, but it was still unpleasant to not be home when you wanted to be.

Veronica and Betty had swapped wine for milkshakes, for old time’s sake, and sat for hours in their diner booth, talking about the past, the future, everything in between. They laughed at themselves and at everyone else they’d ever known. Betty loved her friends in New York, her old college roommates and her colleagues at the paper, but none of them were Veronica, and it felt great to be reminded that their friendship was rare, special, they were B and V no matter how much time had passed. Finally, both bloated and loaded with a sugar induced stomach ache, they parted ways, with promises to meet for lunch the next day before they faced the rest of their classmates.

Her laptop was still open on her bedside table, glowing in the dim room, and she groaned as she shut it. She’d attempted to organise her thoughts on the upcoming days for her article, writing out the questions she wanted answers to, but she never worked well online, preferring an old fashioned note book, but the blank page had been staring at her when she’d arrived home the night before, so she’d tried out the computer method. It was more intimidating than she’d thought, trying to revisit the story that launched her career and, at least a little, defined it, and it was filling her with fear she hadn’t felt for a while.

She reached for her phone and flicked through it, there was a message from Veronica sent last night.
confirming they were meeting Archie for lunch, a text from Kevin asking if she wanted to meet for brunch, and a group email from Ginger Lopez confirming times for the mixer the next night.

Rather than a classic one night reunion their organiser, the aforementioned Ginger, had decided to make it a three day weekend, complete with a variety of activities and a big dance on the last night. Betty wasn’t sure whether to thank the girl – for giving her more interview opportunities with her classmates – or to kill her – for forcing her to spend longer than necessary with people she no longer knew – but either way, the fact remained that she was going to be spending about a week in Riverdale. She sighed, shot off a quick message to Kevin telling him to come to lunch with the rest of the gang, and then got up to stretch. It was still early, the weather not yet grey and bitter, so she tossed some comfy clothes on with the intention of going for a quick walk.

Tying up her hair in the mirror, Betty almost wanted to laugh remembering her high school hair styles, the painfully tight pony she used to force her hair into every single day. Now she pulled her hair back neatly, smoothly, but comfortably, and she laughed at its metaphorical resonance, the difference between the teenager her and the adult her. She smiled, pulled on her sneakers, and took off.

The air felt cool in her throat, and it was the freshness that made her realise how suffocated she’d felt in that tiny hotel room, just being outside gave her a chance to catch her breath. She often struggled with that, her anxiety and small places, and it was the only problem she had with New York, she loved it, but it was nice now and then to find a place with space to breathe.

There wasn’t really many people around yet, a handful jogging or walking their dog, but no one she knew. She thought it was going to be harder to be anonymous in this town, a place that both pitied and blamed her, but maybe that was naivety, maybe she remembered Riverdale as smaller than it was, maybe it had new ghosts that didn’t want to haunt her anymore.

She walked peacefully, strolling with her headphones in, until she saw something across the street that almost made her heart stop. She wondered for a split second if she was imagining it, had wanted this so badly that she’d willed it into existence, but no, it was him.

She tore the headphones from her ears. “Jughead!”

The man turned around, and it was unmistakably him, his blue crown hat, tattered clothing, dark hair, crooked lips, teeth that stuck out just a little. “Betty?” He squinted.

Ignoring all her better instincts, ingrained from the busy streets she dealt with in the city, she sprinted across the road without looking and hugged her old friend tightly. The dog he was holding barked, but not unfriendly, as they embraced, Jughead’s arms coming tentatively up around her back.

“I can’t believe you’re here.” She said, still holding him.

“Alive and in the flesh.” Jughead drawled sarcastically.

That old voice, a voice she hadn’t heard for years, was so familiar that Betty found herself worried that she was about to cry. She pulled back, Jughead smiled at her, and she whacked him in the chest. “You idiot.”

“Oh.” He stepped back, pulling on the dog’s leash who was barking in defensive of his owner. “Calm down Hot Dog, I don’t think she’s going to kill me.” He looked back towards the blond. “Although I’m not 100% sure.”

“I can’t believe I haven’t heard from you in years.”
“I know.” He winced, looking down. “Would you believe me if I said I’d been busy?” She didn’t even dignify that with a response, and he couldn’t blame her. “Honestly, I don’t know what to say.”

She grabbed his wrist, dragging him and the dog to a nearby bench, dropped her grip as she sat and watched him expectantly. He sighed, tying Hot Dog to the leg of the seat, and then dropping into place next to her. Betty almost wanted to laugh that no matter how adult he became, he still managed to find the most awkward way to sit in a seat.

“How’ve you been?” Betty asked, after a moment of silence.

“Fine.” He shrugged, and then clumsily, faltering just a little. “How are you? How’s your fiancé?”

“Oh.” She paused, doing that awkward half-shrug he remembered. “We broke up.”

“Shit. I’m sorry Bets.”

She sighed, hearing him call her by her old nickname, leaning back against the bench. “I broke up with him.”

“Good. He seemed boring.”

She let out a bark laugh of surprise. “How would you know? We haven’t spoken in years. I’m surprised you even know I was engaged.”

“Look, I’m a pathetic, apathetic, tortured writer, and a terrible friend.” He paused. “But that doesn’t mean I don’t ask Archie about you.”

“You know, you could have just asked me yourself?” She said. “I haven’t heard from you since Archie’s concert like six years ago.”

“I send you a message on your birthday. I read all your articles.”

She gave him a sharp look. “You do?”

“Bets, you’re kidding? Your articles singlehandedly prove that print media is not dead. I cried honest to god, real tears, when I read your article about living with undiagnosed anxiety. Before then, I could’ve sworn my heart was cold and dead.”

“Thank you.” She looked down at her lap, absentmindedly stroking the dog that was nudging against her thigh. “I missed you.”

“I-“ Jughead hesitated. “I missed you too.”

“You’re here for the reunion then?” She looked up at him.

“You know me, I’m just full of school spirit.”

Betty snorted. “Of course.”

“I’d tell you Archie made me come but I’d be lying. The truth is, I’m a masochist.”

“Really?” She bobbed her head in a way that somehow conveyed scepticism.

“Sure, I just can’t wait to see everyone whose lives I exposed for the general public’s amusement.”

“Well,” She said matter-of-factly. “Join the club.” He shot her a confused look, so she elaborated.
“I’m here to write a follow up article, to the one I wrote after your book was published?”

“I loved that article.” He said, low and sincere. “I always thought you should’ve been the one to write the book.”

“Don’t.” She protested weakly. “Book writing isn’t my thing, I like articles, and newspapers. You’re the one with the literature skills.”

“If you say so.”

“Anyway,” She shook her head from its thoughts. “What have you been doing? Where’ve you been?”

“Here and there.” He shrugged. “After getting ran out of Riverdale, I was in Canada for a bit, stayed with Archie in Chicago, and then landed in San Francisco.”

“Wow.” She nodded. “What’s that like? I’ve never been.”

“Sun, suicides, and prison.” Jughead quipped, and then sighed. “No, it’s cool. I’ve been writing a lot. There’s lots of vintage cinemas, so I’ve been doing old film reviews for the paper.”

“Juggy, that’s great.” She said, sounding like she meant it.

He shifted uncomfortable, but he couldn’t help his lips twitching upwards just slightly. “I guess.”

“It sounds like you’re doing really well.” She wanted, for a split second, to reach out and grab his hand, but she didn’t. “I’m really happy you came.”

“Me too.” Jughead said, surprised to realise that he meant it. “But I should go,” He gestured towards the dog, who was wagging his tail and nudging insistently against Betty’s palm. “Hot Dog can’t walk himself, as much as he thinks he can.”

“Oh, right.” Betty replied, seeming surprised, as if she’d forgotten they’d both had another purpose when they’d set out that morning. She stood, watching Jughead lean down to untie him. “But you’re meeting us all for lunch right? Archie, Kev, and Ronnie?”

“I think Andrews will probably drag me along.” He replied, standing up, hand wrapped firmly around the dog’s leash.

“Good.” She said, and then, startling them both, she leant up and kissed his cheek. “Don’t be a stranger Jug.”

He ducked his head, bizarrely feeling as if he was about to blush. “But that’s the only thing I know how to be.”

Betty ignored that, rolling her eyes, or laugh or something, when she found herself back in Pop’s for the second day in a row. It seemed they’d reverted right back to their childhood selves, meeting up in the same place every day, because Riverdale had nowhere better, and, deep down, they really loved it
It was busier than it had been later the night before, less scary too once she’d conquered the first visit in five years, and now she knew what, or more precisely who, would be greeting her. She looked around, hoping to spot a familiar face in the crowds. She thought maybe she could see Moose and Midge, people she hadn’t seen since school had ended, with the kids she remembered hearing they’d had not long after she’d left, but she couldn’t be sure, and she’d barely known either of them anyway, so she just turned the other way, heading towards an open booth and waiting for her friends to arrive.

Kevin came first, sauntering in with an air of ease and enthusiasm, giving her a blinding grin when he spotted her scribbling at the table. “Betty Cooper.” He cried out, rushing towards her.

“How the hell have you been?” He asked, as they pulled apart and he took his place opposite her.

“About the same as the last time I saw you.”

“No. You are doing much better. You’ve finally grown out those horrendous bangs.”

“Of course.”

“Those were a cry for help if I’ve ever seen one.”

“Well,” She shrugged. “I got help?”

“I can see that, you look great.”

“Why, thank you.” She said, tucking her chin in as she spoke. “And you? How are you? Where’s Ravi?”

“Lunch with the sheriff.” He said.

“Sounds fun.”

“It sounds crazy but I swear, Ravi actually seems to enjoy spending time with my dad. It’s enough to make me want to dump him.”

“Aw,” Betty leant against her hand, giving him a half-mocking half-sweet look. “You two are adorable.”

“Ah.” He sighed, a joking love-sick one. “We know.”

The door opened again, and the two adults turned to look at who was entering.

“Kevin, Betty.” Veronica called out as she approached them, after she was done with whatever she had been typing on her phone.

“Hey V.” Betty smiled.

Kevin gave a faux-solemn nod. “Ronnie.”

“What were you guys talking about?” She asked, as she slid elegantly into the seat next to Kevin.

“How incredibly perfect and adorable my relationship is.” He smiled widely.
“Figures.” Veronica said, sighing she unhooked her handbag from her arm and let it drop into place at her side. “Although.” She gave him a mischievous smirk and pointed at where his hand rested on the table. “I don’t see a ring on your finger.”

“Yet. You don’t see a ring on my finger yet.” Kevin emphasised.

“Are you telling us you have plans?” She shot Betty an excited look.

Betty tried to pretend as if she hadn’t been distracted. “Wow. Really?”

“Nothing immediate. But it’s in my plans, my not-too-far-in-the-future plans.”

“But for now I still have a chance?” Veronica joked, fluttering her long eyelashes

“For you Ronnie, I’d go straight in a second.” He said, grandly.

“My hero.” She sighed, linking her arm with his and resting her head against his shoulder

Betty laughed at the sight of them, looking like two romantic heroes from some terrible film from the 50s. “Hands off Keller, that’s my girl.”

“There is plenty of me to go around.” Veronica said primly, causing them all to dissolve into laughter again.

They were too busy joking around, giggling, and generally having fun, to notice the two men who were approaching them until they were right on top of them.

Veronica noticed first, turning around, spotting the redhead, and breaking out into a huge grin. “Archiekins!” And then, spotting the dark haired boy lurking behind him, nearly did a comical double take. “And Jughead?” She turned quickly to look at Betty who, for some reason, was studiously not looking at her.

“Jughead?” Kevin mouthed towards the blond who, ignoring that too, was smiling softly at the two boys.

Betty moved first, standing up abruptly and coming round the table to pull Archie into a tight hug. She felt oddly comforted seeing him again, her first love, who was kind and sweet and oblivious, all at the same time.

“Hey Betty.” He said into her hair. “I missed you.”

“Missed you too.” She said, grinning as she pulled away, realising how much that was true. She didn’t think about him that often, not when she had her own life, but when she saw him, when he rolled into town for a concert or a visit, she remembered how much she loved him, this childhood sweetheart who’d seen her grow up, her best friend.

She moved past him, as Veronica moved in for her own greeting, pulling Jughead into their second hug of the day. “I’m glad you came.” She said softly.

“Couldn’t risk the wrath of a Cooper.”

She smiled, pushing her hand teasingly against his chest, a gesture that made her blush even as she did it. “Good.”

“Kevin. Ronnie.” He nodded over Betty’s head at his two old classmates, who were both still staring at him with sceptical looks on their faces.
“Hey Jughead.” Veronica said, hugging him, for the first time in their lives, it was fast but still startled him.

“What’s up?” He said, waving at Kevin, who just smiled, a little stiffly, back.

It was clear to them all that Jughead was uncomfortable with this mini reunion, so they kept it short, and eventually they all ended up sat again. Somehow in the shuffle, Betty found herself pressed thigh to thigh with Jughead.

“You still wear the hat.” Kevin said, breaking the silence first, Archie shot him a slightly annoyed look.

Jughead reached up reflexively to touch it. “Not every day.”

“I like it.” Kevin said, a touch defensively as he felt everyone’s gaze on him. “I admire a man who can find a style and stick to it.”

“Er, thanks.” He shifted uncomfortably.

“How’ve you been Arch? I haven’t seen you since you last played in the city.” Betty asked, sensing that Jughead wanted attention shifted away from him, something he noticed she was doing and was grateful for.

“Great. Really great.” He smiled, wide and genuine, like he truly had no worries in life, at least none bigger than what girl he was dating. “You know, it’s tiring traveling all the time.”

“You were in Texas last night?” Said Veronica

“Yeah. I came straight from the airport” He looked annoyingly happy for someone running on so little sleep. “I love playing there, awesome venue, great atmosphere.”

“Are you playing at the dance Sunday?” Betty asked politely.

He wrinkled his face up. “Ginger asked, but I don’t know, I kind of wanted a night off, and the rest of the band aren’t here.”

“I cannot believe it’s been ten years since we formed The Archies.” Ronnie said.

“I know.” The redhead nodded in agreement.

“And then you ran away to success and left us all behind.” She said, smirking at him.

“Hey,” Kevin perked up. “Remember when you made Jughead your drummer for like two days?”

“Unfortunately.” Jughead deadpanned. “Those rehearsals are burned into my memory.”

“Sorry dude.” Archie shrugged. “We were desperate.”

“Glad to always be your last choice.”

“So,” Veronica began, narrowing her eyes and scrutinising the boy she hadn’t seen in years. “What’s up with you Jughead? Where’ve you been hiding yourself?”

“No hiding. Just living, eating, breathing, contemplating my own existence and meaning in life.”

“None of us have seen you for years.” She pointed out.
“I see Archie. I lived with Archie.”

Veronica turned her appraising gaze towards the redhead. “You lived with Jughead?”

“Yeah. For a bit. I never mentioned it?” He replied, sounding innocent, but he was studiously looking at the table instead of the faces of his friends.

“No. You didn’t.” She said pointedly, sounding more confused than annoyed.

“He was probably ashamed of my man-whore ways.” Jughead offered, leaning back against the bench, satisfied to hear Betty chuckle next to him.

“How is your love life Jughead?” Kevin asked.

“Non-existent.” He said, quickly.

“You dated Trula Twyst for two years.” Betty blurted out before she could stop herself, because it had been on her mind since she’d seen him that morning, although she didn’t know why.

“I did.” He said carefully, shooting the blond a confused look, then he addressed the rest of the table. “But now I’m not.”

“Good.” Veronica said suddenly. “Now we can all be miserably single together.”

“That’s oxymoronic.” Jughead said, at the same time that Kevin protested being lumped in with the rest of them.

“Whatever.” She said, ignoring them both. “First, let’s get some food, I’m hungry.” She nudged Archie with her foot so she could slide off her seat and towards the counter.

“Finally, a sensible idea.” Jughead said, hoping out of his seat. “Who’s paying?”

Betty rolled her eyes, but followed the rest of them towards where Pop Tate stood, looking both bemused and annoyed by their encroaching presence. It was strangely exactly like it had always been and nothing like it at all, they were different but the same, people who’d changed for everyone else, but around each other felt as if they were slipping back into the bodies of their old selves. She couldn’t tell if she hated it, or loved it just a little.

() Betty looked herself over once more in the mirror, smoothing down the tight fabric where it clung to her stomach, fiddling with the silver pins that held back the front strands of her hair. It was a simple dress, one Veronica had given her a few years back as a birthday present, something she’d worn a handful of times, on dates with Ben, one wedding, a couple of work functions. Tighter than something she might have worn in high school, a lilac colour that looked good against her pale skin, set off with a simple necklace. She smiled at her reflection, grabbed her bag that hung against the back of her chair to check if she had all of her supplies ready. Her pulse was steady, and she didn’t feel the sense of dread that she’d been expecting, instead she felt the cool collectiveness that normally fell over her when she was about to begin investigating an assignment. It was just drinks with people she vaguely knew, most she didn’t care about, and she was going to get a story and have fun too. It was all going to be okay.

One last check she had her phone, her notepad, her pen, her charger, a backup recorder – just in case her phone died – and she was done, pulling on a coat and rushing out to meet Veronica in the lobby.
“You look great.” The dark haired girl called out as the doors pinged and deposited Betty on the ground floor.

“Thanks. You do too, as always.”

“Whoever bought you that dress has exquisite taste.” She smirked, holding her arm out for the other girl to grab when she got close enough.

“She does.” Betty laughed, gratefully threading her arm through the other girl’s. “But she thinks a little too highly of herself.”

“Careful B, my stilettos are sharper than yours, I’d watch your toes.” She warned.

They staggered out into the cold, damp, evening air of Riverdale, shivering in their bare legs, attempting to hail a taxi.

“Jughead came then.” Veronica said, as she held out her arm, broaching the topic for the first time.

“He did.” Betty nodded, dropping the other girl’s grip and hugging herself to stay warm.

“I’m surprised.”

“I’m not.” The blond said simply, because, despite the original shock she’d had at his seeing his face after all those years, the more she thought about it the more it made sense. “He loved this place more than any of us.”

“He did?” Veronica asked distractedly, waving down the passing taxi. “He had a strange way of showing it.”

“Jug does everything strangely.” She shrugged, as the car pulled over and they slid in.

Veronica gave the address, some trendy new bar that had popped up in the centre of town, someplace none of them had been to yet, and then turned back to her best friend. “But a school reunion? Really? Could it be anymore made-for-TV movie?”

“It has a certain poeticism that I think he appreciates.”


“I did?” She asked, pulling that face she did when she was confused or uncomfortable, features all tucked in on themselves.

“Please, you know you did.”

She watched the town passing through her window, a blur of lights and buildings she didn’t know, a landscape that had changed without her being there to notice. There was a time when she believed she had known Jughead well, if not as much as Archie then almost, but that was a time long gone, where she’d believed signals had lain where they hadn’t, and she no longer claimed ownership over any knowledge of him, he was as strange to her as he had tried to make himself to everyone. And that was what, with his silence, he’d made clear he wanted.

It didn’t take long for them to arrive at their destination and it didn’t look too bad. There was nothing puke green coloured or neon pink, just a simple sign in red lettering, and a big poster that proclaimed it booked for Riverdale High’s reunion.

“Ready to face the music Bet’s?” She said, after tossing the driver the money, hand poised over the
door handle.

She took a deep breath, holding her bag tightly to her, noting that she still felt as calm as she could hope for. “Ready to face it together. It’s B and V to the end right?”

“Right.” Veronica nodded as she opened the door. “But this isn’t the end, it’s just high school.”

Ginger Lopez, event organiser, was manning the table at the entranceway, grinning perkily at every person who passed by, ticking off names on her list. She looked good, a little rounder, hair cut a little shorter, but eyes brighter now she was no longer living under the shadow of a Blossom.

“Betty and Veronica.” Ginger said excitedly as they approached, and Betty found herself smiling, the enthusiasm was a little much, and they hadn’t exactly been friends in school, but it felt genuine enough. “I’m so glad you could make it.”

“Of course.” Betty smiled sweetly, signing her name on the sheet that was proffered to her. “Thank you so much for putting this on for us.”

“We wouldn’t have missed it for the world.” Veronica said as she was passed the sheet.

“No problem” She grinned, checking the list as it was handed back to her, and putting it down once she was satisfied all was in order. “Now,” She said, all business like. “I mentioned on my last email to everyone that you were here to ask a few questions Betty, but I’m presuming you’ll be tactful, I organised this so we could all have fun and catch up.”

“I understand.” Betty said, switching to her professional voice. “I promise I will be as sensitive as possible. I’m here to get a feel for how we’ve changed, to let the world know what happens after a tragedy, how we all learnt to heal in the ten years that have gone.”

“Way to drag up the past Cooper.” Came a loud clear voice, ringing out behind them, as recognisable as it was terrifying, a voice that had been known – once upon a time – to strike deadly fear in anyone that heard it. It was, of course, Cheryl Blossom.

There was a moment where no one said anything, the whole world felt like it was on pause, and then Veronica laughed, stepped forward, and pulled the redhead into a hug. “Hey, Cheryl.” They embraced, and then stepped back. “It’s been forever. You look good.”

“I know.” She said, moving her shoulders in just the right way to send her hair rippling down her back. It wasn’t as long as it had been in high school but it was still that signature red, and shiny, like it belonged in a shampoo commercial. Which it did, Cheryl had a cult following from her Instagram posts, what had begun as endorsements here and there for various skinny teas or hair vitamins, had grown into a mini health and beauty empire. The Blossoms had begun their legacy with sugary syrup, tarnished it with drug smuggling, and Cheryl was ending it with shake weights and herbal pills. “You look presentable Veronica, and you too Betty. Did you lose weight since last Christmas?”

“I don’t know. But thanks Cheryl.” The blond replied, resisting the urge to laugh.

“Looking less like the troll dolls of high school each day.” The redhead swept past them, smiling a sticky lip-gloss smile at Ginger. “Hello former-minion, care to sign me in to this hell hole?”

“Sign here Cheryl.” The girl said, sighing. “And here’s your name tag. You too Betty, Veronica.” She passed out three laminated cards to the girls, their names written in pretty lettering.

Cheryl immediately dumped the card in the trashcan, shrugging as she looked up to see three pairs of eyes on her. “What?” She said. “Everyone knows who I am.”
Ginger stared stoically at her papers, as Veronica whispered wryly to Betty. “Well, she’s not wrong.”

“See you inside witches.” She said, giving them a half-wave before heading through the door.

“She has not changed.” Veronica remarked.

“Unfortunately.” Ginger muttered under her breath, so quiet they almost didn’t catch it.

Betty couldn’t help but give her a sympathetic smile, it couldn’t be nice being stepped on all through high school, to have the girl come back ten years later and think she could do it again. But that wasn’t really her concern at the moment, so she shook her head, and pinned her tag to the front of her dress. “I’ll see you inside Ginger?”

“Sure.” She gave a smile. “I’ll find you for a catch up, and I’ll even give you some quotes for your article.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.” She turned to Veronica. “Ready?”

Veronica finished tucking her badge into her handbag – she wasn’t about to ruin her Chanel dress, and the name tag hung out enough so it was visible – and then gave the other girl a nod. “Ready.”

“Cloak room is on the left.” Ginger waved them in. “Have fun guys.”

Jughead regretted coming before he even entered the bar. Bars themselves tended to make him uncomfortable, a remnant from the childhood memories of his alcoholic father, and one filled with people who hated him, whilst not unfamiliar, was even worse. He’d donned a nice pair of pants and a clean shirt, shaved, showered, and made himself look semi-okay, all for something that was bound to make him miserable. As some act of defiance, as a reminder that he still didn’t fit in with these people, he’d shoved his old beanie on with the rest of the outfit. He slouched behind Archie as he chatted to the girl running the desk, a perky, tan cheerleader he’d vaguely distained at school, who’d shot him such a wide-eyed look when he’d said his name that it had instantly made him uncomfortable. As soon as they entered the room, he’d slipped the nametag into his back pocket, as easily as Archie pinned his proudly to his chest.

“How are you doing Jug?” Archie said, clapping a hand against the other boy’s back, acutely aware that this was not his best friend’s scene.

“Nauseatingly uncomfortable.” He responded.

“It is awkward.” Even the redhead could admit that, watching the people he vaguely knew all milling around even if he had been liked in high school, it didn’t make things exactly pleasant. “I mean, who knows what they’ll bring up? We all did the stupidest things in high school.”

“You dated around a bit.” Jughead said bluntly. “I wrote a damning expose about our entire town. Those things are a little different.”

“Okay.” Archie laughed. “Point taken.”

Jughead felt as if he could feel people’s eyes on him, but he couldn’t figure out if it was classmates trying to figure out why he was still wearing his trademark hat, or people who were wondering how he could dare show his face.
“Betty and Ronnie should be around here somewhere.” The other boy continued, turning back to his friend after his surveying of the crowd. “And we should at least try to have some fun right?”

“By golly, I’ll give it my best shot.” Jughead said, his voice dripping with fake cheer.

It was that moment that Archie’s football rival, chief of the jocks and, therefore, student most loathed by Jughead, barrelled into them.

“Archie, my man.” Reggie cried, pulling the other boy into that weird, manly, pat hug that Jughead had often seen other guys do and that never failed to make him cringe. “How’ve you been dude?”

“Reg, it’s great to see you man. I’m doing great.”

And then, to Jughead’s surprise, Reggie turned towards him and, flashing him a smile that was devoid of the spite he remembered, held out his palm for a handshake. “Jughead. What’s up?”

“Nothing much Mantle.” He said, tentatively allowing the other guy to pump their hands up and down.

“Awesome. I can’t believe it’s been so long. I mean, ten years man, that’s like, a lifetime. What’ve you both been up to?”

“Touring, writing music, mainly.” Archie shrugged, a nice attempt at modesty.

Jughead eyed the once-jock suspiciously, like he was an animal that could turn feral at any minute. “Living. Breathing. Writing, I guess.”

“Cool.” He said, nodding his head. “Yeah, I heard some of your stuff on the radio the other day, you’re not doing too bad Andrews.”

“Thanks.” The redhead ducked his head. “But what about you? What’s going on with you?”

“Oh, I’m up in Texas now.” Reggie said. “I coach kids at football.”

“That’s so great man.” Archie said, really meaning it, whilst Jughead simply watched them as if he was witnessing a bizarre social experiment unfold.

“It totally is.” He nodded enthusiastically. “It’s like unbelievably rewarding when you see a kid score his first touchdown.”

“I bet.” Archie said.

Then, there came a roar from across the room, closer to the bar, where a group of muscled men sat hunched. “Mantle!” One of them shouted.

“Ouch. That’s me.” He raised his hands like he’d been caught. “I better go. But come by later to hang out?”

“Sure.”

“Oh, and Jughead,” Reggie said as he turned to go, addressing the other boy so suddenly and unexpectedly that it startled him. “I read your book man.”

“You did?” He asked, incredulously.

“Yeah.” Reggie clapped a hand against his shoulder. “I loved it. Honestly, totally truthful, but
sensitive to like- Cheryl and Betty and shit.” Jughead was too much in a state of shock to respond. “I thought it was killer.”

Jughead looked into the other boy’s face, searching for a hint that he was mocking him, but there was nothing. He seemed sincere – completely unaware about the irony of calling a book about murder ‘killer’, but then, some things never change. “Thanks?” He responded

“No problem bro.” He swung his hand away from the other boy. “Catch you both later.” And then he was gone, barrelling out of their lives once more.

“Okay, who the hell was that?” Jughead said, as soon as the other boy was out of earshot.

“You remember Reggie, Jug, I know you do.” Said Archie, seeming completely unperturbed by the events that had just transpired.

“The Reggie Mantle from high school did not read anything I wrote, Reggie from high school didn’t understand what something rewarding was, and now he’s all kumbaya, ‘children are the future let them lead the way’ and shit.”

“People change.” He gave Jughead a stern look. “We both have.”

“No.” He shook his head. “This is some creepy, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Pod People thing.”

“You’re being ridiculous.” Archie laughed.

“I guess I just expected everyone to still be a jerk.” Jughead shrugged.

“You’re expectations are always way too low.”

“And yet,” He sighed. “People somehow always manage to disappoint.”

Archie turned around, ready to rebut his point, but was distracted by someone shouting his name. Jughead took that as his opportunity to slink away into the corner, particularly appealing as he spotted Betty across the room, alone and surveying the rest of the guests, chin bent in a way he knew meant she was thinking deeply. So he waved off Archie’s protests and goodbyes, slipping away to check up on the blond.

() (}

“Give me a few minutes, I need to soak in the room.” Betty said when they entered, and Veronica had wanted to make a beeline immediately for the bar. “There’s Kevin.” She pointed to where their old friend stood with his partner, they waved. “Go find a drink, I’ll follow in a second, I just want to figure out who’s here and who’s not, scope out who’d be willing to talk to me.”

Veronica shrugged, she’d never seen the other girl in full work mode, not since they were teenagers, and her intensity and professionalism had been a fraction of what it was as an adult, she couldn’t help feeling rather impressed. “Okay B. Stay Safe.” She said, squeezing he arm, and walking away. “See you in a second.”

“Hey Ronnie.” Kevin said as she approached, kissing her on the cheek.

“Hey.” She said, turning to greet Ravi, his boyfriend, with a hug. “How are you guys?”

“Not nearly as entertained as I had hoped.” Kevin pouted.

“I think it’s interesting.” Ravi chipped in.
“That’s because it’s not your reunion.” Kevin pointed out. “Anyway, it got immeasurably better as soon as you walked in the room.”

“Thank you.” She grinned. “Have you seen many people?”

“A few.” He said, casually. “Cheryl Blossom just walked past. She looks good.”

“Hmm.” Veronica said, feigning disinterest. “Does she?”

“Come on Ronnie, we all know you have a thing for redheads.”

“Yes.” She replied “Sane redheads.”

“Cheryl’s sane.” Kevin said innocently. “If you have a very broad definition of the word sanity.”

“I just can’t believe I saw the Cheryl Blossom in real life.” His boyfriend chipped in. “I mean, Kev has built this girl into a mythical legend, I can barely believe she’s a real person.”

“She isn’t.” Kevin snorted. “She’s a force onto herself.”

“Think about Betty, she has to deal with her at family gatherings. Just wait until you meet her Ravi.” Ronnie muttered.

“I have dreamed of running into her ever since I learned she lived in LA too.” He admitted shyly.

“So sweet and innocent.” She placed a palm against his face. “You have no idea what you’d be up against.” Slapping him once, lightly and in jest, she pulled away. “Now please, can someone find me a drink?”

“God, yes.” Kevin cried in agreement, and they threaded their way through the crowds, towards the bar.

Jughead leant against the wall of the bar, watching Betty work through her thoughts, waiting for the moment her eyes would go clear again so he could approach her, without worrying that he was knocking her out of her work zone. As she reached into her bag, pulling out a notebook, he could see the time had come.

“Hey Bets.” He said, as he walked towards her.

“Juggy.” She grinned as he approached, and he was relieved to see that she seemed genuinely happy to see him. “How are you?”

“Currently acting out No.3 on my list of things I never want to do.”

“That bad?” She tilted her head.

“Pretty much.” He said. “Do you know if everyone’s turned up yet?”

“You saw me looking?”

He nodded.

“I think so.” She riffled through her book. “Most of the people I expected. Josie and the Pussycats
aren’t coming till the last night, I haven’t spotted a few people, you know, Nancy Woods, Valdez, but that’s normal.” She shut her book, slipping it back into her bag. “Have you spoken to anyone?”

“Only Reggie Mantle who, by the way, has gone totally Stepford Wife nice on us all.”

She pulled a face. “That sounds terrifying.”

“It was.” He agreed.

“Well,” She sighed. “At least he’s still pretty.”

Jughead laughed, and she looked down at her feet, her own smile threatening to spill out onto her face.

“I was thinking,” He said after a moment, hesitating awkwardly. “And, this is only if you want-“ He paused again.

“What is it?”

“If you need any help in your investigation Bets, I’d be happy to.” He shifted weight on his feet. “We did make a good team.”

“I would li-“ She began, before the squeal of microphone feedback interrupted her, bringing both their attentions to the tiny stage erected on the far side of the room.

Ginger Lopez took to the stage, smiling just a tad manically, clutching a microphone as she looked across the sea of faces. “Welcome back Riverdale High class of 19’!” She cried out, and there was a smatter of cheering. “It’s so nice to see all your lovely faces again at this first welcome back mixer. This is just a taste of what festivities we have in store this weekend. So, without further ado, I’d like to kick this weekend off in style.”

She fumbled for a rope that hung next to her, connected to the large canopy that hung across the ceiling. What was meant to happen when she pulled that rope was a banner – one she’d spent weeks painstakingly painting – was meant to unfurl, welcoming all her old classmates back to Riverdale, and with it, a few dozen balloons were to be unleashed.

And they were. As she tugged on the pulley, the banner was revealed, the balloons floated down, and with them, the body of Dilton Doiley came crashing down, landing on the floor with a sickening thump.
“Just like old times.” Jughead said after a moment, watching the chaos of the parking lot, people milling around like survivors at the end of a movie.

“It’s horrible, and awful, but you’re right.” She followed his gaze. “It’s exactly like old times.”

“It’s not Riverdale without an old fashioned murder.”

Hey! Back with another ridiculously long chapter, hope you enjoy! As always, only I proof read this - and badly - so I'm sorry if there's any mistakes. Hope you enjoy.

At first the whole room was silent, like a tableaux trapped in glass, people's face caught in a pantomime of horror. The banner had been positioned in the centre of them room, the dance floor cleared so no one was hit by a stray piece of curtain as it was unveiled, and that left them stood, frozen in a loose semi-circle around the body

And then the screaming began. No one knew who started it, it could've been Maria Rodriguez who screamed first, a transfer student who arrived a year after Jason's death who'd missed the murder frenzy the first time round, or even Ethel Muggs, returning from the bathroom into a still room, wondering why everyone was so quiet until she saw the body for herself. But whoever it was, it set off a chain reaction, people crying, shouts and prayers.

Betty could fell her pulse rushing in her ears, but she could handle it, she gripped her own wrist reflexively, turning to find the comforting presence of Jughead just behind her, knowing he was not about to fall apart on her. "Call the cops." She said to him

He nodded, phone already in hand. "Hi. There's a – a body found at the Riverdale High Reunion, at The Four Oaks bar? Yes. A body. You need to get here quickly okay? People are freaking out."

Meanwhile, Betty was surveying the room, calculating her next move, nails still digging absentmindedly into the skin of her wrists. She spotted Kevin at the bar, mouth pressed into a tight line, already on phone to - Betty presumed - the sheriff. That was good, calming, even if the sickly green face of Kevin's boyfriend was disconcerting. Next to them was Veronica, who caught her eye and was stood gaping, Betty thought that maybe the other girl was on the verge of tears, which made her throat feel thick, but she had to keep it together. This had to be fixed, she had to be okay, this wasn't high school anymore, not like Veronica said, and it really had been the end, at least for one of them.

"People need to calm down.” Jughead murmured quickly, eyeing the crowd as they got closer to the
body, close enough that someone was about to leave footprints in the pool of blood that was beginning to form. "They could damage the crime scene. Or someone else could get hurt."

Betty looked back at him, and he could see she saw the same things he did. "I know. I'll calm them down."

He reached down, gently prying her hand away from her arm, she looked down at herself in surprise, as if she'd forgotten what she'd been doing. "Be safe Bets." He said softly. "I'll try find Archie. He's good at getting people to do what he says, you know, he's still got the affable football god thing."

"Thanks." She gave him a grateful, wobbly smile, and then she left, picking her way through the outskirts of the crowd, until she reached the stage where Ginger still stood.

Ginger had slapped her hand over her mouth, like she was in staring in some amateur dramatics production, but this was all too real. The microphone hung limply in her hand, and she made no resistance when Betty reached for it, stepping backwards and out of the way with a whimper.

“Everyone needs to calm down.” Betty’s voice rang out across the noise of the crowd and the music, horrified eyes turning to stare at her. “We all need to step away from,” She paused, her mouth choking as she tried to get the words out. “From the body, the police are on their way, what we need to do now is make sure no one else gets hurt.”

At that moment, the lights flicked on, so bright and blinding compared to the dim bar lighting they’d experienced before, that Betty could only blink in surprise. When her vision focused, she scanned the crowd and almost smiled in relief when she spotted Jughead speaking urgently to one of the bar’s staff, Archie and Veronica directly behind him. She could only assume that the lights switching on was his doing. As she was reassured that the rest of the gang had the staff under control, she turned back to addressing the crowd.

“Avoid the middle of the floor as much as possible. The Sheriff will be here any second, but for now, we need to make sure we do our best to leave the evidence intact as much as possible.”

As if on cue, the sound of sirens filled the air.

She stepped outside and she saw them, the gang, her people, all huddled together in the cold night air. Seeing them like that made her feel as if she was watching a movie with the way the flashing lights reflected on them, the blue then red then blue of the police cars arriving, and how they all turned to watch her approach, so cinematic, beautiful and horrible and familiar. And she almost wanted to laugh, because this turn of events was so inevitable she wondered why she didn’t see it coming, their childhood was defined by murder as much as it was by milkshakes. They were a gang forged by a tragic mystery, and they couldn’t seem to escape it, no matter how much they thought they’d left the past behind.

“What did they say?” Jughead asked, when she got close enough.

Betty wrapped her arms around herself, not sure if she was warding off the cold or the fear. “They want everyone to do witness statements. They’re talking to Ginger first.”

“What do they think is going on?” Archie asked, running a hand through his hair, looking as if he was resisting the urge to pace.

“I don’t know.” She shrugged.
“Gee Arh, I don’t think they caught the killer in the past five minutes.” Jughead mocked, kicking absently at the ground.

“Can we not joke about this around people who don’t realise this is normal for you?” Kevin glared at the other man, his arm wrapped tight around his boyfriend who was the most visibility affected by the events, so unused to anything dark, face still grey around the edges.

“Yeah. Not cool man.” Archie chimed in.

“I know.” He said, sounding genuinely contrite. “Bad habit.”

Veronica seemed distracted, searching the crowd of people streaming out of the building for one face in particular. After a moment, as her friends bickered around her, she spotted the girl she was looking for, walking hurriedly around the corner. “I’ll be right back.” She said, jogging away in her high heels towards the side of the bar.

As she reached the alley, she saw the figure, shrouded in darkness, half crouched against the dirty wall. “Cheryl?”

The woman snapped her head towards Veronica and it was unmistakably her, bee-stung lips, vibrant hair, and wide eyes circled with makeup that was beginning to smudge, Cheryl Blossom.

“What is it post-makeover Andy from the Devil wears Prada? You’re here to reassure yourself that you won this little high school reunion??”

“No.” Veronica said, edging closer. “I came to see if you were okay.”

“I hate to indulge your dirty teenage fantasies, but I’m not.” Cheryl said shakily, standing up but still leaning back against the wall, breathing in deeply. “It hurts enough to come back here without Jason and now-“ She shut her eyes.

“Hey, I know.” Veronica stepped closer again, placing a comforting hand against the other girl’s bare shoulder. “This situation is a nightmare for anyone, I can’t imagine how you feel.”

“I see him every day.” She opened her eyes, staring right into the other girl’s. “I look in the mirror and I see him. Most days, it’s fine. But when I saw that body-”

“It looked like Jason’s.” The dark haired girl finished for her.

“It was Jason.” Cheryl said. “I saw Jason.” She started to shake again, just a little, tears blurring her vision.

“Cheryl. It’s okay.” Veronica reached out, and Cheryl grabbed blindly at her, sobbing into her shoulder like she used to, all those years ago, when things were so fresh and raw and the only person there was supposed to be her enemy.

“I’m not that girl anymore Veronica.” She said, voice muffled. “I grew up.”

“You don’t grow out of grief, you learn to live with it, and some days it’s harder than others.”

“I shouldn’t have come.” She pushed herself away from the other girl, shaking her head. “I knew everyone would be looking at me, what they’d say.”

“And what’s that?”

“They hug me, ask about my life now, what I do, who I am, but all the time they’re thinking about
Jason. They look like they’re listening to me talk about my job or whatever, but really all they’re thinking is poor girl with the dead twin and the murderous father. In high school they moved past it, but here, I’m a novelty all over again.”

“Why did you come then?”

“I don’t know.” She bit her glossy lips.

Veronica gripped her wrist, so tight it was almost painful, forcing her to jolt in surprise. “You came because you are Cheryl Bombshell. Fuck this place, fuck whatever they say, fuck the person who murdered Dilton, and fuck your father. You can walk all over the people here with your Manolo Blahniks without batting an eye. And, believe me, I know what it’s like to have people look at you and only see your Dad.”

After a second Cheryl spoke, voice calmer than it was before. “Mildly helpful Lodge, but don’t let anyone tell you you’re the next Mother Teresa.” She wrenched her hand from the other girl’s grip, and rubbed at the a few stray tears on her cheeks.

“Please, my style is way too important for me to become a nun. Unless, it was a cute nun like Audrey Hepburn in that 50s movie.”

“Thank you for finding me. I could use a friend here.” She admitted.

“You’ve got one. You always did.”

The redhead looked a little cowed by that, head slightly bent, and it reminded Veronica of how much she’d been through, and how strong she was to still be standing.

“Okay.” Cheryl nodded decisively, straightening her posture and flipping her hair over her shoulder. “Let’s go.”

() 

“Is Ronnie okay?” Archie asked.

“She’s fine. But I’m going to speak to my dad.” Kevin said, grabbing his boyfriend’s hand and tugging him away. “He’ll let us know what’s going on.”

“Good idea Kev,” Archie nodded decisively. “I’ll call my dad, if he heard he’ll be worried.” He said, stepping away, leaving Betty and Jughead alone in the dim night.

“Are you cold?” Jughead asked her after a moments silence, eyeing the way she shivered. It had been such a blur, a rush of officers and people being escorted out of the building, that she hadn’t had time to pick up her jacket.

“I’ll be fine.” Betty shook her head distractedly.

“Here.” He shrugged out of his jacked, draping gently, tentatively, across her shoulders.

“Jughead.” She said, a tinge of exasperation in her tone.

“Come on, let me play the chivalrous lead for once.”

She rolled her eyes, but he couldn’t help but notice the way she pulled it tighter around herself.

“Just like old times.” Jughead said after a moment, watching the chaos of the parking lot, people
milling around like survivors at the end of a movie.

“It’s horrible, and awful, but you’re right.” She followed his gaze. “It’s exactly like old times.”

“It’s not Riverdale without an old fashioned murder.”

“Is it crazy Jug,” She asked, turning her face up towards him, the artificial street lights illuminating her hair from behind so, for a second, she appeared to have a halo of gold. “That I feel like I should’ve expected this?”

“Yes.” He said, bluntly. “It’s crazy.” He paused, but then sighed. “But I was thinking the same thing.”

“I always thought we’d out ran this.” Her eyes followed the rest of the students that swarmed the area. “No one else is haunted by high school.”

“Not true.” He shook his head. “And I’ve never been good at running. I flunked gym”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” He smirked, and then paused, expression suddenly soft. “And you don’t run away, you run towards. I’ve seen it.”

“Is it going to happen again?” Betty asked, examining him in a way that made him uncomfortable, as if no one had really looked at him for years. “Should we reopen our old partnership? Or should we trust that this place can figure things out on its own?”

“Trust Riverdale? I don’t know. A lot can change in ten years, but time can’t work miracles.”

She sighed. “I want to help, that’s the worst part of it all, that I bring this on myself, that I make myself get involved.”

“People like us, Bets, we’re just programmed this way. We’re relentless in our quest for the ugly truth.” Jughead replied, slightly mocking them both.

But, underneath all that, was the seed of truth, because Betty and him, that was who they were. He hadn’t known it at first glance, when they were teens, that the bubble gum pink girl with the perfect façade would be such a kindred spirit. And then they’d worked together at the Blue and Gold, and he’d seen it, slowly filtering through the cracks. She could’ve become a housewife, or a teacher, or a million other safer things, but there was that ineffable thing that ran through her, through him too, that darkness that thirsted for something else, that longed to uncover what was buried.

She had her face turned away from him, staring away in contemplation, and he was grateful for that, as he realised he’d been looking at her just a beat too long. But she hadn’t noticed, and then she spoke, almost as if she wasn’t really aware of what she was saying. “The truth is rarely pure and never simple”

“Wilde, right?”

She nodded, a wistful smile on her lips. “Right.”

“He got a few things right. The truth isn’t pure. It isn’t simple. But it can be found, if you pick at something hard enough and long enough.” Jughead said

“That’s our speciality, being the only ones willing to do it.”
“Sometimes that’s worth more than any of it, being willing to try.” He nudged her gently with his elbow.

“Then it’s a good thing that we will.” She replied.

This time, when he caught her gaze, he almost grabbed her hand. It felt symbolic as a gesture, of union, of standing together against everyone else, but also because he wanted to, always had wanted to, since they were children with sticky palms. But that was a fictionalised version of who he was, of who they could be, so he settled for shoving his hands in his pockets instead.

“Oh God, I need to call my editor.” Betty broke the silence they’d fallen into.

“Slow down Lois Lane, they can wait till morning.”

“They’ll be all over this.” She shook her head. “My article is going to be huge now, they’ll want to discuss the new direction and maybe even my first front page. And I hate it, it’s so callous to be thinking of that right now, but my mind can’t help it. It gets in these loops and I know my phone is buzzing and people are waiting on me so it’s all I can think about.”

He placed a hand on her shoulder, a solid weight that grounded her. “They can wait till morning, or at least until the wardens tell us we can go.”

“I do not want to go back to that hotel, but I need to shower this night off me.” She pulled a face. “And then lie awake all night because there’s no way I can sleep.”

“Me too.” He said, letting his hand drop back down to his side. “By this point in my life, I’m held together by mostly caffeine and sheer hatred. I dread to think what will happen when I hit middle age.”

She laughed, and the sound of it made him feel just a little warmer. “I guess I’ll just stay up and brainstorm. That way we’ll have an action plan tomorrow.”

“Aye aye, Captain.” He gave her a lazy salute, and then stopped, shifting backwards and forwards on the balls of his feet, stuffing his hands suddenly in his pockets again. “Or-” He faltered. “We could brainstorm together. I’d even give you a glimpse of my man cave.”

“Aren’t you staying with Archie?”

“No. I own a house here.”

“You said you lived in San Francisco?”

“I do, I also have a place here. Most of the time I rent it out, or it stays empty, but when I’m back in Riverdale I stay there.”

She thought of her hotel room, clean but anonymous, the artificial bulb, and the grey curtains that always made her sad to look at, for no reason at all. When she went on a job alone, that was always the worst, the sleepless nights in the hotel room. She gave a little half smile, tilting her head. “Is this a genuine offer?”

“Bets, I never say things I don’t mean.” He replied, faux-innocent. “I could even sleep on the couch if you fall asleep.”

“I can’t tell you how much I hate hotels Jug, especially after a night like this.”
“Then let’s just stay together,” His stomach flipped as he said it. “If neither of us get much sleep anyway.”

There were so many reasons she should’ve said no, but there was only one thing she wanted to do. “Okay.” She said, just as Kevin, Ravi, and Archie appeared.

“We can leave.” Kevin said, as he arrived.

Betty turned, crossing her arms, and shooting him a puzzled look. “But aren’t they interviewing us all?”

“No.” He shook his head. “They’re only interviewing people who were close enough to the body that they got er-splashed” Ravi physically flinched at the word. “And the organisers. They’re just registering the rest of us, getting our contact information, and interviewing us tomorrow. No one’s allowed to skip town though.”

“Damn it,” Jughead drawled. “I was just about to hop on a plane.”

“I already gave them your number Betty, you too Jughead, so you guys are good.” Kevin said.

“How did you get my number?” Jughead asked, brow furrowed.

“I have my ways.” He answered mysteriously.

“I gave it to them.” Archie said.

“Okay. But where’s Ronnie?” Betty asked, and as she did so, the woman in question arrived, with a familiar redhead on her heels.

“Right here B. Sorry about running off.” She said. “I spotted someone I needed to talk to.”

“That was moi, of course,” Cheryl said, arriving with her usual flourish, eyes now dry. “Hello Archie, Jughead, Kevin and whoever this guy is.” She waved her hand at Ravi who paled at being addressed by her.

“Hey Cheryl.”

“Cheryl.” Jughead said, nodding his head in a reluctant manner.

“So, what’s the 411? How long are we required to wait around like extras?”

“If you register with the Sheriff or the deputies, you can leave.” Kevin said. “Ronnie, I already gave them your details.”

“Thanks Kev.” Veronica said gratefully.

“I hear you and I are staying at the same hotel,” Cheryl said turning towards Betty. “Fancy sharing a cab B?”

“Oh.” She shrugged her shoulders awkwardly, catching Jughead’s eye. “I’m not going back yet.”

Cheryl caught their exchange and sneered. “You two are boning now? You know you’re meant to improve since high school sis, not regress.”

“Such a pleasure as always Cheryl, but I’m out.” Jughead held his hands up in a surrender, and then went to stalk off.
"Erm. Me too. I’ll catch you guys later.” Betty said, waving awkwardly and then jogging off to catch up to Jughead.

“Didn’t we say something about being nice?” Veronica asked primly.

“No.”

“Well, we should have.”

“Whatever. Now I think about it, it’s kinda cute.” She shrugged. “I dig it. I met her fiancé, he was a total bore.”

“Jughead and Betty aren’t dating.” Archie cut in.

“Who said anything about dating, Archiekins?” Cheryl asked, innocently. “We’re all adults here.”

“She is exactly like you said she was.” Ravi whispered, speaking in the group for the first time since they’d emerged from the bar.

“I know.” Kevin sighed. “I’ve missed it.”

“Jughead and Betty aren’t doing anything, right Ronnie?” Archie turned to the other girl.

“Of course.” She said quickly, though not totally convincingly.

“Sure.” Cheryl cocked an eyebrow. “Anyway, I’m going to cross my name off this list so I can check out. I’ll see you guys at breakfast.” She stalked off, waving a hand.

“We’re having breakfast with her?”

Veronica sighed. “I guess.”

Jughead had walked off slowly under the expectation, or more like hope, that Betty would follow, and was filled with relief when she quickly caught up to him.

“You could’ve give a girl a warning.” Betty said as she arrived next to him. “Especially when I’m wearing heels.”

He looked down at her feet. “Ouch. Sorry. I didn’t feel like spending much more time with the devil incarnate.”

“Imagine having to see her at the Holidays. Last year, she bought the twins matching candelabras.”

“Wow, that’s- I don’t think even Tarantino could come up with a character like Cheryl Blossom.” He said, causing Betty to let out a little snort. “Are you okay to walk in them?” He said, suddenly concerned, gesturing towards her heels. “The house isn’t far.”

“I’ll manage. But I am never going to be a Veronica Lodge, every time I put on a pair of heels I wonder why I didn’t just throw on some sneakers.”

“I prefer when you wear flats, there’s less of a chance that you’ll be taller than me.”

“I’m still not taller than you.” She pointed out.
“Yes.” He replied. “But there’s still a chance that you’ll be taller than me, and just the thought is damaging to my fragile male ego.”

“I promise, next reunion, I’ll wear some sandals.”

“Better.” He said solemnly “I’d offer to switch shoes with you right now, but I’m already giving you a place to shelter and, literally, the clothes off my back.”

“Shit. I forgot.” She said, stopping to try shrug out of his jacket.

“Don’t be stupid Betty.” He placed a warm hand on her shoulder. “I’m kidding.”

She looked at his hand, then back up at him. “I know. But aren’t you cold?”

“I’m impervious to the cold.” He said, dropping his hand and continuing to walk. “Plus,” He tapped his head. “I have this neat hat.”

“I’m glad you wore your hat tonight.”

“You are?” He asked.

“Yeah. If you hadn’t, I don’t know, it’d have felt like you weren’t Juggy. And with everything happening, I needed you to be Juggy.”

“Oh.” He looked away and towards the ground, eyeing the sidewalk they were passing over just to avoid looking her in the eyes. “Good.” And then he looked up, half relieved, half scared to see a familiar street sign. “I’m just down here.”

She dutifully followed until they reached a small, pleasantly nondescript house. He scrambled for the keys in his pocket, feeling waves of nerves roll through him for some undefinable reason, he twisted the key and let them in.

Immediately the dog began to bark, as he switched on the hallway lights and shut the door behind Betty.

“Hey Hotdog.” She bent down to let him sniff her palm, scratching the top of his head a few times.

“He’s not as young as he was, though he tries.” Jughead said, tossing the keys onto a nearby table.

He felt suddenly overwhelmingly self-conscious as he watched Betty stand up and begin to examine the room. This wasn’t his main place of residence, so the house wasn’t completely decorated the way he wanted, but it wasn’t devoid of personality, they were hints of him everywhere, and the idea that Betty was looking at them, judging them, and therefore him, and finding something lacking, was terrifying.

He led her through to the living room, turning on the lights, the dog padding behind them, and watched as she smiled, fingering the corner of his framed poster of Pulp Fiction. “I love your house.”

She said, turning to him.

He ducked his head. “It’s barely mine.”

“No. It definitely is. When did you get it?” She asked, perching on the end of his sofa, pulling off her heels.

“I bought it with the first bit of money I got from the book.” He shrugged.
“That’s so great Jug.” She smiled sweetly up at him. “You always talked about getting a house here.”

That was true, that this had always been a dream for him, as a child he had never had that, not the stability, at least not for long, and his forays into self-imposed homelessness, the years he stayed with the Andrews, had ingrained in him the need for something permanent. But he wasn’t sure if he was embarrassed that Betty knew this, his whole history, or relieved that there was no need for explanation.

“Back then we were all going to live together.” He said, sitting an appropriate distance away from her on the couch, tugging off his own shoes. “And the house was more tree based.”

Betty leant back against the cushions, sighing. “Alice Cooper nixed that idea, she stopped me climbing trees because Polly broke her arm.”

“How is Alice Cooper? Still terrorizing the neighborhood?”

“Terrorizing a different town’s neighborhood.” She said. “Actually, she’s doing pretty well. She has a boyfriend.”

“That’s great. Though I am a little afraid of the kind of man that can lock down a Cooper.”

“Not so great when your Mom gets a boyfriend before you do. That’s just depressing.”

“I think it’s nice.” He said. “Unless said boyfriend is our age, then I’m a little sceptical.”

“No. They’re the same age.” She laughed.

“Then it’s sweet. We have to have some hope. One day, we’ll be old and frail, and it’d be nice to think we could still find a hand to hold.”

“Did you just call my Mom old?”

“Definitely not.” He pulled his beanie off, shaking his head. “Please don’t tell her I did. I live in mortal fear of her till this day.”

“I can’t wait until I’m all old and wise.” Betty sighed. “And I can get a thousand more cats and no one will judge.”

“You got a cat?”

“As soon as I got my own place that allowed it. Her name’s Caramel. And when I’m old, I’ll have 40 more.”

“I for one will make a brilliant old man.” He said, shifting so his legs were underneath him.

“Definitely, you’ve been 80 years old since we were 8.”

“When you’re old you can tell kid’s to get off your lawn and no one cares.”

“And read and watch old soap operas all day. Or take up some random hobby like knitting.”

“Eat pudding all day long.” He patted his stomach in imagined satisfaction.

“Watch your grandkids grow up without having to do any of the work.”
“Growing old, it’s paradise.” Jughead said, and then they were both silent. Suddenly they were thinking of the people who never got to grow old, to become crotchety grandparents, people like Jason and, since that evening, Dilton.

“I should shower.” She said quietly.

“Right. Of course.” He swallowed nervously. “I can show you the bathroom upstairs.”

“I don’t even have any clothes.” She laughed. “We didn’t exactly think this through.”

“Archie doesn’t think many things through and he’s made it this far.”

Betty snorted.

“Besides, it’s nothing, I can lend you something to wear.” He said casually, as if his heart rate wasn’t increasing at just the thought.

“I don’t even have my laptop.”

“We both know you prefer working on paper.”

She sat up, cocking her head. “How do you know that?”

He stood up, feeling strangely as if he was about to blush. “You forget we worked together for years at the Blue and Gold.”

“Right.” She shook herself, standing up. “And I have my notebook stashed in my purse.”

“Right.” He repeated, and then he gestured towards the door. “Ladies first.”

Jughead was trying exceedingly hard not to think about Betty being in his house, in his shower, using his things, and about to put on his clothes. He’d led her to the right room, and then gone to his bedroom to change out of the stifling reunion clothes, and passing the bathroom door on his way back downstairs, he’d heard her singing, and the sound of her soft voice amidst the running water made his heart clench. He’d moved past the door quick, and sat himself on the sofa, attempting to read the latest scandi noir novel he’d been enthralled with, but finding himself listening out for the soft pad of Betty’s feet on his staircase.

He was beginning to remember why he’d spent so much time away from her, and questioning whether this impromptu sleepover was really a good idea.

“Hey.” Came a voice from the doorway, and Jughead tossed his book aside as nonchalantly as he could.

“Hi, was the shower okay?” He asked.

Betty was stood in the doorway in a pair of his gray sweats, a large navy t-shirt emblazoned with the letter S, her golden hair tied up in a wet pony, and her face bare of makeup. She was what every boy envisioned when they thought of the perfect girl next door but she was real, and incredibly flawed, dripping water on his living room floor. “Great thanks.” She smiled. “Ready to get to work?” She nodded at the collection of things he’d spread out on his coffee table, a notebook, his laptop, some pens, scissors, and string.

“Ready.” He nodded, as she took her place next to him on the couch.
Betty reached forward, tracing a hand against the assembled supplies, as she pulled her legs up to rest next to her. “Is this to make a murder board?”

“Potentially.” He shrugged.

“I’d be afraid that you had all this stuff” She joked. “If I didn’t know you Juggy.” She shifted awkwardly. “Or, I guess knew.”

“You still know me.” He said quietly. “High school stunted my growth.”

“I find that hard to believe.” Smiling in a way he’d forgotten existed, all crumpled and pulled in, but beautiful.

He turned his head away, pulling his laptop off the table and into his lap. “Where to begin?”

“We need to figure out the basics. We haven’t seen Dilton Doiley since we were all teenagers, and even then the main thing I remember is that we threatened him to reveal information about the night Jason went missing. So who was Dilton now? Who had he become?”

“I can research while you write down any questions or answers we find?”

“Perfect.” She said, reaching for her purse and pulling out her notebook and pen.

They worked that way for a few hours, until the night shifted into the early hours of the morning, and their eyes grew tired from staring at blank pages and the artificial glow of a laptop screen. But they were making progress, in that slow slog way that journalism sometimes is. They’d discovered that their once-classmate had a short lived career as a computer technician that had ended abruptly, and for a reason they’d yet to discover, before moving to Utah to work as a park ranger, was highly intelligent and highly paranoid, his Facebook saw him subscribed to all sorts of conspiracy theories and when they dug into the internet forums, they found handles belonging to him all over the message board of any survivalist group you could find.

“He believes in more conspiracy theories than you Jug.” Betty said, assessing everything she’d written down.

“You tell a girl you think the moon landing is faked once, and she compares you to every murder victim you see.” He replied.

She tapped her pen against her chin, face set into its ‘deep thought’ mode. Just as he was about to say something, she turned to him suddenly with a mad glint in her eyes. “Do you have a copy of our yearbook?”

“Yes. I keep every piece of Riverdale memorabilia I can to ensure I never forget one precious moment.” He deadpanned, and she just carried on staring at him. “Fine,” He sighed, putting his laptop down and standing up. “It’s upstairs.”

Seeing that blue and gold cover, dusty in his eyes, kept locked away in some cupboard, made him almost sick with nostalgia, but what exactly he missed he wasn’t sure. Still, he hurried to get downstairs with it, so he wouldn’t have to look at it alone.

“You got it?” She looked up from her notepad as he walked in, and he tossed it to her, taking his seat next to her and peering over her shoulder as she flicked through the glossy pages.

“Don’t these things have an index or something?”
“Not in Riverdale.” She sighed. “It was stressful enough just getting everyone’s pictures and clubs in here. I should know, I was on the yearbook committee.”

“I’ll never know how you had time for the newspaper, yearbook, cheerleading, and to be a straight A student. I barely managed to graduate.”

“Yet, you’re smarter than the rest of us.

“Right.” He snorted, leaning back against the cushions so the book was out of sight. “Please, skip past any photos of me.”

“But you were so cute.” She cooed, and then, her voice softer, she spoke again. “Look.”

He turned, following where her finger pointed to look at the page, expecting to see Dilton, or something else pertinent to the case. But instead she’d paused on a picture of the two of them, looking so young, just children, with The Blue and Gold written in bold letters above them.

“I forgot you made us take a photo.” He said.

“Our time with the paper needed to be commemorated.”

“You said the same thing ten years ago.”

“That just means I’m still right.”

“You made your mum take it.” He said, resisting the urge to lean in closer for a better look. They were posing in front of a desk, she was wearing one of those sweaters she used to love, pale blue and soft looking, her hair scraped back into a ridiculously tight ponytail, hands clasped together at the front, giving the camera a smile that was dazzling. On the other hand, Jughead looked as if he wanted to be anywhere else but there. He remembered how Betty had talked him into it, the only person who was ever able to get him to do what he hated, and how he’d regretted it the moment they’d got in front of the camera. Betty had always thought that was funny and, once she’d seen the photo, she’d laughed and pinned it up in her locker. All of this things he’d forgotten, stuff he hadn’t thought of in years, rushing back at the sight of that photo. He had a sudden, overwhelming urge to slam the book shut.

“You complained the whole time.” She laughed. “It was like I’d threaten to kill you or something.”

“That probably would’ve been less painful.” He said, leaning back so he no longer had to look at it.

“Aren’t you happy that I made you do it? Now that we’re older and you can look back on it?”

He didn’t want to hurt her feelings and, the truth was, he wasn’t sure if he was glad to have it or wish he never had to see it again. “I guess.” He said, after a second.

“Well,” She said decisively, looking from him back to their photograph. “I’m glad.” She lingered on the page for a second longer, before flicking through.

They passed pictures of Betty in the cheerleading squad, pictures of her holding a bake sale to raise funds for the local animal shelter, Archie posing with the goons that made up the football team, Veronica pining up a poster announcing the sexual assault awareness and consent classes she had helped to implement. But no more pictures of Jughead, not even a senior portrait.

“I can’t believe there’s not more of you.” She said.
“That’s what I wanted.” He shrugged. “I wasn’t exactly front and centre in high school.”

“Yeah but you had friends.”

“I had two friends.” Jughead said firmly. “You and Archie.”

“And Veronica and Kevin and—”

“No.” He shook his head. “They were your friends Betty, not mine.”

“That’s ridiculous.” She scoffed.

“It’s true” He shrugged again.

“Sometimes you don’t get a say in who you’re friends with Jughead Jones. And that was one of those times. We were all friends, even if you didn’t always feel like it.”

He wanted to argue, ask her why he never hung out with them outside of her, but that was the stubbornness within him, rising upwards at the sight of all their young faces. The truth was, he hadn’t considered them friends, not really, but he knew it was an argument that he was bound to lose, because they’d all acted like friends, sometimes cared for him as if they were. “Let’s just look for Doiley.”

“Fine.” She said, as if she had won the war that had not been waged.

They turned their attentions to the book fully and combed through it with the eyes of investigators, not adults reliving their teenage years. It was comforting, especially for Betty, that monotony of research, and it was remarkable how familiar it began to feel. They’d never paged through yearbooks when going after Jason Blossom’s killer, but they’d spent hours with heads bent over different kinds of research. And there was a rhythm to it they had not forgot, a groove that they could lose themselves to. They saw that he was a member of the AV Club, the Scouts, and Chess Club, but there was one particular girl he was continually photographed with.

“Ethel?” Betty said, peering closer at the image, asking herself the question more than anyone else.

“Were they dating? You were friends with Ethel right? Do you remember?”

“I don’t know.” She bit her lip thoughtfully. “We kinda drifted apart senior year, I was so busy, and really she was more Veronica’s friend.”

“Maybe we should ask Veronica tomorrow?” He suggested.

“Hmm.” Suddenly, she turned towards him, tucking her legs up so she was sat cross legged and facing him, so close that he could feel her knees pressed against his thighs. He shifted a little, so he was angled towards her. “Something about this feels so strange Jughead.”

“Every murder is strange.”

“No.” She shook her head. “I mean more than that. It’s theatrical. The way it was set up, with the reunion, and the balloons, and the unveiling. The person who did it was trying to send a message. They didn’t hide the body, or try to pretend it hadn’t happened, they wanted us to see it, to watch.”

“Figure out who the message was for…”

“Figure out the killer.” She finished for him, they both stared down at the page in her lap, the smiling face of a boy now gone. They stayed like that for a moment, until Betty let out a breath of air,
leaning back against the arm of his sofa, shifting so that her legs were across Jughead’s lap. He stiffened for a second and then, with great willpower, forced himself to relax. “You always forget how much you don’t know at the start.” She said. “It always feels like there’s more questions than there can ever be answers to.”

“I know.” He rubbed a hand across his tired face.

She leant down to retrieve her notebook that had slide down the side of the coach whilst they talked, her movement made Jughead hyperaware of the warm weight of legs in his lap. If this had been anyone else, he’d have immediately tossed the off with a laugh or scoff of disgust, but this wasn’t anyone, it was Betty, and he’d always gone with whatever she wanted. She seemed completely oblivious to these conflicting emotions rushing through him, as she tossed him her notebook. “Here, read through what I’ve written. That way we have a fresh pair of eyes.”

“Yeah, okay.” He said, shifting so he could place his feet up on the coffee table, the book propped up in one hand against the arm of his chair, maximising both his and Betty’s comfort.

She reached for a new sheaf of paper, a part of the supplies that he’d laid out earlier. They stayed like that for a while, him reading through her notes, her switching between the yearbook and the paper, scribbling type any thoughts and facts that could be relevant, working in easy companionable silence as the late night twisted into early morning.

“My brain’s gone all mushy.” Betty sighed after some time had passed, and the pages of the book seemed to blur together. “I can’t keep this up much longer.”

“Me too.” He admitted.

“Instead, can we talk?” She said carefully and casually, causing him to look up from the book he’d been half-reading to find her bright eyes trained on him in a way that was highly disconcerting.

He suddenly felt a lot more alert. “Unless I’m hallucinating, I’d say that’s exactly what we’re doing.”

“I want to talk about what happened, ten years ago, the night before I left for college?” It felt as if she’d been waiting to bring this up since the moment she’d walked back into his life.

“No.” He said abruptly, purposefully not looking at her.

“Jughead.”

“I am willing to discuss literally any other topic in history, including the times me and Archie bathed naked together as babies, and whether or not Cliff Blossom was just misunderstood. But I don’t want to talk about that night Betty. Not now.”

“Jug, I-“

“Please Betty? I can’t.” The way he looked at her, almost pleading, twist her heart. “Not today.”

“Okay. Okay.” She repeated, sinking into her cushions. “Can we talk about everything I’ve missed since you went silent on us all then?”

“Well, the obvious, I became insanely hot.”

“Obviously.” She laughed.

“And irresistible to the ladies.” He said goofily.
“You were with Trula Twyst for a while.”

“That topic’s off limits too.” He smiled briefly, not genuinely, mouth twisting upwards in a way that told Betty to leave it alone.

“Okay.” She replied simply.

And maybe it was the fact that she let him be, didn’t push him in the way others did, that made him sigh and open his mouth again. “It didn’t end great.”

She looked at him very softly, gently, as if he was an animal that was easily startled. “What happened?”

“It turns out I’m a much more interesting test subject than I am a boyfriend.”

“What do you mean?” She sat up a little, feet still resting in his lap, brow crumpled in confusion.

“I mean, she was using me.” He was looking fixedly at the coffee table in front of him. “She read my book and thought I would make a fascinating psychological study, only she didn’t tell me that’s what she was doing. She said what she felt was real, but if you like someone you don’t write your thesis on them without them knowing.”

“Oh Jug,” She swung her legs off him, tucking them beneath her and leaning forward so she could place one of her hands over his. “That’s awful.”

“It’s fine.” He looked at her hand on his as if he didn’t recognise them. “Now I can be alone and misanthropic. It’s my destiny.”

“That’s not your destiny Juggy.” She squeezed his hand. “And you are not alone, you know you could’ve called me anytime, you just chose not to.”

And he had known that, of course he had, but that was what made it worse. “I like being alone.” He insisted. “I like being alone.” He insisted. “It’s who I am. And I didn’t love her anyway.”

“I know a lot about that.” She finally let go of his hand. “About not loving someone.”

“Your ex-fiancé?”

“Yes.” Betty said, lying back against the seat of the sofa. “It wasn’t love so what was the point?”

“He was nice but it wasn’t enough.”

“Exactly.”

“Either we’re hopeless romantic or desperate cynics Bets. I can’t figure out which ones worse.”

She poked him teasingly with her socked foot, and he sighed, moving his arms so she could rest her feet in his lap again. “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with either.” She declared.

“No?”

“No. I’m a realist and I want to be happy, there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“One day, your Prince Charming will come for you.” He joked.

She shook her head, yawning. “I never liked Prince Charming. He bored me. Even as a kid I wanted
someone realer.”

“You don’t need anyone anyway Bets.” He said softly, gently

“I know that.” She said, shifting so she was on her side, body still warm against him. He could hear in her voice the first signs of sleep arriving. “But that doesn’t mean I don’t want someone.”

Acting on instinct, he gently grabbed her ankle, where it still lay in his lap, tracing comforting circles on the small strip exposed between her sweatpants and socks. ‘You’ll find someone’

“Hmph.” She grumbled into the side of his sofa.

He should’ve been horrified at the waves of affection crashing over him, watching her drifting off, but he couldn’t find the energy within himself. Instead, he reached for the blanket draped across the back of the sofa, and pulled it down so it covered both of them, moved delicately, so as not to disturb Betty, and fell slowly into sleep along with her.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading. Please let me know what you thought in the comments, each one makes me ridiculously happy. I really value your feedback!
The Unusual Suspects

Chapter Summary

He smiled to himself as he started the engine, thinking about how satisfying it was to learn something new about someone, how it opened up another facet of them that had previously been off limits, how he thought he’d never get tired of learning new things about Betty Cooper. “Is there anything you can’t do?” He said, a sarcastic twist to his voice that caused the phrase to make her laugh rather than annoy her, as it would of if anyone else had tried to ask that sincerely.

“I’m pretty bad for burning my food.”

“Well, nobody’s perfect. “

Chapter Notes

Another instalment! I'm sure you noticed/read, but the title of the fic's been changed from Return to Riverdale, to Teenage Talk. Hope it's not too confusing. As always, it isn't beta'ed so I can't promise absolutely no mistakes. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Betty woke up first the next morning. The sunlight was beginning to stream in through the curtain of Jughead’s living room, illuminating the parts of the room that weren’t lit by the dim floor lamp they’d left burning all night. She was used to waking up in strange places, but it still took her a moment of adjustment to realise that she was in Riverdale, in Jughead’s house, limbs sprawled across him. As she sat up, she shifted her legs from underneath Jughead’s arms, knees cracking as she pulled them in towards her body.

The other boy was still asleep, and she couldn’t help but take a moment to watch him. He was slumped down, head cricked at an awkward angle that made her want to reach out and adjust it, black hair messy without its beanie, face slack and softened in a way that made him look startlingly young. For a brief moment, she wanted to reach out and smooth his hair, place a soft kiss against his temple, but she shook herself. This was just lack of sleep, and all the emotions of the past night within her making her think ridiculous thoughts. Instead, she stood up, stretching her body to knock out the kinks from sleeping all night on a couch rather than a bed.

Checking her phone, that had been charging all night, she noted that it was just eight in the morning, meaning she’d had around four hours sleep. She thought, briefly, about whether Jughead would want to be woken up. But images of his tired face went through her mind, the dark circles under his eyes so shocking they looked like bruises, and she decided to leave him for a least a little longer. She tiptoed quietly from the room, shutting the door gently behind, making her way through the corridor into the kitchen.

In the corner of the room, reclining on a bed of cushions, Hot Dog lifted his head as he eyed the new intruder. “Hey boy.” She whispered, bending down to scratch his head, the dog nuzzled contentedly.
into her palm.

As she stood up, she took the opportunity to examine his kitchen. It was neater than she might’ve expected, but she supposed that was what came from him only living in the house temporarily, but there were still a few plates piled up in the sink, and an open bag of chips left abandoned on the counter. The walls were a soft orange, a soothing color, and the table in the middle of the room was a nice worn wood, and she couldn’t help but feel it wouldn’t be a horrible place to spend a lazy morning.

Carefully, she searched through the cupboards for mug, hoping that Jughead wouldn’t take her need for a coffee fix as some invasion of privacy. She picked out a nice grey mug with the picture of a skeleton smoking a cigarette on the side, a painting by Van Gogh that made her laugh, spooning the coffee she’d found into the fancy machine that lay next to the fridge. The smell of coffee filled the room, and as she took her first sip she was surprised to find she was feeling okay, not drained or exhausted as she’d been expecting, but steely eyed and ready to face the rest of the day.

She leant against the counter, deep in thought, as Hot Dog padded across the room, his tail wagging slowly, nudging against her thigh. In-between sips of her drink, she absentmindedly stroked the soft fur of the dog. It seemed like it was around the time Jughead walked him, judging from when she’d met him just the morning before, and she wondered again if she should wake him. But the more she thought about it, imagining the sweet sting of fresh morning air in her lungs and on her cheeks, the more the idea of walking Hot Dog herself appealed.

Her clothes were ill-fitting and not her own, her hair had dried into a crushed ponytail on the top of her head, and her face was devoid of makeup, probably with cushion creases imprinted into her skin. But she found she didn’t care about things like that like she used to, or like Veronica still did, and the idea of a brisk walk felt unbelievably appealing. If people saw her and judged, made assumptions about what she’d been doing or with whom, she decided that she wasn’t going to care.

Remembering that she’d slipped some ballet flats into her handbag the night before, a fact she wished she’d thought of on the walk from the bar to Jughead’s, solidified the idea in her mind. Sneaking back into the living room, she picked up her bag and left him a quick note about her whereabouts, in case he woke up and thought she’d abandoned him, slipping on her shoes and attaching the lead she’d found on the counter onto Hot Dog’s collar. He waited eagerly and patiently at her side, as she left the door closed but unlocked, and led them both out into the early morning light.

When she arrived back, Jughead was sat on the couch, awake and flicking through the notebook she’d been using the night before, brow crumpled as he read through pages of her handwriting. The dog caught his attention first, as she unclipped the leash he came rushing through the room as quick as his old legs could carry him, heading straight for his master.

Suddenly, Betty felt alarmingly self-conscious, stood in the doorway of the living room, small strands of sweaty hair sticking to her forehead, and the very act of taking the dog for a walk felt ludicrous, like she’d been acting out the part of sensable adult in some play without realising it. But then he looked at her, smiling, and she breathed out.

“Where’d you get off on stealing my dog Cooper?”

“I left a note.” She pointed to where it sat, a little more crumpled than she’d left it. “And I can’t help if he prefers me.”

“Insanity.” He huffed, grinning.
“Hot Dog.” She patted her legs, stepping away from the door as if she was going to the kitchen, and almost immediately the dog’s ears pricked up, and he abandoned his position at Jughead’s feet for the kitchen. The sound of him lapping up water from a metal bowl filled the room, and Betty laughed a little in surprise: she hadn’t actually expected him to move.

“Cheat.” He accused, standing up and stretching his limbs, tossing the book onto the table as he did so. “The kitchen has food and water, you had an unfair advantage.”

“The Coopers play dirty.”

“Hmm.” He grumbled as he scooted past her, close enough that she could feel the ghost of his hand against her back. “I remember.”

She followed on his heels, into the kitchen, where he peered into a fridge that was mournfully empty. “Sorry about the lack of food, I wasn’t expecting company.”

“It’s fine.” She shrugged. “But I will take advantage of your fancy coffee machine again.”

“You’re a coffee addict now?” He said, shutting the fridge, eyeing her as she rinsed out the mug she’d been using.

“Hmm.” She hummed in agreement. “Late night investigations and college studying has that effect.”

“I remember you as more of a tea girl.”

“I like both, I just doubted you had any tea hiding in your cupboards.”

“I might.”

“Do you?”

“No. Tea tastes like dirt.”

“Coffee it is.” She moved round him, operating the machine like a pro, turning to him with a sweet smile. “Want a cup?”

“Yeah thanks. Black.”

“I remember.”

As he watched her operate the machine, he felt a shiver of unease rush through him. The way she moved around the kitchen, so comfortable, bare feet padding against the tiles, dog greedily lapping up his dinner before coming to nudge against its owner, was too close to some fantasy version of the life his teenage self might’ve wanted.

“Here.” She said, sliding a mug towards him.

“Thanks.” He grinned into his drink, as she slid into the seat opposite him. “Did you sleep well?”

“Surprisingly, yes. I swear your sofa is more comfortable than the hotel.”

“Riverdale Inn can’t compete with the luxuries of Chez Jones.”

“Hmm.” She said, taking a sip of her coffee. “Exactly what I meant.”

“Luxuries like no food and a distinctive dog smell.”
“Don’t insult Hot Dog, he can hear you.” She teased

“He’s used to it.” Jughead shrugged, nudging him gently with his foot. “But- thanks for walking him this morning. You didn’t have to. You could’ve woke me up.”

“I know. But I didn’t mind, I like going for walks in the morning, and Hot Dog was nice enough to keep me company. Besides, you looked tired, I wanted to let you sleep.”

For some reason, he had the urge to touch his face, a reflex, to check the dark circles that often lingered there, that defined his features no matter how much sleep he got. The idea that she noticed them, thought about the enough to not wake him, made him self-conscious. “Thanks.”

The smile she gave him was so soft, he could’ve sworn if he said a word it would shatter. “Anytime.”

“We could head to Pop’s after this? If you’re hungry? I know he misses me when I’m away.”

“I would but-” She gestured to her outfit.

“You mean you don’t want to be seen out in public wearing my old, ill-fitting sweats?” He crumpled his brow in faux confusion.

“I think they’ve already been out in public enough. I need to take my pills, and get dressed so I can look convincingly functional enough to get people to talk to me.”

“So, we’re talking to people today?”

“Of course. I think we need to prioritise Ginger, so we have a basic overview of the event, who had access, who else was helping to plan, and then ask Veronica about what she remembers about Ethel and Dilton from high school, then ask Ethel, sensitively, if they were childhood sweethearts, because then that’ll give us an idea of what he was like when we were teenagers, and then we can piece together who here might have had a motive.” She looked up, and Jughead wasn’t saying anything, just looking at with a strange expression on his face, and it made her blush. “What?”

“Nothing.” He flicked his eyes down to the table, and then back up to her. “I just- I guess I forgot that this is your job now, you’re a real professional, award winning journalist Bets. This isn’t play acting”

She leant back on her chair. “Was it ever?”

“I guess not.”

“And I haven’t actually won any awards.”

“You should have.” He insisted. “It’s impressive.”

“Hmm.” She muttered, draining the last dregs of her drink, and trying to pretend that she wasn’t pleased.

He stood up, worried he’d given too much away, moving to take their cups to the sink. “This town is lucky they’ve got you on the case Bets.”

“Lucky they’ve got us.”

They moved gradually from the kitchen to the living room, pretending that this was normal, straining to forget any tension that lingered in the air, any remembered fantasies they’d both pretended they’d
As she walked around the room, gathering her belongings and the notes she’d made the night before, Jughead took one last glance through her book, looking at the very first few pages, the notes she’d made before they’d arrived at the event, before there had even been a body to be found.

“It’s strange.” He furrowed his brow. “But Dilton isn’t on this first list of people attending.”

“What?” Betty looked up sharply from where she’d been shoving stuff into her purse.

“Here.” He held it out to her.

She snatched it from him, flicking through the pages with such laser focused vision that Jughead wasn’t sure if he was scared, amused, aroused, or a little bit of all three. After a moment, she looked up, brain clearly working franticly. “Jug, I could kiss you!” She cried triumphantly.

“I bet you say that to all your partners in crime.” He grumbled, looking down in the hopes that she wouldn’t see his embarrassment.

“This is the first thread.” She said excitedly, slipping the notebook into her bag and picking up her phone, scrolling through her emails till she reached what she was looking for. “Here.” She thrust the phone into Jughead’s hands, he squinted at the screen. “That’s the first list that Ginger sent me right? And he had rsvp’d no. But then-” She took the phone back, flicking until she reached another email and turning it so he could see. “Here, three weeks later, he was going. And it could be nothing, work granted him more time off, he had a spur of the moment change of heart—”

“But it could be everything.” Jughead finished for her, and was rewarded with a satisfied smile.

“Exactly.” She said. “It’s something. I can’t believe we missed this last night.”

“It was late and we were tired.” He shrugged. “His name’s only missing off your first list, it was easy to skip past it.”

“Still,” She chewed on her lip thoughtfully. “A rookie move.”

“We got it.” He nudged her gently, and she looked up.

“I should call a cab.”

“I’ll drive you.”

“You drive?” She asked, not sure why she was so surprised, only it wasn’t an image of him that fitted with her memories, he’d been the only one of them senior year who didn’t have a licence.

“Yeah. You didn’t notice the car last night?”

“I guess I did, but I assumed it was someone else’s.”

“Nope.” He led her outside, grabbing his keys and slipping into the shoes he’d left by the front door. “This is my hunk of junk.”

She had to admit that ‘hunk of junk’ wasn’t exactly an inaccurate description. It was a battered Oldsmobile, something from the 90s, painted a fading red color, looking a little rough around the edges. Betty moved towards the passenger side door and tugged, fruitlessly, on the handle.

Jughead winced. “You have to jolt it. Here.” She stepped dutifully out of the way, giving him space
to whack the side with one palm of his and, whilst twisting on the handle with another, until the door
gave in with a groan and swung open. “Bought it cheap off one of dad’s friends.” He offered in way of an explanation.

“Hmm.” Betty said, voice thick with amusement. “You know I could fix this for you?”

“Really?”

“Sure.” She slid into her seat. “My dad taught me a couple of things before he moved out. I’m kinda big into cars.”

“Huh.” Jughead said, shutting the door for her and quickly moving to the driver’s side, slipping in beside her. “I didn’t know that.”

She shrugged. “I guess you do now.”

He smiled to himself as he started the engine, thinking about how satisfying it was to learn something new about someone, how it opened up another facet of them that had previously been off limits, how he thought he’d never get tired of learning new things about Betty Cooper. “Is there anything you can’t do?” He said, a sarcastic twist to his voice that caused the phrase to make her laugh rather than annoy her, as it would of if anyone else had tried to ask that sincerely.

“I’m pretty bad for burning my food.”

“Well, nobody’s perfect. “

V <3

B, joining us for breakfast with your dear almost-sis?

B <3

Cnt! Got to get to hotel, shower, grab a bagel before heading straight to the station with Jug.

Sorry! Have fun w the gang.

V <3

Just Cheryl. The boys flaked (typical).

Also, you had a sleepover? Hmm.

B <3

We fell asleep doing research. Have fun with Cheryl x

V <3

Just teasing Bets, got to get our joy where we can these days.

Hope your visit with Sherriff Keller isn’t too disastrous.

Stay safe xoxo
As Veronica slipped her phone into her pocket, the door of Pop’s swung open, leaving a certain redhead silhouetted in the doorway. She watched Cheryl move towards her, confident and composed, aware of the eyes that followed her. Veronica used to think that she and Cheryl were two sides of the same coin, because there could’ve be alternate worlds where she stayed as icy as she had been in New York, with all that money and power a fortress against self-reflection. Only that world didn't happen, and Cheryl showed herself to be infinitely more complex, but they still had some cracks in the same places, father issues, and a family name that others defined them by. But that wasn't exactly a unique problem, the name, God knows in a town like this was it was a problem that haunted most of them.

She wished she had been thinking any of those things though, waiting for their breakfast date to occur, but she wasn't, because Cheryl Blossom walked through life with the volume always turned up, hair blowing in a wind machine of allusion, lips sticky like the maple syrup that used to be her legacy, tight green dress that made her shudder.

Damn, Kevin had not been wrong about her thing for redheads. From childhood crushes on Prince Harry, to Archie, to this, a study in scarlet strutting her way into a diner like it was the hottest club in Hollywood. Veronica hadn't gotten laid since her ex-girlfriend in London and, apparently, this was going to cause problems.

"Lodge." Cheryl nodded, slipping into place opposite her, shaking her head so her hair fanned out perfectly, and raising an eyebrow at the rest of the empty seats. She raised a sharp, plum nail and pointed at the blank spaces. "Where's the rest of your second-rate Scooby gang?"

"Busy." Veronica shrugged.

"You know if you wanted to take me on a date you should've just asked. Although, I'd expect something nicer than Pop Tate's."

"I'll keep that in mind." She said sarcastically, not bothering to mention that this hadn't been her idea in the first place. "But for now," she pointed at the laminated menus. "Breakfast."

"Is this a breakfast menu? Or a step by step guide on how to develop heart disease?"

"It's a diner, not Sugarfish."

"Hmm." Cheryl hummed. "I guess a lifetime of sucking Archie's dick really did lower your standards."

"Moving to LA hasn't changed you much has it?" She sighed, shutting the menu.

"I'm iconic as ever." The redhead shrugged. "Only now I'm verified on Twitter."

"I saw. You're internet famous."

"Which is basically the only type of famous that matters these days. They say do what you know, and I know how to be admired. What?" She snapped, when Veronica didn't immediately say anything. "People were always going to look at me anyway, because of my dad and Jason, so I decided to make some money in the meantime.”
"Hey, I think it's smart." She replied, because it was and she did. "Image is a form of modern currency, and people who scoff at if or call it shallow are being naive."

"Thank you." She said, leaning back against her booth. "It's more than just posting a pretty picture on Instagram. I teach dance classes. I do appearances. And I carefully cultivate what brands I'm going to work with."

"That sounds great Cheryl." She said sincerely. "It sounds like you're doing well."

"I was born to succeed. I'm a B-" She broke off, looking down, and Veronica could've sworn she was about to say Blossom. "Whatever. How are you doing now Daddy's locked away for good?"

She continued, and Veronica tried to tell herself the girl was only lashing out to compensate.

"Living up to the potential that always frightened you." She said. "I'm was in New York for a while, Paris for two years, and now London since December, running a lifestyle brand."

"Lifestyle brand? What, you sell ideas to yoga toned Moms too stoned on Xanax to care about the cost?" Cheryl asked.

"No. I run a business that markets clothes, art, and house pieces, to young, up and coming people via a selective, monthly, online newsletter."

"You've turned classism into an art form."

"Please," She scoffed light heartedly. "It's not money you need to be in the know, it's sense. Anyone can find my site if they want to, and not every item costs like you'd think. Plus, we partner with a lot of charities."

"You can find a Lodge original on every Hobo in England?"

Before she could responded, they were interrupted by a kind, smiley waitress, who hovered with a notebook open. "What can I get you gals?"

"Is there anything on this menu that's organic?" Cheryl asked, turning her head confidently towards the waitress and blinking at her expectantly.

"I don't know." The waitress said, a hint of exasperation in her voice. "We do get most of our produce from local farms."

"Not worth the risk." She turned back to the menu. "Two slices of whole wheat toast, and a poached egg. On the side. Please. And orange juice."

"Sure thing Hun." The older woman sighed.

Just an Omelette for me, and OJ." Veronica said, smiling in an almost apology. "And some more coffee please?"

"Coming right up." The woman grinned back, slipping her notebook back into her

Veronica took this opportunity to steer the subject back to the girl opposite her, images flashing of her crouched at aching in the alley way the night before still fresh in her mind. "So, Cheryl, how are you doing?"

"Since I found out I have at least one frenemy in this godforsaken place it's been slightly better." She replied.
“Frenemy?” Veronica asked. “Haven’t we grown up since high school? What are we, extras in a badly cast reboot of 90210? Can’t we just say friends?”

“Fine.” The redhead pouted, shiny lips momentarily distracting the other girl from whatever she’d been about to say. “Veronica, my friend,” She continued, placing way too much emphasis on the word. “Thank you. You’re the only one who really thought about me last night, or this morning, or pretty much ever in my entire life.”

“Like I said, that’s what real friends do. If I learnt anything in Riverdale, it was loyalty.”

“And I learnt that I come from a family of psychopaths.” Cheryl said bluntly.

“Do you see them much? Your Mom and the rest of your family?” Veronica asked, leaning forward unconsciously.

“You mean the cult of eternal redheads?” She replied and Veronica smiled, nodding. “No. In a family of murderers, and drug pushers, I’m still the black sheep. You burn down one family mansion and flee to California and suddenly you’re not invited to Thanksgiving.”

“I don’t even want to think about what Thanksgiving with the Blossoms would be like, that one dinner party at Thornhill was enough.” She said, flashing back to that odd, liminal time, where the truth kept shifting every day, and Cheryl’s actions were broken and unpredictable. That strange sleepover, when she’d lain in bed next to a girl about to bury her brother, more delicate in sleep than she’d ever seen her, pale skin so gossamer thin that Veronica worried that if she shifted too much she could break her. That wasn’t the first time she’d thought about kissing the other girl, because there wasn’t an honest person on earth who hadn’t thought about what it would be like to kiss Cheryl Blossom, standing in a cheer uniform with lips pressed into a permanent pout, but it was that night that had been the easiest to imagine it. Them, in bed, the redhead looking like she lit up from the inside with her own unearthly glow, in that twisted fairy tale of a house where it seemed like anything could be possible, even love.

“Most of the Blossoms I see nowadays are more of the Cooper variety.” Cheryl shrugged, as if this fact wasn’t painful.

“You see Polly and the twins a lot?”

Here was where Cheryl’s face truly transformed, and suddenly Veronica realised that she had never truly seen a real smile from the other girl, at least not for a very, very long time, and even then, so infrequently it was like it didn’t exist. But here, this was an actual grin. “I visit as often as I can. I mean, I can’t let my sister-in-law turn them into total losers.” She said, but there was no bite to her words.

“I hear from Betty that they’re doing well.” Veronica said.

“Please, they’re related to me, they’re doing fabulously.” She said, shifting to send a cascade of shiny, red hair over her shoulder. “Jason is about to be the handsomest kid in seventh grade, and Juliet has been absolutely slaying her ballet lessons, I keep telling Polly she gets her dance skills from me.”

“Oh yeah?” Veronica quirked a perfect eyebrow. “I seem to remember somebody losing a certain dance battle to someone else sitting at this table.”

“Because everyone thought you were hot, new shit. And I’ll give you that, you were hot.” Cheryl said, so simply that Veronica couldn’t tell if it was meant to be flirting or not. She didn’t get a chance
to figure out what her reaction was going to be, because the food was arriving, and then the moment got left behind.

“Eurgh.” The Redhead said, picking at her steaming food. “There is no part of me that misses this seventh circle of hell that we used to call home.”

“I don’t know.” The other girl replied, taking a sip from her coffee and looking around. “I met the only people in my life that I’ve ever really cared about right in this place. I think Riverdale was my destiny.”

“Okay Psychic Sally, that’s cool for you, but you weren’t really raised here. You can’t imagine the kind of damage a childhood here can do.”

"I know, I had a life before this place. Granted, I was a horrendous bitch, but I don't think that was New York.”

"Who could forget you were the star of your very own Gossip Girl series before you landed in this rejected David Lynch directed Dawsons Creek pilot." Cheryl said, before taking a sip of her orange juice and groaning. "How much do you wish this was a Mimosa right now?"

"Yes." Veronica sighed dreamily. "Or a Bloody Mary."

"And we were drinking them with a better view then this backwards hick town."

"A Manhattan skyline." Veronica almost shut her eyes, as if she could envision it, dream it into being.

"A rooftop pool in LA" Offered Cheryl.

"London when it's not raining."

“Promise me Lodge, next time we meet it’s going to anywhere other than Riverdale.” The redhead joked, reaching over to clutch at the other girls hand. Veronica eyed where their hands touched.

“Fine” She pulled her hand back. “And I don’t make a promise I can’t keep, Cheryl Bombshell.”

Jughead waited for her in his car, window rolled down just slightly, tapping a noiseless rhythm against the dashboard, keeping time to each second she was gone. He wanted to get his laptop out right there and then, type up everything that had happened last night as if he was still a boy again, still a teenager sitting in diners while the lights burned low, throwing everything in his life at a computer screen and hoping something would stick. That something was always Betty. What else could it be but her? Even now, his fingers itched with words all about her, how she’d changed, how she’d stayed the same.

Archie had once said she was too good for this world, an excuse he’d used after their inevitable breakup, but Jughead had never once agreed. Maybe, it was because they looked for different things in life- Archie always saw the brightness and the glamor, whilst Jughead couldn’t help but search for the grit and the dark.

Betty wasn’t too good for this world, no one was, but she might’ve been one of the best things in it.
“Hey.” Betty yanked open the door, copying his trick from earlier. She smelt like peaches, her hair was down and curling at the edges where it was still wet from the shower. “Bagel?” She thrust a brown paper bag into his lap. “It’s blueberry.”

“Thanks.” He said, reaching into the bag as she chomped on her own breakfast.

“Courtesy of Riverdale Inn’s buffet breakfast.” Betty shrugged. “I’m assuming you got a text?”

“From Sheriff Keller?”

“Yeah.”

“Nothing says welcoming back to Riverdale like being the suspect in a murder inquiry.” He said, in-between bites of his breakfast.

“You really think we’re suspects?”

“I think he called us in early because he doesn’t like us.”

Betty shoved the rest of her bagel into her bag, rummaging around in her purse until she found the sunglasses she’d packed, and shoving them on to avoid squinting at the bright sunlight that had emerged from behind the clouds. “I guess so. But he hasn’t called in Archie or Veronica yet.”

“Right, but they’re Archie and Veronica, and we’re us. We just can’t leave well enough alone, and we both made him look like a fool.”

“Nights at Kev’s were always a little frosty.” She admitted, thinking back to the Sherriff’s mistrustful gaze on hers as she complimented his cooking or studied with Kevin in the kitchen, sometimes she could’ve swore he was looking at her with hurt in his eyes.

Jughead tossed the empty paper bag into the back seat, started the car, and manoeuvred them roughly out of the near empty parking lot. “And I was a Southside Serpent for a while. All of that spells nothing but trouble.”

“Well,” She sighed. “I can’t wait.”

“Hey, you’re still a golden child Bets, I wouldn’t sweat it. And this isn’t my first time at the Riverdale Sheriff’s department rodeo.”

“We’re crazy messed up.” She laughed.

He grinned, glancing over at it. “That’s Riverdale. Home of the most messed up childhoods in Northeast America.”

“I’m thinking of turning the tables on him anyway.”

“Oh yeah?”

“People give a lot away without even knowing it.” She said confidently, watching the town pass by as they sped down the streets. “And I wouldn’t be much of a reporter if I didn’t do my best to find out what they already know.”

“You’re the best damn sleuth around Cooper.” He said, as they pulled into the station.
Ginger Lopez was waiting when they walked in, sat hunched on a hard plastic chair, face pale and eyes red but dry, for now, looking vacantly at a spot on the floor.

Betty and Jughead exchanged looks.

“Ginger.” Betty started tentatively, approaching the woman slowly.

“Oh.” She looked up, startled. “Betty. Jughead.” She attempted a faltering smile. “You’re here to talk to the Sherriff?”

“I’m up first.” Jughead said, lifting his arms in a gesture half in greeting, half in goodbye, nodded conspiratorially at Betty, and headed towards the desk. This was something best left to Betty, he was good at the interrogating of suspects, the waiting thoughtfully for someone to divulge something secret, but trying to coax a weepy cheerleader that he didn’t know, that was something he’d better avoid. He’d take his chances with the Sherriff first.

“How are you feeling?” Betty asked, slipping into the seat next to her.

The other girl rubbed her hands together. “I’m not sure.”

“You’ve had a terrible shock.”

“I’ve never seen a dead body before.” Ginger looked up, right at Betty. “Had you?”


She shifted, her dark brown hair swinging forward. “I can’t believe I organised this whole thing and- and that happened.”

“You couldn’t have known. You were trying to give us a good time.”

“It’s just-“ She shook her head. “I don’t know. I just never thought something like this would happen again, or that I’d be involved in any way. I’m a model now you know?”

“Oh, you are?”

“Uuh.” She sniffed, as if tears were about to fall. “I’m the face of Segarini’s Pizza. I’m doing well. And now- everything is ruined. Everyone is ruined.”

“It doesn’t have to be. If we get to the truth, if you’d just-“

Ginger stood up abruptly, cutting Betty off, shaking her long brown hair. “I have to go. My ride is here.” She looked back at the other girl, as she hitched her bag onto her shoulder. “Thank you Betty. Check your emails. I’m planning a thing in memory or something, since we all have to stick around.” And with that, she was gone, walking shakily out of the room, leaving Betty cursing that she hadn’t learnt much valuable at all.

Jughead found himself, once again, waiting for Betty in his car. When he’d emerged from his interrogation – an event that had gone exactly as he’d expected, with the Sherriff throwing him those familiar ‘I know you’re a rotten egg, because of your preference for black and inability to ignore the deep corruption that seeps through this town, but have never been able to prove it’ looks but hadn’t been kept for long when he’d provided an alibi, given a witness statement, and was also completely devoid of any plausible motive - Betty had been gone already, presumably off kicking ass and
taking names, or whatever it was that real life investigate journalists did, that he wouldn’t know as a
half-assed amateur.

And, as he waited, he felt himself alive with anticipation that, quite frankly, made him feel ridiculous.
He shouldn’t be this wired, this on edge, at the prospect of her walking through those station doors
and back into his life again, probably grinning, probably with a new lead that helped them crack the
case, because he knew that it was bad for him. She was bad for him.

But god, it had been years since this.

Not just years since he’d seen her, though it had, but since he’d seen her like this. Probably a decade.
Probably since that goodbye party that went so wrong, since she’d sailed off into the sunset of the
life she’d deserved and he’d slumped back into the one he had. Because this was really seeing her
again, it was not those pale imitations he’d had since high school, the texts on her birthday, the phone
calls he ignored, the quick smiles and hellos at Archie’s concerts before he excused himself at even
the slightest hint that they might end up together, alone, and have to force awkward small talk.

Here, tangled in the midst of another murder, authorities breathing down their necks, this was the
Betty and Jughead that set him alight. Because look at her, he thought, as he spotted her walking
towards him from the station, with the shades pushing back her blond hair, hard thinking face on,
short dark skirt, creamy blouse, jacket with the floral embroidery that was at once fierce and
adorable, she was goddamn cinematic. A walking moving picture that only the best director could’ve
thought to put together. And he’d heard other people, Archie mainly, say Veronica was the one with
the face for movies, and he saw it, he wasn’t blind, she had that classic femme fatale look down pat.
But Betty, she was the one his camera wanted to linger, with her eyes like a liquid sky, the tapered
chin, crescent moon palms, and the mind behind, sharp and funny, kind but dark.

He could write this script. Her, struggling with the door, mouth twisting into a grin, climbing into the
seat next to him, flicking him a look. Only in his version, she’d put a palm against his knee, and kiss
him. Only no, because that was what teenage Jughead envisioned, those days they’d spent heads
bent together over alibis and suspects, milkshakes at Pop’s, when he’d almost had the courage in her
room, but then seen the pictures of her, arms around Archie, plastered all over her desk and reminded
himself that this girl had a different ending planned.

That was the childhood tale, this one he had to write differently.

“What’s new Nancy Drew?” He asked, as she fastened her seatbelt.

“Well, they don’t think I killed him.” Betty began, but before she had time to elaborate, there was a
sharp rap against the driver side window.

They turned to look, and found an over-excited teenager grinning at them through the window.
Jughead had noticed this girl loitering around in the parking lot earlier, but he’d just assumed she was
waiting for someone, possibly a father who worked there or something like that, but now she was
looking at him expectantly.

He rolled down his window. “Yeah?”

“Omigod, you’re Jughead Jones.” She let out in a rush, phrasing it as a statement and not a question,
in a way that was deeply unnerving to him.

“I think you’ve got a fan.” Betty whispered wryly

The girl looked to be about sixteen years old, with dark hair that flicked outwards at her shoulders,
hazel eyes, and a ring in her pierced nose, wearing an orange halter neck tank and a cracked leather belt holding up frayed denim jeans. By all appearances, completely harmless, but with an intense gaze that was as unsettling as it was amusing. “And you’re Betty Cooper!” She cried out, turning her scrutiny onto the blond, who wished she could slump down out of view.

“I am.” She admitted, begrudgingly.

“My name is Tomoko Yoshida, and I’m like, you’re absolute biggest fan. Both of you!”

“Thanks.” Jughead said, with sarcasm that she appeared not to pick up on.

“So I was staking out the place, and I saw Jughead waiting over here, and I was like omg that’s him right? That’s totally him- the guy who wrote like only the best true crime novel in the past decade, based on the town I live in! I mean- I was in California when the murder took place and also a total baby, but still- I’m obsessed right?”

Jughead couldn’t look over at Betty, because he knew that she was struggling not to laugh, and as soon as their eyes met he knew both their resolves would dissolve.

“And I was like I have to go over, I’ll just hate myself if I don’t. But then, you know, it seemed like he was waiting for someone and I thought omigod, what if! What if it was you-“ Tomoko gestured excitedly to Betty. “And it totally, totally was! I just knew it! Because what an opportunity, to meet not only you, but the star of the goddamn book. I thought, the rest of the Bloomers, would just kill me if I let this chance go to waste.”

“Bloomers?” Betty asked, whilst Jughead looked down at his lap.

“That’s what fans of the book call ourselves, you know, because it’s called ‘Murder in Bloom’?” She elaborated. “You haven’t seen the message boards?”

“No.” Betty bit her lip.

“Oh.” Tomoko replied, sounding just a little disappointed. “Then you totally should. There’s whole threads dedicated to you.”

Betty wasn’t sure if this was meant to be a compliment, and therefore something she should politely thank her for, so she just sort of awkwardly shrugged. “Oh?”

“What did you want?” Jughead cut in, a little too bluntly because he was getting uncomfortable with the attention.

The teen didn’t seem fazed at all. “I work at The Blue and Gold now.”

“That things still going?” Betty asked, perking up at the sound of it.

“Yes!” She grinned. ‘Thanks to you two revolutionising it. Anyway, so I heard about the murder last night, and I had to get here straight away because I knew people were being interviewed, and I’m so going to be on the ball and write about it for the paper. And I wanted to know if you two had any comments? Are you working together again? Is this going to go in the article you’re writing Betty? Is there going to another book?” She almost squealed on the last line, being entirely too filled with glee for someone discussing a murder.

“We’re not sure.” The blond replied. “It only just happened, it was a shock for everyone.”

“No, no, of course.” She said, sounding a little contrite. “It’s just happened. But do you have
anything I could quote you on? It’s going to be my first front page.”

Betty looked at Jughead, who shrugged. “I guess,” She began. “I guess you could say, that this was a horrible, tragic event. But as long as there are things like that in Riverdale, like death, and destruction, and injustice, there will be people seeking out the truth.”

“Are those people you two?”

The pair exchanged looks, and after a pause, Betty spoke. “I guess so.”

They made their excuses and Jughead sped away as soon as he could, leaving her waving excitedly in their dust, not even with a destination in mind, just wanting to get away.

“So,” Betty said, as they turned sharply out of the parking lot. “That was nice. You have fans?”

“A couple.”

“I knew your book was a bestseller, of course I did, and I even got recognised once or twice on campus, but I didn’t know people loved it like that. I mean that’s a fan base. They have a name.”

“I know. They think I’m cute.” He said the last part through gritted teeth, and Betty burst into laughter, causing Jughead to glance over at her in a half-hearted glare.

“Jug,” She said softly, voice still full of amusement. “You’re acting like it’s the worst thing in the world. It’s good that people like it. “

“I know.” He sighed. “But you haven’t been to the fan sites.”

“And you have?”

“There are some things that can’t be unseen.”

She leant back against her seat. “I think it’s a good thing. People love to mock the things that teenage girls like but there’s something so beautiful about liking things as sincerely as they do.”

“Even if those things are murder, amateur detectives, and us?”

“Yes.” She said firmly.

“I know.” He finally relented, sighing as he pulled unexpectedly into a parking lot, and was greeted with the familiar glow of Pop’s sign. “I’m grateful. I am- it’s just weird when it’s about you, you know?”

“Just face it Juggy, you’re a teen heartthrob.” She joked, and he didn’t want to admit how nice it was to hear her call him Juggy, a name he rarely heard anymore – only occasionally when Archie wanted something – and how it had always sent a jolt to his heart whenever he’d heard her say.

“Ha. You’re funny.” He said, grumpily, slumping in his seat.

She poked him playfully in the arm. “And you told me you were destined to die alone.”

He didn’t respond.

“C’mon, I’ll buy you a milkshake since you drove us here, and we can exchange interrogation
details.” She said, struggling just slightly with his damaged door.

Before Jughead had a chance to reply, she’d managed to fling the car door open, and was off, heading out of the bright sunlight into the diner. He cursed, scrambling with his seatbelt, thinking about all the ways Betty turned his life upside down, without even realising it.

She was already at the counter, smiling pleasantly at Pop Tate while he enquired after her wellbeing, something he hadn’t had the chance to do since she’d arrived back in town.

Jughead came up behind her, and listened to the old man speak.

“We always knew you’d make something of yourself.” Pop’s was saying fondly.

Betty looked down at the counter, thinking about the pressure that one sentence contained, the weight of an entire town that she’d always felt pressing in on her, no matter how well intended that support might’ve seemed. Jughead knew all that, and it was only him that spotted the small slip in her smile that betrayed what she was thinking. “Thanks Pop, I did my best.”

“Smartest person to pass through here I swear.”

“And what I am?” Jughead interrupted sarcastically, not missing the small, grateful grin that was shot his way.

“A rotten thief.” Pop sniffed, then he turned to address Betty. “This kid makes billions writing a bestseller right here in my diner and I don’t even get a cut.” He said, following the familiar banter that had characterised his interactions with Jughead since he’d first started frequenting the place.

“Pop I offered to buy you a new kitchen and you said-”

“I know what I said.” He grumbled good-naturedly. “Now go, two milkshakes coming up, but you’re paying for it this time.”

They did as they were told, and soon found themselves safely ensconced in a comforting, cracked vinyl booth.

“You made billions huh?” Betty joked as she took her seat.

“Pop likes to think so.” He shrugged, hauling himself into place opposite. “But if that were true I’d be the worst billionaire in history.” He examined the scratched on the table, and then looked up abruptly. “Let’s put it this way, Veronica still smelt like money, even when she was a shit broke as I was, and I still smell like trailer trash, even when I have cash to spare. It’s the way of the world, and I’m not trying to pull a Gatsby.”

“That’s the way of the world huh?” He just shrugged. “Fine. What do I smell like then?” She asked teasingly, and all sorts of things flashed through his mind. Embarrassing thoughts, sentimental thoughts, and some that were definitely inappropriate.

He smirked. “Danger.”

She laughed, leaning backwards against her seat. “The Sheriff didn’t seem to think so.”

“You mean you weren’t arrested for murder?”

“Not yet.” She shrugged.

“Damn. I was hoping we’d have that in common.”
“You were never arrested for murder Jug.”

“I was held on suspicion.” He pointed out.

“And it was the stupidest thing that Sherriff Keller ever did.” She said simply, as if were pure, accepted fact. “For that mistake alone he should’ve been fired, the idea that you were ever a suspect.” She shook her head.

“This got you all riled up Bets.” He tried to joke.

“Yeah.” She looked down at her lap, and then back at him, eyes flashing. “I guess I don’t like to remember that they ever locked you up.”

He wished he hadn’t brought it up, knowing their minds were both flashing back to that horrible day, how he’d been so vulnerable and scared, how she’d believed him even though she didn’t have to, even though he meant nothing more to her than an old friend. He tried to deflect. “I think you’re allergic to injustice.”

“You could say I’m intolerant to intolerance.” She said goofily, cracking a self-satisfied grin that made him laugh. As she said that, a waitress arrived sporting too Vanilla milkshakes.

He shook his head when she’d gone, taking a sip from his drink. “Moving on from that attempted quip, you cracked this case wide open yet?”

“Not quite.” She said, leaning forward now, the promise of investigation sparking something in her. “But Keller gave us a couple of leads.” He waited for her to continue, knowing he needed to say nothing more, just waiting. “He died of a blunt force trauma to the back of the head. They’re not sure what kind of weapon yet. And apparently he was staying at the Riverdale Inn, same as me, and Cheryl, and probably half our classmates, but it’s still something we can look at.”

“See if he had any visitors? Any overnight guests?”

“Exactly.” She smiled, that one of recognition that he’d missed since their last collaboration, the one that signalled that their ideas were racing along the same tracks. “And there’s one other thing, he was spotted hanging outside a bar with some Southside Serpents two nights before the reunion.”

“Really? So that’s why Keller was asking me all about my sordid Serpent past.” He said, sighing. “He wants to start Civil War part 2? Didn’t anyone tell Keller that sequels always suck?”

“I know it’s stupid.” She shrugged. “But I figure we shoot down that theory first, and then we’re left with more plausible options.”

“Okay.” He agreed. “You’re right.”

“But first,” She said brightly, after she’d swallowed the mouthful of her drink. “Lunch.”

“Lunch?” Jughead asked.

Ginger Lopez was not someone who let thing a little thing like murder slow her down, or derail her plans entirely. By the time she was done with her interview at the station, she had a whole new schedule planned out, she figured someone needed to take control, and she figured that she was the only one really up to the task, everyone would be looking and listening to her.
That’s how most of the former-Riverdale students found themselves, the day after that dreadful night, mingling in Segarini’s Pizza.

Archie was waiting outside, looking just a little lost, and murmuring greetings to the students that passed him by, waiting for his actual friends to arrive.

Jughead pulled up, found a spot to park, and he and Betty hopped out and made their way over to him.

“Hey, Jughead, Betty.” Archie said, looking relieved to see them approach.

“Took it upon yourself to be Riverdale’s No. 1 bodyguard Arch?” Jughead asked, and at Archie’s puzzled look, elaborated. “Waiting alone outside the entrance? I thought being a creep was my thing.”

“No one else was here yet.” Archie shrugged. “I thought I’d wait for at least one friendly face to arrive.”

“Everyone’s a friendly face for you.” He muttered. “They can’t help it.”

“We’re here now.” Betty said, ignoring Jughead’s snarky comments. “Is Veronica not here yet? We wanted to ask her a few things.”

Jughead didn’t miss the way Archie glanced between them at the use of the plural, and could only hope that the redhead had learned enough subtly that at least Betty hadn’t noticed. “Ronnie’s on her way,” Archie said, choosing not to comment. “She just texted, I think she’s hitching a ride with Kevin, so we can meet her inside.”

“Perfect.” Betty said, as she led the way into the most bizarre event any of them had ever attended.

Segarini’s Pizza was one of those places that had popped up just after they’d left town, and therefore none of them had had the chance to check it out. It was a typical, family restaurant, with red check tablecloths, cheery sayings and pictures of vintage Italian celebrities plastering the walls, music piped into the room, and there was even a large cardboard cut-out of Ginger, biting into a slice, which greeted them at the door. But this was horribly juxtaposed with the faces of their classmates, everyone wandering around in varying states of grief, horror, and fear.

“This has got to be the most morbid pizza party that’s every existed.” Betty said, looking around at everyone in a state of disbelief.

“I don’t know.” Jughead chipped in. “I heard Mussolini held some pretty bad ones.”

“You just have to look on the bright side.” Archie said.

“Please, do tell us how we can approach murder with a hop and a skip in our steps” Jughead drawled.

“At least we aren’t alone.” The redhead continued sincerely. “It’s better that everyone’s here, together, than apart.”

“Did you take up a career writing cards for Hallmark?”

“I mean it.”

“It’s easier for us.” Betty said, eyeing the crowd with a careful but considerate eye. “This is a lot of
witnesses all in one place.”

“Who’s missing?” Jughead asked thoughtfully.

“A few people.” She said. “But it’s early yet.”

They moved out of the way of the door and into the empty space, evidently Ginger had hired the place out last minute – perks of being the places spokesmodel- because the place was devoid of customers other than the reunion. Instead of being waited on, there appeared to be a buffet of pizza laid out for them, and a space cleared out for people to hang, but everyone seemed to just be stood awkwardly, as if waiting for further instruction.

“Where is Ginger?” Archie wondered out loud as they passed by a cartooned version of her, complete with speech bubble proclaiming Segarini’s as ‘The Best Pizza Place in Town.’

“Posing for another portrait.” Jughead offered, looking at the various pictures that littered the place with mistrust in his eyes.

“Either way, she should come out soon, people seem confused about why we’re here.” Betty said.

“She’s going to lay out the plans for the rest of the reunion right? Something about honouring Dilton? That’s what she said in her email.” Archie replied.

Before they could respond, Betty was returning a wave across Archie’s shoulder, and they turned around to see the rest of the gang enter.

First came Veronica, stepping out of the sun into the restaurant, dress clinging just perfectly to her, large Prada sunglasses obscuring, looking every inch the perfect socialite, business woman, and heading straight for them. Then Cheryl – stalking in behind with a determinedly fiery expression on her face that let people know she was going to give nothing away – and, finally, Kevin appeared, hand in hand with his boyfriend, both of them looking a lot more grim and subdued.

“So,” Veronica said as she came to a stop next to them, slipping her sunglasses to the top of her head. “This is not how I thought this reunion would go.”

“Since when did we land in Ginger’s wet dream?” Cheryl said, looking at the various images of her best friend that filled the room.

“She’s the spokesmodel here.” Betty offered as a weak explanation.

“Oh.” The redhead said in such a way that the one word conveyed more judgement than a whole monologue could.

“I feel greasy just looking at this food.” Kevin said.

“Shouldn’t you be used to that?” Cheryl asked, and received glares in return. “We spent the entirety of our teenage lives in a diner.”

“How is everyone doing?” Betty asked, shooting a concerned look towards Kevin’s boyfriend, someone she didn’t know very well, but who she could tell already was deeply affected, quieter and withdrawn, features pulled together.

“As good as one could hope.” Veronica replied. “I haven’t quite reached Fantine levels of despair.”

“We’ll be fine.” Kevin said, squeezing his Ravi’s hand. “My dad’s already working overtime on the
The rest of the crew decide to politely not comment on the Sheriff’s previous ineptitudes when it came to murder investigations, which included but were not limited to, arresting the wrong guy, destroying Jughead’s family life, and only putting the right man behind bars because of the gang’s own detective skills.

“Me and Juggy too.” Betty said. “We’ve decided to investigate.”

“This must’ve really spiced up your article Betty.” Cheryl said. “Angling for that promotion?”

“Angling to figure out the truth.” She shot back, not really affected by the other girl’s words, knowing that, in Cheryl’s brain, they probably weren’t meant to be insulting. Apparently she’d learnt rather a lot from years of strange family dinners and holidays. “And yes, then I’m going to publish it. This town likes to keep too many secrets that deserve to be told.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less B.” Veronica said, giving a proud grin.

“Yeah, yeah,” Cheryl waved a hand. “It’s great. You’re like this town’s own Truman Capote, only with more split ends.” From her, that was almost a compliment.

Then, there came a squeal of noise, and from the kitchen area emerged Ginger Lopez, holding a microphone and looking solemnly across the crowd. Nearly everyone there was thinking back to the last time this girl had tried to make a speech and a sense of unease filled the air.

“Welcome, Riverdale Class of 19’ to this last minute gathering. As you know, last night,” She paused. “One of our very own was taken from us, in the cruellest way possible. And I thought to myself, how can I help? What can we do to mark this tragic event? To remember the passing of someone taken before their time?” She paused again, as if expecting someone to shout out suggestions, but when no one said a word, she shook her head sadly and continued. “Of course, nothing we can do will make up for our loss, but we need to try. It is better for us to together in this trying time rather than apart, so for the next week – as long as the investigation dictates us to stay in town- we will have a variety of events planned to bring us together. And, the reunion dance will be rescheduled for next week, and will be dedicated in honor of our dear, departed friend, Dilton Doiley. More details to follow. Now enjoy your food, courtesy of the team here at Segarini’s.”

She nodded once more and stepped back, the assembled crowd gave a small smattering of applause that was quickly drowned out once more by the tinny music of the restaurant’s speakers, and then replaced by the low buzz of whispered conversation.


“Me and Jug, we wanted to ask you something.” Betty looked from Jughead to Veronica, shaking herself out of the reverie the odd speech had put her in, turning to where her best friend stood beside her

Veronica shot them a puzzled look, but not an annoyed one. “I’m all ears.”

“It’s about E-” Jughead began, clearly picking up on the blond’s thread of thought, but was interrupted by someone yelling.

“Ethel!” Came a shout from across the room, and everyone turned to watch the redhead sprinting out of the room, sobbing uncontrollably as she exited the pizza parlour.

The whole place froze and then, without consulting each other, Betty and Jughead began pushing
their way outside, through the din, but, by the time they reached the parking lot, Ethel Muggs was nowhere to be found.

There was nothing there but a blue Mini, speeding away from the lot, leaving the two writers behind in its dust.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Please, let me know what you thought in the comments. They always make me day. :)
Play it again, Jug

Chapter Summary

“Listen,” Betty sighed, tugging the book closer to her chest so it was less likely to be snatched away. “We’re journalists from The New York Times.”


Chapter Notes

I'm back with another chapter so soon! I don't know how this happened haha. Hope you enjoy!
As always sorry for any mistakes, it isn't beta'ed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sun had disappeared behind a cloud, leaving a cool breeze to flow through the parking lot where Betty and Jughead stood, watching their lead disappear.

“Damn.” Jughead spoke first, cursing their missed chance.

“Do you think Ethel was in that car?” Betty said, nodding at the road it had disappeared down.

“Either that or she’s a magician. Now you see me, now you don’t.” He muttered.

“We should check around the back.” She said. “Just in case.”

Jughead nodded, and that was how he found himself, moments later, comforting a grieving redhead, right next to a pair of smelling trashcans, overflowing with refuse from the cheesy restaurant they were stashed behind.

As they rounded the corner, they’d spotted Ethel, crouched down against the wall, as if she could make the sadness smaller by shrinking physically, willing to keep everything buttoned into her sweet, vintage dress and nice façade.

“Ethel.” Betty said, softly, approaching her gently, footsteps light on the ground.

The other girl looked up, squinting through tears. “Betty Cooper?” She asked, sounding vaguely confused.

“Hey, we saw you run out, and just thought you might want to see a friendly face.” She smiled softly, coming round to perch next to her, arranging her skirt around her thighs. Jughead stayed put, as close as he needed to be, hands shoved awkwardly into his pockets.

It was only at the use of the word ‘we’ that Ethel even seemed to notice he existed, blinking up at him like he was a new found creature that had just landed on the planet, only a creature she didn’t particularly care about. “Jughead Jones?”
“Jughead Jones the 3rd.” He corrected. “That’s me.”

“Huh.” She replied, swiping at the tears and snot that were still streaming from her face. “You’re here to get the latest scoop?” Her voice didn’t seem angry, was almost devoid of emotion, she looked fixedly in her lap, taking in a few heaving breaths.

“I’m here because we were friends Ethel.” Betty said, reaching out to place one warm hand against the cold arm of the other girl. “And because I want to figure out what’s happening, yes.”

“We do this because we care.” Jughead tried, shifting on the balls of his feet. “Probably more than any other person in there.” He jerked a hand towards the restaurant. “All we want is the truth.”

“I know.” Ethel sniffed, she was now fully sat on the ground, legs pulled inwards. “God, I just couldn’t stand another second in there.”

“Then let’s get out of here.” Betty said, so tenderly that Jughead had brief visions of a fictional future, where she was cradling a child, talking sweet nothings into a cot. “Come on.” She stood up, brushing off a skirt, before offering a hand. “I’ll buy you a milkshake.”

Jughead drove them to the diner, wondered if he was going to have to pay Pop Tate rent the amount of time they were spending there, though, he had to admit it wasn’t coming anywhere near the hours he’d accumulated during high school. Betty had insisted that Ethel sit up front, which left her alone in the back seat, giving her the opportunity to observe the other woman, who stared numbly out the window, tear tracks still staining her freckled cheeks.

They swiped an open booth, and Betty insisted on going up to the counter to order, leaving Jughead and Ethel alone. Jughead eyed her over steepeled hands, as she looked out at the half-full parking lot.

“I had a crush on you in high school.” Ethel said after a moments silence, and Jughead nearly did a double-take, he was so startled.

“You did?” He furrowed his brow.

“Yeah.” She looked down at where her hands lay, like corpses’ hands, dead in her lap, her voice devoid of any inflection. “And I felt completely stupid when I realised the truth.”

“The truth?” He echoed.

Her eyes were back on his, and something he saw in there made him shift uncomfortable. “That you were in love were Betty.”

He was momentarily stunned into silence, before he stuttered. “I didn’t- I wasn’t-”

“Don’t bother.” She said, sounding hollowed out. “I don’t care anyway.”

He leant back nervously, eyes instinctively flying towards where Betty stood, chatting away at the counter, he could sense that the redhead was following his line of sight.

“I was just saying,” Ethel continued, when he returned his gaze to hers. “That I thought I was heartbroken, and then I met Dilly.”

“I’m not going to pretend I knew him well.” Jughead said.

“I know.” She nodded, sniffing. “That’s why I’m sitting here with you, I bet you didn’t even know we dated.”
He shook his head.

“Did Betty?” She asked.

“Not until we paged through the yearbook.” He answered honestly.

She gave him a broken smile at the mention of that. “The yearbook. It took weeks of begging to get him to be in so many photographs with me, I wanted a record of our relationship, and he didn’t want to risk putting it out there.” He stayed silent, sensing that this was something she needed to get out at her own pace. “People thought they knew him,” She continued. “But they didn’t. Everyone said he was a freak, too intense for scouts, loved his guns and his survivalist manuals too much, but they didn’t know what he’d been through.”

“But you did.” He filled in for her.

“His father was abusive.” She said. “And they only escaped from him when Dil was ten, his mother got remarried and he took his stepfathers last name, he did everything to distance himself from that man. But he was still scared. He told me he wanted to be able to win any fight, even if it was fight against the world itself.”

“Honorable.” Jughead nodded.

“I’m not surprised that Betty didn’t know I ever dated him.” Ethel said, fiddling with her hands, eyes glassy. “We flew under the radar. It was senior year, we met at a study group, and he said something that made me laugh, and I don’t know, it just happened. He was the first serious boyfriend I had, my first everything, and he made me feel safe. You thought he was just paranoid, but he told me about the things he did to outrun his father, using a fake name at every place he stayed, never going back to the town he was born in. That boy was damaged, and I loved him. He loved me.” The tears began to fall, and that was when Betty decided to make her appearance, depositing a half-melted milkshake in front of the other girl, the state of it revealing how she’d delayed her return to the table.

“Here.” Betty said, sliding her a drink and slipping into space next to Jughead. “One chocolate malt.”

“You remembered my favorite.” She almost laughed, her face a twisted grimace.

“Of course I did.” She said.

“You and Veronica, you were good friends to me in high school.” Ethel said, gazing into her chocolately drink, as if it held the answers to a question not yet asked.

“You were the great friend Ethel.” Betty insisted. “We could be, distracted I guess.”

“No.” And then at Betty’s expression, she relented. “Fine, you were a little. But I never blamed either of you. By senior year I had Dilly, and I didn’t mind that shopping sprees with Veronica were few and far between.”

“It must be awful to have walked into that place today.” Betty continued, watching her over the top of the glass. “Grieving, whilst other people pretended to care.”

Ethel looked a little shocked at the astuteness of the other girls comment, but not that much, and after a second she just sighed. “It was. Ginger couldn’t have cared less about Dilly in high school, but here she is, throwing a party in his honor.” Her face crumpled inwards. “I don’t care about anything they have to say about him. Not really. I just want to know the truth.” She was shredding her napkin now, bits of it floating in the air. “Betty,” The blond was shot an intense look, made all the more effective by the tears that were still leaking. “You have to find out who did this. I don’t want justice
for Dilly to be forgotten, just because he wasn’t popular like Jason, or because we’ve all grown up.”

“I wouldn’t let anything like that stop me.” Betty said determinedly, shaking her head. “I will find out who did this. But we need your help.”

“Me and Dilton,” Jughead said. “We were both outsiders, so I’d be damned if I didn’t fight just as hard to get justice for him as I would want someone to do for me.”

“Anything you can tell us about him, no matter how small, it could be the key to unlocking this whole thing.” Betty said, unconsciously leaning towards the other girl.

“We hadn’t spoken for years.” Ethel said, and here was when her tears began to dissolve into real sobs. “Not until this reunion. And then— She took a deep, ragged breath. “He emailed me, before the reunion, told me he wanted to speak to me, to tell me something. I think that’s the only reason he decided to come. And I never got to find out what it was. If it wasn’t for me- he wouldn’t be dead.”

“The only reason he’s dead is because someone hit him around the head” Jughead said, so abruptly and harshly that both girls turned to look at him, startled. “And then they strung him up, and the only person we can blame is whoever did it.” He took a deep breath as the girls remained silent. “I’ve had enough practice playing the blame game to know that it’s never productive.” Then he continued, voice softer. “It wasn’t your fault Ethel.”

She shook her head. “I wish he’d stayed for away from this place. Look,” She pushed the drink away, untouched. “I can’t tell you much. But I know who you should look up, his real dad. From the stories he told me…” Her voice trailed off. “He was just the worst man, abusive, and mean. I don’t know his first name, but his last name was Tadpole. Try to find him. I don’t know if he had anything to do with it but—“

“Thank you Ethel.” Betty said, fiercely sincere. “That’s a great lead. You’ve been very helpful.”

Ethel looked out of the window, eyes blank in a way that sent shivers down Betty’s spine. “Just take me home. And please, please figure it out.”

They watched Ethel walk up the driveway to her old home, clutching her stomach like a child whose belly ached, being greeted at the door with a hard hug from her mother. Betty and Jughead sat there, silent in the stuffy car, even after the door had shut behind the other girl.

“You knew she used to like me.” He said, one hand fiddling absentmindedly with the steering wheel, tracing patterns on the warm leather.

Betty glanced at him. “I suspected it. Either way, I thought she might talk to you more than me.” She paused. “Did she?”

Jughead shrugged. “I guess.” He found himself thinking too much about what she’d said, about him, about Betty, how it made him feel vulnerable, as if everyone had been able to read his teenage emotions so clearly. “She confirmed that Doiley was as paranoid as we remembered, only with good reason apparently. I don’t know if there’s something in the water, but we have more than our fair share of fucked up fathers here in Riverdale.”

“We have our explanation for why he didn’t appear on our lists at first. He wasn’t going to go until he saw that she was going.” She said.

He sucked in a breath through his teeth. “Hell of a burden to bare.”
She shook her head. “Poor Ethel.”

“Unless she did it.” Jughead said casually. “Lured him here, to the place that’s most convenient, and killed him.”

“What’s the motive though?”

“I don’t know but—“

“I know. I know.” She repeated. “We have to examine every option. Even if my gut is telling me no.”

“And what was he going to tell her?” Jughead muttered. “Did he tell anyone else? Or was it something he took to his grave?”

“It’s our job to find out.” She said, gazing out the window with a faraway look in her eyes. This was an expression he’d seen before, in class, over more lunchtimes than he could count at the Blue and Gold, a face that told him she was lost in something, thoughts racing around her head as she tried to puzzle out a problem.

“What are you thinking about?” He blurted out before he could stop himself, hating how much he sounded like an insecure teenager questioning a relationship.

She turned to look at him, eyes still cloudy. “If Ethel did run behind the restaurant, then who was in the car that sped away.”

“An overzealous delivery boy?”

She shot him a dubious look. “In a baby blue mini?”

“Ah, it was a mini, I forgot. Never mind, it was obviously the murder. No one but a cold blooded killer could own such a terrifying car.”

“Murderers come in all shapes and sizes.” She protested, but he was glad to see that he’d pulled a small twist of a smile from her.

“Don’t we know it.” He said, thinking about the Blossoms.

“Oh shit,” Betty muttered under her breath, checking her phone and pulling a face at the awaiting message.

“What’s got you cursing? Don’t tell me someone else is dead, I think one murder was enough.”

“Nothing life threatening.” She pulled a face. “My boss. I’ve been avoiding them.”

“Not eager to talk shop?”

“I’m being ridiculous.” She said, tensing her shoulders against the leather of the car seat. “I didn’t feel like turning the murder investigation into a job just yet.”

He looked at her, chewing nervously on her lip, and wanted to badly to reach out, place a comforting hand on her knee. But he didn’t. “Bets, you know that you’re doing a good thing here. That doesn’t change just because now you get paid to do it.”

“I’d still be doing it. Even if there was nothing, even if it was just to find out the truth.” She insisted.
“You think I don’t know that?” He asked.

“I know. But the rest of the town doesn’t see it the same.” She said, slumping forwards, rubbing a hand absentmindedly at the bags under her eyes. “I just wish it wasn’t so complicated.”

“It comes with the territory.” He replied, tapping against his wheel.

She nodded, and then, slipping her phone back into her pockets, seemed to steel herself. “Can you take me back to the hotel? I think I have a conference call to attend.”

“That’s the spirit.” He said, finally turning his key and pulling away from Ethel’s curb.

They drove in a comfortable silence, the radio stuck on some old station, background noise to the thoughts that travelled round their heads. Jughead couldn’t stop himself from glancing over occasionally at the blond in the passenger seat, wondering what she was thinking as she gazed out of the window, eyes fixed on something in her mind rather than the reality that was passing them by. Sometimes it felt like nothing had changed since their days as teenage detectives, as if the world had simply stopped turning until they’d partnered again, but then there were moments – like this drive – where time seemed like an insurmountable object, all the years that had passed, the things that had happened and the people they’d become, made a gulf too big to ever cross, and they’d always be stuck on the wrong side, waving desperately at each other.

“Here.” He said, coming to a stop at Riverdale Inn. “That’ll be five bucks. Friends and family discount.”

“Funny.” She said, grinning, grabbing her bag from where it lay by her feet and fiddling with the door until it swung, a little too violently, open. “I’ll text you later, okay?”

“I eagerly await your call.” He deadpanned, as she clambered out, leaving him to watch her retreat.

Almost as soon as she disappeared from sight, there was a buzzing noise issuing from his pocket.

Andrews

Pick me up from pizza place?

Jug

Didn’t your mother teach you to say please?

Andrews

PLEASE pick me up

Jug

No.

Andrews

What kind of a best friend are you?

Jug

A longsuffering one.
Here was where Archie deemed it appropriate to send a long string of pleading emojis, all of which made Jughead tempted to pull his own eyes out with a spoon.

Andrews

I know u just dropped Betty off so have nothing 2 do

Jug

Are you spying on me Arch?

Andrews

No I just happened to text her

Jug

Fine. Be there in ten.

He tossed his phone onto the passenger seat, ignoring where it vibrated with a string of thank yous and smiley faces, and, true to his word, found himself pulling up to entrance of Segarini’s Pizza just a few minutes later. Archie was loitering outside, and immediately hopped in, having perfected the knack of dealing with Jughead’s car years ago.

“Thanks.” Archie said quickly, fastening his belt and looking entirely too twitchy.

“What’s the matter with you dude?” Jughead said, glancing over. “You’re acting more uneasy than the rat in a mafia film.”

“Nothing. I’m fine.” He said, but there was a tell-tale tension in his jaw that said otherwise.

He started the car, but couldn’t help from eyeing the other boy suspiciously as he began to drive.

“How come you didn’t hitch a ride with Kevin?”

Archie shrugged. “I didn’t feel like getting squashed in the backseat.”

“Because of Veronica?” Jughead asked, keeping his eyes on the road and his voice casual.

“No.”

“I know I say I’m tired of hearing about the reality tv show that is your love life.” He said. “But you know you can talk to me about it if you want. Was this the first time you saw her since your last break up? Because, hate to hurt your ego Arch, but that was two years ago, I think she’s probably over it.”

“It’s not about Ronnie. We’re good.” He sighed, tugging at his belt. “It’s nothing.”

“If you’re sure.” Jughead trailed off, unused to Archie acting so cagey. It wasn’t that Archie was an open book, it was just the he tended towards simple emotions, things with him weren’t gray, or blurred around the edges, they were more defined than that, the problems straight forward, he thought in primary colours, and these days he didn’t often indulge in the displays of typical high school angst that had dogged their teen years. But here, there was something bothering him, eating him up, that he wasn’t doing anything about. But Jughead was willing to wait it out, he’d seen Archie wrestling with things before – he wasn’t very good at hiding his dilemmas – and was sure the other boy would divulge the truth soon enough.
“What about you? How’s things with Betty?”

“Just dandy.” He replied, grateful for the excuse of driving to avoid eye contact.

“This is the first time you’ve really seen her for years.” Archie, unhelpfully, pointed out.

“I think I’m aware of the passage of time thanks.” Jughead said, sarcastically.

“How’s it been? To be working together again? Especially since-“

“Where am I taking you?” Jughead interrupted the other boy as they idled at a traffic light.

“Home.” The redhead replied, sighing as if signalling that he was giving up the fight.

Jughead didn’t say anything, neither of them did, not until they’d arrived at a familiar house, a place ripped straight out of the pages of their childhood. Archie’s home, and, at one point, Jughead’s.

“Come inside man.” Archie said as they rolled to a stop. “My dad will be pissed if he hears you were around and didn’t come in to say hello.”

“I don’t know.” He said, strangely reluctant.

“You don’t have to play detective all day. Betty will be busy for the new few hours anyway. Can we just hang out and play video games for a while? I don’t get to see you that much anymore, not since you moved.”

“Fine.” He sighed, wrenching his door open. “I’ll come in.”

“Great.” Suddenly, Archie was grinning. “It’ll be just like old times.”

“Right.” Jughead snorted, but was already exiting the car and following the other boy up the driveway.

Three hours later, Betty found herself collapsed on the lumpy mattress of the hotel bed, eyes shut, body limp with the exhaustion that the phone calls had brought with them. The calls hadn’t been filled with anything awful, not really, her bosses and colleagues at the paper were beyond understanding, but there was still the underlying current in every word that this story was going to be a Big Thing. And that scared her, played at the anxiety she tried to keep clamped down, in short, it was so tiring. She let herself lie there for a few minutes longer, before growing sick of her own indulgence, and rolling over to grab her phone. Hesitating, for just a second, she scrolled through her contacts and pressed the call button.

“Hello.” Jughead answered almost immediately, a fact which sent a little jolt through her system.

“Hey.”

“Hey.” He repeated. His voice sounded different somehow, lower or softer, and she couldn’t figure out if that was the phone, or something else entirely. It struck her at that moment that they hadn’t spoken on the phone since he’d called to tell her he was publishing his book, something that felt like decades ago.

There was a pause.

“Did you call just to exchange pleasantries?” He teased.
“I finished up with the paper.” She said, rolling onto her back and blinking up at the plain ceiling.

“How did it go?”

“I’m not fired yet.”

“You positivity astounds me.”

“It went fine.” She said, letting out a breath she hadn’t been aware she was holding. “They’re good people. They get it.”

“Course they do, otherwise you wouldn’t be working for them Bets.”

“Can you- “ She hesitated, taking a breath. “Can you pick me up? We could work on the murder board?”

Another pause, that went on for so long she nearly considered taking it back, blurting out an excuse and hanging up. “I can’t pick you up.” He said finally. “I’m at Archie’s - but murder board. I can do that. Get to mine and we’ll do it. Okay?”

“Sure. I’ll see you in a second.” She said, and then she was hanging up, letting her phone slip from her grip.

She wasn’t sure why she had even asked him to pick her up, she had her own car stowed away in the Inn’s parking lot since she’d driven down to New York, and it made more sense for her to find her own way there rather than have him go out of his way. But still, she felt a twinge of disappointment, because, for some unknown reason, she liked being the passenger of his car, watching from her seat the world pass by knowing he was in control of it. Something about it remind her of when she was a child, before her father had left, before Polly had been broken, when her family still believed it couldn’t maintain its façade of normalcy forever, and they’d been on a long trip, visiting relatives or something, and her father’s music was playing low on the radio as the car lulled her to sleep, the sound of the engine a perfect lullaby.

But it didn’t matter, not really, so she shook herself from her reverie and pulled a coat on, grabbing her bag with her supplies already laid out, and heading out the door. It didn’t take long until she arrived at Jughead’s – bag filled with takeout she’d picked up spur of the moment from Pops – and was knocking on the heavy, wooden door.

It swung open quickly.

“Enter.” Jughead said, standing out of the way, leaving her room to pass.

She walked from the corridor to his living room, remembering the way from the night before, placing her bags on the worn coffee table. Hot Dog looked up from his position in the corner of the room, but he made no movement, just snuffled in response as if he was acknowledging her entrance. Jughead followed behind her, launching himself at the couch, ending up sprawled out amongst the cushions.

He looked messier than when she’d left him, she noticed it immediately, his hair was all over the place, inky black strands sticking up in every direction. The shirt he was wearing was so creased, so crumpled, it looked as if it would never be smooth again. But it was his eyes that unnerved her the most. He was looking up at her through those unfairly thick lashes, and his gaze was different, a look from him somehow felt as if it had a weight to it, a physical presence, but not anymore, there was something strange, glassy now about the way he was looking at her, both like he was seeing her in a way no one else could, but was also looking right through her.
“What’s in here?” He said, eagerly leaning forward to peer into the plastic bag. “You didn’t. Betty you are an angel. Remind me to thank whoever taught you that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach, because they were not wrong.” He was pulling out the food, laying it out, hopping swiftly out the room and coming back with cutlery, all while she perched herself on the edge of the sofa. He pulled out his burger and took a huge bite, chewing with an almost exaggerated level of satisfaction. “Incredible. Breathtaking. An incomparable experience.” He said, before going in for another bite.

“They are pretty good.” She said, laughing as she reached for her own food and took a much more manageable bite.

“Good?” He said, after he’d swallowed his mouthful. “Talk about making a molehill out of a mountain. These burgers are a gift from God himself. Hypothetically.”

“I had a friend in New York try to convince me Shakeshack had the best burgers around but-“

“Blasphemy.” He said solemnly. “It will not be tolerated in the Jones household. We are Pop Tate household through and through.”

“I can’t argue with that.”

He licked his fingers, having made short work of his burger, before moving onto to the fries, perfectly golden and crispy, still warm despite the drive over. “Heaven.” He groaned again.

“Are you okay Jughead?” She asked, voice both confused and amused as she watched him, all askew, shoving food into his mouth. “Are you really experiencing this much ecstasy over Pop’s burgers? Because I’ve see you wax lyrically about his food before, but- not quite like this.”

“Of course.” He said, but then he leant back and gave her a sheepish look. “But I may also be doing that under the influence of a few beverages.”

“Beverages?” She asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“Archie wanted to do that whole buddies who bond over beer and video games shit.” He shrugged. “And you know how I love classic male bonding experiences.”

“You and Archie got drunk?” She summarised, oddly amused, and suddenly realising why she’d been left to figure out her own ride.

“Nope.” He said, after finishing his last mouthful of food. “Not really.”

“I thought you didn’t really drink?”

“I don’t. Not regularly. But Archie-“ He trailed off for a second, brow furrowing as he thought about how to phrase it. Betty wasn’t wrong, he wasn’t a drinker, he’d had a childhood defined by a relationship to alcohol and he didn’t want an adulthood that was similarly affected. So he didn’t really make it a habit, he’d drank, been drunk, but not often, and definitely not in front of Betty. But Archie had been so weird, almost desperate when they were at his house, that he’d given in. “Archie wanted us to be bros.”

“That doesn’t sound exactly like your scene.”

“What can I say? Anything for another bro.”

She snorted, and then, eyed him curiously. “How much did you have to drink?”
“Wouldn’t you like to know.” He said, tapping her on the nose playfully, an action that made her blush despite herself.

“Maybe I would.” She teased back, pushing her empty carton of food away from her, curling her feet up underneath her.

“Hold that thought.” He responded, before bounding away, returning a moment later with too cold glasses filled with brown liquid. “You brought the burgers, I’m providing the milkshakes.”

She took a sip. “Chocolate milk? Suddenly I feel like we’re back in kindergarten.”

“How could we be back in kindergarten if I’m drunk?” He asked, placing his glass down and sliding down into the cushions next to her.

She put her own glass down. “So you are drunk?”

“No.” He denied, leaning his head against the back of his seat and shutting his eyes. Betty took this as opportunity to observe him in a way she’d never been able to before, he seemed loser, more free, less like he wasn’t keeping every part of himself under lock and key.

He opened his eyes, grinning as he caught her staring. “Take a picture it’ll last longer.” He said, voice low and filled with amusement.

“Original.” She retorted.

“Maybe you should catch up with me.” He suggested, only half-joking. “I think there’s beer in the fridge.”

“I think I’ll pass.”

“Hmm.” He hummed, eyes still shut, strands of black hair falling over his eyes in a way that made her want to reach out and push them back. And then, still not looking at her, he began to talk, his voice with an odd hint of tension in it, as if he wanted to take back what he was saying even as he was speaking it. “You know, I was in New York last month, I nearly looked you up.”

“You were in New York?” She repeated, looking at him in surprise, and with a tinge of hurt that she tried to keep locked down. Because it was one thing to tell herself, all these Jughead was just busy, off living his life in a different part of the country, that he simply couldn’t see her, but to know all this time he’d been coming to the city and avoiding her by choice, it stung more than she wanted it to.

Jughead, however, didn’t seem to notice Betty’s reaction. Instead, he was grinning, affection and pride spilling out of him as he spoke about his sister. “Oh yeah, she still goes by JB , and she’s an absolute monster. Cut all her hair off and dyed it hot pink. She’s a thousand times cooler than I’ll ever be. She’s gonna be the next Coppola I know it.”

“That’s great. I’m so happy she’s doing well.”

“Thanks.” He smiled again. And then there was another pause, he was shifting in his seat again, leaning backwards and looking at her in a way that made her want to squirm, intently, like she was a
puzzle, or a particularly interesting passage of a book.

“What?” She asked, trying to keep her voice casual.

Jughead leant towards her, getting close enough that she could smell the chocolate of his drink on his breath, and something else too, the aroma that filled his blankets and home, the musky, spiced scent that was all his own. Gently, he reached forward and captured a strand of her golden hair between his fingers. “I love your hair when it’s down.”

Her breath hitched, almost imperceptibly, she prayed that he hadn’t noticed. “You do?” She managed to get out, sounding almost normal.

He nodded, fingers still rubbing the smooth silk of her hair together. “It’s just- it’s like there’s always light shooting through it. I can never find a way to write about it. It never comes out right.”

She couldn’t help herself, unconsciously her gaze flicked down to his lips, she couldn’t keep looking at his eyes a second longer. When she noticed where they were lingering, she quickly looked down at her lap instead.

“Don’t get me wrong, I like it when it’s up too.” He continued. “But I always thought that those ponytails must’ve been giving you headaches.”

“They did.” She admitted.

“Then why did you do it?”

She inhaled a large breath. “I think I thought I had to.”

Finally she looked up to meet his eye, as he tucked the strand he’d been playing with behind her ear. “You should’ve known you could do anything you want to Bets.”

His fingers lingered against her skin, so she had to turn her head away from him to give herself the chance to breath, she could feel her pulse accelerating. “You’re drunk.” She said softly.

He pulled his hand back, letting it fall between them on the couch. “No. I’m not.”

“The more you say it the more it’s true.” She laughed, a little shakier than before. “You’re like the twins when they say they’re not tired.”

“It’s nothing.” He waved a hand.

“I know you.” She said. “I know when you’re acting differently.”

“Do you?” He asked, leaning away from her, as if he wanted to properly take her, get as much of her in sight.

“What?”

“Do you know me?”

She paused, and then sighed, looking away. “You tell me.”

“Do I know you?” He asked, quieter this time.

She looked back at him. “Better than nearly everyone.”
There was a pause, a beat, a shift in the atmosphere. And then she stood up. “I should go.”

“Why?” He asked.

“We aren’t about to get anything productive done.” She said.

“I can work. I swear.” Jughead tried to insist.

Betty smiled an even sweeter smile at him. “You don’t have to. You aren’t on the clock Juggy, it’s fine.”

“I’m fine.” He insisted.

“And I’m tired.” She responded, moving to the table to pick up the handbag she’d deposited when she’d walked in. “Let’s just get together in the morning, after we’ve both had a good night’s rest.”

“I thought neither of us ever had good nights of rest.”

“Fine.” She said, exasperated. “Let’s both have bad nights of rest. We can get back to work first thing tomorrow.”

“But danger never sleeps.” He deadpanned.

“Yes.” Betty laughed. “But murderers do, and so do journalists.” She leant down, patting her hand so quickly to his knee he could’ve imagined it. “I’ll see you tomorrow. Good night Juggy.”

“Betty-” He scrambled up, trying to walk her to the door, but she was already retreating, leaving the sound of the door shutting behind her reverberating into the night.

As much as she might’ve hated to admit it, Jughead had been right when he said that neither of them got good nights of rest, because Betty Cooper spent her entire night restless. The bed was lumpy, the room so nondescript that it made her feel lonely, unanchored from the reality of where she was, she could’ve been anyone, in any city, lost and with nobody to go to.

And then there were the thoughts, intrusive and unwelcome, of Jughead and his messy hair, his rumpled clothes, his eyes lingering on hers, the feeling of his touch on her hair, on the bare skin behind her ear. She couldn’t stop them, they were chasing each other round her head, turning her hot and cold in equal measures. She feared how she felt, wouldn’t examine it further, squeezed her eyes tight and tried to pretend that she was feeling nothing, nothing but affection for an old friend, for a complicated past she was no longer a part of.

When she did fall asleep, later than she was proud of, she dreamt she was back in New York, but there was something wrong, something terrible happening, something she needed to tell Jughead about, only when she turned every corner of the city’s block he was always gone, always just a little too far ahead, out of reach. She woke up at the sound of her cell phone, ringing obnoxiously against the wooden surface of her bedside table.

She scrambled to answer it, without checking caller ID. “Hello.”

“Morning Bets.” A husky voice greeted her, sounding apologetic.

“Juggy?” She said through a yawn.

“Yeah. Shit, sorry Sleeping Beauty, I didn’t wake you did I?”
“It’s fine.” She replied, checking the digital clock she saw it had just passed 8 in the morning.

“I was meant to be making up for last night, not ruining your dreams.”

“Jug, you don’t have anything to make up for.”

“My distinct lack of a work ethic says otherwise.”

“This isn’t actually your job.” She pointed out, slipping out of bed and padding to the window, twitching at the curtains to check the weather outside.

“Ouch. Reminding me that I’m unemployed Cooper? Kick a man while he’s down.”

“You’re a freelancer writer. There’s a difference.” She said, stepping away from the window. “Anyway,” She picked up the notebook she’d been working from, flicking to the list of things they’d yet to do. “If you really want to make it up to me, you can stop by Riverdale Inn. We have a few hotel staff to speak to.”

“A classic shakedown?” He asked.

“Give me twenty minutes to get ready, and meet me in the lobby.”

“Bossy.” He replied. “But I’ll be there.”

Twenty five minutes later, Betty was descending in the elevator of the hotel, freshly washed and dressed in a denim skirt and a blouse, her hair tied back in a neat ponytail. She spotted Jughead immediately, loitering by the entrance, and made a beeline straight for him.

“Finally.” He said, as she approached. “I thought the staff were about to call the cops on me. I just have an untrustworthy face.”

“I’m five minutes late.” She responded. “And what happened to atoning for the actions of last night?”

Jughead looked down at his feet, shuffling awkwardly. “Yeah, I am sorry, I-“

“Juggy.” She interrupted him. “I’m joking. Now stop acting all apologetic, it doesn’t suit you.”

“I know.” He looked up, smiling at her in a way that was only slightly forced. “It goes against my natural inclination to believe I’m always right.”

“Of course.” She rolled her eyes.

“So,” He said. “I’m guessing we’re here to verify that Doiley was staying.”

“And to see if he had an overnight visitors.” She nodded in agreement. “They make you log them in the guest book.”

“A totally foolproof method. I’m sure no one has ever snuck in to stay.”

“It’s worth a look anyway.” She shrugged. “You’re going to be my guest. I’ll log you in and sneak a look at the earlier pages, I imagine he arrived a few days before he died, he must have, since we know he was spotted with the Serpents two days before the reunion.”

“Whatever you say Boss.” He drawled.
The lobby was most empty this early in the day, just one woman, headphones in and scrolling through her phone, lounging in the waiting area, and one bored looking teenager managing the front desk.

“Hi.” Betty said sweetly, placing one hand lightly on the desk. “I’m here to sign in my guest? He’s staying tonight?”

The girl flicked her gaze between the two, somehow managing to convey both judgement and a firm disinterest, Jughead tried to smile at her but it came out looking more like a grimace. “Sure.” The girl said eventually, bending down and tossing a battered brown ledger at them. “Sign your name and his in the space afterwards.”

The book was open to a near blank page, just one other name at the top she didn’t recognise, but was definitely not Dilton Doiley’s. She leant forward, as if writing really slowly, attempting to conceal from view that she was trying to flick the pages back.

“Is there anything good to do around here?” Jughead asked, voice noticeably louder than usual, attempting to distract the girl.

“No.” She replied.

“You must have some ideas of how to keep us entertained? Small town traditions? Annual human sacrifices? Nothing?” He tried again.

“Nope.” The girl said, looking back at Betty. “Aren’t you done?”

“Almost.” The blond looked up, glancing at Jughead. “How do you spell your name again sweetie?”

“F-O-R-S-Y-T-H-E”

“That’s not the page you’re meant to be writing on.” The girl pointed out, and then looked between them suspiciously. “What is going on?”

“Listen,” Betty sighed, tugging the book closer to her chest so it was less likely to be snatched away. “We’re journalists from The New York Times.”


“You heard about the murder that happened a few days ago?” Betty continues, as if Jughead hadn’t opened his mouth, the girl nodded slowly at her, not looking very impressed. “We’re investigating it. And we believe that the victim was staying here before he was killed. We just want to verify it, and see if he had any guests visiting.”

“You want me to break guest-hotel confidentiality or whatever just cos’ you’re from New York? Lady, I don’t give a shit where you’re from. Give me the book back.” The teenager said, holding out her hand.

“Would you be willing to talk to us about it? Any information could be valuable.” Betty asked. “If anyone from the staff could give us an interview…”

“We aren’t allowed to. No one’s gonna talk because they don’t want to be fired. So just give me the damn book back.”

“Janet.” Jughead said, distracting her once again, giving Betty a meaningful glance. “Can I call you Janet?”
The girl looked down at her nametag. “It’s Janice.”

“Janice.” He quickly corrected. “You know if you help us you could be helping to catch a murderer.”

“You two don’t look like you could catch shit.” She replied, looking pointedly back at Betty, shaking her hand. “Give it.”

“Janice!” Jughead hit the desk with his open palm, causing the other girl to jolt her gaze back to him. “As members of the press, we have a right to request information from your establishment that could be vital in cracking the case. Now, I’d like to speak to your manager.”

The girl sighed, exaggeratedly, and turned around to look towards the back room. In this brief moment of distraction, Jughead prodded Betty in the side, the blond slipped the book into her open bag and then under her breath began to speak. “Go. Go. Go.” She whispered hurriedly.

“Never mind. We give up. Goodbye.” He rushed out, and they turned, speeding walking away.

“Hey! The book!” The teenager yelled.

“Shit.” Jughead cursed, and at the same time he and Betty broke out into a sprint. Betty could feel the waves of hysteria lapping at her feet as they sped through the shiny lobby, the patrons looking up at them in alarm as they crashed through the doors. In all likelihood, they weren’t being followed, but that didn’t stop them racing to Jughead’s car. He slid into the driver’s seat, leaving her panicking to get her jammed door open, he leant across the passenger side so they were both jiggling with it, until it finally relented under pressure from both sides and swung open. She hopped in, and as soon as the door slam shut behind her, they were speeding away.

“I am fixing that door.” She breathed out heavily.

“It wasn’t made for quick getaways.” He agreed.

She did her belt, and then slumped back against the seat, the adrenaline leaving her body. She tried to suppress it, but the urge was too strong, as the hotel faded behind them she broke into a huge fit of laughter. “I can’t believe that just happened.”

“You’re a criminal now Bets.” Jughead laughed, glancing at her. “Join the gang.”

“That has got to be the most unprofessional thing I’ve ever done.” She slumped forward, still laughing. “What has gotten into me? I swear you make me do crazy things Jughead Jones.”

“I don’t know what your excuse for that terrible plan was.” He replied. “But I’m hungover, so you can’t blame me.”

“This goes against every ethics rule I ever learnt about journalism.”

“We’ll give it back when we’ve looked through it.” Jughead said.

“Oh god.” She leant back. “I didn’t think this through. Where am I meant to stay? I can’t go back there, but I left all my things in my room.”

“We’ll figure something out Bets.” He chuckled, as they turned down his street. “I know a few things about being homeless.”
V <3

I am intrigued but afraid.

Spill.

B <3

Can you go to Riverdale Inn, pretend to be me, and get all my stuff from my room?

V <3

Don’t tell me I’m going to need blond hair dye for this.

Because, I love you B, but not that much.

Also please no wig. You know what it does to my hair.

B <3

Nope! Just grab my stuff and hand back my key to the desk.

V <3

And tell me, why am I required to do this?

And which address do you want everything dropped off at?

Hmmm?

B <3

There was a little.. misunderstanding.

Just drop it at Jughead’s. I’ll text you his address.

V <3

You two are fast becoming so Scully and Mulder it hurts.

Also, can you tear yourself away from your detective work for long enough to have dinner with your best friend tonight?

B <3

Sure! Xx

V <3

Perfect. I’ll cook, I have to make sure you’re not just living off Pop’s.
And I’ll come pick the key up now. See you and Jughead in a second. Xoxo

Veronica’s heels clicked against the shiny floor of the empty corridor, each note heralding her arrival, the noise a reminder of why she’d avoided the detective path that her best friend had set out on. She could do inconspicuous, if she really put her mind to it, but she didn’t like to put her mind to it, it didn’t bother her when people looked up when she walked into a room. Everyone had been doing it to her since birth, first because she was a Lodge – one of the richest princesses that ever graced Manhattan- and then because she was a Lodge – disgraced, penniless daughter of a criminal – and then, finally, because she was Veronica – a noteworthy, head turning feat in her own right.

Every now and then, sure, she could slip into a nondescript persona, but it never suited her well. She couldn’t even managed to do it for one hotel visit, she was spotted immediately.

“Wrong room Lodge.” Cheryl called out, leaning in the doorway of a room just a few paces away from Betty’s. “If you were looking to seduce me that is.”

Veronica looked back across her shoulder, arching an eyebrow. “And why would I be doing that?”

Cheryl shrugged. “Boredom. That’s why most people do it.”

“When I bored I watch Audrey Hepburn movies, or online shop, not seduce my unsuspecting friends.” She turned back to door. “If I wanted to seduce you, it’d be for a much better reason.”

“I’ll check back in next time your internet connection is down.”

Veronica shoved open the door, and she could feel Cheryl approaching behind her. “What are you doing here anyway? Planning on following your father’s footsteps down the rabbit hole to incarceration by breaking into the rooms of this fine establishment?”

The dark haired girl held up her key card. “With a key?”

“Don’t tell me you’re moving in here.” Cheryl continued. “I thought your Mom still owned that bachelorette pad?”

“She does. Although she’s away at the minute.” Veronica replied. “This is Betty’s room.”

“Interesting.” The redhead peered around the other girl to get a view of the room. “I wasn’t aware we were staying so close.”

“Not anymore.” She stepped inside, leaving the door open so Cheryl could follow her in. “She’s moving on to better things.”

“Shacking up with Boo Radley?” Cheryl guessed.

“Something like that.” She replied.

“Cute.” Cheryl perched herself on Betty’s unmade bed, bouncing up and down for a few seconds whilst the other girl surveyed the room. “And you’re here because?”

“Betty asked me to pick up her things.”

“And you came running? Didn’t anyone teach you some dignity?”

“Didn’t anyone tell you the mean girl act was over ten years ago?” Veronica replied airily, without...
any bite behind it.

“There’s always going to be space for bitches.” The other girl replied. “Besides, you know I don’t mean it.” That was the first time she’d verbally acknowledge that all her barbs, her jokes, were just the way she approached the world, not meant to cut like they had in high school, and it stopped the other girl in her tracks. “Most of the time at least.”

“Good to know.” Veronica said finally, before bending down to flip open the lid of the suitcase. She was pleased to see that Betty had kept most of her things still neatly packed, there was only a few bits and pieces she’d have to hunt for, the toiletries in the bathroom, books by her bedside, maybe some dresses hanging in the wardrobe.

Cheryl looked down at the case. “I’m guessing you’re not going to let me look through Journalism Barbie’s things?”

“Remarkably astute Cheryl.” She replied. “I doubt Betty would want me to help in your invasion of privacy.”

“That wouldn’t always stop me.”

“You’re you, and I’m me.” Veronica shrugged.

“You’re whipped Lodge.” The redhead leant back on her elbows, crossing her ankles elegantly. “I can admire that in a woman.”

Veronica felt something hot creeping up her spine, she tried to suppress it. “Are you just going to sit and watch me?”

“Only if you ask nicely.”

She rolled her eyes, ignoring the other girl’s comment, and pretend that the entire time she packed up the room, moving books, folding clothes, that she couldn’t feel the redhead’s eyes following her around.

“Done.” She said, standing up and tugging on the handle of the suitcase.

“Want me to carry this tote down?” Cheryl offered, genuinely, standing up and gesturing to the bag.

“Yes. Thank you.” Veronica said, as they exited the room and shut the door. “But, heads up, the people at the desk think I’m Betty.”

“Kinky.” Cheryl responded.

“Look,” The raven haired girl stopped, pulling the suitcase to a halt beside her. “I just want to know, is all this flirting amusing to you because I’m bisexual? Because I want to tell you that, biphobia? Not a cute look.”

“Ronnie, you’ve got to be kidding me right now.” Cheryl replied, seeming equally as annoyed, she let her bag drop to the ground and crossed her arms. “You don’t know that I’m a lesbian? Honestly? Like, do you not follow me on Instagram?”

“I follow you.” She said, a little taken aback. “But- I don’t know. I never saw you come out.”

“Four years ago.” Cheryl replied, and then added, a little smugly. “It trended on twitter.”

“And Betty never said anything.” She trailed off, but thinking about it, about where she was four
years ago, there was a distinct possibility that she had been told and that it had never sunk in. Four years ago had been right in the midst of her Archie years - the period in her mid-twenties when they’d tried to make it as a real couple, continually dating on and off for years, until their schedules and their lives together had been too emotionally draining to go on – and it was conceivable that it had just passed her by, like so many things had.

“I posted pictures with my ex all the time. And, unlike you, I’m not one to use sexuality for shock value.”

“That was me being a baby gay and thinking I could get away with it if I played it off like a joke.” Veronica admitted. “It was dumb. And you called me out.”

The redhead tilted her chin up, looking a little pleased. “I know.”

“So, you’re not biphobic?” She clarified.

“Duh.” The other girl said. “Angelina Jolie is bisexual. You’re in good company.”

“Fine. Good.” She nodded once sharply, and then picked the handle of her case up again, Cheryl following behind, looking distinctly pleased with herself.

All Veronica could think about, as they rode in the elevator, as she handed her key over to the disinterested woman at the desk, as she waited for her Uber to arrive, was the revelation about Cheryl. She’d been half believing she was kidding herself, that Cheryl was straight and flirting with her just for kicks, pushing away other possibilities that came with entirely too much baggage to make her think straight. Every time she tried to trample her feelings down, Cheryl would appear, smelling like bubble gum and jasmine, and all Veronica could think about was kissing the lip-gloss off the other girl’s mouth, and, she thought, with this new information, it could only get worse from here.

()  

After waiting outside for ten minutes – in which Veronica made a brief appearance to pick up the hotel key – Jughead and Betty finally entered his home again.

“Thank you.” She said, as he opened the door and stepped away to let her pass. “For letting me stay.”

“If you don’t stop saying thank you, I’m going to rescind the offer.” He muttered dryly.

“I knew your hospitality wouldn’t last long.” She teased, waiting for him in the corridor as he locked the door behind them. Hot Dog padded out to greet them, she bent down to give him a quick stroke, before watching as he left to inspect the remainder of his food in the kitchen.

“It’s a spare room Bets.” Jughead shrugged, trying to act casual about the offer that had just been accepted. If he was being honest with himself, which he tried not to be, he was absolutely terrified about the prospect of Betty moving in for the foreseeable future. The one night they’d slept there, crumpled together on the sofa, had been bad enough, but every night, being so close, was going to be something akin to torture. But he must’ve been a masochist, because he’d jumped at the chance to let her stay, hadn’t entertained the fact that there might be other possibilities. “Besides, I’m half the reason that you’re about to be persona non grata at Riverdale Inn.” He paused. “Also, I- there’s a surprise waiting for you in the living room.”

“A surprise?” Her expressive eyes grew comically wide, and she let out a laugh that was almost nervous.
“It’s not a puppy so don’t get too excited.” He tried to joke. “I just wanted to make up for ruining our night of investigating yesterday.”

“If I’m not allowed to thank you, then you’re definitely not allowed to apologise.” She said, pointedly.

“Fair.” He raised his hands in a gesture of innocence.

She nodded, pleased with herself, before turning tentatively to the living room door. She approached it as if it was fragile, or like she was afraid, and it was so ridiculous that it almost made Jughead laugh. Eventually, she swung the door open, revealing, in the centre of the room, a large board with various scraps of paper pinned to it.

“A- a murder board?”

“I know. I know. You don’t have to say it, I shouldn’t have.” He mocked, faux-modestly.

“When did you get the chance to do this?” She asked incredulously, walking towards it to examine the slips of paper that were up.

“A little last night. And then this morning.”

It was a perfectly organised piece of art, it was the only way Betty wanted to describe it, listing everything they knew or needed to know. In the centre was Dilton’s name and the circumstances surrounding his death- at Hop’s Bar, school reunion, blunt trauma to the back of the head- and beneath that everything they’d learnt about him from their nights of sleuthing – abusive father, paranoid, fired from job as a computer technician, park ranger in Utah, dated Ethel Muggs in high school- and from there spiralled out all the suspects and their motivations, the aforementioned Ethel – ex-girlfriend, reason he came to Riverdale, he was about to tell her something- then came Ginger – host of the reunion, had access to the bar and banner – then Serpents – not averse to criminal activity, seen with Doiley two nights before he died – then Chuck Clayton – I just don’t like the guy, Jughead had written – and, finally, Theodosius Tadpole – abusive father, in prison.

“You found his dad?” She asked, fingering the last piece of paper.

“Unless he hired someone, we can cross him off the list. He’s serving time in a correctional facility in Ohio for assault. Bar fight.” He paused, rocking back on his heels. “Not bad for someone who was drunk huh?”

“And this.” She said, bending down to look at the bottom right corner of the board.

“A list of questions we don’t yet know the answers to.”

In a scrawl, as neat as Jughead had managed to get it, was a list that neatly ordered all the things that had been rushing through Betty’s mind, the things that they needed to know. Who had access to the bar that night? What was Dilton going to tell Ethel? Why was he visiting the Serpents? Why was he fired from his computer job? Who was in the blue Mini? Was Dilton really staying at Riverdale Inn, and did he have visitors? Why was the death so public? Was it a message? Who was the message for?

“At least we can tick one thing off this list.” Betty sighed, straightening up and reaching for her bag, pulling their hard-won book from its depths, coming to sit on the couch and spread it open across the table.

“It better have been worth it.” Jughead said, sitting down next to her. “Our quest for it turned us into
criminals."

She flicked through, going back two weeks, with no sign of a Dilton Doiley, but, three days before the reunion, there was something. “Clark Tadpole?” Betty asked, peering closer.

“He used a fake name.”

“His dad’s last name.” Betty nodded. “And payed in cash.”

He noted. “Poor paranoid Doiley. I’ll add it to the board.”

He moved to stand up, but Betty caught his wrist, and he lowered himself back down into the cushions, eyeing her confusedly.

“Juggy, thank you, for organising this.” She said, looking at him with those wide, expressive eyes shining. “I can’t tell you how much it helps now we have it all written down.”

“I was just doing the job.”

“Our job.” She said. “And I mean it, thank you.”

Suddenly, Betty was pulling him into a tight hug, arms around him, face buried in the crook of his neck. Tentatively, he let his arms wrap around her back, holding her tight. “Anything for you Bets.” He said, meaning it as a joke, but having it come out a lot more truthful than he’d meant it.

“You too.” She said, gruffly, pulling back.

At that moment, it didn’t matter how much they were yet to discover, the mountain of work that they were facing, the fact that there could be a murderer amongst them, because they were there, together, ready to face whatever came next.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading. I can't promise the next update will be so fast, but hold on for me.

Please please let me know what you thought, every comment means the world to me :)

Chapter Summary

“I wouldn’t care if I never got credit for any of this.” Betty shook her head. “The most important thing should be figuring out the truth.”

“I thought a lot about this.” He replied. “Our problem is we expect everyone to hold themselves to the same moral standards we do. The world just doesn’t work like that.”

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took a little longer than normally, I’m afraid this wait will probably become the new norm, but we’ll see. Enjoy! And as always, not beta’ed, so I’m sorry about any mistakes x

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ginger Lopez was napping when Jughead and Betty came calling.

Her eye mask was firmly on, soft whale noises were playing in the background, and she’d dimmed all the lights, when the knock came, signalling the arrival of the pair of journalists. She cursed, pushing the mask up so it rested on the top of her head, slipping her feet into some furry slippers, before stomping down the stairs to let them in.

“Oh.” She seemed taken aback when she opened the door to see them standing there. “It’s you.”

“Hi Ginger.” Betty smiled sweetly. “Sorry for the ambush. We’ve been calling but you didn’t pick up.”

“Napping.” She gestured to her sweats.

“Sorry.” Betty furrowed her brow. “It’s just we urgently need to talk to you.”

“There’s a killer on the loose.” Jughead chipped in.

When Betty and Jughead had confirmed that Dilton had been staying at the inn, with no guests that he’d signed in, they’d figured that the easiest question to tackle next, the one with most urgency, was about Ginger, and the bar, about how easy it would’ve been for the murderer to have strung the body up. As they’re fifth call and five hundredth text was ignored, Betty had found the other girls address via Tina Patel and they’d found themselves knocking not ten minutes later.

“Sure.” Ginger said, stepping back to let the other two in. “Of course.” She led them to the kitchen, gesturing to the two seats at her tiny kitchen table. “Do you want anything? Tea, coffee, Ginger Ale?”

“Tea would be great thanks.” Betty said, appearing casual, but secretly looking around at her surroundings, cataloguing the room for future examination. Really, there was nothing significant to
note, it was a simple, small room, with one table and a smattering of appliances and counters. The walls were mint green, and the only person touch was a chrome clock gleaming on the far wall.

“Breakfast or camomile?”

“Breakfast. Please.”

“I’m fine.” Jughead said. “Thanks.”

The brunette busied herself with looking for cups, placing her kettle on the hob. “This is about – about poor Dilton right? I guessed you’d be turning up soon.”

“Right. We’re investigating what happened.” She confirmed.

“We want to know how someone could’ve had the chance to kill him and wrap him in the banner you made.” Jughead elaborated.

Ginger turned towards them as she waited for the water to boil, leaning her back against the counter. “You never really spoke to me about Jason’s death. This is my first time. I didn’t have anything to do with it last time. It feels strange to have you talking to me like this.”

“Ginger, is it okay if I record our conversation?” Betty asked. “Just so we don’t miss anything.”

“Gosh.” She said, looking surprised. “You care that much? I’m not sure how much help I can be.”

“Anything is helpful.” Jughead said. “We cracked the Blossom case with just one letterman jacket.”

“Is this going to be in the paper? The New York Times?” Ginger stretched onto her toes, looking a little anxious.

The pair exchanged a look. “Possibly. Although, we could change your name if you’d be more comfortable with it.” Betty said.

“No. No.” She shook her head. “It’s fine. I just- almost can’t believe it. It all still feels surreal.”

Betty tilted her head, her expression arranged to convey sympathy. “Of course it does. So, I can record this?” She reached into her bag and got out the recorder.

The kettle whistled, and Ginger went to pour out the hot water. “Yes. Anything to help. Milk? Sugar?”

“Just milk please.” She said, grabbing the steaming mug that was passed to her. “Thank you.”

Ginger took the seat opposite, clutching her own cup of tea, she looked down at the wooden table, tracing a circular pattern with her index finger. Finally she sighed, looking up at where the two of them faced her. “Where do you want me to start?”

“The beginning would be nice.” Jughead said, unable to stop the tinges of sarcasm in his voice.

“Was it you who set up the banner?” Betty asked.

“Yes.” Ginger nodded. “I did it all the night before. I asked Hop, the bar owner, if we could set it up and leave it overnight, because I had a lot of stuff to do the next day before people started arriving, you know? I had to make sure we had all the nametags ready and double check the guest list, not to mention the mani pedi and facials I had booked. I had to look good right? You get it?”
“Right.” Betty nodded, lips pursed.

“Anyway,” She continued. “Hop said yes because, no offence, the bar doesn’t get that much business and the reunion was gonna bring in a lot of coin for him. So he was fine with it. I’ve been pretty much the only person organising this whole thing, like, I don’t know where the Riverdale spirit went but whatever, so it was just me who hoisted it up. It worked on some pulley mechanism? I just had to pump up a few balloons and wrap it around, pull a rope, and it was done. Then I just strung up some lights and banners around the room, so it looked good, set up the table outside, and then I went home. It shouldn’t have been touched until the next morning…”

“Do you know who else had access?” Jughead asked.

“There were a few maintenance guys round the back.” Ginger shrugged. “They left the back door open for me to get in and I didn’t lock it behind me, I didn’t have a key.”

“Did you notice anything off? Was there anyone acting suspiciously?”

“No.” She bit her lip. “There was nothing. Not until the next day when- when- well, you saw what happened.”

“Did you know Dilton in high school?” Betty asked.

“Not really.” Ginger replied. “He used to DJ some of the parties Cheryl had, but that’s the only thing I remember about him. And I feel terrible about that. I’m sure he was an awesome guy. That’s why I think this reunion is so important! I want to make sure we honor him, you know? That’s why I’m organising so many events, so that we can all come together again, like we did for Jason.”

Betty and Jughead exchanged quick looks, saying nothing.

“And you never saw him at the reunion?”

“No. Not- not when he was alive. It’s so awful but I see it as an opportunity. If we have to stay here, we should do it together and we should have some fun, I’m sure that’s what he would’ve wanted.”

“Sure.” Jughead drawled, but she seemed not to catch his tone of voice and smiled at him.

“Do you have the contact details of the bar?” Betty asked, after taking a sip of her drink.

“Yes.” Ginger stood up, reaching for the cell she’d left on the counter. She sat back down and began to flick through it, stopping when she found the right contact and handing it over to the blond. “That’s the number of the bar itself, I don’t have anything else, and I know they’re closed for the next few days. Active crime scene and all. I can’t promise they’ll even talk to you.” She said, as Betty wrote down the number. “I have to warn you, the Sheriff is telling people not to talk to journalists.”

“He is?” Betty looked up sharply.

“It’s nice to see he’s still doing anything he can to botch his own investigation.” Jughead muttered.

“I’m still willing, of course, you can ask me anything.” She insisted. “It’s just I don’t know if they’ll risk it.”

“Thanks anyway.” Betty sighed, stashing her notebook and recorder away in her handbag. “We’ll give it a shot.”
Jughead stood up, sensing that their interview was over, and Betty followed suit, leaving her half-empty drink cooling on the kitchen table. Ginger walked them to the door. “Don’t hesitate to call me if you need anything!” She said, as she waved them off. “I always want to be helpful. And I hope to see you at some of my events!” She grinned at this, in a way that was just a little incongruous, before shutting the door behind them.

They found themselves, a moment later, in a position that was becoming all too familiar. Jughead, hands tapping a rhythm against the steering wheel, and Betty, after a short fight with the door, sat contemplating their investigation in the passenger seat.

“That explains the hotel’s reaction then.” Betty said, sighing.

“What?”

“She said they’d get fired if they talked to us.” She elaborated.

“Our favorite Sheriff payed them a visit?” Jughead said. “I’m beginning to think this ‘no-press’ ban is focused more on press whose names begin with a J and a B.”

“I think so.” She replied. “He’s supposed to care more about the murderer being caught, not him being the one to catch them.”

“He was supposed to actually be capable of catching a murderer, but instead he got bested by some underage sleuths. I don’t think his ego could take another hit.”

“I wouldn’t care if I never got credit for any of this.” Betty shook her head. “The most important thing should be figuring out the truth.”

“I thought a lot about this.” He replied. “Our problem is we expect everyone to hold themselves to the same moral standards we do. The world just doesn’t work like that.”

“I know.” She responded. “I’ve spent enough time doing profiles in Washington DC to have figured that out. But that doesn’t mean we stop. It just makes what we do ten times more important.”

“Believe me, I know, or I wouldn’t have placed this town’s perfect image under a microscope, and held everyone here responsible.” As he was speaking, his phone buzzed in his pocket, and he slipped it out, squinting at the message. After a second, he turned to Betty with a grin. “How would you feel about playing detective a little longer?”

“That’s why we’re here isn’t it?”

“That was from Fox, one of my dad’s old buddies, he says the Serpents are all gathered at the Whyte Wyrm, we could stop by, ask them about Doiley.”

“Perfect.” She reached over and fastened her belt. “Let’s go.”

Jughead started the car, easing himself away from Ginger’s curb, and began to trace the familiar route to the old gang’s hideout. It felt strange to be driving back to a place so linked with his memories of his father, the few short months he’d joined them as a refuge when he’d been stuck in the foster system, before his father had got out, upped and left to join his mother, and done the necessary paperwork to let Jughead stay with Archie’s family. But he hadn’t been back in years, not since he’d left his life on the Southside behind, and he wasn’t sure how his reappearance was going to be taken.
“Listen Bets,” He said, channelling his nervous energy into a tight grip on the steering wheel. “Things have changed with the Serpents since I last saw them. They still look after their own, but I don’t know how much of their own they see me as.” She was watching him, listening intently. “The new leader, I don’t know him, so we probably won’t get long in there. There’s a few guys, Fox being one, who’ll listen to me and respect me, but the rest…”

“We might receive a hostile welcoming?”

“Not exactly hostile,” He said. “But not not hostile.”

“I think I’ll be okay Juggy.” She replied. “I can hold my own.”

“It’s not you I’m doubting.” He muttered.

All too soon, they found themselves pulling into the parking lot of the bar. He was pleased to see that his car didn’t stand out much, which made sense considering it had originally been Serpent owned, and he was hoping that the rest of him would follow suit. He was dressed in jeans, a flannel, and a jacket, scruffy like he usually was, and he imagined his appearance wouldn’t cause much of a stir. But Betty, well, he wasn’t exactly an impartial judge, but he couldn’t imagine a room that didn’t notice when she walked in.

“Ready?” He asked as they pulled to a stop.

“C’mon Jug.” Betty teased, patting his knee. “Let’s revisit your teenage delinquent past.”

The bar was dingy and dark inside, matching the slowly darkening evening light, as if it had been designed to ensure that it looked as shady as possible. The whole place smelt like beer and stale sweat, the aroma of decades of masculine posturing that had imbedded itself so deep in the place that its foundations would probably still carry the tangy scent, and was filled with males, varying in ages, but all dressed in the tell-tale leather jackets that marked them as one family. The whole place didn’t stop like it would in a movie, music scratch as the record switched off, but there were a few curious glares thrown their way, and a couple of lecherous ones focused on Betty that made Jughead clench his fists, but they made it to the bar unscathed, where a man with salt and pepper hair gave them a rough nod.


“Hey Fox.” Jughead returned the nod. “How’ve you been?”

“Not bad. Not bad. How’s your old man?”

“Fine. He’s still up in Toledo.”

“And your sister?”

“Still taking the city by storm.” He replied, and Betty could hear the change in his voice, the pride that always filled him when he spoke of her.

“And this is?” Fox asked, jerking a head towards Betty.

“I’m Betty.” She held out her palm for him to shake and the old man seemed very amused by this, cackling as he gripped it roughly and tugged.

“Nice to meet you Betty.” He replied. “Now, what’s a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?”
Betty had to stop herself from recoiling at the moniker of ‘nice girl’, something she got tired of demonstrating she wasn’t.

“I’d think careful before you answer that.” Came a voice from the stool nearby, and a younger, attractive Serpent, in his 30s, turned around. He had a thin, narrow face, all bone structure, and a ragged scar that ran across the side of his cheek. “Coz I don’t remember inviting any blonds to our bar.”

“I told you Jughead was coming.” Fox replied. “He’s FP’s kid.”

“The same FP that abandoned the pack?” The man replied.

“My dad.” Jughead nodded, speaking through gritted teeth.

“He sure was something.” The guy said, in a tone that indicated he didn’t mean something good. “But he hasn’t ran things for a decade, and these days I’m the boss. Now, I heard about Jughead, but no one said nothing about a pretty girl.”

Acting on instinct, Betty snaked an arm around Jughead’s waist, hand gripping his hip. “Betty.” She said, holding out her other hand for him to shake. “I’m Jughead’s girlfriend.”

“Gunner.” He replied, he took her hand, holding it in a grip so tight it nearly made her eyes water, but she didn’t react. “So, he landed himself a girl?”

“I did.” He followed her lead, draping an arm across his shoulder, feeling his protective urge rise, though useless, heavily conscious of where the lines of their bodies touched. “But I didn’t come here to talk about that.”

“No? Then why have you graced us all with your presence?” He challenged.

“Jughead wants to ask about that kid that was snooping around.” Fox chimed in.

“The dead one?” Gunner asked, seeming less than impressed.

“Dilton Doiley.” Betty said. “We went to school with him.”

“Hmm.” The younger biker leant in, close enough that she could feel a rush of hot, rotten breath graze her face. “What’s got you so interested huh?”

“Jughead wrote a book about the Blossom murder.” Fox tried to explain, despite being aware that Gunner knew this, the whole act a power play. “He’s doing the same thing about Doiley.”

“You’re a professional snitch?”

“I cleared the Serpents’ name.” Jughead said defiantly, without thinking his grip on Betty’s shoulder tightened “I was a Serpent.”

“Not while I was around.” Gunner responded. “Under your daddy maybe.”

“Gunner-“ Fox tried, but shut up when a sharp look was thrown his way.

“We don’t want the Sheriff lurking around here again.” The younger guy said.

“The Sheriff doesn’t like us much either.” Betty said.

“A good girl like you?” The guy chuckled, voice husky. “I doubt that.”
“I’m not as good as I appear.” She snapped.

“That so?” He quirked an eyebrow, then turned to look at Jughead’s impassive face. “You got yourself a wild one huh?”

“I don’t got anyone.” Jughead replied.

Betty looked between the three men, playing their masculine games – albeit, for Jughead, reluctantly – and sensed that they weren’t going to get any closer to the solution if she remained there, an object for this other guy’s amusement. “Do you have a bathroom?” She asked.

“You wouldn’t want to use it.” The old guy said.

“Sure do.” Gunner replied, leaning back on his stool. “You ain’t the only girl that frequents this place.” He pointed towards a corridor at the far side of the room. “Second door down there.”

“Thanks.” Betty went to pull away.

“Betty-“ Jughead began, not wanting to loosen his grip. It wasn’t that he thought Betty couldn’t handle herself, he knew her, had seen how strong she was, and was aware that, through her job, she’d probably faced situations ten times more dangerous than he ever had, but he was reluctant to let her out of his sight. He couldn’t help but think that anything that happened there would be his fault, he’d brought her into the lion’s den, and he had to protect her. But she was her own person, and not someone he would ever dictate to.

“Let your lady go.” Gunner said. “We don’t bite.”

“I’m fine Jug.” She lifted herself onto her tiptoes, placing the ghost of a kiss against his cheek, before moving away. This time, he didn’t hold on or protest, he watched as she was swallowed into the crowd of Serpents.

“Dilton.” He said, turning back to the matter at hand, trying not to let his thoughts stay with the blond that had disappeared from view. “What did he want?”

“He wanted to buy a gun.” Fox said, looking relieved now that Betty had disappeared.

“A gun?” Jughead repeated. “What kind?”

“That kid had all kinds of specifics.” Gunner waved a hand. “He was a nut, wanted a hand gun of some special kind, and I told him no. We don’t do that.”

“So you didn’t sell him anything?”

“We offered him weed but he wasn’t biting.” The other guy shrugged. “He thought we were a gang straight out of a movie, gonna give him some unregistered gun like it wouldn’t come right round to bite us in the ass.”

“Did he seem paranoid?”

“He was buying a gun kid.” Gunner replied, in a way that made Jughead bristle, considering he was only a few years younger than the guy. “What do you think?”

“Thanks.” Jughead muttered after a second, pushing himself away from the bar. “That’s all?”

“That’s all.” Fox replied.
“You’re lucky we even told you that.” Gunner responded. “We aren’t looking to be the subjects of another bestseller. But if Keller comes sniffing around again, we want someone that can tell him we ain’t mixed up in this, got it?”

“Got it.” Jughead nodded. “We’re done then?”

“Collect your girl and go.” Gunner nodded, and that was all the permission he needed.

Jughead made his way eagerly to the spot he’d seen Betty disappear into, careful to move forcefully through the crowds but not jostle anyone, until he found himself outside the girls’ bathroom. He contemplated waiting, but realised that Betty had simply been using the bathroom as an excuse and was, presumably, waiting until he was done, and that there was a high chance that there were no other women in there anyway so he knocked once and opened the door.

The place was dirty, tiles more grey than white through grime and age, but also completely empty.

“Oh Betty?” He called out, aware that it was ridiculous, the bathroom stalls being obviously empty, but wanting to say something to drown out the nerves that were trickling through his body.

He walked out, keeping the bundle of anxiety building in his chest clamped down, he scanned the bar. It was pretty packed, empty spaces few and far between, but not too full that he wouldn’t have been able to spot her distinctive blond hair, it didn’t look like she was anywhere on the floor. That left two options, either she’d retreated back to the car – which seemed unlikely considering she’d been heading in the opposite direction to the exit – or she’d headed further down the corridor than had been expected. With that conclusion reached, he turned on his heel, heading straight into the bowels of the bar.

He moved with his head down, praying that no one had spotted where he was going, until he reached a door, with a window cut into it, clearly on office of some kind, and a flash of movement caught his eye. The room seemed empty when he peered in, but he could’ve sworn he’d seen something, so – tentatively – he turned the handle. “Betty?” He called out, voice low.

“Jughead.” Came a familiar voice, filled with relief, and her head popped up from behind the desk.

It would’ve been amusing, if he hadn’t felt so worried. “What are you doing?” He asked, perplexed.

“Snooping.” She shrugged, getting up and dusting off her knees. “They weren’t giving you much out there, so I thought I’d take my chances. I figured they don’t see me as a threat, so I’d take advantage of it.”

Jughead couldn’t help feeling distinctly impressed and, not for the first time, like he was way out of his depth. “They told me enough once you’d left.”

“Of course they did.” She sighed, picking her way through the room to the door. “Because they couldn’t think with their brains when I was around.”

“They’re idiots Bets.” He said. “I’m sorry they treated you like that.

She shrugged. “I’ve seen worse. What did they say?”

“Dilton was trying to buy a gun, but they wouldn’t sell.”

Her eyes grew wide at that, and she looked excited. “I wonder if someone threatened him? Did he know his life was in danger?”
“I don’t know.” He looked behind his shoulder, body alive with tension. “But we should get out of here, if they catch us where we aren’t meant to be…” His voice tailed off, the unsaid implications evident.

“Of course.” She replied, he stepped back as she exited the office, the door shutting behind them, leaving them trapped in the corridor. They began to make their way back out into the main bar but, just as they were about to turn the corner, they heard heavy footsteps approaching.

“Shit.” Jughead cursed, grabbing Betty’s wrist and pulling her behind him.

Both of them examined their surrounding areas, the office was too far away to get to, and probably the destination of the footsteps anyway, and if they were caught mid-entry it would only make things worse.

“You trust me Jug?” Betty whispered urgently, tugging on his wrist to get him to turn and face her.

“Always.” He said, instinctively, not even having to pause to contemplate it.

“Good.” She said, much more confidently than she felt. “Then I’m going to kiss you now, okay?”

“Okay?”

She reached up to tug on his collar and bring his lips to hers.

Betty tasted like vanilla, and it made him think of home, of warmth, of pressing her against the wall of the dingy bar without considering the consequences. His hand trailed from her cheek to her neck down to her shoulder as he crowded her, every space he could occupy he did, until she was flat against the bricks and he was flush against her. And she did not seem to mind, her hands in his hair, fingers tugging lightly against black curls, then the flat expanse of his back, tracing nonsense patterns with her fingertips.

He wanted to lift her up, have her legs wrapped around him, every layer of skin colliding until they were both panting, breathless. But suddenly, it was too much, her lips on his, soft and pliant, were all a fantasy that was only being fulfilled by chance. Her kiss was a lie, an alibi, and he couldn’t carry on a second longer when it didn’t mean a thing. Instead, he moved his lips to her neck, hoping that placing puffs of warm breath against her skin would be enough to satisfy whatever cover she was aiming for.

“Jug.” She breathed out, so quite he almost thought he’d imagined it, hands flying to his soft hair.

It was a mistake, to be so close, to press his mouth to her skin, because she smelt so much like the lotion she used, like peaches, and it made him want to lick, to kiss, to bite, until he had the scent memorised. His hand was by her waist now, digging in hard until he moved lower, lower, down her legs until he had a thumb slipped just under the end of her denim skirt. He just wanted to know, now that he had the chance, if the skin of her thigh was always as soft as he’d dreamed it was. He did not let his hands wander further, but he could’ve sworn, when Betty gasped again, it sounded realer than before.

“What the hell are you two up to?” It was Fox, speaking in angry whisper, looking thunderous.

They pulled apart.

“What does it look like?” Jughead drawled sarcastically, trying to keep his voice from shaking.

“Kid, I vouched for you in good faith, because your dad was good to me, and because I knew you
when you were a Serpent. It may have only been for a couple months, but to me, once a Serpent always a Serpent. But if you think I’ll stick up for you if Gunner comes round that corner,” He jerked a thumb back towards the bar. “Then you’d be dead wrong.”

“Blame me.” Betty said, arm still around him, hand lingering on the skin at the back of his neck. “I kissed him.”

“I’m not stupid.” Fox said. “I read the goddamn murder book, unlike Gunner, I know you’re Betty Cooper. You’re a bigshot journalist, and you’re lucky no one else in here noticed that you were Alice’s daughter, you aren’t harmless. And I bet this little jaunt wasn’t either.”

“We just wanted to fool around.” Jughead lied through gritted teeth, wishing the blond would stop touching him, stop breaking his heart without meaning to.

“That’s bad enough.” Fox said. “You aren’t one of us anymore Jughead. Things aren’t like they used to be.” He sighed, looking down at the ground, suddenly looking unbearably sad. “With Gunner – life around here’s changed. If another Serpent came round here, saw you like that, well, they might insist you share.”

“Betty isn’t a thing to be passed around.” He spat out. “She’s a goddamn person, better than anyone else in here.”

“And I’m right here.” Betty said. “I don’t like being talked about as if I’m not around.”

“Don’t get smart with me.” Fox retorted. “I’m just telling you what it’s like now. Just- get out of here. I’ll lead you out the back so you don’t walk out of here looking like criminals.”

The older man stormed past them and they followed down the corridor, Betty finally – finally – breaking contact with Jughead, they walked with an inch between them that felt both wider and smaller than anything else they’d ever experienced. Fox shoved an old metal door and it opened with a whine, the blond hopped out and Jughead was about follow when he felt the other man grab his shoulder. “I just don’t want to see you get hurt Jug. Be careful.” He said, and he jerked his head towards Betty, who was already walking away to the car.

“I’m fine.” Jughead wrenched himself from his grip.

“That’s what your dad used to say.” Fox muttered, as he watched Jughead leave.

They were silent as they walked to car, as they took their seats, buckled their belts, as Jughead started the engine and begin to guide the car out of the parking lot. There was no destination in mind, no prearranged activity they needed to be heading to, but Jughead couldn’t get himself to ask where he should go, he just turned the key and set off.

He could sense Betty’s nervousness, the way her legs were jiggling, the tightness of her posture, and he wanted to do something, anything, to soothe her, but he couldn’t know what the right thing would be.

“Well,” She said, after a minute, her voice shaky but light, as she tried to joke. “It’s not like that was the first time we’ve kissed.”

“Betty-” He sighed.

“What?” She asked. “We’re not going to talk about it?”
“About now or the past? Because I’ll gladly dissect the last twenty minutes, but anything beyond that is a no.”

“The past.” She answered, he could sense her eyes staring at his profile.

“It happened a decade ago. I’d rather we didn’t.” He muttered, eyes determinedly set on the road.

“And I’d rather we did.”

Jughead didn’t say anything, wouldn’t look at her, for fear of what he’d blurt out, the things he’d say that would ruin whatever this tentative friendship that was blooming between them was. There was a long pause.

“You never called.” Betty said, quietly, eyes trained on her lap, and Jughead turned his head towards her, startled to hear a crack in her voice that shook him to his core. She was crying, not much, but a few tears were leaking from the corner of her eyes and she wiped at them furiously. “You kiss me, the day before I’m meant to leave for college, and then you never even call Jughead.”

He thought there was a distinct possibility that he was going to be sick. Hearing Betty upset, crying, was enough to rattle him, but for him to be the source was too much. He pulled over to the side of the road, stopping the car more violently than he meant. “What was I meant to say?” He asked, finally.

She looked sharply up at him. “Anything Jug. Literally anything.”

“How?” He said, and then suddenly, angrier, though not necessarily at her. “Really? What the hell was I meant to say? You were off at Yale, Archie was in Boston, Veronica was at Wharton, and I was stuck here, earning minimum wage flipping burgers at Pop’s. What would we have spoken about?”

“I didn’t care what you were doing!”

“I did!” He burst out. “You were gone already Betty. So, I figure, why prolong the pain? Why wait until you’re halfway through your classes and figure out you have nothing to say to me anymore?”

“It wouldn’t have happened.” She said, softly, muffled by tears.

“It would have-“

“You didn’t get to make that choice for me.” She interrupted.

He looked down at his lap, feeling the beginnings of tears of his own forming, wishing he had stayed away from Betty, like he’d intended, like he’d been doing for the past decade.

“Why did you kiss me? At the party? If you’d decided all that?”

He wished he could’ve been honest with her but there was something preventing him. His speciality was words, always had been, but at that moment he was betrayed by them and no matter what he wanted, he couldn’t find the right ones to wish all the pain away. “I don’t know why.” He said, eventually.

“Jug,” She said, softly. “It wasn’t even about that, fine, forget the kiss, why did you stop speaking to me? I get why you stopped talking to Ronnie and Kev, but I thought, I thought we were special. You were one of my best friends Juggy.”
“We were special.” He said quickly. “I don’t- you were my only friend outside of Archie, Betty, of course you were special. I just- I was 18 and lonely and I don’t know, I thought that you’d forget about it soon enough.”

“Did you not think that maybe I was lonely too?” Betty asked. “That first year of college, I was so alone, I missed you so much.”

“I guess I was incapable of imagining a world where everyone wouldn’t want to know you.”

Betty sniffl ed, swiping at her wet cheeks with the back of her hand. “Will you just take me to Veronica’s?” She asked.

It felt as if something very large and horrible was sitting on him, choking him, constricting his chest. “If that’s what you want.” He said, resigned, starting the car.

They drove in silence again, only punctuated by the occasional sniff from Betty. He wanted to take her in his arms and hug her, or erase her memories of his existence, anything was better than this. “I’m sorry Betty.” He said, his own voice breaking, as they turned down Veronica’s street and he pulled to a stop outside her building.

“Don’t be.” She sighed, her voice filled with something he couldn’t quite pinpoint.

“When will-“ He tried, and then again. “Are you staying here tonight?”

“No.” She said, not looking at him, eyes trained on some point in the distance. “I’ll be back later, I’ve got the spare key, we’re just having dinner.”

She struggled with the door, finally popping it open, as she stepped out to leave he spoke. “I-“

“Don’t Jug.” She said, her voice rough and low.

And then she was gone, leaving him wishing that his life had turned out differently.

() 

Betty wasn’t technically meant to be arriving at Veronica’s for at least another hour, but she thought that her best friend probably wasn’t going to resent her for turning up a little early. She just couldn’t have lasted another second in that car, Jughead not looking at her, crying like she was a teenager again, lost on some boy she wasn’t meant to be with. She rang the doorbell.

“Betty, you’re early.” Veronica grinned when she opened the door, but she took one look at her friend’s face and her own expression fell. “Okay.” She said, putting a hand on one hip. “Who do I have to kill?”

“Ha.” Betty said, shakily. She was done crying, but there was still the remnants of it lingering on her face, the puffiness of her eyes, tear tracks against her cheeks. “No one. Can you just let me in?”

She stepped back, letting Betty take shelter in her mother’s swanky apartment. She felt immediately better as soon as she crossed the threshold, it smelt exactly as it always had – like expensive perfume – and made her think of the nights she’d spent there, sleepovers, where, for once, everything had seemed right with the world. Suddenly, Betty wanted to get on her knees and pray, thank whatever God that brought Veronica Lodge into her life over a decade ago.

“B, what happened?” She placed a soothing hand against the other girls shoulder. “If you aren’t going to let me kill them, at least tell me you managed to get a few kicks in.”
“I’m being ridiculous.” She said, forcing a smile, feeling her shoulders tense up. “I’m fine.”

“No.1. Having emotions is not being ridiculous, let them out girl.” Veronica said. “And No.2. you’re evidently not fine because your mascara is currently down your cheeks instead of on your lashes where it belongs.”

“Have you been cooking?” Betty asked, aiming for nonchalance as she wandered into the Lodge kitchen. “It smells good.”

“Only the best for you.” She sighed, following the other girl. “But if you think you can distract me with compliments then you don’t know me like I thought.”

She perched on a stool at the kitchen island, watching as Veronica leaned back against the counter to give her a cool gaze. “It’s Jughead.” She said, after a second.

“Jughead?” Veronica furrowed her brow. “What the hell has that second-rate Donnie Darko done now?”

“You have been spending way too much time with Cheryl.” Betty said at that outburst.

Veronica frowned, and then shrugged. “Probably. Yet my point still stands.”

“He didn’t do anything.” She said, thinking, wryly, that that was the main problem.

“You know, I was going to open us a bottle of wine.” The dark haired girl mused. “But I have a feeling this situation is going to require something a lot stronger.” She moved towards the well-stocked bar that took up the corner of the room. “How does a vodka gimlet sound?”

“It sounds like something strong and way too drinkable.”

“Perfect.” Veronica smirked.

“I guess it is my turn to get drunk.” She muttered, resting her chin on her palm.

“Who got drunk?” Veronica asked, as she busied herself making the cocktails.

“Jughead and Archie. But that’s not really related to the story.”

“Jughead and Archie got drunk?” She laughed. “I wasn’t aware they had it in them.”

“We’ve seen Archie drunk plenty of times.” Betty pointed out.

“But not Jughead.”

“He was just Jughead, but even more I guess.” She sighed, thinking back to how messy he’d looked, his rapture at the burger, and his hands in her hair. But thinking about that inevitable led to thinking about his hands elsewhere, on her shoulder, her neck, inching just inside her skirt, and she had to shake her head to try force the thoughts away.

“And what has he done to have you turn up on my doorstep?” Veronica asked, passing her a cloudy cocktail glass with a ledge of lime sticking out, and slipping into her own seat with an identical drink in hand.

“Isn’t the food going to burn?” Betty tried to stall one more time.

“No. It’s simmering. Now stop trying to delay, what happened?”
“It wasn’t really Jughead.” She said. “It was just-this whole day. And I really am fine, I’m an adult, I’m just stressed.”

“B,” Veronica leant across the table, taking the hand that wasn’t clutching a drink in hers. “That’s understandable. You put yourself under a lot of pressure when you come back here.”

“And, well,” She bit her lip, looking down at the table. “We kissed.”

“Who kissed?”

“Me and Jughead.”

“You and Jughead?” She repeated, seeming taken aback.

“Not like that.” Betty said. “For the case.”

“For the case?” Veronica echoed, sounding extremely sceptical.

She pulled her hand away from the other girl, taking a sip of her drink. She nearly winced: Veronica had a habit of making every drink extremely strong. “Are you going to repeat everything I say?”

“Maybe.” The dark haired girl replied, leaning back and taking in the other girl over the rim of her glass. “Until you start making sense.”

Betty took a big breath, and then another gulp of her drink for liquid courage, before the whole sordid tale came spilling out. She told the other girl about Dilton, about the Serpents, about sneaking off to the backroom to let the sexists talk, about getting caught, about kissing him, about letting him press her up against the wall, about enjoying it, but she did not mention the real reason that she had turned up, tears falling from the corners of her eyes.

The kiss ten years ago had been something she had told no one about and, as far as she knew, she and Jughead were the only two people that knew anything about it. It happened upstairs at Archie’s house, just outside her ex-boyfriend’s door, and, at first, she didn’t want to mention it because she wasn’t sure what it might’ve meant, and then – as time went on, and Jughead stop replying to her texts and returning her calls, as she settled into her new life in a whole different state – she’d been too embarrassed to bring it up.

She knew that Veronica would listen to her and that if she was going to tell anyone it would be her, they were B and V, they didn’t keep secrets, but even so, Betty couldn’t bring herself to say it. It felt like saying it out loud would bring her to close to something, something like the truth, and she wasn’t ready to deal with that right now.

“That sounds like a hell of a day.” Veronica said, when both their drinks were drained and the story was finished. “And I thought I was having a confusing reunion.”

“Why is your reunion confusing?” Betty asked, grateful for a change in topic.

“We’re focusing on you here B.” She said briskly. “One shitstorm at a time please.”

“I just felt like I’d made a mistake. And I hate mistakes.” Betty sighed, tracing the grains of wood in the table. “I should never have gone back into that office.” She’d been following her journalistic instincts, pursuing the truth no matter the consequences, and it had, of course, got her in trouble before, but she’d always wormed her way out and never felt embarrassed for any damage her actions had caused. But here, sat at the Lodge table, she felt the beginnings of humiliation creep up her spine. All of this, the kissing, the outburst, the feeling she’d had when she’d hear Jughead’s voice
crack, all of it would never have happened if she’d stayed away.

“Bullshit Betty Cooper.” Veronica exclaimed, yanking her out of her thoughts. “You’re the kind of girl who goes into those offices, who snoops around, and damn whatever happens afterward. You can’t start wishing you were some other way, if you were than you wouldn’t be you, and then we wouldn’t be B and V any longer, and we can’t have that, we’re a matching set.”

“I’m so glad you’re here Ronnie.” She admitted, slumping down onto the table, letting some of the tension that had kept her shoulders hunched tight fade away.

“You too Betty.” Veronica smiled, the sweet one she always saved for her best friend. “But poor Jughead, I’m sure it can’t have been easy on him.”

“What?” The blond crumpled her brow. “Why? Because I’m too hideous to kiss?”

“Please,” She scoffed. “You know you’re the hottest girl Riverdale has ever produced. It’s just that Jughead was so in love with you in high school.”

Betty felt her body go cold. “No he wasn’t.” She snapped back.

“I’ll admit it, I couldn’t see it at first.” Veronica elaborated, taking a sip of her drink. “But towards the end of our high school years, he looked at you like you hung the moon or whatever romantic metaphor fits.”

“He didn’t.” She insisted, her mind involuntarily flashing back ten years ago, thinking back to all the times they’d been alone, to the moments when he’d turned his gaze away from her just as she turned to look at him. But then she thought about the years of silence, about the tension between them now. “Or if he did, he’s long over it.”

Veronica must have sensed something in her tone, because she didn’t push it. “Okay. Okay.” She said. “Maybe my straight-and-in-lovedar was off.”

“Yes.” Betty nodded. “It must’ve been.”

“Right.” She repeated, grabbing both their drained glasses and placing them on the side. “Now, are you ready to try my Coq au Vin? The recipe comes straight from the Chef at Le Cinq in Paris.”

“Sounds delicious.” She attempted a smile, and this time her expression managed to mould itself into something that, if not quite there yet, was closer than it had been before she’d arrived. She was going to not think about whatever Veronica had just been trying to insinuate, going to push it to the depths of her mind.

Betty decided that she was done wasting energy on whatever had just occurred, on a drama that was ten years in the making. She had spent so much of her life trying to change the things around her, a town that wanted to stay ignorant, a boy next door who would never love her, a family that was unhappily imploding around her, and herself, because she was not as perfect as everyone willed her to be, as she herself wanted, but she was done. Jughead didn’t want to remember a past where they might’ve been entangled, and she wasn’t going to try to change it. She was going to stay at Veronica’s, drinking the bottle of wine that had just been cracked open, and eating the fancy French food that she’d cooked up, and then she was going to go home to Jughead and they were going to go back to normal. The rest of this reunion would be focused on solving their case and, after that, she hoped they’d stay friends.

But that was the only thing she was letting herself hope for, anything else was just too painful to want again.
Jughead went straight home after he’d dropped Betty off at Veronica’s, got into bed and tried to will the night away, putting in a marathon of his favourite movies on his laptop and feeling an empty drop in his stomach anytime a scene got even remotely close to kissing.

He tried to sleep after a while, when the scenes all blurred into one headache on a computer screen, but he couldn’t. The truth was, he didn’t really believe Betty was going to return, not really, so it wasn’t until he heard the door open and close, the soft footsteps on the landing, that he was able to let himself drift away into a restless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Ahh, there u go. It's slightly shorter than usual because I had an unusually busy/crappy few weeks, but I'm hoping quality over quantity? Anyway, thank you for reading, and please comment and let me know what you thought! I love each and every one of them x
I See Dead Peoples' Things

Chapter Summary

Jughead couldn’t help the small shivers of enjoyment at how comfortably they’d slotted into this strange living situation, the way she wandered through his house so effortlessly, finding mugs in his cupboard, leaving her shampoo in his shower, the sound of her hair dryer keeping him company as he towel-dried his own locks. All of these things created a pattern that he knew he could get too used to, that he had to keep reminding himself was temporary, knowing that it would soon be snatched away.

Chapter Notes

wow this is a monster of a chapter, by far the longest I've written, it just kind of got away from me. But hope you enjoy! (this has my favorite chapter title so far, because it made me laugh, and if you can't laugh at yourself, how in the hell are you gonna laugh at anyone else?)

As always, only I proof-read so sorry about any mistakes etc etc

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Betty slept in the morning after her dinner date with Veronica, the exhaustion she felt after her long day of sleuthing and small crying jag, combined with the amount of alcohol the girls had managed to put away, left her feeling more than a little bleary the next day. The only reason she woke at ten, was because of the soft knock on her door.

“Hey.” Jughead tentatively pushed the door open, she peeked up at him over the mound of covers, rubbing her eyes wearily. “I’m sorry, is this ok?”

“Yes.” She said, and then sat up a little more. “Yes. What time is it?”

Her hair was a messy poof, falling around her shoulders, and as she moved the strap of the tank top she’d been sleeping in was slipping off her shoulder. She looked so domestic, so sweet, that Jughead felt his heart lurch.

He leant in the doorway. “It’s around ten.”

“I never normally sleep in.” She said, yawning.

“I thought- well, you work hard.” He shuffled on his feet. “Anyway, I- I made you breakfast.”

“You did?” She cocked an eyebrow at him.

“Yes. Is it so hard to believe? I’m a man of many talents.”

“The only thing I ever remember you cooking was frozen pizza.”
“I lived with Archie for too long in Chicago.” He replied. “It was either one of us learnt to cook, or we contracted scurvy.”

“Sounds like Archie.” She said, and then, shifting uncomfortably. “Can you give me a sec?”

“Right. Right. I’ll be-“ He gestured to downstairs, and then retreated, thinking, as he shut the door on her, that he had strong urge to slam his head against the nearest hard surface.

When she emerged he was stood with his back to her, fiddling with the pan on the hob, pretending he wasn’t hyper conscious of every creak on the stairs.

“What are you cooking?” Betty came up behind him, peering over his shoulder.

“An apology.” He turned around, to see that she was smiling at that, the half-downturned smile he’d often seen thrown his way in high school.

“Really?” She asked, stepping back and taking a seat at the kitchen table. He slide her a cup of coffee, which she gulped at greedily, and then her plate.

“I know it looks suspiciously like an omelette.” He sat down opposite her. “But it’s actually made up of a healthy serving of regret, remorse, and just a dash of humility.”

“For such strange ingredients it looks good.” She replied, poking at it with her fork.

“Just wait until you taste it.” He said, taking a nervous sip of his coffee.

She hadn’t bothered to get changed yet, still wore the remnants of sleep all over her, blond hair messy around her shoulders, pyjamas covered by a terrycloth robe, just the ends of the cute, floral pattern peeking out. She looked like exactly the sort of dream he could slip into.

“Mmm.” She swallowed her first bite. “It’s actually pretty yummy. Thank you.”

“Don’t.” He said, quickly. “Don’t thank me. I mean it- it’s an apology. Actually this is the apology, I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry too.”

“Bet-“

“Wait. Just- give me a second. I want to say something.” Betty interrupted, and Jughead nodded. “I don’t think I realised how hurt I was about you giving up on us all those years ago.” She said, he looked down at his lap. “I was doing what I have always done best, repress it, and then because we kissed again, it brought back everything from that night and the months that followed. I guess I couldn’t hold it in anymore. But we can’t let that hang over us, not if we’re going to be working together the whole time I’m in Riverdale. I can’t stay in your house if we aren’t talking.”

“I know.” He ran an anxious hand through his messy, black hair. “And I want you to stay here, I want to talk, I’m sorry, I was the one refusing to talk about what happened in high school.”

“But I know myself.” She insisted. “If I’d really wanted to talk about, we would’ve talked about it. If I had pushed the issue you would’ve let me, right?”

“Yes.” Jughead said. “I hope I would have. And now I will, I do want to talk. The reason I stopped talking to you Betty- I just-“ He looked down at his plate. “There’s always been something in me that told me it’d be better off if I just left. All my life I’ve been someone’s burden, you worried about
“The only thing you ever did was bring me up. And none of that even matters, because you took away my choice.” She said, voice cracking. “I wanted a choice. And that wouldn’t have been the one I made.”

“I know. And I can’t apologise enough.” He said. “I was eighteen, I was depressed, and I was stuck in the same damn town that I loved but that hated me, minus any of the people I cared about. But that doesn’t excuse it, I fucked up.”

“But you fucked up ten years ago.” She replied. “I’ve been harbouring resentment since, because even now, every time we meet, you’re distant.”

“Not at the reunion.” He pointed out.

“No.” Betty admitted, hands wrapping round her coffee for some sense of comfort, of warmth. “Not here. Why?” She looked up at him.

“I think maybe I got tired of running away.”

“I’m tired of you running away.”

“Good.” He said. “You should be.”

“So, you’re done?” When we go our separate ways after this you’re not gonna go back to blocking my number and dodging my texts?"

“Yes.” He nodded. “Next time I’m visiting Jellybean, I’ll look you up too. All of that, I promise.”

“Good.”

“Friends?” He asked.

She bit lip, her heart hurting at that, twisting just a little, but she ignored the twinge, reaching across the table to put her hand over his. After all, this was what she’d been expecting. “We’ll always be friends Juggy, there’s too much history between us to stop it.”

“Thank you.” He replied, and she wanted to say there was no reason for gratitude, but it didn’t feel like there was enough air in the room for her to say it.

“Anytime.” She eventually settled on.

“It’s a good thing too.” He remarked. “Without you I’m down to two friends, maybe two and a half if you count Hotdog. And one of them is my little sister.”

The heavy air in the room seemed to dissipate, just a little, and she leant back, removing her hand from his and immediately missing the warmth she’d found there. “I definitely count Hotdog, and Archie, and Jellybean, also Veronica, and Kevin, and your agent, not to mention a whole bunch of people you’ve probably met that I don’t know about.”

“Alright. Alright.” He grumbled. “I get your point Cooper, very subtle.”

She grinned at that, taking a bite from her omelette and giving him a satisfied look.

“Hasn’t that gone cold in the time it’s taken us to have this emotional heart to heart?” He said, poking
at the food on his plate but not eating anything.

“A little.” She shrugged politely. “But it’s the thought that counts anyway.”

He smiled wryly. “I’m not sure that’s a compliment Bets.”

She frowned. “It’s a compliment when I say it. Besides, we’ll be eating again soon.”

“Is that a comment on humanity’s general relationship with food, or have we got something specific planned?”

“Something specific.” Betty laughed. “Kevin texted us an invite to lunch last night.”

“Joy.” Jughead muttered. “I can’t wait to invade the home of our favourite member of law enforcement.”

“I already checked, the Sherriff won’t be there.” She replied.

“Out actually doing his job?”

“I sure hope so.” She sighed. “Anyway, the whole gang will be there, Kev’s worried because Ravi isn’t taking this whole situation so well.”

“Sure shows how messed up we are when the odd one out is the guy reacting appropriately to murder.” He said.

“There’s no appropriate reaction to murder, not really, not from what I’ve learned.”

“You’re right.” Jughead agreed. “But I’m pretending there is for sarcastic purposes, it’s the way I make sense of the world.”

“Noted.” She smiled softly.

“And what time do we have to go then?”

“Soon.” She replied, checking the lopsided clock that hung on his wall, something that made her want to get up and fix it immediately.

“Come on.” He whisked the plate from under her nose before she could protest, scraping the remains into a tupperware box and placing it into the fridge – it had always been ingrained in Jughead to never waste one scrap of food – and then placing the plate in the sink. “You can shower first, it only takes me five minutes to look this good.”

“Fine.” Betty came round to deposit her now empty mug on the counter next to him, poking him playfully in the side. “But tonight I’m cooking dinner.”

“I thought you said you burn everything.” He said, taking the cups from her and adding them to the dirty dishes.

“Not everything.” She protested. “Just some things. I’m a grown woman Jug, I can cook us some pasta.”

“I do have a legendary iron stomach, so I’m sure whatever you make will go down fine.” He replied, his own way of agreeing to her invitation.

“Great.” She said, and he hated how he noted the brightening of her voice. “Then it’s decided.” He
caught a whiff of her perfume as she turned around and headed for the stairs.

“There’s towels in the cupboard.” He called out.

She waved a hand in acknowledgement and then was gone from sight and the sound of the shower switching on upstairs replaced their previous banter. As they got ready for the day, Jughead couldn’t help the small shivers of enjoyment at how comfortably they’d slotted into this strange living situation, the way she wandered through his house so effortlessly, finding mugs in his cupboard, leaving her shampoo in his shower, the sound of her hair dryer keeping him company as he towel-dried his own locks. All of these things created a pattern that he knew he could get too used to, that he had to keep reminding himself was temporary, knowing that it would soon be snatched away.

“You ready?” Jughead knocked on the spare bedroom door, Betty’s door now.

“One second.” She called out, and a moment later, true to her word, she emerged from the bedroom. She was wearing a pair of jeans and snuggly fitted lilac t-shirt, her hair once again down around her shoulders. The sight of it made him think back to his drunken thoughts, the feeling of her soft hair between his fingertips, and he had to fight the rise of embarrassment. “I’m ready.”

“Great.” He stepped back quickly, already heading for the stairs. “I’ll drive but you have to direct me.”

“I know you know the way to Kevin’s Jug.” Betty replied, following just behind him. “I’d wager that you know your way around Riverdale better than anyone.”

“I didn’t take you as the gambling kinda gal Bets.” He said. “And I was the only one in high school who didn’t drive.”

“But you were also the only one who was always paying attention.”

“Hmmph.” He grumbled as he reached the front door, attempting to flee to the relative safety of his car.

“Uh, Juggy?” Betty called out when he reached the driver door.

“What?”

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

“I don’t know.” Jughead drawled. “I think I lost my will to live a while back.”

“Your keys?” She said, grinning at him, dangling the offending objects between her fingers. “You left them on the hook.”

“Thanks.” He held out his hand and caught her neat toss with ease. “How would I survive without you?”

“I think you’d be just fine.” She said softly, making her way to the car door and opening it with much more ease than she had been doing, she was almost as practiced at it as Archie, and the thought of that scared them both. “All of this reminds me, I left my car in the Inn’s parking lot.”

Jughead glanced at her as he backed out of the drive. “So get Veronica to pick it up.”

“Oh.” She squirmed a little in her seat. “I don’t know about that.”

“What?” He asked, amusement coloring his tone. “Lodge is a bad driver?”
“No.” Betty protested, not entirely convincingly. “She’s just- a little careless.”

“Careless is definitely Betty speak for don’t let Veronica drive your car unless you never want to see it again.”

“No.” She repeated, and he shot her a dubious look. “Okay. Fine. She’s not the best driver. But you absolutely cannot tell her I said that.”

“We’ll see.” He said.

“Jughead.” Betty said, her voice low in a warning tone that sent shivers down his spine.

They were pulling up to Kevin’s house now – despite what Jughead had said he’d remembered the way perfectly from their childhood – and he chose merely to smirk, leaving Betty to glare half-heartedly at his profile.

Veronica had been the first one to arrive at Kevin’s house, despite the miniature hangover she was nursing. She had always been the person least affected the morning after, but she’d started to get headaches whenever she drank just a tad too much wine, a not so nice reminder that while she was still young, she was growing older, and she’d slowly lose that youthful ability to bounce back no matter what you’d done the night before. But then again, she was a Lodge, so maybe anything was possible.

“Ronnie.” Kevin seemed entirely too relieved when he opened the door, pulling her into a tight hug. “I can’t tell you how glad I am to see you.”

“Kev.” She laughed. “You know I’m your girl, but this is a little much.”

He pulled back, and the look on his face was just a tad manic. “Ravi has been baking pies for the last four hours.”

“Four hours?” Veronica quirked an eyebrow as she followed him into the house.

“Four.” Kevin mouthed, holding out the same amount of fingers, and then looking around him for any sign of his boyfriend, lowering his voice. “He bakes when he’s upset. When he lost out on a big wardrobe job for HBO, he baked cookies for an entire week straight. It was not good for my waistline.”

“But were they worth it? I’d willingly go up a dress size for something as good as say an éclair from Maitre Choux.”

“Oh they were good, and they fed the writers room for a couple of days, but by the end I was going to vomit it if I saw another chocolate chip.” Kevin said, grabbing her wrist. “But you cannot say this to him, he’s going to go full on Britney Spears if we don’t eat every single thing he makes.”

“We’ve all been there.” Veronica replied, dryly. “I promise to devour the feast like it’s my first meal at a Michelin star restaurant. But seriously, how is he holding up?”

“I think this is something we must discuss over wine.” Kevin muttered.

“Is it even past 12?”

“Probably.”
“Good enough for me.” Veronica shrugged elegantly.

“Glasses are in the kitchen.” He said. “You can see how he is for yourself.”

She dutifully followed him into the familiar kitchen, she stood waiting in the doorway as Ravi popped his head up from behind the oven, hair askew and a spotted apron covering his normally stylish clothing. “Hey Ravi, how are you doing?”

“Veronica.” Ravi said, coming round to wrap her in a brief hug. “I’m fine thank you. How are you?”

He was looking a lot better than he had the day before, but she could see the tension in his shoulders, the slight hunched form of his back, the fact that his skin was paler than usual, his demeanour all together less carefree than the other times she’d met him. Kevin manoeuvred behind him, shooting Veronica looks before reaching up for the wineglasses stored in the cupboards.

“Can’t complain.” She said breezily, stepping back. “Nothing that a beautifully cooked meal won’t fix I’m sure.”

“I guess.” Ravi replied, swallowing harshly, choking on some thoughts and feelings he wasn’t letting out.

A timer went off, vibrating harshly against the kitchen counter, Kevin placed the glasses down and switched it off. “Honey, I think the croutons are done.” He walked over to Ravi, who turned to look at him.

“Thanks.” Ravi said, shooting him a private smile, not a happy one, just one that was soft, filled with something undefinable to Veronica.

“Oh of course.” Kevin replied, a hand coming up to cradle the side of his boyfriend’s face, gentle and tenderly. “You’re okay?”

Ravi’s eyes fluttered shut, almost of his was taking strength from the other boy’s touch, like it was a breath of relief when air was getting thin. It made Veronica want to look away, to have a glass in her hand already so she had something to do, because she couldn’t remember the last time she’d looked at anyone like that – or had anyone look at her. Definitely not with her past few partners, maybe with Archie, but even then she couldn’t be sure. It was a brief moment, a passing second of intimacy between two people, but it affected her all the same.

“I’m good.” Ravi said, eyes open.

“Okay.” Kevin responded, pulling his hand back and pressing a kiss to his cheek. “Me and Ronnie will be in the lounge. Come through when you’re done kay?”

“Sure.” He turned back to whatever he was fiddling with, and Kevin picked up the glasses again and led the way into the Keller lounge.

“You two,” Veronica said as she watched him pour them drinks. “You have something special.”

“It’s not something special.” He said, passing her a wine glass filled with merlot. “It’s called a healthy relationship.”

She hummed, taking her drink from him and perching herself neatly on the love seat. “I’d say that’s about as rare as finding a vintage Dior dress in good condition and just your size.”

“For some people.” He shrugged, taking a seat on the sofa opposite her. “But not for others.”
“I think I want that.” She said plainly, taking a sip of wine.

“Ronnie,” Kevin said, tone suddenly sympathetic. “You’ll find it. Violet just wasn’t the one.”

Veronica startled at the name of her recent ex because, the truth was, she hadn’t been thinking of her at all. “Right.” She said, after a pause that went on a little too long. “She wasn’t. But Ravi is?”

He looked back towards the kitchen, as if he could see through the walls and furniture that blocked his view, then he turned back to Veronica. “Ravi is.”

“Kevin Keller, in love and not ashamed of it.” She sighed, leaning back to cross her ankles daintily. “I definitely have to be best woman at the wedding.”

“So you’re going to help plan it, I want you to use your numerous celebrity connections to make it the most talked about event of the year.”

“You are going to be the worst bridezilla, Ravi is so unbelievably lowkey compared to you.”

“But he knows what he’s signing up for.” Kevin shrugged, and then paused. “Or I guess he will when I actually pop the question.”

She laughed. “Make it soon. I think he needs something to look forward to.”

“I doubt he’d want to have it in any way connected to Riverdale.”

“Not exactly.” He replied. “He’s more not a fan of the murder.”

“I do think he has a point.” Veronica said, taking a big swig of her drink. “It’s not exactly the greeting you’d want.”

“When Ravi took me home to meet his parents, they threw me a dinner party and fed me more food than I could stomach.” Kevin said. “When I take Ravi home, I traumatise him for life.”

“That’s what Riverdale does to all outsiders.” She shrugged. “It happened to me as soon as I arrived.”

“I’m trying desperately not to make it worse, that’s why I jumped when he suggested he cook everyone lunch.” He chewed a little on his lower lip. “Do you think everyone will be nice?”

“Kev, it’s us. Of course they will.”

“Let me phrase this another way, do you think Jughead will be nice?”

“Nice?” Veronica raised an eyebrow. “I’ve never known him to be not nice, but I guess we can’t promise tactful and appropriate. However, Betty is here to keep him in line, and everyone else is a safe bet. Unless you invited Cheryl?” She attempted to be casual with her last inquiry, but the flash of Kevin’s eyes let her know she could get nothing past him.

“I didn’t think Ravi could handle Cheryl Blossom right now. But why, my dear Ronnie, do you ask?”

“It’s you who was worrying about the friendliness of the occasion, I was just making sure you had all your bases covered.”
“I’m watching you Lodge.” He smirked over his glass. “The potential drama I see brewing is the only thing keeping me sane during this stay.”

Conveniently, there was a knock at the door that spared Veronica from having to come up with a reply, she could just make out the tall, redhead boy standing on the doorstep. “Archie has arrived.” She pointed out.

Kevin gave her a look – as if to say this topic was far from over – before moving without comment to let their old friend in.

() 

Jughead and Betty were the last ones to arrive at the Keller residence that day, by the time they’d pulled up to the driveway, the rest of the gang were already safely ensconced in the lounge, even Ravi was perched in the corner of the room, looking into the depths of his drink like it held the answers he so desperately wanted.

“Betty. Jughead.” Kevin said, as he swung the door open, shooting the blond an annoyingly knowing look but not saying anything about the fact that they’d arrived together, or that he hadn’t even bothered to tell Jughead himself to come, knowing she’d be there to pass on the message. “I’m glad you could come.”

“Of course Kev.” She smiled, giving him a quick hug. Jughead waved lazily from behind her in acknowledgement.


Both of them looked a little embarrassed, as if they were remembering a recent memory, and Kevin made a mental note of it, filing it a way in the part of his brain kept especially for gossip.

“I’m okay thank you.” Betty said.

“Me too.” Jughead added.

Kevin led their way into the lounge, taking his seat in-between Veronica and Ravi. Archie waved at them from his position on the armchair, though his eye contact was brief and he quickly turned his gaze to the carpet, which left the only seat the snug loveseat. Jughead and Betty took their places dutifully, both of them trying desperately to ignore how their legs were unintentionally pressed together.

Veronica gave her a questioning look, attempting to jerk her head subtly in a question about last night, Betty shot her a small smile, and the look of concern that had been lingering on her face dissolved. Jughead, Archie, and Ravi missed the exchanged completely, only Kevin had noticed it, eyeing it with a smirk.

“Hi Betty. And Junkhead was it?” Ravi said, as they walked in.

“Jughead.” He corrected. “It’s a family name.”

“Ah.” Ravi replied, the fact that he was uncertain about whether or not the other boy was telling the truth clear in his voice. “It’s very nice.”

“How are you holding up Ravi?” Betty cut in, rescuing the other boy from that briefly awkward exchange.
Kevin placed a hand over his boyfriend’s, where it lay against his thigh, as if stopping him from involuntarily clenching it. “I’m doing fine.” Ravi said. “What about you?”

“Good. It’s a little strange to be back, and everything that’s happened since we’ve arrived has been crazy, but I’m okay.”

“How’s your stay been at the Riverdale Inn?” Kevin asked. “We almost booked there, but my dad insisted we stay here.”

“Oh.” She smoothed down some non-existent wrinkles on her jeans, purposefully not looking at the boy sat next to her. “I’m not staying there anymore. There was a slight… mishap. I don’t think I’ll be welcomed back there.”

“You’re rooming with Veronica then?” He asked.

“Not with me.” Veronica said.

“I’m staying at Jughead’s.”

“You have to tell us how this happened. Betty?”

The blond shrugged.

“Jughead?” Kevin’s eyes zeroed in on the dark haired boy.

“What can I say Keller? Call your dad and have us arrested, we’re criminals.” He drawled, Archie looked up sharply at him.

“We aren’t criminals.” Betty rolled her eyes. “We just didn’t exactly endear ourselves to the staff when we came around asking about Dilton.”

“They kicked you out for asking questions?”

“Partially.” She half-lied. “Anyway, it didn’t matter, we got the information we needed.”

“How is your investigation going?” It was Ravi who asked this, voice quiet and soft, Kevin’s hand now laced through his. “Do you really think you’ll be able to figure out who did it?”

“Yes.” She said simply. “We do. Otherwise why would we bother? The reason I became a journalist was to discover and publish the truth.”

“We don’t do this just for kicks.” Jughead grumbled.

There was an awkward tension lacing the room, and there were so many factors at play that it was impossible to pinpoint which one was the main culprit. There was Ravi, clearly still reeling from the shock of the past few days, Archie, sitting so quietly in the corner of the room that he gave the appearance of sulking, Kevin, with his father the Sheriff and his boyfriend on the fritz, and Betty and Jughead themselves, tiptoeing around each other and everyone else.

There was a faint dig of a timer coming from the kitchen, and Ravi stood up abruptly. “Lunch is ready.”

“What did you make?” Veronica asked politely.

“Nothing fancy.” He replied. “Just pasta and salad. I baked a pie for afterwards.”
As they all stood up, Jughead leant forward and whispered in Betty’s ear. “I guess you’re out of culinary options for tonight.”

“I’m sure I can think of something else.” She shot back, following everyone else to take their seats around the kitchen table.

Betty couldn’t help but feel strange, sat in such a familiar room, yet with everything so different, as if it was a reflection distorted in a fun house mirror. She traced the scratches that marred the table and thought back to when she used to do the same thing over dinner, over study sessions, and how the girl she was back then seemed almost a stranger to her now.

She startled out of her thoughts when Jughead passed her the salad bowl, she took it dutifully but her brief moment of reverie hadn’t escaped his notice. “Are you okay?” He asked, under his breath, everyone else around the table too focused on getting their food to notice.

“I’m fine.” She let out a little breath. “Promise.”

They settled into an odd silence, peppered only with murmurings of compliments about the food, the sound of knives and forks against plates, but nothing else. It was strange, for a group that had been through so much together, they normally always had something to talk about, but it felt like everyone was holding back, keeping a breath in, rather than letting things fall like they might’ve done as teenagers.

“What do you think about Riverdale then Ravi?” Betty had asked, as she chased the last remnants of her meal around her plate, speaking thanks to the looks Kevin kept throwing her way.

“Um-“ He tried. “I don’t know.”

Veronica took a sip of her wine, leaning back against her chair. “I know how you feel. Believe me, moving here from New York was a bigger culture shock than moving to another country.”

“But you like it now though?”

“Of course.” She placed a hand to her heart, as if shocked he would ask. “Riverdale made me the person I am today. There’s nowhere else on earth like it. I’m forever grateful and indebted to it.”

Ravi shook his head. “I don’t see it. How could moving somewhere where two of your classmates are murdered be a good thing? You should’ve just stayed away.”

Veronica raised an eyebrow. “Look, I see your point, and there were times in high school when I was seriously contemplating hopping on the next train out of here, but like Belle with her beast, I fell in love. Call it Stockholm syndrome, but this place, the people, they get under your skin.”

“I don’t want them under my skin.” He replied.

“Like LA is a paradigm of morality.” Jughead muttered.

“C’mon, you wrote a whole book trashing this place.”

“Jug wasn’t trashing it.” Archie spoke up for the first time, looking like he’d been awoken from a strange dream. “Dude, we grew up here, we love this place, that’s why we’re allowed to point out its flaws.”

“It’s like it’s our favourite, misbehaving, messed up, child.” Jughead said.
Ravi shook his head again. “I don’t know. I think you’re all crazy.”

“Don’t call us that.” Betty said, politely but firmly. “We get that this trip is upsetting, but don’t.”

“He didn’t mean it like that.” Kevin tried.

“No.” His boyfriend interrupted. “She’s right. I’m sorry – it’s just, the way you all are, how you seem so fine. Kevin told me about what happened in high school, but honestly, I thought he was just exaggerating, making it seem like you did solve an entire murder investigation and were fine with it, but here, look at you all. You two.” He nodded his head towards Betty and Jughead. “You’re acting like we’re in some crime show, instead of letting Kev’s dad do his job.”

“Cos’ it wouldn’t get done otherwise.” Jughead murmured under his breath, and Betty nudged him with her leg to get him to shut up.

“Listen, it’s clear that you don’t understand us.” Betty said, her voice slipping into professional mode, but tone occasionally wavering with passion. “The fact that you think we’re all fine shows that, we aren’t fine, none of us are, but we try to be anyway. We’re not acting like we’re in a show, we’re doing a best to help someone who didn’t get the chance to help themselves, and then to tell the world about it, so he’s remembered, so he has justice.” She took a slightly ragged breath when she was done.


“I know.” Ravi said. “I know I don’t get it. That’s why I think it’s good that we’re leaving.”

“You’re leaving?” Archie asked.

“No.” Veronica shook her head. “Kevin wouldn’t pass up the opportunity to go to his high school reunion dance, that’s too much gossip potential gone to waste.”

“I’m afraid I am Ronnie.” He admitted. “Ravi has some work stuff he needs to work on anyway, and with this happening, we thought it was for the best.”

“I’m sorry guys.” He said. “Kev’s dad gave us permission, since we aren’t suspects and he knows how to get in touch with us, we’re leaving tomorrow.”

“That means you have to keep me well informed on any drama that emerges.” Kevin said. “I’m looking at you Ronnie.” He nodded at her and she smiled, nodding back.

“And I’ll laugh along with him when you tell him all about whatever iconic things Cheryl Blossom is doing.” Ravi said. “But I just need to be at home.”

Betty nodded, smiling sympathetically at them, Jughead held his tongue, attempting to stop whatever snarky comments that had been brewing from spilling out, Veronica shook her head sadly, and Archie sat there, silent, brow furrowed as if deep in thought.

Then a buzzing sound came, loud and harsh, from the Betty’s pocket. She slipped her phone out, wincing. “It’s Ethel.” She said, looking to Jughead, who nodded, and then she turned to the rest of their friends. “We have to go.”

“But Ravi made pie.” Kevin said.

“Sorry. Duty calls.” Jughead replied, and they gathered their things, and were gone.
“Was that really Ethel?” Jughead asked, as they slipped through the front door, heading back to his car, where they seemed to be spending far too much time lately. “Or were you giving us an excuse to escape whatever twilight zone episode we’d slipped into?”

She glared at him half-heartedly as she tugged on the handle. “You think I’d lie to them just so we could leave?” Betty asked, getting into the passenger seat.

He slipped into his own seat. “I was seriously considering it. But I’m like that no matter the social situation.”

“It was a strange time.” She admitted, shoulders slumping back against her seat. “But yes, that really was Ethel, she wants us to meet her at her house.”

“You think she’s going to make this easy on us and just confess?”

“That would be nice.” Betty said. “But somehow I doubt it, I don’t see her as the killer.”

“Shouldn’t we be seeing everyone as the killer?” He asked.

“Yes.” She said. “Which is why she’s still up on the murder board, despite my bias.”

“Professional journalism at its finest Bets.” He joked.

Ethel Muggs still lived in town, had moved briefly out of Riverdale for college before returning to the safety of the home she’d always known, the lawns and the picket fences, a place that at least gave the allusion of safety, even if it was never very good at keeping its promises. And the small house she rented, with the money she earned working at the local elementary school, was just two blocks over from the Keller residence, so it didn’t take long until the two sleuths were pulling into her driveway.

They were both surprised to see, as Jughead’s car slowed, the figure of a woman, sat forlornly on the curb, clutching a cardboard box.

“Ethel?” Betty was out of the car instantly, approaching the other girl as if preparing to coax a flighty animal back into its cage.

“That was quick.” The redhead said, the same hollow tone to her voice that they recognised from their recent interactions.

“We were just around corner at Kevin’s.” Betty took the space next to her, the cold of the sidewalk seeping into her jeans almost immediately.

“I hope I didn’t interrupt anything.”

“No. Of course not. This is more important.” Betty said,

At almost the exact same time Jughead took the seat on the other side of the girl, saying, “It was a nightmare. You rescued us.”

The blond, correctly, ignored his snark. “What happened? Did you think of something that might be helpful, or did you just need to talk?” She looked at the box in the Ethel’s hands, politely waiting, at least for now, until she brought it up herself.

“Dilly’s Mom is in town.” She said.
“Mrs Doiley?” Jughead asked.

“Yes. She lives just over the river in Greendale now.” Ethel nodded, looking at some spot far away, a memory in the distance. “She came by about an hour ago.”

“Do you think that-“ Betty tried.

“She won’t talk to you guys.” She shook her head. “I asked her already.”

Jughead kicked a rock in slight frustration, but said nothing, while Betty spoke. “Thank you for trying.” She said. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“You’re going to find out who killed Dilton right?” Ethel turned her head sharply to look at her, then at Jughead, eyes burning fiercely.

“We’ll try.” Jughead said.

“Yes.” Betty nodded determinedly. “What he said.”

“Then I had to ask her, but she just, she won’t do it.” She said. “She thinks you’re just kids, but she did give me this.” She thrust out the box towards Betty. “It’s some of the things Dilton had left with her for safe keeping. The Sheriff has already looked through them, but he couldn’t find anything, so she said I could have them. But, but I think you should take them for now. Maybe you’ll be able to find something that he couldn’t.”

The pair exchange glances, before Betty took the box, cradling it gingerly, like it was filled with fragile, precious things, which – at least to the girl who’d given it to them – it probably was. “Thank you Ethel. This is incredibly helpful.”

“We’ll be careful.” Jughead nodded.

“And when we’ve figured it out, we’ll give it straight back.”

Ethel just nodded, seemingly done with conversation, tired after all that effort of keeping herself together, she brushed off her skirt, stood up, and turned to go back into the house, leaving Betty and Jughead to watch her retreat.

They drove home in near silence, the buzzing of the radio the only noise, the two of them lost in their thoughts, of the case, of Ethel, of each other. The cardboard box that had been entrusted to them carefully stowed away in the trunk.

There had been no discussion of where they were heading, but it had just felt natural to turn around and head back to Jughead’s, the thought of what was inside the box was pressing down on the both of them.

When they reached the house, Betty carried it in gently, clutching it with both arms to her chest as Jughead fiddled with the door, only letting it go when she deposited it, carefully, on the living room table.

“One second.” Jughead said, returning a moment later with a box of surgical gloves, shrugging as he passed them to her. “Just in case we find something and it needs to be fingerprinted again.”

Betty seemed both impressed and amused, reaching to pull out a pair of gloves for herself. “Should I ask why you have these?
“Best not.” He replied. “I don’t want you charged as an accessory.”

She gave him an amused smile, before turning her attention back to the box in front of her. They worked together for the next hour, a blanket of comfortable silence washed over them, punctuated by small remarks about the items they found, about what certain things might signify, until they reached the bare bottom of the container.

It was rather depressing, to see what a life boiled down to, to what he’d thought was worth hiding away, and both Betty and Jughead couldn’t stop themselves from wondering what their own lives would look like, collected into a box to be rummaged through by foreign hands, and then left, forever, to collect dust.

Altogether, the box contained not much of significance. There was a survivalist guide book, clearly well thumbed through and at least a few years old, a paperback science fiction novel, the bookmark from the national park he worked at positioned about three quarters of the way through, a laptop and phone charger, but no electronic devices, one wallet, that seemed empty apart from a receipt for one diet coke at a gas station, a wooden box, that contained a variety of magazine clippings about the next release in an upcoming game saga that he was a huge fan of, a plain jacket, and a notepad, empty apart from the last page, where a scrap of paper had been torn out.

“This is what he chose to save.” Jughead said, shaking his head. “These are all the things he didn’t want to risk losing.”

“Why wasn’t he keeping this stuff at the Inn? Do you think he always did that, leaving things with people for safe keeping, or did he really believe he was in danger?” Betty asked, though she was speaking more to herself than to him. “He did try to buy a gun.”

He shook his head again. “I don’t know. He was so paranoid, things beyond the realm of most peoples’ behaviour seemed like normal actions for him.” Jughead picked up the novel, flicking through the pages to see if there was anything underlined, some hidden clue they could decipher, but there was nothing.

“It’s the scrap of paper we need.” Betty said, reaching for the notebook. “He could’ve have had it on him when he died…” She trailed off.

“Or, it could hiding with the rest of this stuff.” He finished for her.

Betty scrunched her face up in thought, reaching for the wallet, searching with her fingertips for any rips, any holes, and her eyes grew wide when she poked a finger through the lining and felt a rolled up piece of paper, she pulled it up with a triumphant flourish.

“I swear, most cold cases would be solved if people just thought to check the lining.” Jughead muttered.

She unfurled the paper carefully, it was only small, but written across it in a cramped, slightly messy, scrawl, were an address and a name.

2141 Menhaden Road.

Mandy.

Menhaden Road was a small little suburban stretch of housing that lay just on the outskirts of Riverdale, and as such, Betty and Jughead had never really ventured towards it. It lay close to
Sweetwater River, many of the properties garden’s backing up onto the wilderness that could be found there, and their main defining features were the lawns that were generally much bigger than the neat, compact houses themselves.

As their car turned the corner, the two journalists buzzed with excitement, their minds alight with the possibility that this – this note they’d found hidden away – might crack their entire case open, send everyone home to sleep soundly with a murderer finally caught, or at least a plausible motive developed, and the answer to the question about the address became immediately clear when they rocked up onto its doorstep.

Outside the property they were looking for, was a huge, plastic sign, declaring it for sale.

The two of them stared at it for a beat, before a sharp rap was issued against the driver side window, making them jump. Stood, smiling way too broadly at them, was a dark haired woman in a cheap, red suit. Jughead, reluctantly, rolled down his window. But Betty leaned forward with a start, when she noticed the little golden nametag on the starched jacked, declaring the stranger to be Mandy Parker.

“Hello!” She said, extremely brightly, mouth opening to reveal lipstick tinged teeth. “You must be here for the open house.” Before either of them could reply, her lips had downturned, her whole face transforming into an exaggerated frown. “But I’m afraid you just missed it, it ended 30 minutes ago.”

They exchanged a quick look.

“Actually.” Betty said, leaning unconsciously towards the clue. “We aren’t interested in buying the house.”

“Oh.” The woman replied, looking a little crestfallen.

“But.” The blond continued hurriedly. “We were wondering if someone we know had made an offer.”

“Or you gave him a tour.” Jughead chipped in.

“Ooh.” Mandy, the realtor, bit her lip, clearly split between excitement and anxiety. “I’m not sure if I’m really meant to tell you that.”

“We’re journalists.” Betty tried. “And you’re information could be valuable to our case.”

The other woman seemed slightly swayed, but not fully, still balancing on the edge of a decision.

“How about I show you a picture?” She offered, in remarkably calming tones. “And then we’ll ask a few questions, you can just nod yes or shake your head no?”

“I guess-” Mandy said. “I guess that would be okay.”

“Thank you.” She said, reaching for her phone and flipping through it, until she stopped on an image of Dilton Doiley, leaning across Jughead, she showed the woman her screen. “Do you recognise this man?”

“Yes!” The woman said enthusiastically, before seeming to remember her promise and becoming much more serious, nodding her head gravely.

“Did you show him around the house?” Jughead asked, and again she nodded.
“Did he put in an offer?” Betty tried, and was greeted with a hesitant shake of the head. “Did it seem like he was going to put in an offer?” She said, and this time the woman nodded in confirmation.

“But he didn’t?”

Mandy looked around, as if expecting some executive to pop out of the bushes and catch her, before she leaned forward so that her head was almost sticking through the open car window. “Truth is, he did seem like he was going to put in an offer, me and my client got very excited, he said he’d get back to us within a few days but he never did.” She shrugged. “We just assumed he changed his mind.”

“When was it that you saw him?” Betty asked.

“I don’t know.” The realtor said. “I think- I think it was the last open house, around five days ago?”

“Who is your client?” Jughead asked.

The two of them seemed intrigued by this knowledge, and Betty was already writing it down in the notebook she’d pulled out from the depths of her purse.

“It feels weird to tell you when you’re not interested in the house.” Mandy said. “I will say that it’s a nice retired couple, they’re moving out to Florida.

“Thank you.” He said to the woman. “You’ve been very helpful.”

Mandy stood up, so she was no longer leaning so heavily into the car. “I hope everything is okay.”

“Me too.” Jughead muttered.

The woman seemed confused by that statement, and grateful that the conversation was over, with one last cheery wave, Mandy retreated, the sound of her heels clacking against the sidewalk reverberating until she got into her own car and drove away.

But her retreat did more than just rid them of her presence, as her car pulled away from its parking space, it revealed a much smaller car, which – in all their conversing and trying to find the correct address – the two sleuths had missed.

“Is that-“ Betty began.

“A blue mini.” Jughead finished.

Without discussing it, the two of them were unbuckling their belts and opening their doors, practically sprinting to the familiar car and the unknown assailant that could be hiding in it. They were well aware that this could be a coincidence, that there were probably a few dozen people in Riverdale that drove similar things, but in both their guts there was a tug, a thought, that this was the same car they’d seen speeding away from Segarini’s Pizza just a few days before.

Jughead tapped rapidly against the window, Betty right behind him, his expression crumbling into confusion when the girl in the driver’s seat turned her head towards him. “Tomoko?” He asked.

The girl seemed unreasonably excited by his sudden appearance, scrambling to switch off her music and wind down her window. “Omg, Jughead! You remembered my name?”

“Tomoko.” He repeated, impatiently. “What are you doing here?”

“Ummmm.” The teen held the syllable, looking down in her lap and then back at them, shrugging with a grin. “Just hanging.”
Jughead rolled his eyes. “Were you, by chance, ‘just hanging’ outside Segarini’s Pizza the other day?”

“Maybe.” She half-sang.

“Hey, Tomoko?” Betty stepped closer, and Jughead gladly moved aside to let her peer into the car’s messy interior. “Are you following us?”

“No.” The younger girl huffed, crossing her arms, then, relenting, a small sheepish grin flickering on her face. “Okay. So I followed you today, just once, and only like- a block.”

“Is this about the Doiley case?” She asked, trying her best to be polite and kind.

“Yes.” Tomoko’s smile grew even wider, as she scrabbled with all the debris filing her passenger seat, finally emerging clutching a battered notebook. “I’ve been making notes, googling things, trying to talk to people. I really think the Blue and Gold is gonna blow this whole thing wide open.”

“You cannot be following us.” Jughead said, voice tinged with annoyance.

“Why?” She retorted, not seeming phased by his apparent disproval. “Isn’t that what you would’ve done?”

“That was different.” He grumbled. “We had stakes in that case, and- and- we were the only ones paying any attention. Things have changed.”

Tomoko shook her head. “Not that much. Anyway, I’m only following the examples you two set.” She reached, once again, onto the other seat, this time producing a very well-read copy of Jughead’s book. “This reminds me, will you sign it?”

“No.” He said.

“Another time.” Betty promised.

“I get it. I get it.” He said. “I’m all about free speech, and letting the underdog make a go at solving the case, but it’s dangerous. You don’t seem like you know that.”

“Duh.” She drawled. “I’m not like, a total doofus.”


“Yeah. Yeah.” Tomoko replied, tossing her books back where she found them. “I won’t. Probably.”

“Have you discovered anything we might need to know?” Betty asked, figuring it was worth a shot, remembering herself at that age, how she’d asked the tough questions and – surprisingly – been given the answers.

“Um.” The teen looked down at her lap, looking a touch embarrassed. “Not yet. But like I’m probably 70% there in getting something useful.

“Great.” Jughead said. “We’ll be in touch if we need help.”

The girl perked up at that, seemingly taking his word on face value. “Thank you so much! I’m looking into things every day.”

Jughead was already gone, stalking back to their car, and Betty left with a little wave, hurrying to catch up with him.
“You okay?” She laughed, as she arrived at his heels. “I’m beginning to think you don’t like having fans.”

“Just for this, we’re adding her to our suspect list.” He said, wrenching his car door open, and sliding inside.

The dinner party at Kevin’s had wound down almost immediately after Betty and Jughead had made their abrupt exit, Veronica made a valiant effort to keep conversation up over her slice of pie, but with Ravi being awkward, Kevin a little frantic, and Archie seemingly sulking, it didn’t do much good. As a result, it didn’t take long until everyone had made their excuses, and Veronica left for her mother’s apartment, laden with spare pie and promises to meet up before the couple skipped town for good, dreaming of the bubble bath that awaited her.

There was a small fear brewing in her stomach, nagging her the whole ride back to her home, that everything was just on the brink of collapse. It seemed like there were signs pointing to this everywhere, Archie’s strange silence, Betty’s tears, Kevin and Ravi leaving town before the events were up, but then she shook herself. Veronica was not the type of person to brood, to sit and stew of hypotheticals, she was a woman of action, not of superstition, and she wasn’t about to let herself sink into some stupor. Instead, she let herself sink into the warm waters of her claw foot bathtub, candles lit, drifting away into an attempt at relaxation.

Afterwards, she crawled into the thick covers of her bed, thinking about how strange it was to be in her home as an adult, without her mother – who was away on some kind of business retreat – how it made her feel both supremely young, and as if she’d grown too old without noticing it. She was content to waste away for the rest of the day, and for most of what was left of the afternoon she did just that, lying around and watching old re-runs of shows she only half-enjoyed, until, as the light outside her windows began to dim, her phone binged with a text message.

Cheryl Bombshell

You didn’t give me a fake number did you Lodge?

Veronica

You know I wouldn’t do that Cheryl.

Cheryl Bombshell.

Just making sure, we can’t all be as trusting as St Veronica.

What are you doing tonight?

Veronica

Nothing. It’s a quiet night in I guess.

Cheryl Bombshell

My night is looking like a character’s played by Emma Stone who makes being friendless look chic.

But it’s not funny, and not cute.

It’s depressing.
Veronica

Is this you asking if I want to do something?

Cheryl Bombshell

No.

This is me telling you we should do something and practically begging for you to invite me over.

Don’t make this more embarrassing than it needs to be Blair.

Veronica

One day I’m going to get tired of you forgetting that we’re friends.

But today is not that day.

Yes. Of course you can come over.

Girls night? I’m already halfway through this wine and I know there’s ice cream in my freezer.

Cheryl Bombshell.

You know when emo people like Jughead say they hate everyone and don’t mean it?

I hate everyone. But you’re climbing in my estimations.

Thank you. I’ll be there in ten.

Veronica stood up and stretched, pushing away the thick covers she’d been lounging under, and moving to examine herself in the mirror. Her lithe body was covered with a green silk shorts and a matching camisole, typical sleep attire for her in the summer, but something about the cut of it, the way the fabric moved with her body, was a little too suggestive. That wasn’t exactly the mood she was going for, or that she thought Cheryl was going for, unless it was, she couldn’t be sure.

She was so used to being sure of herself, of every action she took, of taking what she wanted and not being quiet about it, but with Cheryl it felt different, she cared about Cheryl, she saw through the fierce exterior to some inner softness, a girl tired of being worn down by the world around her. She didn’t want to risk cracking this tentative friendship with Cheryl by acting on her libido, but even so, it felt ridiculous to cover up, she was comfortable dressed like this in the summer heat of the evening, and if it was anyone else coming for an night in, Betty or Kevin, she wouldn’t have thought twice about it. Settling on a compromise, she pulled on a robe, just in time to hear a knock at the door.

Cheryl was stood waiting politely on the doorstep, her red hair, though not as long as it was in high school, was still a formidable sight, thick waves of it framed her face, part of it pulled upwards into a ponytail at the crown of her head. She was wearing an old, snug Riverdale High t-shirt, cropped so a slip of skin at her waist was in sight, something that Veronica had to force her eyes to skim over, and a pair of tight workout leggings finished off the ensemble. She looked tired, but Veronica noticed a little brightness in her pale face when their eyes met.
“Well, are you going to let me in?” Cheryl asked.

“I don’t know.” She shot back playfully. “Are you going to play nice?”

Cheryl cocked her chin up, eyeing her defiantly. “Would you want me to?”

Veronica pretend to think about it for a second, before stepping back and allowing the her to enter the apartment, watching as she stalked in with such confidence, as if she owned the place, as if this was now as much her home as it was Veronica’s. “I wouldn’t want you to go against the laws of the universe.” She said. “I want you to be yourself, bitchiness included.”

“No one wants me to be myself.” The redhead scoffed, placing the tote bag she’d been hauling around on the kitchen counter, moving to examine the fridge.

“I do.”

Cheryl froze, almost imperceptibly, but Veronica noticed, she kept her head turned to the contents of the fridge, hiding any emotions that may have flitted across her face. “You might just be the exception.” She straightened up, seeming to collect herself, shutting the door behind her and turning to the other woman. “Where’s the rest of the family? Your mother not here to disapprove of my presence?”

“My mom isn’t allowed to approve or disapprove of anyone I know.” Veronica replied. “And she’s away on some business trip. It’s just us.”

“Hmm” She hummed. “And what did you have in mind to entertain me Veruca?”

“My wild evening was about to consist of leftover Chinese food, wine, and some Netflix browsing.” She admitted. “I know, not quite as exciting as a night at Chateau Marmont, but it’s the best Riverdale has to offer.”

“Actually, that sounds… nice.” Cheryl admitted, a surprisingly tender smile on her face.

“Great.” Veronica said, returning the smile. “But um, it’ll have to be in my bedroom. That’s the only television that works, my mom is hopeless at remembering to fix the things she breaks.”

Cheryl looked as if she was going to make some snarky comment, some barb or tease, but the moment passed and instead she shrugged. “That’s fine. What do you want me to carry?”

A moment later, the two girls were arranged comfortably on Veronica’s large, king-sized bed, two wine glasses and a half-full bottle on the bedside table, and plates of cold noodles and reheated egg rolls balanced between them.

“This is how the peasants live huh?” Cheryl asked, sounding vaguely impressed rather than disdainful.

“I wouldn’t know.” She said, pouring her a glass and passing it over. “But this is how Veronica Lodge lives.”

Cheryl took a sip, put the glass down, and then took a tentative bite of the egg roll, chewing it, then putting the rest down. “Not bad for something from this hick town. We never got takeout when I lived here, Mom said it was beneath us.”

“Mr Chows is the best.” Veronica replied. “Their beef and broccoli has me on my knees every time. Not everything has to be from a five star restaurant.”
“But it’s nice when it is.” She pointed out.

“Yes.” Veronica laughed. “It is.” She took a sip of her drink, before turning her attention towards the television screen, where the Netflix logo hovered. “What do you want to watch? My vote is for a girly classic, since this is beginning to feel like every sleepover I ever had in high school.”

“I never had sleepovers like that.” Cheryl said.

“Huh?” Veronica turned her head towards her. “Not with Tina and Ginger?”

“No.” She shook her head. “People weren’t always welcome at Thornhill, and Tina and Ginger were more minion than friend. There was that time with you, but that was, that was something else.”

“Then we have to fix that.” Veronica said softly. “How does watching my favorite 90s classic sound?”

“Do not tell me it’s Romeo and Juliet.” Cheryl said. “I’d rather not watch two dumb kids commit suicide right now.”

“No. Clueless!” She replied. “The outfits alone make it an instant classic. Plus, Alicia Silverstone is hot. And Paul Rudd, but I imagine you’re less interested in that.”

“Fine.” She sighed, but it was clearly put on. “I guess I’ll suffer through some heteronormativity for you Lodge.”

“If you want,” Veronica said. “We can pause the film before the end and pretend she dates the new girl instead.”

“That might make it… tolerable.” She replied, but that was smile creeping its way onto her lips. “But I wouldn’t want to deprive you of your man candy.”

“I think I’ll survive.” The dark haired girl said, flicking through the options until she reached the movie, clicking it on with a resounding flourish.

They ploughed through the leftovers as they watched it – and the rest of the opened bottle of wine – making snarky comments to each other about the characters, drooling over Cher and her wardrobe, and, contrary to what had been promised, watching it through until the end.

“I’ll admit it.” Cheryl declared. “The film wasn’t awful.”

“Are you ready to admit that I have good taste?” She leant over and poked Cheryl’s thigh teasingly.

“Not quite Cordelia.” She drawled. “Maybe you’ll just have to prove it to me some more.”

“Fine.” Veronica stood up, turning away to pick up the empty plates on the bedside table, thus missing the way Cheryl’s eyes traced their way up her long, exposed legs. “But first, I’m making popcorn.”

It wasn’t long before Veronica was stalking back in, bearing a bowl laden with hot, buttery popcorn, and another bottle of wine for them share.

“Are you trying to get me drunk Lodge?” Cheryl asked, taking the bowl from her, placing it delicately on the bed between them.

“Please,” She scoffed. “I don’t need to get anyone drunk.”
“You’re probably right.” The redhead shrugged, sending a wave of hair rippling mesmerizingly down her back, she leant forward so she didn’t have to look at the Veronica, grabbing a handful of popcorn.

“What next?” Veronica said, as she came to her side of the bed, settling into the cushions, unintentionally shifting closer. The bed was big enough that they could’ve slept there all night without touching, but there was the excuse of sharing food, and something else, some sheer magnetism that seemed to draw them together in the centre of the mattress.

“Hmm, I’ll think I’ll let you decide, since you’re the expert on sleepovers.” Cheryl replied.

“Generous of you.” She commented, flicking through the options. “How do you feel about cute girls smashing the patriarchy?”

“They’re exactly my type.”

“Good.” Veronica nodded, as she clicked on the movie, and the opening scene of Legally Blonde began.

This movie played out much the same as the last, complete with sarcastic commentary, lusting over outfits and Reese Witherspoon, drinking wine and chomping on handfuls of popcorn, and Veronica was realising just how much fun hanging out with Cheryl was. It dawned on her that this was the most fun she’d had for a long time, definitely since she’d arrived back in Riverdale, with Betty off sleuthing or coming to her in tears, she hadn’t had much time to just relax, to laugh, everything was always so complicated, but this, sat with Cheryl, was just nice. Really nice.

“Veronica?” Cheryl said, after a lull in conversation, the popcorn gone, but the movie still playing.

“How?” She turned towards her distractedly, but stopping at the expression she found there. She’d never seen such an open expression on Cheryl’s face. She looked, younger, kinder, her pale skin almost luminous, but fragile too. It made Veronica want to hold her, to tell her everything was going to be okay.

“Thank you.” Cheryl said, very simply. “For being so nice to me.”

“Cheryl-” She tried, but was interrupted.

“I don’t mean just now.” The redhead said. “I mean always. Even when I was a bitch to you, to your friends, you were nice, you were kind. You saved my life.”

“Archie saved your life.” Veronica said gently, the quiet sounds of the movie still playing in the background.

“He did.” Cheryl agreed. “But you saved it afterwards, again and again, by helping me, by not hating me.”

“I’ve never hated you Cheryl.” She said truthfully. “Not even a little bit.”

“Veronica.” She repeated, her eyes flicking down unconsciously to the Cheryl’s lips. It was then that they both noticed how close they’d drifted, close enough that if they lay down they could probably share the same pillow.

“Call me Ronnie.” She said instinctively, without thinking, because Cheryl rarely called her that, only a handful of times, in confrontation, or quiet moments, and she was realising just how much she liked the sound of it on her lips.
“Ronnie.” Cheryl practically sighed, shifting forward to tuck a strand of dark hair behind her ear. She leant in slowly, giving her time to react, but when Veronica didn’t pull away, she placed a gentle kiss to her lips.

Veronica’s first kiss with Cheryl went very differently from how she might’ve imagined it. She’d though that it would be all rough, long, blood-red fingernails scratching, teeth and tongue, fire and ice, but it wasn’t like that at all. It was surprisingly tender, and tasted sweet, it sent shivers all down her spine, from the top of her head to the tips of her toes, she lit up.

After a moment, she pulled back, and it was her turn to play with Cheryl’s hair, fingers carding through her thick red locks. “Cheryl,” Veronica said, startled at the vulnerable expression in the redhead’s eyes, so different from the cloud that normally covered them. “What are we doing?”

“I don’t know.” She breathed out.

“You aren’t doing this just to thank me are you? Or because you feel like you have to?” She asked, suddenly worried.

“No.” Cheryl scowled, and then her face softened, returning back to a face without facade, an indication that she was telling the truth. “I’ve wanted to kiss you since high school.”

“Me too.” Veronica admitted, but when Cheryl inclined her head towards her again, she leant back, just a little. A heart-breaking flash of upset crossed the other girl’s face, and she hastened to speak. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Ronnie,” Cheryl said, and the use of the nickname rendered her momentarily unable to think. “I don’t care.”

“I care.” She insisted, and she was glad to see her soften.

“You won’t hurt me.” Cheryl replied. “I promise.”

“I can’t promise you anything.”

“That doesn’t matter.” She said, shaking her head. “I just want to kiss you.”

“I want to kiss you too.” Veronica said.

“Then what’s the problem?” Cheryl replied. “Let’s have fun while we’re in Riverdale.” She was even closer to Veronica now, whispering in her ear, one cold hand toying with the end of her silk camisole.

Veronica thought about how this was almost inevitable, with the way they’d been looking at each other, dancing around their flirting, and how much she wanted it, wanted her, and if Cheryl wanted it just as badly, what was the harm in giving in?

“Yes.” She sighed “Let’s have fun.”

Cheryl took that as her cue to slip her hand beneath her top, and press another kiss against her lips.

()
question a second later, was Dilton Doiley returning to Riverdale?

True to Betty’s word, she cooked them dinner, stopping at the Grocery store to pick up some simple ingredients, and presenting Jughead just 30 minutes later with a quick chicken stir fry. They sat eating it in the living room, bowls balanced in their lap as they took turns to stare frustratingly at the growing pile of evidence, suspects, and unanswered questions.

“Do you think Ethel knew he was coming back?” Betty asked, spearing a piece of broccoli.

Jughead shook his head. “She didn’t act like she did.”

“That could’ve been what he was going to tell her.” She said thoughtfully, after she’d swallowed her mouthful of food. “He was moving back and he wanted to try again?”

“With an old high school sweetheart he hasn’t seen in a decade?”

“Never underestimate the power of first love.” She said, which made him shut up and turn his face away from her, shoving some food in his mouth as an excuse to stay quiet. And then she sighed, placing her near empty bowl on the coffee table, leaning back just slightly, untwisting her leg from where they’d been crossed, and shutting her eyes.

Jughead placed his bowl down next to hers, his completely empty, watching her carefully. She opened her eyes and caught his gaze. “What?” She asked, a cloud of self-conscious coming to momentarily hover over her.

“Are you okay?” He asked. “You seem tired.”

“I am tired.” She admitted, stretching her legs so he could feel the toes of her socked foot brush against his thigh.

“If it’s any consolation, your cooking was pretty good.” He tried, and she laughed, a little snort of amusement. “Not as good as Pop’s, but I wasn’t asking for a miracle.”

“Thanks.” She replied, eyes flicking open lazily.

“If you wanted to take a break, you know I wouldn’t think any less of you as a journalist Bets.” Jughead said, watching as she reached down the side of the couch for her laptop, hauling it up onto her lap.

“Yes. Break.” She said. “We can take a break, find something for us to watch on tv or something, I just want to look at one thing.” Her eyes became more focused as she looked at the screen, so Jughead turned to the television with a sigh, grabbing the remote and switching it on, flicking absentmindedly through the channels, occasionally glancing over at the Betty’s expression, illuminated by the artificial glow of her screen.

“You’re missing out on my profoundly insightful commentary.” He said dryly, after fifteen minutes had passed, gesturing to the TV, where he’d landed on some cooking channel.

“Hmm.” Betty replied, distractedly.

“Betty,” He paused the TV, leaning in to look closely at her, eyeing the faint redness on her cheeks. “Are you blushing? What are you reading?”

“Nothing.” She said, too quickly, lowering the lid of her laptop, looking over the top of it with a suspiciously guilty look on her face.
“Somehow I doubt that.”

Betty looked down, somehow unable to look him in the eye, flush growing deeper. “If I tell you, you have to promise not to laugh?”

“I promise nothing.” He replied. “But I probably won’t laugh.”

“I just—” She sat up slightly, so no part of their bodies were touching. “I just decided to look up some of those forums Tomoko mentioned.”

“The Bloomers?” Jughead asked, genuine surprising coloring his tone.

“Um, yes.”

“Then why are you embarrassed?” He asked, brow crumpled. “Why would I laugh? It might be helpful to the case, if you can figure out which user is Tomoko.”

“I know. It’s just,” She faltered again. “There’s a lot of stuff about us.”

It took him a second to understand what she meant, but the moment he did her reactions suddenly made perfect sense to him, and he found himself looking away from her, staring somewhat stoically off at a spot directly in front of him. “Do I even want to know?” He muttered.

“Probably not.” She laughed nervously, then added, a moment later, voice still slightly shaky, “They call us Bughead.”

He wrinkled his nose. “That’s weird as hell, it sounds like some kind of genetic disease, or new found deadly insect.”

“They’re very enthusiastic.” Betty tried to brighten her voice. “It’s almost sweet.”

“I think the key word is almost.” He replied, feeling intensely uncomfortable, the attention he sometimes received was bad enough, but the idea that it was aimed towards a relationship even he himself couldn’t figure out, that was excruciating.

“It’s just funny- you know.” She continued on, voice gaining an octave. “All these strangers on the internet, spending all day thinking about us, together, it’s just-“ Her voice broke into an awkward mix between a laugh and a splutter

“I get it.” Jughead said shortly. “Us. It’s a ridiculous concept.”

“No, Jug-“She sensed something in his tone, leaning towards him, almost as if she was about to touch him, but, at the last minute, thought better of it, letting her hands drop down back to her side. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

Suddenly, Jughead felt overwhelmingly tired, tired of lying to himself, and to Betty, to nearly everyone around him, for a decade. He leant back, shutting his eyes, hands involuntarily clenched into fists against his jeans. “Betty,” He let himself glance at her, just for a second, any longer and the words would have gotten stuck in his throat. “Aren’t you curious about why I kissed you?”

“I asked you to, for the case.”

“No.” He shook his head. “I mean, all those years ago, before you left for college.”

“We talked about what happened then, it’s okay, I thought, we were okay?” Betty said, her words catching. “That we were okay with it all?”
“We are. But- didn’t you?”

“Yes Juggy, fine.” She admitted, hands fluttering anxiously in her lap. “I did. I wondered about it all the time. How could I not? But then, then you stopped returning my texts, and I thought that it was just- emotions running high. It was a strange time, everyone was leaving, and--“

“I liked you in High School.” He said finally, turning to face her, their eyes locking. “I really, really liked you.”

There was a very long pause where Betty did nothing but blink her large eyes at him, unable to help to the shocked expression that slackened her features, and then she seemed to recover, speaking softly into the silence. “I liked you too.”

“No.” Jughead said, shaking his head. “I mean more than as friends, I mean in the way that you liked Archie.”

“I know.” She replied, voice steady. “I liked you too.”

“You-“ He stuttered, unable to believe what he was hearing, sure that she was just saying this to placate him, to save him the humiliation. “You did?”

“Yes.” Betty admitted, eyes flitting down and them back to his again. And he could see in them, that she was telling the truth, and all of sudden their entire history was changing before his eyes, and he was inventing a narrative that could’ve been, if he hadn’t been a coward. “I never knew it at the time.” She continued. “I was so caught up with Polly, and Jason, that I didn’t have time to think about my feelings changing, and then when that was over, well, Archie was there, and I always thought he was the guy I was going to end up with, so I did.” She shrugged. “And then when he wasn’t and he ended up with Veronica, I just didn’t stop to examine my feelings, that wasn’t something I was taught to do. And either way- I thought you wouldn’t be interested.”

“I was. I would’ve been..” He stuttered out, tripping over his words. “I just – I wouldn’t have done that to Archie. And, I didn’t think-“ He paused for a moment, trying again, voice carefully neutral, gaze trained at some patch on the sofa, because looking at her eyes became too much. “I didn’t know you felt that way.”

“I did.” She said, voice gentle, looking at him processing this, feeling a shiver of something she couldn’t define pass through her body. It seemed like she was about to say something more, her mouth open, but then a loud buzzing sound erupted from the table, and they both turned to look at the mobile phone, lighting up with the words, Mama Cooper.

They were silent at first, both of them staring at the phone, and then it was as if the relentless ringing sent a jolt to their systems. “I should-“ Betty reached for it.

“Right. Yeah.” Jughead said briskly, glancing at her. “Go talk to your Mom.”

“Hey Mom.” She picked the phone up with a sigh, walking out of the lounge and into the kitchen to achieve some semblance of privacy, of distance, all the while cursing Alice Cooper’s impeccably bad timing. The older woman kept her on the phone for longer than she would like, each minute that passed she looked at the door wondering when she could escape, listening to her mother’s worries and concerns, her offer to drive down to Riverdale – which was met with a resounding no thank you – and her complainants about Betty’s father, who wanted Polly and the Twins to spend Christmas at his house for the first time since their divorce. Eventually, about twenty minutes after she’d first picked up, she was saying goodbye and wishing her mother love, preparing to return to whatever she’d walked away from.
“Hey.” Betty opened the door quietly, noting that Jughead was still sat where she’d left him, now feigning interest in some book, lounging stiffly on the couch.

“Hey.” He startled, though really he’d been waiting for her to walk in. “How was your Mom?”

“Oh, fine.” She said, trying to sound breezy, but still feeling stuck, waiting awkwardly in the doorway. “She was just checking up on me, she’s been following the news online.”

“Bet she wishes she still wrote for the paper here.” Jughead said, glancing at her then back down again, as if she was the sun, something you couldn’t keep your eyes on too long, for fear of getting burnt.

“Probably. I’m sure she’ll have plenty of suggestions when I’ve written my article.” Betty said, feeling her voice coming out all wrong, stiff, but being unable to stop it. She could hardly believe that before she’d left that room they’d be talking so truthfully, so intimately, because the moment now felt so out of reach it was as if it had never happened. She rubbed a hand against her face, both in frustration and exhaustion, unable to hold back a weary yawn.

He finally looked up at her, stoic gaze breaking into a display of tenderness that made her heart lurch. “You’re tired.” Jughead said. “You should try to get some sleep.”

She held his gaze for a second, before sighing, accepting defeat, though she wasn’t sure who the real victor was. “You’re right.” She said. “And so should you.”

He stood up, limbs cracking, but made no move towards where she stood at the threshold of the room. “I will.” He said, quietly.

“Okay.” Betty replied, shifting unsurely. “I- Sleep tight Juggy.” She eventually settled on, and he watched as she turned in the direction of the stairs, leaving him alone in the dim light of the living room.

Chapter End Notes

Ahhhh! Okay, haha, I hope you liked it?? Thanks again for getting through this monstrosity, let me know in the comments what you thought if you want to make my day.

Also, the scene where Betty looks at the bughead forum was inspired by heatherkw and jandjsalmon's requests, so shout out to them!! And i saw that jandjsalmon rec'ed me on a tumblr slow burn bughead list so I wanted to say a big thank you!!
Never Been Missed

Chapter Summary

He looked at her for a beat, cocking his head to the side, finally he spoke. “Do you ever wonder how you got to be so smart?”

Betty flushed. “Um, an overbearing mother and an Adderall prescription?”

“No.” He shook his head. “I think you’re just a natural born genius, the rest of us must look so small to you.”

Chapter Notes

next instalment is here! As always, only I proof read this, so I apologise for any mistakes. Also, I'm changing the rating from T to M, mainly for future chapters and also just to be on the safe side? It's never gonna get explicit, but there'll be suggestions of/the lead up to sex etc. Okay, hope you enjoy another ridiculously long one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Jughead.” Betty called out softly, peering round his bedroom door to find him sprawled across the bed. Sleepily he lifted his face just slightly off the pillow, locking eyes with her and, in his half-awake brain, he wondered if he was still dreaming. “Are you awake?”

“No.” He muttered, but even as he protested, he sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. The t-shirt he’d worn to bed was exposed as the covers slipped down, it was on over-washed and threadbare navy blue cotton one, and Betty blushed because her first thought was how soft it looked, how nice it might feel to press her face against his chest.

“C’mon.” She laughed, shaking her head free from that direction of thoughts. “I made coffee.”

“Only for you Cooper.” He grumbled, shifting so his legs were positioned at the side of the bed, standing up with a groan. “Only for you.”

“You woke me up yesterday.” She pointed out, watching him stretch.

“Yeah. Not at the ass-crack of dawn.”

“It’s 7:30.” She responded. “It’s not that early.”

“Early enough.” Jughead complained, finally fully awake, he turned to look at Betty, and immediately felt jittery. He hadn’t slept much, hence all the grumbling, but had instead replayed what she’d said to him the night before over and over, like a lovesick teen, which he, currently, quite closely resembled. He spent a large portion of the twilight hours cursing his younger self for not kissing her in her bedroom, the time he almost had, knowing that she would’ve, probably, kissed him back, his life could have been entirely different, maybe they’d still be together, or maybe it would’ve
ended in flames, and this reality was the better version. But mostly, mostly he thought about what it meant now, now that he knew – once upon a time – she’d liked him back. His mind wanted to race to the present, to think about it now, but there hadn’t been any indication from her that last night they’d been discussing anything but the past, but apparently his body hadn’t got the memo, because his heart raced just seeing her in his bedroom.

The thing was that, despite the fact that she’d been living in his house for the past few days, this was the first time she’d really been in his room. She peeked in when he was collecting some clothes for her to wear, waiting in the doorway politely, too tired to really look around, but she hadn’t been in like this, and both of them were realising it at the same time. There was something about seeing her standing in his bedroom, examining his framed, vintage film posters, the clothes he’d left scattered on the floor, all the things that made this room his and not just anyone’s, that left him feeling vulnerable and exposed.

Betty was curious, waiting for him to get up, she wandered further into the room unconsciously, drawn to the things she was seeing, wanting to know more about Jughead, over the course of the past few days, she’d forgotten that he was someone she hadn’t known for the better part of the past decade, and that was something she wanted to rectify. She edged closer to the wall nearest to her, it was neatly plastered with a selection of artsy photographs, arranged in four columns, and as she leant in closer she recognised familiar faces. “Did you take these?” She asked.

“Yeah.” He replied warily, watching her nervously, scratching absentmindedly at the back of his neck.

“I remember when you got your camera senior year, but you would never show us any of the photos.” Betty said, voice soft with memory. She noticed a fairly recent picture of Archie, on stage at some gig, the smoke and lights perfectly enveloping him so he looked like he was floating, weightless. There were shots of Jellybean, leaning over the railing of a boat, pink hair so fluorescent it was almost blinding, looking any moment like she might fall over the side into the ocean, but acting as if she wouldn’t have cared one bit. And then leaning even closer, she spotted something else, without thinking she lifted her hand, as if going to touch it, but thinking better at the last moment, left it hovering in the air. “Is that me?” She asked, though it was pointless, it was unmistakably her. She was wearing her old cheerleading uniform, looking so young, clearly in motion, practicing some kind of dance move, the blur of her tight, blond ponytail giving it an almost dreamlike quality.

“Yeah.” Jughead said, and she could sense that he was moving closer to her, until she could feel him stood behind her, just a few inches from her back, peering at his own artwork. “A lot of this is old stuff from high school, most of my new work is on the walls back in San Francisco.” He could see how strange it looked, and he felt small waves of anxiety threaten to crash over him.

But Betty was unfazed, as soon as he’d said that she’d spotted other pics that were obviously leftover from their youth. There was a shot of Archie and Veronica, leaning against the side of Pop’s deep in conversations, bodies lit up with an unearthly neon glow. And even a big group one, of Betty, Archie, Ronnie, and Kevin, lounging around the forest near Sweetwater River, Betty with her hands covering her face, Archie grinning proudly at the camera, Veronica looking coolly into the distance, and Kevin lying down with his eyes shut. She remembered that day, they’d took a picnic there during summer, but it had all ended up as a slight disaster, some forgotten romantic drama had bubbled out, but looking at the picture she didn’t see that, she saw a group of people that looked happy, that looked like they loved each other. “Why aren’t you in any of these?” She asked, glancing back at him, before turning her gaze once more to the photographs.

“I’m more comfortable behind the camera.” He shrugged.
“You shouldn’t be.” She said, so quietly he almost didn’t hear it. Then she noticed a picture, right at the bottom of the display, of a girl she’d never seen before. The woman had thick, burgundy hair, and full bangs, and was smiling up at the camera, the flare of light from the window behind her giving the whole picture a sun-drenched feel. Before she could stop herself, she was pointing at the image and found herself blurting out, “Is that Trula?”

Almost immediately, he was reaching around her, and plucking the photograph from where it lay, whisking it away from her view. Betty felt herself flush with embarrassment, regretting that she’d ever opened her mouth. “We broke up when I was in Chicago.” He said after a moment of awkward silence. “I don’t really come here very often, and when I do I tend not to examine the shit I have plastered to my walls, I must’ve forgot her picture was still up here.”

“Well,” Betty said brightly, turning away from wall so she could properly face him. “They’re really good Juggy, really, really good.”

“Thanks.” Jughead replied, shifting backwards, noticing how close they were standing when she turned to look at him, too close for him to feel comfortable, to trust himself not to do something stupid. Betty smiled up at him, the crumpled one he liked so much, and he had to look away for a second. “Why did you wake me up so early then?” He asked, moving to put the photo in the trashcan by his bed, conscious of her eyes following his actions.

“Oh.” She said, momentarily having forgotten the real reason she’d be in there. “I arranged for us to give a talk at Riverdale High.”

“The school?” He looked back at her over his shoulder, mustering an unimpressed glare. “It’s summer. There is no school.”

“It’s a summer school programme.” Betty replied.

“I think you’re taking this reunion a little too literally. You know we don’t have to go to the actual high school right? I left that place under the impression that I would never have to set foot in its hellish halls again, and I’m at peace with that.”

“You know that the reunion dance is going to be held at the school, so you’d have to go back anyway?”

“Fine. But that’s an hour, why would I want to spend any longer than was necessary?”

“You were the one insisting that Tomoko should be a suspect.” She pointed out, matching his unconvinced air with one of her own, her expressive face outdoing his glare by a wide margin. Most of the time he greatly appreciated the over the top expressions she managed to pull her features into, especially when they were outraged or disgusted and aimed at someone else, but in that particular moment, he wasn’t liking it so much.

Jughead crossed his arms. “I was just putting it out there…” He mumbled, sounding unintentionally childish, like a little boy, in a way that made Betty suddenly grin with exasperated affection. “As a possibility.”

“A possibility huh?” She teased.

“You were the one saying we should consider everyone a suspect, I was just following your lead.” He replied. “And I wasn’t expecting it to lead me straight back to school.”

“I got an email from Ms Haggly, she’s the faculty advisor for the Blue and Gold now.”
“The Blue and Gold gets a faculty advisor now huh?” Jughead replied. “I guess it’s totally sold out, thank god we got out before it went mainstream.”

“I don’t know how seriously she takes that position,” Betty continued. “I think it’s more like she’s the new English teacher and occasionally sits in on brainstorm sessions, from what I can gather it’s pretty much student run. Anyway, she asked us if we would come in and give a talk, both of us about the Blossom case, you about your book, and me about working for the New York Times.”

“And you said yes to this because….”

“I told you.” She said. “Because we can do some snooping on Tomoko, if you really think she had ulterior motives when she tailed us. And, well,” She did an awkward shrug, bobbing her head to the side. “I think it’s a nice thing to do.”

Jughead hated how he softened at that. “You’re too nice for your own good.”

She shook her head. “I’m the exact right amount of nice. I get to perform an act of service for the community, and use it for my own secret, personal gain. It’s a win, win situation, Juggy.”

He looked at her for a beat, cocking his head to the side, finally he spoke. “Do you ever wonder how you got to be so smart?”

Betty flushed. “Um, an overbearing mother and an Adderall prescription?”

“No.” He shook his head. “I think you’re just a natural born genius, the rest of us must look so small to you.”

“Are you telling me you’ll do it?”

“Are you giving me a choice?”

“No.” Betty admitted. “I did already tell her we’d be there.”

“Ugh.” He pulled at his face with his hand, as if he could drag the sleep away somehow. “Fine. I guess I’m in.”

“Perfect.” The grin she rewarded him was almost worth it – almost – and she clapped her hands together briskly. “Then get dressed, grab a cup of coffee, and let’s go, we don’t want to be late.”

There was a heavy knocking ringing through the Lodge apartment that morning, and Veronica opened her eyes with a groan. Glancing over, she could see that Cheryl was still asleep, tucked gently into her side, body warm against her. She wanted more than anything to reach over, brush a strand of deep red hair from her face, and wake her up with a deep kiss, but then there was another knock against her door, and any thoughts of a repeat of last night had to be pushed from her head.

She got up gently, so as not to wake the slumbering girl, pulling on her underwear and the nearest t-shirt from her drawer, she staggered through the lounge through the lounge. “I’m coming.” She muttered under her breath, wrenching the door open.

“You have not been answering my texts.” Kevin said, as soon as he could, not waiting for an invitation and, instead, barging swiftly in. “Did you forget I was leaving your sorry ass today? Ravi is waiting in the car, we were meant to do breakfast?”
“Oh shit.” Veronica cursed, rubbing sleepily at her eyes. “I’m sorry, I completely forgot.”

“It is downright unfair that you look this good having just woken up.” He said, momentarily distracted. “But whatever, that is beside the point, I hope you have a good excuse for forgetting all about your second best friend.” He looked her up and down, taking in her rumpled appearance, her uncharacteristic lateness, then, his eyes turned to the counter, where an unfamiliar bag lay where it had been dropped the night before. Suddenly, all his features lit up with breathless excitement. “Tell me you did.” Kevin said, voice low with delight.

This was the moment that Cheryl chose to make her grand entrance, entirely accidentally, emerging from the bedroom clad only in her panties and a borrowed t-shirt. “Ronnie, you better be cooking me breakfast. That’s the only excuse I’ll take for waking up in an empty bed.” She spoke as she walked in, not spotting the intruder till the last minute, but when she did see Kevin, staring at her with his jaw dropped, she seemed entirely unruffled, smirking at him. “Oh, when did the personification of an outdated stereotype arrive?”

“Cheryl.” Kevin grinned, eyes sparkling. “It is always a pleasure, but particularly right now.”

The redhead shrugged, plopping herself down on a kitchen stool. “I wish I could say the same, but you woke me up from an especially pleasant dream.”

“I’m sure it was.” Kevin replied, turning to look at Veronica, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively and causing her to roll her eyes. “I can’t apologise enough, I’ll be heading out.”

“I thought we were going for breakfast.” Veronica asked.

“No. No.” He shook his head, backing towards the door. “I’ll leave you two alone, I’m sure you’ll be visiting LA soon enough huh Ronnie?” His voice all mock-innocence, he pulled her in for a hug before he left, whispering in her ear. “As soon as she leaves you are going to call me, I don’t care if I am on the road or in airport security, I will pull over, I will do anything, to hear this gossip.”

“You’re an idiot.” Veronica huffed, but she hugged him back tightly, after all, he was leaving Riverdale.

“An idiot whose ship has sailed.” Kevin said proudly, pulling away from her with a grin, he gave another wave and wink to redhead, before he was gone, slamming the door shut behind him.

Veronica leant back against the recently closed door, watching as Cheryl eyed her from her perch by the kitchen counter, holding her gaze.

“You’re not going to make this awkward are you Heather?” The redhead asked, aiming for haughty confidence, but unable to stop the hint of insecurity from peeking through.

“No.” Veronica stalked over, a determined look on her face, she stepped right into Cheryl’s personal space, pushing her knees apart and standing in-between them. “Do you keep calling me by the wrong name because you like to make me think you’ve forgotten it?” She leant forward, close enough that a puff of warm breath ghosted across the other girl’s face. “Because you had no trouble remembering last night.”

“No.” Cheryl smirked, arms coming to wrap around Veronica’s neck. “When you figure out the references, you can let me know.”

“I will.” She replied, pulling her even closer, so they were pressed tight together.

“Don’t you have gross morning breath?” The redhead said, voice hitching.
“Probably.” Veronica shrugged, leaning down to kiss her hard, to run her fingers through that ridiculous hair and pull, Cheryl was receptive, arching eagerly up into her lips. “This,” She said, both of them breathing heavily as she pulled back, her hand trailed down until it was resting on Cheryl’s hipbone, she pressed down against the bare skin, fingers inching teasingly beneath the top of her underwear. “This was how I wanted to wake you up.”

Cheryl pouted. “We could always go back bed?” She slipped out of her grip, hopping down from the stool and walking back towards the bedroom. “But brush your teeth first!”

Veronica huffed, crossing her arms. “Only if you do too!” She called back.

Riverdale High looked so startlingly familiar, that Jughead’s first instinct, as they pulled into the faculty parking lot, was to turn the car around and drive as far away as he possibly could. If anyone else had asked him to do this, he would’ve ran away screaming, but it seemed there was no situation that Betty Cooper couldn’t talk him into.

“This is actually weirder than I thought it was going to be.” She admitted, as he pulled into one of the dozens of spaces in the near empty lot.

“I think I gaged the weirdness levels pretty accurately.” Jughead replied. “You ready to face the horror movie known as high school all over again?” He looked over to her, noticing that she actually did look suddenly nervous, hands rubbing anxiously against the thighs of her jeans, eyes unfocused. “Hey.” Leaning over the gaps between their seats, he tentatively placed a hand over hers to stop its constant motion. “I’m sorry I’m being a jerk.” She blinked at their hands and then up at his face. “You don’t actually have to go in.” He continued. “You could wait in here while I go and snoop, or we could both just say fuck it and go get breakfast at Pop’s?”

“I’ve been spending most of my time here thinking about high school in the abstract, I almost forget it actually existed.” Betty said, pulling her shoulders up and tilting her head to the side, she winced. “I didn’t think it would bother me but, Jesus, I hated this place.”

“No one likes high school.” He replied. “Except jocks and Archie and he’s like, a puppy, he likes pretty much anything if it scratches his belly and throws him a few treats. And even he was pretty disillusioned after the whole someone-shot-his-dad debacle. Also, not to mention she-who-must-not-be-named.”

She pulled her hand out from under his, reaching up to tighten her ponytail instinctively, before her postured collapsed against the seat, and she turned her head to side to look at him. “That was strangely comforting.”

He shrugged. “I do my best.”

“You know,” She began, eyes wide and sincere. “I’m glad you’re the one who came back here with me. You and that damned beanie”

He reached up to adjust the hat he’d put back on, a reminder of who he had been and still was. “You are?”

Betty nodded. “I think you’re the only other person who had the same high school experience as me.” He opened his mouth to protest, but she ploughed onwards before he could. “On the surface you can say we were different, call me the over achieving cheerleader and you the loner, but I know you look past the surface of things Jug, and I think high school us, we had cracks in all the same
places.”

At those words, he swallowed nervously, feeling her eyes lingering on his profile. “You know, you’re probably right. But- I think this conversation is a little deep for 8:30 in the morning.”

“Possibly.” She allowed, before visibly steeling herself, eyebrows knitting together, as she reached for the door handle. “Let’s do this, this was my idea after all.” She sighed ruefully as she manoeuvred her way out of the car, Jughead scrambling behind.

The halls were eerily empty in the morning light, and this silence only added to the blanket of uneasiness that had drifted over the pair of them, the soft padding of their sneakered feet was sufficiently loud enough to echo through the corridor.

Being back was like slipping into a parallel universe that was near identical to their own, just a clock set a minute forward, a mirror reflecting something different, noticeable enough to make them uncomfortable but unable to pinpoint exactly why. There were the same posters, same trophies, same lockers, only different names adorned them, and there was an extra layer of age to equipment that had already been outdated when they’d been going there.

“You okay?” Jughead asked.

“Uhuh.” Betty nodded determinedly, chin tilted up in a defiant fashion, as they wandered through the school.

“Bets?” He stage whispered.

“Yeah?” She replied, ponytail bobbing as she flicked her eyes to him.

“I’m beginning to get the feeling that this is a trap.”

“You’ve watched too many movies.” Betty scoffed, but her voice wasn’t as confident as she wished it was.

“You’re definitely right about that. But er- still, where are the students?”

“It’s a summer school.” She tried to justify. “Statistically, it makes sense that there’d be less students.”

“Less. I was definitely prepared for less.” He paused. “But none?”

“They’re probably just all waiting for us in a classroom?” She said, voice going up at the end, unsure if she was asking herself this question, or Jughead. “Here.” She pointed to a door across the corridor from where they were. “It’s this one.”

It was a different classroom than where they’d worked on the Blue and Gold, which was unsettling enough on its own, but as they approached the door there were other more important things that became apparent, mainly that there was only four people waiting in the room, and none of them looked old enough to be teachers, but one of them was definitely a familiar face.

Tomoko waved at them as Betty carefully turned the door handle, the teen moved so enthusiastically she almost fell off the chair she’d been leaning back against.

“You guys made it!” The rest of the teens looked up at Tomoko’s words, their expressions ranging from excited, and mildly confused, to downright apathetic.
“Yes. Hey Tomoko.” She said, trying to match at least a little of her enthusiasm, and Jughead trailed behind her into the classroom, they looked around at the near empty room. “Are we early?”

“No, you’re exactly on time.” She beamed.

“I see the school paper is as popular as it’s always been.” Jughead deadpanned.

“We aren’t the biggest club.” Tomoko admitted, not seeming fazed by this. “But what we lack in numbers, we make up in talent I can assure you. For example, this is Adam, my boyfriend.” She pointed at the boy perched next to her on the desk, he bore an expression of befuddlement, and they couldn’t quite tell if that was just his face or his reaction to the situation. Either way, he gave a polite wave of acknowledgment, and his sandy blond hair and button down shirt didn’t exactly appear threatening. “He writes for the sport section.”

“Yeah, um, nice to meet you Adam-“ Betty began.

“This is Brigitte, she takes the pictures.” The teen carried on, as if no one else had tried to speak, pointing to the large girl who had appeared unimpressed by the entire situation, barely glancing up at them, instead examining the end one of the many braids that her hair was styled in. “And finally-“

“I’m Marcy!” The only other person in the room who seemed pleased with whatever was happening, spoke, she stood up and approached Betty with her arm outstretched for a handshake. She was an extremely petite girl, with short mousy hair, and thick rimmed glasses.

The blond took the hand proffered to her. “It’s great to meet you, I’m Betty, and this is Jughead.”

“Oh, I know who you two are.”

“Ah- Great.” Betty replied, still unsure about what the appropriate reaction to that was, dropping the other girl’s grip when it seemed polite, before turning to address the room at large. “This is wonderful and all, but where’s Ms Haggly? She sent me an email?”

There was a thick level of tension that rose at those words, and all the teens in the room appeared to avoid looking in the two sleuths, and each other’s, eyes.

“I’ll take ‘she doesn’t exist’ for 500 dollars please.” Jughead said, words coated in pseudo-cheer.

“Oh no, she does exist.” Tomoko hurried to reassure. “She technically is our faculty advisor, you know, on all the paperwork? And she’s Adam’s English teacher.”

“But she has no idea that we’re here.” The blond summarised, not even needing to phrase it as a question. “You were the one that wrote that email.”

“Oh, yes, I sent the email.” The teen said.

“How did you get onto her email?” Jughead asked, sounding, despite all his grumblings, just slightly impressed.

“She left her email logged on to a school computer I was using.” Tomoko shrugged. “It was easy for me to find her details and memorise them.”

“That’s clever. Immoral. But clever.” He begrudgingly complimented, regretting it the moment he saw how wide Tomoko’s grin grew.

“Does that mean you’ll stay and talk to us?” She leant forward in her chair, eyes glittering.
“Oh, definitely not.” He replied.

At the exact same time Betty spoke. “I don’t know.” They glanced at each other, a wordless moment of communication, and she turned back to the teens. “Is there even a summer school?”

“Are we trespassing?” Because if so, this is the second time I’ve accidentally trespassed this week.”

Marcy, the short, nerdy girl, looked from Jughead to Tomoko, and then sighed, wistfully. “You were right.” She said solemnly. “He’s as cool as you’d imagine.”

Betty pressed her lips together, in an attempt to stop herself from laughing, to pretend that she hadn’t heard that, or seen the way Jughead had scowled, cheeks flushing.

“No. There is a summer school.” Tomoko insisted. “But it’s for people that are falling behind, it’s not meant to be voluntarily, but I don’t think we’ll be kicked out if we’re caught.”

“We better not be kicked out Koko.” Adam, the tall boy next to her said, though he didn’t appear particular concerned. “My parents will kill me.”

“We won’t!” She promised, swinging her legs against the desk. “They should be thrilled that we managed to organise such an educational visit. They should use their alumni better, you went to an ivy league-” She pointed at Betty. “And you-”She turned to Jughead.

“Worked at Pop’s for minimum wage?”

“Are a bestselling author.” Tomoko finished.

Betty seemed to be contemplating all this, looking from student to student with a thoughtful look on her face, and Jughead just watched, helplessly, knowing that if it was up to him he’d be marching out of the classroom immediately, but also knowing he trusted Betty’s judgement almost more than his own, so he waited.

“We’re not exactly thrilled that you lured us here under a deception.” Betty said finally, giving Tomoko a disappointed look, which was more effective than most people’s thanks to her handily expressive face. “We aren’t here on vacation, not anymore, every moment of our time wasted is a moment that could’ve brought us closer to catching the killer.” She had an air of seriousness about her that Jughead, only because he was so familiar with all things Betty, could tell was put on, but it was still impressive, and he wondered briefly why she’d never joined the drama club, she probably would’ve been pretty good at it, if she learned to conceal the emotions that sometimes leaked unintentionally across her face.

Tomoko, for her part, seemed to be aiming to look contrite, but she was a less accomplished actress, and ended up looking more constipated than anything else. Adam seemed thoughtful, nodding along, Brigitte, who had yet to speak the entire time they were there, looked bored, and only Marcy seemed actually apologetic, magnified eyes blinking solemnly at them.

“But.” Betty continued. “Since we drove all the way out here, we will talk to you guys a little about our experiences, if only to make sure you guys know this isn’t a joke.”

“If it isn’t a joke, why is Jughead so funny?” Tomoko asked, eyes sparkling like she knew she was being a pain in their backsides.

“I can’t help it.” He deadpanned. “I’m a natural comedian, but not everyone is so lucky.”

“Jughead can speak first and will answer all your questions.” Betty said.
“I will?” He asked, raising an eyebrow at her.

She turned around to face him, and the expression on her face slipped from authoritarian to sweet. “Yeah.” She said quieter. “You’re the one they really want to hear from.”

“Betty,” Jughead tried. “I think you’re the one who’s good at speeches. I still remember when you stood up at the Riverdale jubilee.”

She shook her head. “Juggy, you know you have interesting things to say. Why don’t you want other people to hear them?”

They acted as if they’d momentarily forgotten they were in a room with other people, people who were particularly invested in their relationship, and – two in particularly – were grinning at each other with barely concealed excitement.

“Whatever.” He mumbled after a moment, dropping her gaze. “Okay. I’ll do it.”

“Good.” Betty said, and there was that smile again, that pleased grin, that made him want to make her happy no matter what. She turned back so she was addressing the four teenagers. “I was thinking Tomoko, do you have any copies of Murder in Bloom in your locker?”

“Um- only like four.” The girl said. “I keep them on hand in case anyone tells me they haven’t read it, then I can just lend it to them.”

“How about I get them and we can both sign it?” Betty asked, voice purposefully casual. “You’d have the only copies that have ever been signed by both of us.”

“Oh my god, you’d actually do that?” Tomoko leant forward in her chair, near combusting with excitement.

“Sure. I could give a copy to Marcy too?” She turned to smile politely at the other teen, making sure she wasn’t left out, and was rewarded with a grin that nearly broke the petite girl’s face.

“That would be wonderful.” Marcy breathed.

“Great. So what’s your locker combination?” Betty asked. “I’ll go get them so you don’t miss out on any of Jughead’s wonderful speech, we can’t stay for too long and I want you to make the most of it.”

“Sure.” Tomoko said hurriedly, seeming willing to agree to anything as long as she received those signed books, ripping a scrap of paper from her notebook and hurriedly writing down her locker number and the code, passing it down to the blond.

“Okay.” Betty said. “I’ll be back soon.” She made her way to the door, placing the ghost of a comforting hand against Jughead’s shoulder as she left.

As the door shut, she turned to get one last glimpse of Jughead, he had plopped himself down on the teacher’s desk, body sprawled out lazily, looking both a little energised and semi-annoyed, in a way she shouldn’t have found endearing but did.

“So,” She heard him say as she walked away. “What do you nerds want to know?”

()
corridors. She wondered where the rest of the summer school students were, the ones who were actually required to be there, and hoped she wouldn’t have to have an awkward interaction where she explained why she – an adult – was breaking into one of the student’s lockers. Not that this exactly counted as breaking in, since she’d been given both its location and the combination she needed to access it, but all the same, she had motives that extend further than giving the teens a signed book.

She loathed to note that Tomoko’s locker was in the same area that hers had been, and how hauntingly familiar that made the walk. Earlier, when she’d had Jughead by her side, she’d felt less put off by the school, by its memories, but walking alone made her see ghosts everywhere she turned.

She saw Veronica, leaning against the wall near the water fountain, makeup and outfit annoyingly impeccable, languidly eyeing the boys that walked past, making some reference to something impossibly cool she’d done in New York, but making Betty forget why that should’ve annoyed her, by shooting her their special smile, making some funny remark, and listening to whatever worry the blond had. Then she saw Archie, slamming a locker shut, and leaning down to kiss her on the cheek, something that that began to feel more and more like an act of duty instead of love, until one day, there was a different girl waiting to receive his kisses. She saw Jughead, always turning away, slinking through the corridor, never getting close enough for her to catch, not really, his hand always half-raised in a wave, as if he couldn’t be bothered going to the full effort, and then, when the Blossom case was in full swing, suddenly everywhere, by her locker, waiting for her outside her classroom, their heads bent low with discussion and theorising.

But mostly, mostly she saw herself. The girl she had once been, her ponytail so tight it looked painful, nothing out of place, not in her hair, or in her actions. Her swinging along in her perfectly pressed sweaters, smiling at all the right people, never looking sad, nor angry, trying not to let anything real peep through. And then after her world had unravalled, with Polly, with Jason, trying to care a little less, but not always managing it, some part of her still the perfect girl that her mother wanted, wishing she could break away from that idea of herself, something she knew she would only achieve once she left Riverdale behind in her dust.

Betty wanted to hug that girl she’d been, take her hand in hers and rub away the scars that marked her skin, the crescent moons that were still visible, pale but there, against her adult palms. But she couldn’t turn back time, only ensure she never repeated it, and Betty had to ignore it, those adolescent pangs, had to remind herself of who she was, why she was here, and get into journalist mode as she arrived at the locker in question.

There was no sign of outward decoration as she typed in the combination, but as soon as the locker door swung open she was bombarded with images of herself and Jughead. They were ranging in age and quality, grainy teenage snapshots from the local paper, The Riverdale Register, that had clearly been photocopied from the libraries old backlog, and then more recent pictures, shots cut out of the New York times, Jughead’s author photo, a few more of him from reviews, and then the only one of him in the school yearbook, the one she’d made him take for the Blue and Gold, the only photo she had of them both together, an image that had once adorned Betty’s own locker in their senior year of high school. And when the surface wasn’t covered in pictures, there were clips out of their work, an extract of Murder in Bloom that the Atlantic had published, a lot of Betty’s articles – including the infamous one about the Blossom murders – and reviews of Jughead’s book.

There was only one singular photo of Tomoko herself, seemingly tucked in last minute, a snapshot of her with her boyfriend, arms around each other, but the image was so overshadowed by pictures of the two journalists, it was practically hidden from sight. Altogether, the effect was definitely creepy, and it sent a shiver down Betty’s spine, it was too much, so over-the-top that one wouldn’t go amiss
in calling it a shrine.

As a journalist, there was a certain amount of attention that Betty was used to getting, but it was the kind of attention that was confined mainly to Twitter, and had more to do with the actual content she wrote than the person she was. She didn’t have fans, or at least ones that she was aware of, just people who shared her articles, complimented her writing, or else trashed it, calling it bogus or biased, sometimes even saying she only got her job because of her appearance in Jughead’s book.

And sure, she’d read the forum, she’d seen the things people had said, but even that felt distant, removed from the reality of who she was. Those teenagers, who created threads dedicated to imagining how she’d dressed in high school, or what her real relationship with Jughead had been, they didn’t feel real when they were on the screen, and even then, they were more interested in the character of Betty Cooper, the one that appeared on their page, that wasn’t quite fact but wasn’t exactly fiction, and that made it easier to understand. But to be confronted with such obvious admiration, or at least she hoped she could label it that, it was so strange, so surprising, that for the first few seconds she could only gape at it.

After she took a moment to recover, she whipped her phone out, taking snapshots of the locker to show to Jughead later, before scooping up the four books that she’d promised to obtain, feeling chilled to see that there was one other book remaining in the locker, one titled ‘How to Get Away with the Perfect Murder’, and, for good measure, she snapped a picture of that cover too. Realistically, she knew that this could mean absolutely nothing, that having pictures of her and Jughead plastered across her locker was no different than when Betty had wanted posters of her favorite boy bands when she was a kid, it was only that Tomoko’s interests were a little bit more obscure than hers had been. But at the same time, there was a murderer running around town, someone who had wanted to send a dramatic message by stringing up the body and letting it crash to the ground at their high school reunion, and it didn’t seem like such a farfetched idea to imagine that someone had done it to get their attention, someone who had tailed them, had lured them away from the case under false pretences, who proclaimed herself their biggest fan.

She had once written an article about celebrity fans turned stalkers, and suddenly, the information about it came flooding back to her, and she remembered that, sometimes, there was a thin, thin line between love and obsession.

It was her job to observe, to question and be suspicious, so she filed away Tomoko’s actions and her thoughts, ensured she had enough images as potential evidence, and then slammed the locker shut, arms full of books she wandered back down the corridor, heading towards the new headquarters of the Blue and Gold.

As she approached the door, she was pleased to hear Jughead’s voice filtering out from behind the clunky door, in the time she’d taken walking through the school and examining the locker, she’d almost forgotten that she’d left a slightly uncomfortable Jughead alone to give the four teenagers a talk, and she paused, just out of sight of the door’s window, to listen.

“Look, the career path to be a writer isn’t a clear cut thing, and I’m not here to tell you to follow the same path I did. That would be insane, because, last time I checked, none of your classmates have been brutally murdered yet. But what I think is, or should be, universal, is that you’ve got to love it. You have to live for your writing, even on days that it feels hard, you write because you know you can’t do anything else. You think writing my book made me popular? It sure as hell did not, I guess it made me popular with a few people who didn’t know me when it was published, and it made me more successful than anyone ever imagined, since I was practically voted least likely to succeed in high school, but when I was writing it, no one thought I should’ve been. No one but Betty, who was gracious enough to let me regurgitate our lives onto the page and then give it back to her for critique.
But honestly, none of that external stuff mattered to me, I wrote because I felt like I couldn’t do anything else. It isn’t an easy path, so if you think you’re just gonna stumble on a story and a publisher and be happy, then you should quit. But if this is what you have to do, then you can’t let anyone tell you that you shouldn’t. This whole damn town would’ve gladly taken my manuscript and burnt it at the stake alongside me, but I couldn’t let that stop me. Being a writer was as much part of me as being a Jones, and wanting to tell something truthful was more important to me than damn near anything except maybe my little sister, so if that’s how you feel too, then you should write, you should write every day, until you start to suck a little less.”

Betty was stunned to hear him speak like that, she’d expected him to answer a few questions half-heartedly as a diversion, not because she thought that was all he was capable of, but because she had believe that was all he was willing to give, but she’d come back to this speech, and she could hear how much he meant what he was saying, and it struck her that – one day – Jughead would make a pretty inspiring, if a little offbeat, teacher if that’s what he put his mind to.

In the silence that followed, as Jughead took a breath after that rant, Betty turned the doorknob, and let herself in. He flipped his eyes to hers, slumping from teacher-mode to relief, and hopping off the desk. “Great.” Jughead said, grabbing a book from out of Betty’s arms. “We’re done with the Dead Poet’s Society shtick. Anyone got a pen?”

Marcy, the bespectacled mousy girl, held out the pen she’d been scribbling down notes with, eyeing him with even more awe than had been there before Betty had left. “Thanks.” He said, taking the pen and scribbling his signature on the first book, then reaching for the next.

The whole classroom was under a strange spell of silence, even Brigitte, the girl who’d looked like she wanted to be anywhere else, had stopped examining her braids, and was looking towards Jughead with a thoughtful frown on her round face. As for Tomoko, she looked nearly on the verge of tears, happy ones though, and it seemed as if it was only her boyfriend’s presence beside her that kept her from either breaking down or launching herself at Jughead. He dutifully signed each book, and Betty added her signature once he was finished, before he passed one out to each student – despite the fact that they all technically belonged to Tomoko.

“Thanks.” He said, once everyone was clutching a copy of his book. “We’ll see you around.”

“Wait,” Tomoko said, standing up. “I thought Betty was going to talk.”

But Jughead was already breezing past them all and out the door, and Betty was left giving them an apologetic smile, despite not actually feeling all that sorry. “I think we spoiled you enough for today.” She said. “Another time maybe.”

And with that she was leaving herself, following him out the halls of their old haunt, and back to the car.

“What were you up to then Cooper?” Jughead asked, once she’d manhandled the passenger car door open and slipped inside.

“Is this your way of diverting the conversation from your amazing speech?”

He looked momentarilly caught off guard. “You heard that?”

“Of course. Juggy, it was, it was really, really good. I think if I had heard someone talk like that in high school, well, I wouldn’t have thought my need to write, to expose the real truth, was such a
“weird or bad thing.”

“You used to think that?”

Betty shrugged. “Sometimes.”

“That’s-” Jughead tried, but then stopped himself. “But you still did it anyway.” He sighed, looking at her with an expression that she couldn’t quite decipher.

“Like you said, if you need to write, it’s impossible to do something else.” She replied.

He looked at her for a beat, before shaking his head. “Anyway, I actually wasn’t trying to distract you. I was more wondering why you took twenty minutes to complete a task that should’ve taken five.”

“I don’t think I took twenty minutes.” She said, although she couldn’t entirely be sure, she had walked slowly through the corridors, and spent quite a while examining the locker. “But you’re right, I was snooping.”

“That’s my gal.” He responded, in a way that would’ve been funny if he hadn’t sounded suddenly self-conscious. “You find anything?”

“I don’t think we should remove Tomoko from our suspect list just yet.” Betty answered, reaching into her pocket to pull out her phone.

“Please tell me you found a bloody baseball bat or an incriminating note titled Why and How I Killed Dilton Doiley.”

“Not quite.” She said, flicking till she found the right images and handing over her phone.

Jughead squinted at the pictures, seeming momentarily confused at first by the overload of images that filled the small screen, but it only took a moment for him to realise what he was looking at, and then his expression morphed into something more closely resembling annoyance. “Damn, it is totally creepy to see your face covering someone else stuff, is this how celebrities feel?” He flicked through the photos, coming to the picture of the book that had been left behind in the locker. “Actually, I’ve read this one.”

“Was it any good?”

Jughead shrugged. “If you like tongue-in-cheek true crime.” He passed the phone back to her. “Look, I’m totally against singling out the weirdo and pining murder on them, considering I remember how unpleasant it was when it happened to me.”

Betty’s expression soured a little at this memory. “I know Jug. I’m not saying it’s her because she likes reading about murder. That would be a little hypocritical of me, I hated what they did to you Juggy. I hate how this place singles out outsiders for no real reason.”

“Hey, hey.” He put a hand on her shoulder, and she relaxed beneath his grip. “I’m not saying that’s what you think. That’s not why you took the photos Bets, you took them because you’re a thorough journalist, and because you found a shrine dedicated to us in the locker of a girl we know was following us. That’s a bit different than arresting me purely because I wore black and wasn’t a member of the football team.”

“Exactly.” She replied. “That’s what I was trying to say, I just, I didn’t want to be misconstrued.”
“You weren’t.” Jughead said, finally removing his hand from her and letting it drop back down to his
side. “Anyway, I was the one who wanted her as a suspect, because just the fact that she likes me so
much makes me uncomfortable.”

Betty leant back against the leather of her seat, her head turned towards the windshield, gazing out at
the bulk of Riverdale High. “I can think of a motive for Tomoko, even if it is a little out there, that
maybe she wanted to get your attention, force another sequel out of you? Crazier murders have
happened. But then, she’s just a kid, she doesn’t look like she would be strong enough to overpower
a grown man and then string him up with a pile of balloons.”

“Maybe she had help?” Jughead offered.

“Possible.” She conceded. “Maybe her boyfriend, or the rest of the Blue and Gold, but it’s difficult
enough for one person to find themselves okay with murder, let alone to convince a whole gang to
kill someone just to gain the attentions of us. Half of them didn’t even look all that excited to see us.
Or maybe it was Tomoko by herself, and she’s deceptively strong, surprised him from behind? And
then the pulley system made it not that hard to lift him up to the ceiling.”

“It’s a possibility.” He said.

“But shouldn’t we be following Occam’s Razor, the simplest solution is the best one.”

Jughead shook his head. “Nothing is ever simple, not in Riverdale.” His gaze lingered on her profile
a second too long, and she had to pretend she couldn’t feel his eyes on her. “And there’s also another
saying ‘Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be
the truth’,”

She turned to him, a small, teasing smile playing around her lips. “Alright Sherlock, I get it.” But
then she sighed. “But the fact remains that once we’ve eliminated the impossible, there’s about 500
different improbable things it could be, and we have no way of knowing which ones right.”

“We have no way of knowing yet.” He gently reminded.

“You know Jug, have you ever thought about becoming a motivational speaker? Because I think
you’d make a pretty good one.” Betty joked.

“Because I have such a welcoming and enthusiastic demeanour?” He deadpanned.

“No.” She shook her head. “Because somehow you always know the right thing to say.”

He raised an eyebrow at that.

“Okay. Okay.” Betty laughed, noting his sceptical expression. “Most of the time you don’t, fine, but
when you do, it’s just right.”

There was a lull in conversation, where it seemed like they were both searching for just the right
thing to say, but before they could find it, there was a shrill ring coming from the phone in Betty’s
hand, and they both glanced at the screen to see that it lit up with the caller ID for Hop’s Bar.

When Ginger had given them the number, Betty had left a polite message on their answering
machine, explaining who she and Jughead were and the entire situation, and now, it seemed, they
were calling her back. After a short conversation, Betty hung up the phone and turned to Jughead.
“The bar is meant to open back up tonight, they say if we come round now they can talk to us, but
not for very long.”
“Great.” Jughead replied, turning to the wheel and starting the engine.

The atmosphere around Hop’s bar had certainly changed since they’d been there just a few days prior, Jughead had felt uneasy enough just entering a place filled with people from his past, and that was before he’d even realised that history was about to repeat itself, that he’d be staring down another small town murder. Betty, she’d felt almost confident, slipping into her journalistic skin so she could write her follow up article and then leave, back to the new life she’d built for herself, far from the confines of what had once been expected of her, but as soon as she entered this place, the universe had shown her it had different plans, and suddenly every strand she thought she’d held secure was unravelling, everything spiralling out into more and more layers of complexity.

Waiting outside the main entrance was a burly guy with a large moustache, he cut a strange figure, he looked surly, but almost apologetically so, as if he hadn’t asked to be so large and to have to look so tough. It was enough to make the journalists pause, but they recovered quickly, getting out the car and walking over to him.

“Hi. Are you the guy I was speaking to on the phone?” Betty asked, sticking out a hand in greeting.

The man took her hand, his grip tight. “That’s me.” He jerked his chin up in his own version of a nod.

“I’m Betty Cooper.” She said, releasing his hand

Jughead moved forward as Betty stepped back, taking her place and shaking the man’s hand, attempting not to wince at the vice-like grip the other man deemed appropriate. “Jughead Jones.”

“Hop Porter.” The guy said, stepping back as if to take in the sight of them properly, appraising their outfits and stance, sizing them up. “I own this place.”

“We can’t thank you enough for agreeing to talk to us.” Betty pressed on, eyes bright and alert.

“Don’t know why I am.” Hop mumbled, rubbing his chin in defeat, then letting his hand drop to his side with a sigh. “You knew this kid huh?”

“We went to school with him, yeah.” Jughead replied.

“And Ginger gave you this number?” The guy said. “You didn’t just look us up or something?”

“No.” Betty shook her head. “We went to school with Ginger too, she’s been helping us out since she was the organiser.”

“Poor girl.” Hop replied, shaking his head, still looking uncomfortable, but slightly less so. “She’s a nice kid, we were happy to rent this place out to her, and she was so excited, coming in here all the time, talking about what she was gonna put where, buying decorations and storing them in the back of this place. And then it blew up in her face, ours too.” He sucked in a breath through his teeth. “It’s a damn shame.”

“You don’t have to tell us twice.” Jughead said. “We know, that’s why it’s so important that you’re willing to help us.”

The man looked torn. “I’m not thrilled about it, I reckon things like this are best left to the Sheriff, but I looked you both up, and you seem legit, and if Ginger’s gonna vouch for you, then I guess I can talk. But I don’t have much to say.”
“Can we record this? Just to ensure we don’t miss anything?” Betty asked, reaching into her purse.

He waved his hand in her direction. “Go on then.”

She grabbed her recorder, and, gripping it tightly in her palm, set it to record. “You own the bar then? How long has it been here?”

“This is our fourth year.”

“And nothing has ever happened? No robberies or fights that got out of hand?” Jughead asked.

“Nope.” The older guy said. “Sure, we’ve had bar fights, but nothing that wasn’t solved by kicking people out and making them sober up. It’s always been a quiet little place, for first dates, or something like that, people who like it rowdier head for the Whyte Wyrm, which is why the Serpents are fine with us. Our clientele doesn’t exactly overlap.”

“What do you remember about the night before the body was found?”

“Nothing.” He said. “I wasn’t even in. Ginger asked if I could close the bar early to let her set up all her stuff, and it was looking to be a quiet night anyway, knowing that the reunion was going to bring in lots of people buying drinks, I said yeah. I had hired some guys to work on repainting the back of the bar, I don’t like anything, even the shit they don’t see, to look shabby, and they got here around 6. They say Ginger arrived an hour later to set up, and then left probably two hours afterwards, and about thirty minutes later they packed up and were gone. No one noticed anything suspicious that they can remember, Ginger and the rest of the staff arrived about an hour before everyone started to arrive for the reunion, but no one touched any decorations because they were all set up. And then, well, you saw what happened.”

“Have you got any names of the guys who worked around the back?” Jughead asked.

“I draw the line in giving out information like that.” Hop said. “They’re hard workers and they’ve already spoken to the Sheriff, some of them can’t afford to piss him off by talking to you like I can.”

“We understand.” Betty said. “Is there anything else? Was there any sign of a break in? No lock broken or anything?”

Hop actually seemed embarrassed at that question, rubbing at the back of his neck. “Look, the thing you’ve got to understand is, we live in Riverdale, nothing bad happens here. We have a deal with the Serpents, and there’s really no one else that would do any harm. The back door here, a year ago there was a bit of an incident, and it got broken, now well- it doesn’t shut all the way, so there’s no way to lock it.”

“You just leave the back door to your business unlocked?” Jughead asked incredulously.

“We don’t keep any money there overnight.” Hop bit back defensively. “And we weren’t doing too good on the money front at first anyway, and by the time we were, well, you can actually see the peeling paint, no knows anything about the door, and no one had broken in yet.”

“But the maintenance guys knew about it? They must have.” Betty asked.

“A few people did know.” Hop admitted. “But they wouldn’t have told anyone.” He said dismissively.

“But it’s not like it was some massively well-guarded secret?” Jughead attempted to clarify, unable to keep the tinge of sarcasm from his voice.
The man pressed his lips together, clearly annoyed. “I guess it wasn’t.”

“So anyone could’ve gotten in if they’d know about it?” Jughead sighed.

Hop gave a jerky nod.

“What about security cameras?” Betty inquired.

This time, the guy almost winced. “Look, they broke a few months back, since we’d already started redoing the outside, we didn’t have money to replace them yet. We were going to but—”

“You didn’t.” Jughead finished for him.

“It’s not like we live in some big, dangerous city.” Hop protested. “This is Riverdale, this is a safe place.” He repeated.

“No.” Jughead said, his voice steady and hard. “It’s not a safe place, it just does a great impression of being one.”

“Do you have anything else that might be helpful to us?” Betty asked.

“I’m afraid not.” Hop said, clearly annoyed. “And I’m afraid your time is also up.”

She sighed, but seemed to have been expecting this. “Okay, but you have my number, you know how to contact me if you think of anything else?”

“That I do.” Hop said, though he looked like he had no intention of doing so.

The Better Kevin

Are you ready to give me the gossip now?

Spill the tea

I am about to board my plane and u absolutely are NOT allowed to leave me hanging for this entire flight home.

You forgot about the breakfast date, fine, but u cannot tell me u forgot about this.

Ronnie?

You’re kidding me?

She’s still there isn’t she?

I can’t believe I’ve managed to drive to the airport, check in, go through security, and wait for hours at my gate and you are still in bed with her.

I love it.

You saucy minx.

But I am calling as soon as I land.

Go get the girl Lodge!
Veronica turned back towards Cheryl, after she’d done rolling her eyes at Kevin’s text, noting how the sheets the redhead had wrapped around her body had slipped down, revealing the creamy expanse of her back. There was one freckle that stood out, more like a mole than anything, against her shoulder blade, and Veronica wanted more than anything to kiss it.

As soon as she thought this, she realised that she could now, knowing that Cheryl definitely wouldn’t flinch away at her touch, and she wondered when, if ever, she would get used to that. She thought all this as she leant forward to kiss it, wrapping her arms around Cheryl’s stomach, and resting her head against the soft skin of her shoulder. “What are you up to?” Veronica asked curiously, peering over at the phone she was tapping away on.

“Changing my Facebook status to taken and updating everyone on when the wedding will be.” Cheryl replied, wiggling around until she was facing Veronica. “Just kidding.” She said, leaning forward to give her a quick peck. “I was checking my Instagram.”

“Hmm.” She hummed, propping herself up on her elbows. “Hungry?”

“But I already ate.” The redhead gave an almost feline grin.

“Ha.” Veronica replied. “Not that that wasn’t delicious. But I was thinking something a little more substantial.”

Cheryl shrugged, sitting up so her back was resting against the many, fluffy pillows that adorned the bed. “Sure. You want to go out?”

The dark haired girl traced lazy patterns against Cheryl’s stomach, fingers leaving goosebumps against the sensitive skin. “I don’t know. I was thinking I would cook.”

Cheryl slapped her hand down a little too harshly against Veronica’s to still its motion. “Didn’t Mommy and Daddy have an army of personal chefs? When did you learn to cook?” She entwined their hands together as if softening the blow, bringing them to her lips to place a gentle kiss.

“I learnt from that army of chefs.” Veronica replied. “And I have lived on my own for a long time now, I’m actually a pretty good cook.”

“Is this your way of poisoning me so you can do away with me forever?”

Veronica pulled her hand from Cheryl’s, but only so she could cradle her face, leaning upwards so that their lips were nearly touching. “Why would I want to do that? If you were gone, we couldn’t do this.” She said, before closing the gap. They kissed for a while, soft and languid, but just as it was about to go deeper, Veronica pulled back, sitting up cross legged in bed. “Come on. I really am hungry.

“Fine.” The redhead pouted, stopping just short of crossing her arms in a huff. “But you’re not allowed to get upset if I don’t like what you cook.”

“Deal.” Veronica said, bending down to pick up her t-shirt and pulling it over her head, tossing the other girl’s clothes back to her, before standing up and walking towards the kitchen.
A few moments later, Cheryl joined her, dressed – instead of in her own clothes – in her panties and an old t-shirt she’d clearly found when she’d rifled through the drawers. At first, Veronica didn’t notice her, too busy looking through the fridge, foot tapping in time to the radio she’d put on. But when she did turn around, she noticed what Cheryl was wearing immediately, and didn’t want to admit how much she liked it. Her eyes flicked down her body, and Cheryl bristled in pleasure.

“Like what you see Lodge?”

“Always.” She replied, but she was turning back to the carton of eggs she’d been looking for.

Cheryl felt a hint of anxiety, feeling slightly unsure, she’d been expecting more attention, something else, but the dark haired girl’s mind was clearly on different things, so she walked towards her, standing close enough that her chest was nearly pressed against Veronica’s back. “What concoction are you mixing up?”

“Huevos Rancheros.” Veronica replied, dancing away from her to retrieve a pan from the cupboard. “This one was actually taught to me by my mom, it’s nothing fancy, it’s just like literally the only thing she can cook other than toast, and she would always make it for me for breakfast on my birthday.”

“That’s- nice.” Cheryl replied, wrapping her arms around herself, disarmed by the sudden turn in conversation.

“Yeah.” She continued, reaching for a knife to chop the tomatoes she had laid out. “Our last year in New York, when she made them for my birthday, I refused to eat it, I was going through this thing where I thought eating anything that tasted remotely good was going to actually kill me. It was a health kick. She was so upset that the next year on my birthday, when we were in Riverdale, she didn’t even make any. I had to send Smithers out to get the ingredients and make them myself, when she saw what I’d done she started crying. After we ate them, she was like mija you did this all wrong,” Veronica laughed at the memory, knife slipping against the skin of the tomato. “I’d just googled the recipe and followed the instructions, they tasted good, but I hadn’t done them her way, so she made me sit there and watch her do it properly.”

“Did you learn anything?” Cheryl asked curiously.

“The way she made them was honestly, exactly the same way I had done. But yeah, I think I did learn something.”

“You and your Mom, you were close huh?” She asked, voice suddenly small.

Veronica paused, thinking back on her childhood. “We fought like cat and dogs, or more accurately, like Joan and Christina Crawford, but yes. When we first moved here, before all that stuff with Fred and with my dad, we were all each other had. I definitely never approved of most of her actions, but I know she didn’t always approve of me either.” She shrugged, noticing the silence, she turned around to see Cheryl looking wistful, as if imagining a past she never had, a past where she had come from a family much warmer than the Blossoms had been. “Hey.” Veronica said, voice suddenly lower and gentler. “You want to help?”

“Really?” She replied, seeming sceptical.

“Yeah.” Veronica said, reaching for another knife and chopping board. “Here.” She shoved the knife and an onion into Cheryl’s grip. “Get chopping.”

“Bossy.” The redhead said, flirtatiously.
They worked side by side for a while, hips bumping comfortably against hips, in a way that was
domestic and foreign to Cheryl, so used to being treated like she was barely real, like a doll or
inflatable toy. Once she’d chopped the onion, she was issued the jalapeno, whilst Veronica got the
garlic. As the salsa cooled, and the beans simmered on the stove, she even found herself being pulled
into a dance to whatever song Veronica declared she loved that was blasting from the radio.

Usually, she would’ve felt the need to be sexy, appealing, thrusting her hips in time to the rhythm,
crooking her finger towards the other girl, but here, here she didn’t feel like that at all. Veronica
clearly didn’t, she was dancing crazily, care free, socked feet slipping on the slicked floor, like she
was a teenager dancing in her room to her favorite song, so Cheryl joined in, letting her red hair fly
wildly, twisting and turning into a rats nest on her head. At one point, Veronica did such a an
enthusiastic move that she nearly fell, grabbing onto the handle of the cupboard so she didn’t end up
flat on her face, and Cheryl found it so funny and endearing that she was doubled over, crippled with
laughter.

“That’s what you get for thinking you’re a better dancer than me Sharpay.”

“Huh.” Veronica huffed, catching her breath, marching over and poking Cheryl teasingly in the
side. “I think I was the one who won our dance battle.”

“That’s the second time you’ve mentioned it this trip, is that your only brag worthy achievement?”
She retorted.

“Maybe,” She replied, reaching for the beans on the stove and noting that they were done. “But
poisoning Cheryl Blossom is going to be a close second.”

She wouldn’t let Cheryl help with the final bits, the assembling, so instead she watched from her seat
at the kitchen stool, until, finally, Veronica slid a plate of tortilla, eggs, beans, and salsa at her.
Tentatively, Cheryl took a bit. “Mmm.” She said, once she’d swallowed her mouthful. “Not bad
Lodge.”

“I can tell from your face you think it’s delicious.” Veronica said, after she’d swallowed her own
bite, grinning. “Next time, I’ll make you a Croque Monsieur, it’s like if a grilled cheese was dressed
by Karl Lagerfeld”

“I look forward to it.” Cheryl purred, hiding her smile behind another bite of food, pretending she
wasn’t thinking about that fact that she was promising a next time.

“I was thinking,” Veronica said, reaching for one of the glasses of water she’d poured them and
taking a sip. “We could go out tonight?”

“In Riverdale?” Cheryl asked, clearly sceptical.

“No.” She replied. “There’s a nice restaurant across the river, and that club high schoolers used to
sneak into.”

“You mean the place you used to sneak in when you had a fight with your mom and became mini-
Lindsay Lohan.”

“Yes.” Veronica said. “We could even get a hotel room for the night?”

“Like-“ Cheryl paused, fumbling uncharacteristically over her words. “Like a date?”

“Yes.” Veronica held her gaze, serious and direct.
Cheryl pretended to think about for a second, before sitting up haughtily. “That doesn’t sound too torturous. But you best have something up your sleeve, I’m hard to please, unlike my sister-in-law, it takes more than looking at a murder board to get me hot and bothered.”

Betty was looking at the murder board.

They’d driven back after the meeting with Hop, eager to add everything they’d learnt to the board. And now her eyes scanned all the facts that lay before her, everything they’d discovered since Doiley’s body had come crashing down in front of them, so many scraps of paper, but nothing concrete, every theory fragile and liable to collapse.

“Hey.” Jughead came up behind her, startling her out of the reverie she’d fallen into.

She glanced back at him, ponytail nearly whipping him in the face, before turning straight back to the board. “Hey.” She sounded distracted.

“I was gonna take Hot Dog for a walk.” He said. “You could come?” Noting the expression on her face, one he recognised from their days at the school paper, that notified that she was too far lost to whatever thoughts she was chasing, he changed tactics. “Or- you’ll be okay here alone while I take him?”

“Yes. Of course.” Betty leaned in closer, as if she was going to pluck one of the pieces of paper down. “I’ll be right here.”

Jughead took his time walking Hot Dog through the quiet suburban streets, each step he took away from Betty was a step towards a clearer head, one that was reminding him of all the reasons he’d been avoiding her for so long, how just one look at her made his heart clench, and how futile it all was. Even now, knowing that – a decade ago– she’d looked at him in the same way he looked at her, it was painful, and he wasn’t sure if it made it worse. Now each look she gave him, each choice of word, he played around his head as if he was one of those romantic stock heroes he’d always scoffed at.

Every time he was alone, in bed, in the morning, in moments when Betty was gone doing something else, he vowed to create some distance between them, but then she’d appear again, smiling at him, eyes wide, and he’d blurt out that he used to love her, he’d place a hand against her shoulder, or brush against her when he passed by.

He just couldn’t stop it.

Arriving back at his home, he steeled himself, letting Hot Dog off the leash and hearing the sound of his claws scattering against the floorboards, then replaced by the lapping of water. He peeked his head round the door of his lounge, and was startled by what he found. He’d only been gone for around thirty minutes, but Betty had manged to assemble a brand new board across one blank space of wall. The one they’d made together was still there, but across from it now there was an added array of different coloured sticky notes, each with a name of a student they’d gone to high school with.

“Woah.” Jughead said. “Did me and Hot Dog enter a time loop or did you really work this fast?”

Betty whipped round, having not noticed he’d walked in until he spoke, and the slightly crazed look in her eyes was just a little disconcerting. “Oh. Hey.” She said. “Is this okay? I don’t think they’ll make a mark on the walls, but if they do I’ll pay to have it repainted.”
“No.” He waved his hand, stepping further into the room for a better look. “It’s fine, I was just surprised. What is this?”

She stepped back, hands clasped in front of her, surveying her own handiwork. “It’s a list of everyone who went to the reunion in alphabetical order.”

“Not that this isn’t impressive, but, why?”

“I just feel like we’re getting nowhere.” She said, sounding frustrated, crossing her arms as she glared at the wall, as if it was those inanimate objects’ fault. “Every day we find out something more but none of it fits together, it isn’t following a pattern. He’s moving here but he’s also buying a gun, which might mean he’s scared of something in Riverdale? He hated his abusive father but used his old name at the Inn? I feel like we’re getting lost in the details and forgetting the bigger picture.”

Jughead put a hand to his lips, gaze thoughtful. “You’re right.” He said finally. “That makes a lot of sense.”

“Thank you.” She said, lips involuntarily turning into a pleased smile, but the air of mania around her not dissipating yet. “So, we go down the list and ask two questions. We’re thinking that the way the body was found, that the killer was trying to send a message, right? First question, why would someone send a message to this person? And then second question, why might this person have a motive to kill Dilton?” Jughead nodded when she glanced back at him, so she continued, pointing to the first note. “Here. First question.”

The name she was pointing out, was Archie Andrews. “Okay.” Jughead said, following her train of thought. “Archie was involved in the Blossom case in high school, if that’s connected to this. He was a jock and kind of friends with everyone who was a dick to Doiley?”

“And he’s semi-famous now.” Betty continued. “Maybe someone was a fan of his, and wanted to get his attention?”

“If that was their plan they didn’t do a great job.” He muttered.

“Next question.” She said. “Motive.”

“For Archie?”

“Yes.” She nodded her head determinedly, ponytail flying. “We need to do it for everyone Jug, even if he’s our best friend. I’m not saying I think he did it, I just want to be thorough.”

“Right. Right.” He conceded. “Alright. I guess he’s been acting weird since the reunion.”

“He has.” Betty said, thoughtful. “He was so quiet at Kev’s I almost forgot he was there.”

“And he made me get drunk with him like we were re-enacting some buddy cop movie.” Jughead added. “But that’s not exactly a motive, that’s just Archie working through his shit in his typical testosterone fuelled way.”

“But it is strange.” She said.

“I can’t see any reason Archie had for killing Doiley.” Jughead said. “And I’m not just saying that because we’ve been friends since his Jessica Alba days, it just doesn’t make sense.”

“Fine, let’s move on.” Betty said, pointing to the next name on the list. “Cheryl Blossom. There’s the obvious, they wanted to remind her of Jason.”
“I think they did a good job of that.” He replied, feeling pity for the girl he normally distained.

“And she was the queen bee of high school.” Betty continued. “That counts for something if you’re going to murder someone at a high school reunion right?”

“I’m gonna go with probably.” He said.

“Now, motive?”

“I’d say she comes from a family of insane psychopaths, but we both know you’re not who you come from.”

“But she isn’t adverse to illegal activities.” Betty said. “She did burn down her own family home.”

“Cheryl Blossom can get her nails dirty.” He nodded. “But she wouldn’t kill someone, especially someone like Doiley, he was so below her radar, she knew him so she could mock him and make him DJ a few parties, killing him would be beneath her.”

“Agreed.” Betty sighed, moving onto the next one, skipping past Valerie Brown, since the Pussycats hadn’t arrived in Riverdale yet, straight onto Chuck Clayton.

“My answer is he’s a vicious asshole for both of them.”

“Fine.” She skipped past him, knowing that there would be no other answer she’d get from Jughead, landing on the slip of paper that had her own name scrawled on it.

“The message being for us makes sense.” Jughead said. “We were the ones most involved in the Blossom stuff, who wrote it down and publicised it, whoever did this, they probably knew we’d get involved again, especially since it was common knowledge that you were back to write an article.”

“I can’t tell if it’s me being self-centred, but I really do think the message was for me.”

He shook his head. “That’s not being self-centred, that’s called examining the facts, I think anyone would agree that’s one of the most plausible options.”

“Next question then, motive?”

“Bets…” Jughead drawled, sceptically.

“What?” She turned to look at him. “I said we were doing it for everyone.”

“We both know you didn’t do it.”

“I could have.” She insisted. “Haven’t you heard that criminals always return to the scene of their crimes? That could be what I’m doing.”

“Then confess, by all means. But I’m not coming up with fake motives for you, it’s pointless.”

“So this is pointless then.” She retorted.

“I didn’t say that.” He tried.

“I know. I know.” Betty interrupted, hands fluttering to pull her ponytail tighter, she began to semi-pace around the small circle of floor that wasn’t covered by his coffee table, getting more frantic with each step. “I’m sorry. It’s just- it does feel pointless. You’re right. The whole thing. I can’t help thinking that we’ll never get anywhere, and that the Sherriff won’t either, so we’ll just be stuck,
going round in circles, until we eventually have to return back to normal life, as failures, and Dilton goes uncared for, no justice found. And it’ll be our fault. Because we missed something. Because we weren’t thorough enough.”

“Hey-”Jughead caught her arm as she moved, stilling her motion, her shoulders visibly unwinding from where they’d tighten with all her pent up tension. “Come on. None of that’s true.” He couldn’t help himself, he tugged her closely and she followed, his arms coming round to wrap her in a tight, comforting hug, her chin resting against his shoulder. “We’re going to figure this out. And if we don’t, then Doiley being dead, having no justice, that won’t be our fault. It’ll be the fault of whoever killed him. You can’t take on responsibility for the whole world Bets.”

“You’re right.” She sighed. “It’s just- my mind goes on these spirals. When I’m by myself, I start thinking too much, and each thought feeds the next one, until I’m just I don’t know, frantic.” She slipped her head down so her forehead was resting against the soft fabric of his shirt.

“I get it.” He said, rubbing her back gently, feeling her breathing in and out against him.

“You help.” Betty said after a few moments, breaking the tentative silence they’d fallen into. “You make my brain quieter.” She said. “Is that a stupid thing to say?”

He shook his head instinctively and then, realising she couldn’t see him, spoke, words coming out sounding hoarse and quiet. “No.” He licked his lips, his fingers stilled at the nape of her neck, sending jolts of warmth against her bare skin. “I think about you so much when you’re around, there’s no room spare for you to overthink.”

It felt like his words had taken all the oxygen out of the room, she pulled back so she could look at his face. “You don’t mean that.” She said.

Somehow, without his permission, his hands had moved from the back of her neck to cup her face, thumb grazing the soft skin of her cheek. “I do. I can’t help it.” Jughead could see the way her eyes flicked from his, to his lips, and back up again. “This is a bad idea.” He said, but he didn’t move his hands.

“If it is, I’m tired of having good ones.” Betty said, and she was moving towards him, and he knew what was going to happen, knew that he should’ve stopped it, but he didn’t, he didn’t want to, so he pressed his lips to hers.

Kissing her at the Whyte Wyrm was like a pale comparison compared to this, an imitation of dream he’d long known he’d wanted, artificial in its creation, and he was so glad that he’d stopped it, moved his lips to her neck, because somehow it made this moment feel more real, more like a first than anything, despite being the third time he’d tasted her lips.

He kissed her once, gentle and tender, pulling back just slightly and feeling the curve of a smile begin to form, and then again, twice, three times, wanting more and more and more. There was no denying that – for most of his life – he’d preferred fantasy to reality, he’d spent years shaping his own life into fiction, but this, Betty soft beneath him, her arms coming round to knock the beanie from his head so she could twine her hands in the soft hair she found there, mouth sweet as syrup, this was better than anything an imagination could produce.

When they pulled apart, Jughead kept his eyes shut, breathing deeply, his hand still cradling the back of her head, as if he had to take a second to be still, to realise what had just happened. “We shouldn’t be doing this.” He protested again when he’d recovered, eyes flying open to look at her wide green ones, because it wasn’t too late to stop, to turn back to the friendship they’d been pretending to rebuild, despite the fact that he could never see her as just a friend, no matter how hard he’d always
“Why not?” Betty asked, frustrated, hand tugging against soft, black curls.

“I’ve had a lifetime of thinking about how many ways this could go wrong Bets. How long have you thought about this?” He said, and he could see confusion clouding her face, mixing with what he thought was desire, but couldn’t be sure. “A few days? A week? Because I’ve been thinking about it every time I see you Betty, from high school right up until now, so I stayed away, because I know, I know it could go so wrong. But I have always wanted this.” He’d been leaning closer as he spoke, despite what he’d been saying, until he brushed his lips against her cheek. “And this.” Her eyelids fluttered shut, and he kissed them, both, fleeting touches that she could’ve almost imagined. “This.” He moved down to her neck. “This.” The slither of collar bone that her shirt revealed. “And this.” He said, now looking her straight in the eyes, and then capturing her lips again, marvelling once more at the miracle of Betty Cooper kissing him back.

Chapter End Notes

I swear they weren't even meant to kiss this chapter but these characters had a mind of their own and thought enough is enough! Please let me know what you think if you want to make my day :)}
Betty had found something that she thought she would never get tired of, something that felt like hers, and she didn’t want to let it go. It was similar, in a way, to her first kiss with Archie, where she’d been fixated not just on the act, but on the fact that it was him. It was Archie that was kissing her. It was Archie that had his hands through her hair. But then, then she’d been thinking, so why don’t I feel anything?

Here, with Jughead’s lips moving against hers, it was like every beat of her heart was pounding out the sound of his name. Jughead. Jughead. Jughead. It was Jughead kissing her, Jughead parting her lips, Jughead’s tongue, his hands flat against her back, his hair that she was tugging, and his mouth she was licking her way into.

All she could think was, why haven’t we been doing this forever? And then, how can I make sure we never have to stop?

She wasn’t sure what exactly she’d been expecting it to be like – because she’d definitely thought about before, but just done an excellent job of convincing herself otherwise – but it wasn’t what she might’ve pictured. She couldn’t compare it to the other kisses they’d shared, one was a shocking, fleeting thing, whilst the other was a lie she’d guiltily initiated, this was something else, something different and new. Jughead wasn’t timid with her, didn’t treat her like some fragile object destined to break, he was tender, but he had no qualms in pulling her roughly to him, until they were crushed against each other, kisses deepening, and that made her hungry for more, for everything.

They were so wrapped up in one another, that Jughead didn’t notice when the backs of his legs found themselves connecting with his couch, not until it was too late and he overbalanced, falling backwards, his grip accidentally bringing Betty down with him.

Her face ended up buried in his shoulder, and he was momentarily horrified, until she turned to look at him. “Are you okay?” Jughead asked, fingers brushing the strands that had fallen from her hair tie’s grip away from her face.
“Yes.” Betty replied, moving so she was now sat more comfortably, inadvertently straddling him, and then burst out laughing at the look of concern on his face, and a moment later, he joined in too, until they were both in hysteric.

“So much for me being suave huh.” Jughead said, giving her that lopsided smirk she loved so much.

“Lucky I don’t like you for your suaveness then.” She said, playful whacking his chest.

“So, you eh- you do like me?” He asked,

Her expression pulled inwards, melting into a display of affection. “Yes. Did kissing you not make it clear enough?”

“No it’s just-“He struggled with his words, smiling widely at her in a way that he was embarrassed about but couldn’t help. “It’s nice to hear you say it.”

“Then I’ll say it as much as you want. I like you Juggy,” Betty said, fingers lightly skimming the side of his face. “I like you. I like you. I like you.” She clutched his chin, holding it in place, and pecked him lightly on the lips, pulling back and grinning at him.

His hands found their way to her hips, holding her to his lap, as if he was afraid if he didn’t she would disappear. He cocked his head at her. “One more time?”

“I like you.” She said, exasperated, laughing at the goofy look that her words had caused.

Jughead looked at her for a moment, and then sighed. “What are we doing?” He asked, but he didn’t sound serious like he had before, he was smiling at her, as if resigned to whatever she said as long as he got to kiss her again.

“I don’t know.” She replied truthfully, but matching his tone, her hands were around the back of his neck now, thumbs resting against his cheekbones. “But do we always have to know everything? We could just try casual Just- can’t we just – just see how things go?”

“Yeah.” He finally said, after the silence stretched on for a moment too long. “We could do that.”

“Great.” Her eyes sparkled, growing even brighter, as her hands slid down to fiddle with the collar of his plaid shirt.

“So I can keep doing this?” He asked, but before she could answer, one hand was already on the back of her neck, pulling her lips back to his.

They kissed slowly at first, Betty could feel his lips curve against hers, a smirk that felt like a promise, and it was enough to make her shiver. One hand remained against her hip, the pads of his fingertips slipping beneath the end of her shirt, startlingly warm, pressing down hard enough that she wondered if they’d leave marks, wondered why she wanted them to, whilst his other hand grazed a trail against her back until he found her hair, deftly his fingers worked to release it from its elastic, until her blond waves fell to frame them both.

“Beautiful.” His voice was rough, ragged, she couldn’t find the words in her to respond “So beautiful Bets.” Her mind and her heart were racing each other, but they were all leading to the same place, to him, to this, their mouths meeting in another rough kiss.

Betty was no longer a teenager, filled with raging hormones that bubbled up with every touch, but when Jughead’s lips moved against hers, his tongue slipped into her mouth, she felt that youthful rush of greed, of want. Suddenly, she understood what people meant when they say they lost
themselves to a kiss, because her mind wasn’t buzzing with worry like it usually did, it was too full
of Jughead, there was no space left to think about anything but his hands gripping the skin beneath
her shirt, the groan he made when she pulled back to lift her top off, the way his hands followed the
movement of this, fingertips gliding over each new strip of skin she revealed.

“You’re overdressed.” She breathed against his lips, fingers scrabbling beneath his t-shirt. Within
seconds, he’d shrugged out of the flannel shirt, top following suit. “Better.” She said, and he
laughed at that, a noise that was quickly swallowed in more kissing, and now it was her turn to let
her hands wander, tracing patterns against newly discovered expanses of skin, noting moles and
freckles she didn’t think she’d ever get to see, to touch.

The only word she could think of to describe Jughead was present, it felt like he was everywhere,
advancing on every part of her body he could reach, forceful, a constant pressure, and she found that
she liked it, she liked it so much it was hard for to think straight, to worry about stupid things like
whether they’d left the blinds open for the whole world to see them.

“Bedroom?” Jughead asked, teeth grazing the soft skin at the juncture of her neck in a way that made
her dizzy.

“Bedroom.” She said in breathless agreement, hands fluttering to the thick curls of his hair, gripping
them as tight as he was holding her. She arched into every spot his hands touch, she might’ve felt
embarrassed, too needy, if she couldn’t feel that he was desperate too.

As soon as he had this acknowledgement, Betty felt his arms tighten around her, and then – suddenly
– he was lifting her up, without even breaking their kiss. One moment she was straddling him, and
the next they were stood and he was holding her, her legs came round instinctively to wrap around
him, her schoolgirl giggle at the unexpected motion turning into a harsh hiss as she inadvertently
pulled their hips together.

She felt ridiculous, hysterical almost, wondering if she would ever be satisfied, if each touch would
stop her wanting more and more and more. She wanted to crawl inside him, make a home for herself
there, when he put her down for a brief moment – so they could make it up the stairs without incident
– she’d felt an ache when their skin didn’t touch anymore.

“As is this okay?” He asked one last time, she was pressed against his door now, and he fumbled with
the handle behind her, breathing heavily against her neck, not taking his eyes away from her for a
second to look at what he was doing.

She didn’t have the words for how okay it was, how it felt like an inevitability that she didn’t want to
outrun. “Yes Juggy.” She settled on. “Yes.” And he grinned, tugging her inside his room.

Betty woke up first, eyes fluttering in the early evening light, feeling momentarily confused about
where she was, until she felt the arm that was flung across her chest tighten as she moved, familiar,
large hands holding her just beneath her breasts. She glanced at Jughead’s bedside table, noting the
time, and felt a brief wave of panic threaten to engulf her, mind suddenly racing with how much time
they’d wasted napping – amongst other things – rather than working, but then she rolled over,
fidgeting until she was face to face with Jughead, and felt her breathing come a little easier.

He looked unexpectedly young, face slack in sleep, and she could almost imagine that they were
back in high school, that they hadn’t been stupid and too scared to start something as teenagers. She
lifted her hand from where it rested, reaching to push back that one curl that seemed to be perpetually
covering Jughead’s face. He sighed at her touch, but he didn’t wake, after a moment of examining
him, she bent forward, pressed a gentle kiss to his jaw, and then wiggled free from his grip, worrying that if she didn’t tear herself away then that she never would, and not wanting to come across like a creep.

Her panties lay at the foot of her bed and she slipped them on, her shirt would still be downstairs where’d she left it, and the thought of wearing something of Jughead’s appealed to her much more anyway. There was a loose gray t-shirt folded neatly on a chest at the end of his bed, so she slipped it on, feeling like a cliché, but still relishing the fact that it smelt like him.

Walking softly so as not to wake Jughead, Betty’s bare feet padded against the floorboards as she made her way downstairs, moving to the kitchen to get a glass of water, leaning back against the counter and marvelling at how much had changed in such a short time.

Betty still remembered how, in that torn up car ride, just looking at Jughead had hurt, it was painful just thinking about the way he’d cut her out of his life, lines going silent, messages unread, the way his eyes skipped past her when they’d met as adults. But now, now she had better memories to replace them with, ones of his smile, his taste, his lips, his hands, the way he sighed, the way he held her tight, the way he made her feel like she was melting beneath him.

It took around twenty minutes until she heard footsteps on the stairs, time she’d filled with tending to Hot Dog, answering a few emails on her phone, making quick calls, all the while wondering what it’d be like when Jughead awoke.

“Hey.” Jughead said, and she turned around to face him, back against his kitchen counter. He crowded her, arms coming to rest on the surface either side of her. “You left me alone.”

“I left you to sleep.” She gently traced the bags beneath his eyes to emphasise her point. “You don’t get enough of it.”

He tugged playfully at the collar of her top. “Thief.” He said, letting his thumb dip inside the shirt to brush against her clavicle, before pulling it back.

Betty blushed, feeling suddenly shy, her hands dropped to wrap around the back of his neck. “I thought you wouldn’t mind.”

“No. I – I don’t.” His fumbled with his words. “I like it. I like it a lot.”

She tilted her head at him, lips quirking upwards into a crinkled smile, liking how he could be nervous and endearing, and then a moment later, so forceful and calm. “Then maybe I’ll make a habit of it.” She replied.

“Hmmm.” He hummed, fingers skimming the tops of her thighs, which his t-shirt did little to cover. Her breath hitched. “I ordered us pizza.” She blurted out. “It’ll be here any minute.”

“From Capulets?”

She nodded, biting her lip.

“They’re always late.” Jughead said, and then he was lifting her up again, hands cupping her ass, scooting her backwards until her head hit the cabinet, but she didn’t care, didn’t bother pausing, just opened her legs so Jughead’s body could slip into the gap, allowing him easier access to kiss her.

“This is unsanitary.” She laughed, as he mouthed kisses against her jaw.
“I’ll clean it.” He replied, moving back to her lips.

He kissed her greedily, tightly, and she liked how it made her feel less crazy, how he seemed to be consumed by this as much as she was. If they were descending into madness, at least they were doing it together.

“How are we ever going to get any work done?” Betty sighed, when he broke the kiss, remaining tantalisingly close.

“I’m obviously not doing my job here if that’s what you’re thinking about.” He smirked.

“No. You are. You definitely are.” She replied, as if to prove her point, she reached up to capture his lips once more.

They could’ve stayed like that forever, wrapped in one another, even it hadn’t been for the sharp rap on the door, a noise that shook them from their reverie.

“I told you the pizza would be here.” Betty laughed when he let her go, hopping off the counter and away from Jughead, and headed to answer the door.

She knew she looked a mess, dressed in someone else’s clothes, with kiss-bruised lips, but she couldn’t find it within herself to care. It was only a delivery boy, and she – unlike the Betty of the past – didn’t care what strangers thought of her. But, when she opened the door, she found it wasn’t a stranger staring at her, it was Archie Andrews.

Betty could only gape at him in shock, unable to stop her features rearranging themselves, feeling her already too-large eyes growing wider. “Archie.” She stammered.

“Betty?” Archie furrowed his brows at her, looking confused, but not really as if he was seeing her, not taking in her full appearance. “I was looking for Jughead, he wasn’t answering his texts. I forgot you were staying here.” His voice trailed off, he finally seemed to have noticed the state she was in, tangled hair, swollen lips, t-shirt that definitely wasn’t hers and barely covered her underwear. “Oh.” He couldn’t stop himself from saying.

That was when Jughead made his appearance, coming up behind Betty, hand grazing the small of her back. “How much-“ He stopped dead. “Archie.”

“You guys are-“ Archie started and then seemed to think better of it. “Okay. Cool. Cool.” He stumbled backwards. “I’ll just-“

The two of them felt frozen.

“He was looking for you.” Betty prompted, finally, nudging Jughead in the side.

“What’s up?” Jughead asked, trying to remain cool and casual, and not like Archie had just caught him committing the ultimate friendship sin.

“It’s nothing.” Archie shook his head, sticking his hands in his pockets. “It can wait.”

“It’s fine I can-“ Jughead tried to say, but Archie was gone, turning to speed walk so quickly out of this situation that it was almost a jog. He would honestly have laughed at the sight, if he hadn’t been the one causing it.

Betty slammed the door shut, leaning back against it as if that five second interaction had drained all the energy from her, trying hard not to feel guilty, like she was still that good girl she’d been
perceived as, caught doing something she shouldn’t.

“Well, shit.” Jughead cursed, running a hand through his already messed up hair. “That’s not exactly how I planned on telling him.”

“What were you going to tell him?” She asks, trying to be casual, acting as if she is not trying to gage how he felt about her.

“I was thinking of filming us, that way I could really rub it in how I stole his ex-girlfriend.” He muttered. “But come to think about it, I think seeing you like this was bad enough.”

She flushed. “I don’t look that bad.”

“Bets, I mean this in the nicest way possible, but you look like an outtake from a porno.” He said, and then seeing her unimpressed glare rushed to speak. “But like a really hot and classy one? Okay. I’m sorry. I really didn’t mean that.” He covered his hand one his face, slumping forward. “I’m going to fuck this up too aren’t I?” His voice came out sounding muffled.

Betty walked over, gently prizing his hand away from his face, and then entwining it with hers. “You haven’t fucked anything up Juggy, definitely not this, and not with Archie either. I dated him over a decade ago, isn’t there like a statute of limitations on things like this?”

“I don’t know, how about I check my well-thumbed copy of the bro code and we can see?”

“He probably wasn’t even mad about it, just surprised.” She pushed onwards. “Call him tomorrow. Let him process it.” They were still holding hands, but her other one had moved up, cupping his face, turning his chin so he had to look at her, grip firm but gentle. “Forget about Archie for now, he’s clearly working through some things. Talk to him tomorrow.”

Finally, he nodded, and she slackened her grip, moving to tug at the soft curls at the nape of the neck, something she’d found herself doing every time she’d gotten a chance since they’d first kissed. “You’re a freaking miracle Cooper.” Jughead said, brushing her hair off her shoulder, touch lingering. “Don’t let me ever forget that.”

“I would never.” Betty replied, inching closer, but her plans ruined by another ill-timed knock, she sighed, spinning away from him. “Let’s hope this time it really is the pizza.”

Jughead couldn’t keep his hands off Betty, not now that he didn’t have to, each touch no longer had him wondering if he’d crossed the line, been following instincts he shouldn’t, because now he knew how she’d react, that she leant into the casual touches, the brush of a hand, the arm around her shoulders, his fingers lightly threading through her hair.

They were sat on his sofa, the empty pizza box lying open on the coffee table, and her feet on his lap, watching Casablanca playing on the TV. It was such a picture perfect image of one of Jughead’s teenage fantasies – down to the junk food and reruns of classic movies – that the only thing reminding him it was real was the weight of Betty’s feet in his lap, the warmth of her body, the way that when she shifted he’d get a fresh whiff of her perfume, like vanilla and peaches and cream.

He felt her shifting and wiggling, fidgeting against the cushions, and he stilled the motion of his hand rubbing nonsense patterns into the soft skin of her ankle, turning to look at her. “Not into the movie?” He asked.

“Mmm. It’s fine.” Betty replied, but she didn’t sound particularly convincing.
“C’mon,” He said, yanking gently on her foot to get her attention. “What’s up?”

“Nothing.” She said, biting on her bottom lip in a way that suggested otherwise.

Jughead tugged, pulling her towards him so now her entire legs, not just her feet, were in his lap, her upper thighs resting against his, she laughed, momentarily caught off guard by his actions. “There’s more where that came from.” He playfully threatened, ghosting across her skin with his fingertips like he was about to tickle her, an action that only succeeded in making her shiver.

“You’re going to think it’s dumb.” She sighed, scooting backwards just slightly so she could sit up.

He caught the hand that rested in her lap, lacing their fingers together. “Not possible.”

“I just – I feel guilty.” Her nose wrinkled as she admitted it, shoulders tightening with nervous anxiety. “I feel like we’re getting nowhere in our investigation, and I feel guilty that we aren’t working right now, like we should be interviewing suspects or compiling notes instead of – you know.”

“Making out and watching old movies?”

“Right.” She nodded, flushing.

“Hmmm, I take it back. It is dumb.” Jughead said, Betty scowled at him half-heartedly, and he squeezed her hand in response. “You’re not dumb Betty, and I know you can’t help feeling like this, I know. But I also know that it’s okay to take time for yourself, you can’t be helping other people 24/7, there has to be downtime, otherwise you’d burn out, and you’re no help to anyone if you turn yourself into a corpse.”

“I know.” She let out a deep sigh. “My therapist tells me I have an inability to relax, my mom just calls it a good work ethic.” The grin she shot him at the end was false, a mockery of the stiff smiles the Cooper clan used to have permanently etched on their lips.

“Do you always feel this bad?” Jughead asked, thumb rubbing soothing circles into the back of her hand.

“Honestly, no. I’ve been doing so much better.” Betty said. “It’s just that Riverdale is bringing out the worst in my anxiety, everything feels magnified in a town this small, especially when you’re us, when you have the kind of reputation that I do.”

He thought about this for a second, before letting go of her hand, and scooting right back into the sofa cushions, spreading his legs so there was a space in front of him, and patting it.

She gave him a sceptical look. “What are you doing?”

“You’re too tense Bets, I thought I could give you a massage? And I mean that in a non-sexual way I promise.” He said, and Betty couldn’t stop her face from betraying a little bit of disappointment, in a way that made him laugh. “Or you know, it could be a little sexual, if that’s what you wanted.

Betty seemed to be weighing up the options, before finally sighing, and standing up only to unceremoniously drop herself into the space he’d provided, for a moment she let herself fall back against his lean chest, before sitting up properly again. “This better not be some convoluted way to kill me by pinching a nerve or something.” She commented, as he gently brushed her hair from her shoulders.

“What kind of a man do you take me for?” He asked, in mock outrage. “You know my plan to kill
you is much more complex than that.”

“Better get on with it then.” She joked.

“I don’t know, I like having you around too much.” Jughead said quietly, as he began working to release the knots of tension in her back. His nimble fingers worked surprisingly well to relax her muscles, Betty often felt as if she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders, and that had long manifested itself as a bunching of shoulders, a tightness in her neck, and here she could feel it loosening, softening beneath his grip.

“Mmmm.” She hummed, after a few minutes. “You’re actually not bad at this.”

Jughead felt a pleased smile sneak onto his face. “It’s going to sound weird but I er- when I was kid, and my mom was looking after me and working, she used to have really bad back problems, so she showed me how to massage her so I could feel like I was helping.”

“That’s not weird Juggy, that’s sweet.”

He shrugged, before remembering that she couldn’t see him, face still turned to the movie. “I guess.”

They fell into a brief silence, Ingrid Berman and Humphrey Bogart confessing their love on the TV the only sound, until one particularly tense knot on her shoulder unravelled, and Betty accidentally let out a brief moan.

Jughead leant forward, lips brushing against her ear. “Did that feel good?”

She went to turn her head back towards him, but a finger against her jaw stopped her. “Watch the movie.” He said, bending down to press a light kiss to the back of her neck.

His hands now began to move southward, down her back until it reached the end of her shirt – his t-shirt that she still wore - and he slipped his hands inside, moving back the way he’d came and taking it with him, as she lifted her arms allowing him to pull the top off completely.

Her back was completely exposed, and he traced the line of her spine with his fingertips, barely touching her, but it was enough to set off sparks shooting through her body. His other arm locked around her body, dipping just under the waistband of her underwear, before he dragged her tight against him, as he leant down to nip at her neck, her breath hitched, and she whipped round to face him.

“You’re going to miss the movie.” He smirked.

“I’ve seen it before.” Betty shrugged, before clambering onto his lap and crushing her lips against his.

Veronica was waiting in the lobby of Riverdale Inn, shifting uncharacteristically nervously in her towering heels, waiting for a certain redhead to descend in the elevator. She found herself thinking back to the last date she’d been on – her ex-cheater of a girlfriend Violet had taken her a rooftop bar in London and they’d gotten too drunk and had a quickie in the bathroom – and trying to compare how she felt waiting for Cheryl to how she felt back then.

The thing was, Veronica Lodge liked dating. She liked it a lot. She loved the little rituals, the picking out of the outfit, the lucky underwear she always put on, the new places, new people, new conversation, and, most importantly, that little flicker of anticipation, the moment where the person
you liked could be anything, any dream or fantasy, anything you wanted, because you didn’t know them yet. It was Schrodinger’s love life, the romance is both alive and dead, until you open that door and get to know the real person behind the eyes that made your heart beat faster.

But things on this date were different. She knew Cheryl. She couldn’t just write this off if it went wrong, this wasn’t that, disposable, unknowable rush, it was something more, quieter, better, but far, far scarier. And that made her nervous.

As a general rule, Veronica did not get nervous. Her brand was one of perpetual self-confidence, an eternal sureness that allowed her to walk into any room and command it, it was something that had made her a horribly brilliant mean girl, and a startlingly good business woman, but here, she lost her grasp on it.

That’s how she found herself shifting awkwardly, checking her phone for the time, hoping that Cheryl being late didn’t mean that she wasn’t interested or, even worse, that she wasn’t actually going to show. And then, Cheryl appeared, stepping out of the elevator looking like the most angelic devil Veronica could’ve conceived of.

“Lodge.” Cheryl nodded haughtily, but there was a cheeky smile playing around her scarlet lips.

“But things on this date were different. She knew Cheryl. She couldn’t just write this off if it went wrong, this wasn’t that, disposable, unknowable rush, it was something more, quieter, better, but far, far scarier. And that made her nervous.

As a general rule, Veronica did not get nervous. Her brand was one of perpetual self-confidence, an eternal sureness that allowed her to walk into any room and command it, it was something that had made her a horribly brilliant mean girl, and a startlingly good business woman, but here, she lost her grasp on it.

That’s how she found herself shifting awkwardly, checking her phone for the time, hoping that Cheryl being late didn’t mean that she wasn’t interested or, even worse, that she wasn’t actually going to show. And then, Cheryl appeared, stepping out of the elevator looking like the most angelic devil Veronica could’ve conceived of.

“Lodge.” Cheryl nodded haughtily, but there was a cheeky smile playing around her scarlet lips.

“Cheryl.” Veronica nodded back, proffering her hand for her to take. Almost shyly, the redhead wrapped their fingers together, and before she could overthink it, Veronica tugged, pulling them together, and placed a chaste kiss to her cheek. “You look beautiful.”

Cheryl flushed. She was used to looking hot, desirable, sexy, but not beautiful, not really. “Thank you.” She said softly, and then, taking a deep breath, her vulnerability disappeared again. “You don’t clean up so badly. I guess it won’t be too much of an embarrassment to be seen with you.”

“I know.” She shrugged. “This dress is Dior. I look beautiful too.”

“You do.” Cheryl replied, surprising them both by leaning forward for a quick peck. “Now whisk me away to whatever hovel you’ve deemed appropriate.”

Veronica did as she was told, and they moved through the lobby as a mesmerising couple, hands still together, heels clacking against the hard floor. “I’ve made reservations at Claude’s, it’s no ‘On Sunset’ but they fly their lobsters down from Maine and I’ve been told they’re delicious. Afterwards, there’s a cocktail bar not too far that I think would be nice. And then we have a room booked at the Greendale Spa.” She was leading them down to the street, hailing a taxi, and bundling Cheryl in as she spoke, hand lingering protectively against the redhead’s back as she let her go in first before sliding in. “Does that seem satisfactory?” She said after giving the driver the address, voice sparkling along with her eyes.

Cheryl had her hands folded in her lap. “Is this a date Ronnie?” She asked, after a moment. “A real date?”

Veronica was surprised. “Yes. Of course. What did you think it was? I told you before that it was going to be a date.”

“I don’t know.” Cheryl replied, a tad defensive. “I thought it might be one of those things you call taking your booty call to dinner because you feel guilty about having a booty call.”

“Cher.” Veronica said, using a name she never had before that just slipped out. She touched her face, just to make sure she was looking at her in the eyes. “I want this to be a real date. I want- I don’t know. We can talk about this. I know things are complicated with us. But I want this to be the first of
many, many real dates. And if you don’t, then okay. We can have sex and part ways. But if you do, I’m offering it.” She paused, shrugging elegantly. “You can think about it.”

For a moment, Veronica thought she was simply not going to respond, and she was okay with that, she wasn’t expecting a miracle, she knew how damaged Cheryl was, how little she’d ever experienced genuine emotion from another person. But then she felt sharp, red fingernails scratch against her scalp, and cherry lips meet hers in a deep kiss.

“We can try.” Cheryl said, as she pulled away. “I don’t know, I haven’t ever-“

Veronica stopped her awkward stuttering by gently tucking a strand of striking red hair behind her ear. “It’s okay. We can try.” She said, reaching for another kiss.

The next morning, Jughead woke up to an empty bed, which wasn’t usual, but what was unusual was the warm patch of mattress next to him, the space where Betty had spent the night curled into his side, and the scent of coffee drifting up from his kitchen.

He would’ve preferred – of course – for her to still be there, so he could’ve rolled over, place a hand against her cheek, pull her in for a good morning kiss, but he was learning that she was much more of an early riser than he was, able to function on a lethally small amount of sleep, and knowing she was waiting for him downstairs was almost as good.

“What are you burning?” Jughead asked as he reached the bottom of the stairs, Betty startled, her attention being drawn away from the pan at the stove. She was dressed in her own clothes, a plain pink t-shirt and a pair of pyjama pants patterned with fluffy clouds, and her hair was damp, curling at the ends, as if she had just gotten a shower. “I should never have told you that I burn things. It’s usually only when I’m baking, you don’t have to make a comment every time.” Her words were annoyed, but she was smiling at him.

“Sure. Sure.” He smirked, moving to wrap an arm around her waist, placing a kiss to the top of her hairline and inhaling the scent of her shampoo. His lips travelled down her cheeks till they landed on her mouth, placing peck after peck.

Betty laughed pulling away, slapping him lightly against his chest when he attempted to resist. “It really will be burnt if you don’t stop.” She shoved him lightly in the direction of the kitchen table. “Now get yourself some coffee and sit down.”

He grabbed his favorite mug, pouring the brewed coffee into it, before taking his usual spot, watching her switch the stove off and transfer the bacon to a kitchen towel, placing two bits of bread in his toaster. “You didn’t have to cook for me Bets.”

“I know.” She shrugged. “Think of it as a reward for waking up early yesterday. Plus, now it’s your turn to figure out something for dinner.”

“You know if you leave it to me we’ll be eating Pop’s?” He asked, gratefully accepting the plate she slid his way.

Beneath the table their legs brushed, and it made them both want to smile. “Nope.” Betty shook her head. “Since you made me that omelette and let it slip you can cook, I’m expecting something homemade.”

“Cook is a strong word.” He protested.
She smirked into her cup of coffee. “I guess you’d better get planning.”

“Mm.” He bit into his food. “Delicious. Although it is almost impossible to get wrong, even burnt bacon tastes like meat from God himself.”

“Ew. But thanks, I think.”

He dug into his food with his usual enthusiastic vigour, but the whole time, he could feel Betty’s gaze trained on him as she ate her own meal, eyes peering at him over the rim of her mug. “Alright, what are you planning?”

“I’m not planning anything.” She said, amused.

“You’ve got that look in your eye.”

“What look?”

He shrugged, leaning back against his chair. “I don’t know, but it spells nothing but trouble.”

“I was just thinking about what we should do today.” And it was clear that she’d been waiting to launch into this spiel since she’d woken up, the time she’d spent alone while he slept providing ample opportunity for her brain to go into overdrive, to conjure up a plan for the day that would make up for an afternoon spent exploring each other instead of the case. “This morning I think we should try again to get in touch with people that Dilton knew now, send another email, maybe as the news sinks in they’ll be more willing to respond. And Veronica texted me saying she wants to meet for lunch, so I think that’s when you should talk to Archie? If that’s what you think you have to do. Then we can reconvene afterwards, it’s probably time that we actually talk to the Sherriff and see if he’s willing to listen.”

“My guess is that it will be a resounding no.” Jughead muttered, biting into his last bit of toast.

“That’s a possibility.” Betty said, seeming unfazed by it. “But I’d rather we try talk to him than be accused of hiding evidence or theories from him. Then, at least we can say we tried.”

“As reluctant as I am to spend time with our esteemed Sherriff, you’re right.”

Betty’s face lit up, and she pulled his now empty plate from him. “Perfect. Now, go get ready, we’ve got some sleuthing to do.”

They spent the rest of the morning doing exactly as she’d planned, typing up polite emails to people they’d discovered from Dilton’s past, old co-workers at the computer technician job he’d been mysteriously fired from, new co-workers at the Utah park ranger, people they’d already tried to contact – without much luck – but who they hoped would be more receptive to their questions now they’d let a little time pass.

But no one had responded by the time they were shutting their laptops down and hopping into the car, Jughead drove Betty back to the inn to pick up her own vehicle – something she’d been avoiding for reasons neither of them were quite aware of – so she could drive herself to lunch.

Jughead had one hand on his steering wheel, the other lay on the console between them, entwined with Betty’s, and it felt so domestic, so much more than just sex, that he could almost imagine that this was what his life was like, that time with Betty could last a lifetime instead of just this fraught week.

They pulled over just outside the entrance for the hotel, Jughead refusing to drive into the actual
parking lot. “Just in case they’re watching out for us Bets.” He claimed, grinning at her. “Can’t be too careful when you’re a criminal.”

“You’re ridiculous.” Betty said, rolling her eyes, hand on his knee as she reached over for a goodbye peck. “I’ll see you after lunch?” She asked as she made a move toward the door, he nodded. “I hope everything goes okay with Archie.”

“Me and you both.” He muttered, and then she was out the door and gone.

Betty felt the prickling of self-consciousness encroach on her as she walked through the entrance of Pop’s, scanning the area for her best friend. She wondered if Veronica would be able to tell without her saying anything, if she could read it in her grin, the loosening of her shoulders, if she would be able to figure out with just one glance what had transpired with Jughead. Just thinking about it made her shiver, pull her jacket closer around herself, not because she was ashamed, but because the thing they had – whatever it was – felt special, as if she should somehow be kept secret, and by exposing it here, even it was only to her best friend, it would change it somehow, the balance would be thrown, and they’d lose it.

But she couldn’t change it, couldn’t will herself to be less happy so Veronica wouldn’t notice, she knew that whatever was going to happen was going to happen, and she’d had to resign herself to that fact. That still didn’t stop her freezing just a little when she saw Veronica enthusiastically waving at her from a booth.

“Betty!” Veronica stood up, teetering on her heels to pull her best friend into a bone crushingly tight hug,

“Hey V.” Betty hugged her back just as fiercely, but with a little more confusion thrown in. She’d been so focused on what the other girl might think of her, that she’d forgotten Veronica wanted to tell her something in the first place, something that was clearly good news judging from the greeting she’d gotten. “How are you?” She asked, as she slipped into her seat.

Veronica sat down opposite, pushing the plate of fries she’d already purchased towards her. “Better than ever.”

“And what’s got you so happy?” She asked, snagging a fry. “Not that I’m complaining.”

“Well,” Veronica took a deep breath, sweeping her hair off her shoulders elegantly. “I may or may not have started up a romantic rendezvous.”

Betty swallowed her food, nearly coughing. “With who?” Her brow furrowed.

“How are you enjoying your food B?” Veronica asked, nervously, pushing the fries towards her.

“I enjoyed them more when they weren’t bribes.” She said. “V, are you back with Archie? Because you know you don’t need to ply me with food to stop feeling guilty, I couldn’t care less about you two being together. You know this.”

“You’re on the right track. Red hair. Check. But think less muscle more style and cleavage.”

It took a few seconds for her to figure it out, but the exact moment she did you could see the expression dawning on her face, the surprise rendering her momentarily unable to hide the look of confusion, shock, and hint of annoyance that stretched her features. “Cheryl? Cheryl Blossom?”
“You didn’t have to say it like that.” Veronica snapped, chin turned upward in a haughty gesture.

“No. I didn’t mean to. I’m just-“

“Surprised?” She asked wryly, picking at the pile of fries.

“Yes. I just didn’t ever – she’s just so-“


“Cheryl. She’s just- Cheryl.” Betty said. “But that’s so great-“ She leant across the table to take her hand, squeezing it. “I’m sorry, this was not how I meant to react, I was just really surprised. But you seem so happy, so I’m happy.”

“I am.” The dark haired girl admitted, squeezing her hand back, looking radiant. “I really am.”

“Go on.” She pulled her hand back, leaning away. “Tell me all about it. That’s the real reason I’m here right?”

“And I missed your pretty face.” She replied, mischievous smirk playing on her lips. “But yes, mainly I wanted to gloat about my delicious new relationship.”

“Relationship?”

Veronica blushed, a rarity, but was nodding. “Yes. I mean, it’s not like we’re strangers or getting married. We talked for a long time last night, and we’re going to try long distance. I’ve been planning lots of trips to LA to give the brand more exposure on the west coast anyway, so this, I don’t know, it felt like it just slotted into the place. Like there was a cosmic call from the universe to try this out.”

“Oh V. That’s wonderful.” She gave a crumpled smiled, wanting to reach over the counter and hug her. “How did it happen?”

So Veronica launched into the whole story, their flirtatious interactions since the night the reunion began, how she hadn’t been sure that Cheryl was even gay until she’d confronted her, the sleepover, the kiss, everything that followed, their date in a restaurant in Greendale, and their night spent in a hotel afterwards, where their plan, to be serious about each other, had fallen into place. She talked for long enough that the cold plate of fries was whisked away and replaced with individual meals and two icy milkshakes. As Betty listened, she felt sharp stabs of doubt and pain twisting her stomach, despite how genuinely happy she was for Veronica, all of it reminded her of how unstable her thing with Jughead was, how they’d declined to define it, by her own request, and were coasting along on the basis of having fun.

“Anyway, how are you? We didn’t really get a chance to talk at Kev’s, what happened with Jughead? Did you guys make up?”

Betty choked on the milkshake she’d been drinking, “Mmm.” She said, after she’d swallowed. “You could say that.”

Veronica looked her up and down with such intense, almost mechanical, precision that it was scary, taking in every detail, and then she gasped, eyes lighting up. “Betty Cooper, you fox. I can’t believe I didn’t notice immediately, Kevin would so kill me for my subpar skills.”

“What?” She tried for a moment to still remain innocent, if a little flustered, face arranged in an artificially confused look.
“You’re sleeping with Jughead. Right? Right!?"

“Um, yes?” Betty admitted defeat, slumping against her seat and putting her drink down, head tilted to the side. “Yes. Okay. Yes I am.”

“Oh my god.” Veronica exclaimed. “I’ve been waiting for this longer than I waited for the new Fendi bag to go on sale, what happened? How was he?”

“I don’t know.” She flushed. “It just happened. One minute I was freaking out, and the next minute, Jughead had his arms around me, and I just kissed him.”

“I’m melting at how adorable that is. But more, I want more.”

“It’s just been- amazing.” Betty said. “He’s so caring and,” She bit her lip, her voice low and thick. “Good. Really, really good.”

“As much as I loathe to imagine our resident weirdo in any compromising potions, I’m beyond ecstatic about this Betty, look at you! You’re glowing with satisfaction. After all these years, wandering the halls as Riverdale High’s very own Romeo and Juliet, you took the plunge, I’m proud of you, and Kevin is going to be so mad you did it the second he left town. You totally have to let me be the one to tell him.”

“You can tell Kevin.” Betty aid, trying not to focus on her best friend’s other words. She felt a jolt, just a little, of pressure, all this talk of finally, of taking the plunge, made her anxiety creep up on her. “But, right now, we’re taking things slow.” She blurted out. “It’s just for the reunion, we’re just having some fun. We don’t have to know everything.”

“Hmm.”

“What?” She snapped.

“Nothing. It’s just, you haven’t talked about what will happen when we all fly the nest again?” Veronica asked, looking a tad concerned.

“No.” She shook her head. “We agreed that we were just having fun. Seeing how things go and whatever. We’re doing casual.”

“You and Jughead are doing casual?” Veronica repeated.

“Yes.” Betty said defensively, folding her arms across her chest. “Why is that so hard for you to believe?”

“If this was anyone else, under any other circumstances, I’d be applauding you B. But Betty, I’m worried about you, have you met Jughead? He is the single most intense person I’ve ever met. When Pop considered taking the vanilla malt shake off his menu Jughead stood up and gave a speech about integrity and the decay of the American Dream, it lasted twenty minutes, he quoted George Bernard Shaw, and Jughead didn’t even like that flavour!” She paused to let that sink in. “He does not do casual, especially when it comes to you.”

“You certainly remember a lot about Jughead’s speeches.” The blond mumbled.

Veronica shrugged elegantly. “What can I say? Jughead can be pretty inspiring when he wants to be. But you” She raised a manicured finger, pointing it accusingly at her. “Are wilfully missing my point. I don’t know why I’m even bothering to bring up that incident when I know you remember it, Jughead only got his cape out when you told us Vanilla Malt was your favorite flavor as a kid.”
“Milkshakes and sex are not the same thing.” She replied, hearing how ridiculous that sentence sounded even as she said it, shoulders tightening so they came up around her ears, before she sighed, unwinding her arms from where they’d been clenched across her chest and letting her palms fall against the table. “We’re fine. I know you’re concerned, and I appreciate it, but me and Jug, we’re doing okay.”

Veronica watched her thoughtfully, as if weighing up how to proceed, she leant back against the cracked, vinyl booth, crossing her ankles neatly beneath the table. “Okay. So, you’re doing casual.” She said, and watched Betty nod determinedly. “So, it’s just physical then?” Her tone was attempting to be innocence, but was verging closer to calculating.

“I guess.” Betty sighed, unable to stop the scowl clouding her face, because agreeing to that just didn’t feel right.

“Right. It’s like friends with benefits?” She ploughed on without waiting to hear an answer. “When you’re not having sex you’re just pals, like me and you.”

“I wouldn’t say that.” Betty said, slumping in her seat in an annoyed huff.

“But he’s not affectionate with you when you’re not having sex? He doesn’t kiss you good morning? Or find ways just to be touching when you’re hanging out?”

“I-“ She faltered, thinking about the way he’d kissed her forehead that morning, that her let her put her feet in his lap, how he’d squeezed her hand when they’d been driving. “He does some of those things.”

“Okay.” Veronica said, a satisfied glint in her eye. “But he doesn’t compliment you all the time? Listen to all your problems? Look at you like he’s a disgustingly lovesick puppy? You’ll be able to just forget all about him if things don’t work out?”

“I get it V.” She snapped, and suddenly she felt – for one horrifyingly too long moment – that she was going to cry.

Veronica clearly saw that she’d gone too far, recognised the crumpled and pained look passing across her best friend’s features, leaning across the table to grab Betty’s hands where they lay on the table. “Oh Betty, I’m sorry. I wasn’t trying to upset you.”

The blond was looking at the table, the scratched marks that marred it, that had probably been there since the day she and Jughead had met, and would probably be there long after they said their final goodbyes. “I know. I know.” She said, refusing to look up.

“I just wanted to make you see, how you feel about Jughead, that’s not casual.” Veronica said

“What else are we meant to do?” Betty asked. “We live on opposite sides of the country.”

“Yeah, and me and Cheryl live in different countries B, we’re still going to try to make it work.” She pointed out.

Betty pulled her hands out from under her best friend’s, slumping against her seat, letting her head fall to the side, looking out the window at a sight she’d once known so well. “You think it’s that simple?” She turned back to dark haired girl, a tinge of sarcasm to her voice.

Veronica shook her head. “It’s not a question of it being simple, it’s a question of whether it’s worth the fight.”
Jughead stood outside Archie’s front door, waiting, although what he was waiting for he couldn’t be certain, maybe for him to pluck up the courage to knock, or for Archie to come bursting out in a rage and tell him he wasn’t welcome, or waiting to lose his nerve and turn back to his car and avoid the whole mess entirely.

Logically, he knew Archie probably wasn’t mad at him, that his best friend might’ve known for a while that Jughead held a candle – or an entire forest fire – for Betty Cooper, despite his best efforts not to let on, but there was still a part of him, the part leftover from a childhood of neglect and abandonment, that had always been waiting for the moment that Archie decided enough was enough, and that part was suggesting to him that going after his ex-girlfriend would be it.

But Jughead Jones was many, many things, but a coward wasn’t one of them, so he took a deep breath, and knocked on the door.

It took a few moments of anxious waiting, feet shuffling and hands shoved deep into the depths of his pockets, before the door swung open to reveal Archie, looked tired, in a pair of sweats and an old band t-shirt, blinking into the midday sun.

“Surprise.” Jughead said weakly. “It’s my turn for an unexpected visit, got any half-naked girls you wanna shock me with?”

Archie looked at him for a beat, running a hand over his sleep-crumpled face, before stepping back, the door swinging open. “Nope. But come on in.”

They made their way into the kitchen, Archie blearily headed for the cupboard, shoving a Pop-Tart into the toaster, while Jughead swung himself up on a stool by the counter, waiting and watching his friend emerge from the depths of sleep and back into normal civilisation. It was a sight that was all too familiar to him, from days spent living there in high school, Archie blundering around the Andrews kitchen, whilst Jug sat on his usual chair, eating, or talking, or ranting. A lot of important conversations had taken place in that room, and in those exact positions, so it only seemed fitting that they’d revisit it now, for this.

“So, you and Betty huh?” Archie asked, sliding a glass of orange juice towards Jughead and slipping into his seat opposite. “You’re a thing?”

“We may have had a moment.” He conceded.

“Looked like more than a moment.” The redhead snorted.

“It was a moment that turned into a few more moments.” Jughead muttered, looking down. “Arch-”

“Dude, it’s cool. There’s no need to look so guilty, I didn’t catch either of you doing anything wrong.”

“You don’t subscribe to the bro code?” He asked, eyebrow raised.

“Nah. That's bullshit. Betty’s her own woman who hasn’t dated me in like a decade. You believe in that stuff?”

“I wasn’t sure.” Jughead shrugged. “I only have one bro, I was waiting to hear how he’d react.”

“And?” Archie teased.
He shrugged. “Reggie seemed cool with it.”

“Jerk.” Archie grinned around his mouthful of pastry.

“Seriously though,” Jughead said, after returning the look with a smirk. “It’s good that you’re not, you know, upset or whatever. I would’ve told you but-“

“I interrupted.” He finished for him, and Jughead nodded. “Like I said, it’s cool. Honestly, it’s been a long time coming.”

Jughead tensed. “What do you mean?”

“Jug, I can be kinda clueless, but not that clueless. I sort of figured you had a thing for her when you told me not to tell Veronica you lived with me, so Betty wouldn’t know where to find you. Or how you refused to talk to her but always asked me how she was doing.”

“I’m that fucking obvious huh?” He sighed, rubbing his chin with his hand. “And here I thought I was being subtle.”

“You’ve never been subtle when it comes to Betty.” Archie replied. “I think I just blocked it out my mind in high school. But now, Jug, this is great, I’m happy for you dude. Are you two like- dating?”

“No.” He said. “Not really. It’s just- we’re working through things. Having fun while this reunion lasts,”

Archie seemed unimpressed with that answer, and the pained expression that came with it, but it didn’t feel like his place to say anything so he just shrugged in return and took another bite of his Pop-Tart. “Alright, I hope things work out for you. I think you’ll probably be good for each other.”

“Thanks man.” Jughead nodded at him, taking a gulp of juice. “We wouldn’t have continued without your blessing.”

“Anytime.”

“So,” He said, stretching his arms above his head, letting them full back down to his side. “What brought you to Chez Jones in the first place?”

Archie looked uncomfortable, shifting in his seat, like he was trying to avoid his best friend’s gaze. “There’s been something on my mind since we got here, I got some news like the day after Doiley died.” He admitted with a sigh.

“What was it? About the band?”

“Kinda.” He replied. “It affects it at least.”

Jughead titled his head, eyeing him thoughtfully. “You wanna talk about it?”

“I did. But now, I don’t know, I think I’m gonna sit on it a bit longer.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah man.” Archie said, giving him a smile that only looked slightly faked. “I’d rather just forget it for now. But you wanna hang out for a bit? Play some video games?”

“Get me a bag of chips and you’re on.”
Betty’s car idled outside The Pembrooke, watching to see if her best friend got home safe, at the entrance, Veronica gave one last wave, before slipping into her building. But still, Betty lingered, her thoughts were all in a jumble, and she was trying desperately to sort through them, eyes unfocused, staring dreamily off at some spot in the distance.

She was so lost in her own mind, that she didn’t notice someone was approaching, not until she heard the sound of her passenger door opening, she tried to reach for her phone, her other hand scrambling for the lock, but it was too late, a large hand landed on her shoulder, and squeezed it painfully.

“If it isn’t my old friend.” An almost-familiar voice growled. “I’d think twice about going for that phone if I were you.” There was the sound of a door slamming shut, and she was trapped, alone, in the car with this man.

She flicked her head towards him, her body was tight, coiled with the adrenaline that had begun pumping through her body, and she felt like a block of ice beneath his palm. “Gunner.” Betty said, willing her voice not to shake, as she took in the Serpent that had her cornered, the gang leader she’d seen just a few days prior, who’d been less than impressed by the two journalists.

“It’s nice to see you remember my name.” He gave one last squeeze, so tight she wondered if it would leave marks, before releasing her, reclining against the car seat as if he was completely at ease, like he had as much right to be there as she did. “Now I wonder if I can remember yours huh? Betty… Betty… Betty Cooper was it?”

“That’s me.” She replied, each word careful, she tried, in incremental movements, to move her hand closer and closer to her pocket.

“Funny.” Gunner leant towards her, close enough that his hot breath rushed across her face, before she could act he had his hand in her pocket, and now her phone was his. He twirled it like it was a game, a toy, an uncanny grin stretching his would-be handsome face, the scar that marred it distorted with his expression. “You never mentioned your last name when we first met.”

“It didn’t come up.” Betty said through gritted teeth, pulse hammering.

“Really? Didn’t think to mention you were Alice’s daughter huh? Or that you were a journalist off in the big city?” He mocked.

“I was there for Jughead.”

“Bullshit.” Gunner spat, spittle hitting her bare cheek, she didn’t flinch, no matter how much she wanted to, and he leant away again. “You’re a liar Betty Cooper. And if there’s one thing the Serpent’s don’t like, it’s a liar.”

“Technically I never lied, I just didn’t tell you the whole truth.”

“Right.” He actually laughed at that, a short, sharp bark. “But it was an important truth I’d like to have known, rather than have my bar buzzing about it afterwards, having to get someone to fill me in.”

“I won’t make that mistake next time.” She replied, hands clenched into tight fits, her nails digging into scars that had long since healed, she tried to get herself to relax.

“There won’t be a next time.”
Betty took a huge gulp of air, turning to glare at him sharply. “What do you want? Is this about Dilton Doiley?”

“The kid that died? Please, the Serpents have nothing to do with him. And I’d think twice before telling anyone we do.”

“Get out my car, before I drive us straight to the Sheriff.” She said.

“You wouldn’t do that.” Gunner dismissed her. “You know better than to cross me, have me arrested for this and I’ll be out in a week, and with a whole pack of Serpents ready for you. I admire you for thinking of it. It’s a shame your mother was unfaithful to the Southside, you would have made such a good Serpent if you’d been raised right.”

She felt reckless, fear and anger fighting for dominance in her body. “You’ve ruined the Serpents.” She spat. “I’d have felt proud to be one under FP, but now, I’d rather be dead.”

“Don’t say things you don’t mean.” His voice was low, threatening.

“What do you want?” She repeated.

“Consider this a warning.” Gunner said. “Don’t lie to the Serpents Cooper, and pass the message on to your little boy toy.”

With that, he was gone, tossing her phone at her and slamming the door shut violently behind him, leaving Betty alone in her car, attempting to steady her breathing.

Chapter End Notes

Oops. There you go! We're getting closer to the end folks, and I hope you're still liking where it's going.

I'd really appreciate any comment you might want to leave, I love each and every one :)

Also I totally can't believe I wrote basically 4k of them making out! Lmao, I hope you liked it!
The Wronged Man

Chapter Summary

“Jesus Christ.” Jughead shook his head. "Will our lives never not resemble the plot of a bad, teen show?"

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the wait guys! I've been sick and busy which is a terrible combination when you want to get writing done. I hope you enjoy it anyway, and I'm sorry about any mistakes because only I (badly) proof read these haha.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

All she wanted to do was see Jughead, it took her a moment to calm her breathing enough to call him without alarming him, and she didn't want to freak him out, to make him worried over her without her being there to assure him she was okay. So she waited, doors firmly locked this time, until she felt confident enough to pick up her phone and dial.

“Hey.” Jughead answered quickly, and the sound of his voice, warm, intimate, made her feel almost immediately better. “You done with Veronica?”

“Yeah.” Betty breathed out. “Can I park the car at your house?”

“Of course. I’ll be right there. You okay?” He picked up on something, a note out of rhythm in her voice.

“Uhuh.” She tried.

“Are you sure?”

Betty sighed, biting her lip. “I’m okay. There was a bit of an incident, but don’t worry. I’m okay. I’ll tell you at your house?”

His voice was sharper now, rich with concern. “Bets, are you hurt? What happened?”

“Nothing.” She tried to keep her voice even and smooth. “Let’s talk back at the house. Please.” Her tone was slightly pleading, she just wanted to get off the phone, to see him person, to have him wrap his arms tight around her and not let go. “I promise I’m fine.”

“Betty-“

“So I’ll see you in a sec okay?” She asked, words all running together, unusually high pitched, and then she slammed the phone down without giving him a chance to respond.

Despite the bitter taste of panic that still lingered in the back of her throat, her hands were surprisingly steady on the wheel and her breath was coming even. She forced her mind to focus on
the mechanics of her situation, turn the wheel, adjust the mirrors, signal, pause at the traffic light, don’t think about how vulnerable you were, don’t think about how your lack of focus could’ve easily cost you your life.

When that didn’t work, driving through the quiet suburban streets not providing enough distraction, she switched to approaching what had happened practically, sifting through what this might mean for the case. She mentally catalogued this to add to the murder board, that Gunner and the Serpents had been more shaken by her visit than they’d originally anticipated, but she couldn’t figure out if it was just gang logic, anger at her betrayal by omission, or if there was something more sinister lurking, maybe the Serpents were more involved with Dilton’s death than they’d imagined.

It hadn’t been the most danger she’d ever been in, not by a longshot, but that didn’t stop her fear, couldn’t make the knots of anxiety in her chest loosen. There’d been times where she’d had a gun pointed at her, been on ride alongs and tailed criminals, so a hand against her shoulder and a rush of rotten breath should’ve been nothing, but it wasn’t. Back in New York, her work had an off switch, she could go home, take off the bulletproof vest and put away her notepad, and talk to her friends, watch a movie, leave it behind. But in Riverdale, everything was so mixed up together – the case, her, Jughead, them, Dilton, all the suspects, all the witness – here, where the work was her life, and vice versa, it felt like there wasn’t an escape.

Jughead was waiting for her by his front door, leaning back against the wall, she tried not to look at him, although she wasn’t sure why, but he noticed her immediately, springing into a tense stance as soon as he’d seen her car turn into the driveway.

“Hey.” He said, carefully trying to appear nonchalant as she approached, her car door slamming shut behind her. “Is everything okay? Did you have a fight with Veronica?”

Betty couldn’t bring herself to look him in the eyes, her gaze was instead trained steadfastly at her own sneakers, and she gave a short shake of the head. “No. Can we just go inside?”

“Betty-“ He reached out to cup her face, force her to look at him, but she jerked her chin away. “Inside.” She said sharply. And then, quieter, more pleading. “Please.”

He did as she said, fumbling with the keys in the lock, and she could feel the anxious waves radiating off him, waves that matched the own worried nausea, and it made her feel almost guilty, but all she wanted was to get inside, into this place that had somehow become her sanctuary for the past few days.

As soon as the door was shut behind them, she launched herself at Jughead, burying her face in his soft t-shirt. Automatically, his arms came round to hold her, she breathed out deeply, freeing herself of the tension that had locked her limbs during the short car ride.

“Betty, please. Tell me what happened.” Jughead begged, he was holding her as tightly as she clung to him, almost painfully so, and she liked it, needed that solid presence to keep her together.

She breathed him in, the scent of his detergent, the shampoo she’d stolen and used on her own hair, warm, comforting, he smelt like home, like safety. It was startling for her to think that, when she looked back on their first meeting in years, the heart-in-her-throat moment of spotting him across the road with Hotdog, she would’ve never guessed that she’d end up here, even if she’d know that’s what she wanted, she could never have imagined he’d have wanted it too. “Would you believe me if I said I just missed you?” Her voice was shaky even to her own ears, muffled by his shirt, and she winced knowing how it sounded.
“Maybe if we’d been apart three years and not three hours.” He replied, moving to gently stroke her silky hair.

“Every hour away from you feels like a year.” She attempted to joke, but the words came out sounding stuck in her throat.

“Betty.” He disentangled their bodies, pulling back, holding both her hands in his. “Nothing about this is remotely funny, just tell me why you’re upset.”

Sighing, she gently tugged her hands from his grip, moving towards the living room, and settling herself on the sofa, legs tucked beneath her. Jughead came to sit next to her, watching her worry at her lip whilst she thought of how to phrase it.

“I don’t want you to freak out.” She finally said, voice laced with cautiousness.

His hand moved to slide soothingly along her thigh. “So I won’t freak out, fine.”

Her face betrayed how sceptical she was about that, but she pressed on regardless. “I was sat in my car after dropping Veronica off, when someone decided to pay me a visit.”

Jughead narrowed his eyes. “Who?”

She took a deep breath. “Gunner.”

“The Serpent?”

She nodded.

His hand tightened unconsciously on her leg. “That goddamn son of a bitch. What did he want? Did he touch you? Hurt you?” Suddenly he was all over her, caressing her face, neck, hair, as if he was worried she would disappear if he stopped.

“Can you bring back the Jughead of ten seconds ago? You know, the one who said he wouldn’t freak out?”

“This is not me freaking out. This is a totally appropriate reaction to someone finding out that the head of an unfriendly gang cornered my –” He choked, voice trailing off, before finishing lamely. “You.”

“Juggy.” She placed a hand over his own, where it rested against her cheek. “I’m fine.” Then she leant forward, pressing a gentle kiss to his lips. “I’m fine.”

He rested his forehead against hers. “You didn’t seem fine. And you don’t have to be-“

“Okay.” Betty interrupted. “It freaked me out. I won’t lie to you Jughead, I was scared. Something about Gunner he- he gets to me. But now, I’m fine. With you here, I’m fine.” She meant it, giving him another soft kiss before pulling back.

There was a long pause where Jughead seemed to be thinking, before he spoke. “Okay.” He said, voice serious. “But what did he want? Was it about Doiley?”

“I lied to him. Apparently someone told him about my mom, and about my job back in New York.”

“Technically, you never lied to him.”

Betty couldn’t stop herself from laughing a little at that. “Funny, I said the exact same thing.”
“Bets, I told you this wasn’t funny. I said those exact words, this isn’t funny.” He stroked one finger against her cheek, but his lips quirked up despite himself, a soft smile he only ever gave to her.

“I was just saying.” She rolls her eyes affectionately. “That’s what I said, but he didn’t seem convinced. He just told me to never do it again. And erm- to pass the message on to you.”

“Jesus Christ.” Jughead shook his head. “Will our lives never not resemble the plot of a bad, teen show?”

“I don’t know.” She sighed.

“But that was it? And then he just left?”

“He left.” She confirmed. “And then I came straight here.” With that explained she stood up, attempting to scoot past him towards the other end of the room.

He caught her wrist tugging, gently, to stop her moving too far away. “What are you doing?”

“Adding what happened to the murder board.” Betty replied, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Gunner said it wasn’t about Dilton, but we can’t rule it out. He seemed mad Juggy, more than just because some random girl lied, I don’t know, maybe the Serpents had something to do with it.”

He looked up at her, something that she couldn’t quite name in his eyes, and it made her squirm. “What?” She asked, shifting on her feet, exasperated.

“Nothing.” He shook his head again, dropping her hand just long enough to stand up, wasting no time in reaching for her again, curling a hand around the back of her neck and leaning down to press his lips firmly against her forehead. They stayed like that for a long moment. “I’m glad you’re safe Bets.” Jughead finally pulled away, just slightly, whispering into her hair. “I don’t know what I’d do if you got hurt.”

“Good thing you won’t have to find out.”

“I’m serious Betty.” His voice was rough. “This is dangerous stuff. I know you knew that already it’s just – just don’t get hurt. Please.”

“Alright.” She finally relented, tugging on his belt loop so they hips were knocked together. “As long as you promise me the same thing.”

“I promise. Neither of us are allowed to die until we’re 103 years old and surrounded by our loving family”

Betty pretended that she wasn’t wondering if he meant their family together, or something completely different. “Noted.” She nodded, moving away. “Now, let’s add some more to the board.”


Veronica sat on her plush, velvet sofa, kicking off her heels and pulling her legs beneath her. She tugged her phone from her purse, flicking through the contacts before she reached Kevin’s, but her hand hovered over the screen, not quite pressing down on call. She felt odd, strange, and she realised it was because she missed Cheryl. It was ridiculous. They’d barely been apart, but she felt enmeshed in that ridiculous stage of infatuation when just being away from the other person for a few hours felt wrong. But it was more than all the other times, it wasn’t just floaty, free, and surface level, what she, what they felt, that was deeper.
She sighed, shaking her head and laughing at herself, before finally tapping the screen.

Kevin picked up instantly, and she could hear the smirk even in just his first breath. “Veronica Lodge. Finally ready to let me live vicariously through you?”

“You don’t need to live vicariously through me.” She leant her head against the cushions, settling in for a long conversation. “You have a great boyfriend and a nice, if not exactly spacious, LA apartment. You’re living the dream Keller.”

“Hmmm.” He sighed. “You’re right. I’m perfect. But I still want all the details.”

“Well,” Veronica said. “I have two pieces of news I can give you. One is about me, and the other is decidedly not.”

“Did Archie hook up with one of his numerous exes? I do love a good Andrews fuckboy moment.”

“Not quite. But it does involve some old friends of ours in some compromising positions.”

“Don’t.” He faux-gasped. “Don’t tease me about this if it isn’t true Lodge.”

“If what isn’t true?” She smirked.

“Jughead really grew some balls and bedded Betty. He must’ve have, that’s literally the only answer I will accept.”

“Lucky for you, you’re right.” She sighed, stretching out and wiggling her toes against the end of the sofa. “Betty and Jughead hooked up. Multiple times.”

“And he was good right?”

“She didn’t say.” Veronica replied. “But she had that look about her.”

“The look of a satisfied woman.” He said, solemnly. “I knew it. It’s always the quiet ones, plus he has that tortured writer thing going for him. Like Dan Humphrey but not as annoying.”

“They’re being dumb about it.”

“What else is new?” Kevin replied. “They were dumb tiptoeing around each other in high school. They’re dumb now.”

“Betty’s insisting they’re doing casual.”

“Please,” He scoffed. “I guarantee she’ll be asking you to be maid of honor next week.”

“I’m not so sure. This has all the makings of a Cooper disaster. She can get a little- manic. I still remember the phone call I got after her first one night stand, that girl had some unhealthy internalised misogyny drilled into her by Alice and Hal.”

“Pretty sure she’s about to have that drilled out of her.”

Veronica burst into a surprised bark of laughter, she could imagine his face at that innuendo, and suddenly she wanted, more than anything, for him not to have left Riverdale. “You’re gross Kev. But I wish you were still here.”

“Me too.” He sighed. “Once you and Betty have emerged from your love bubbles I’m going to have a real talk with you both about waiting until the moment I left to make your moves. But it was the
right thing to do, we had to leave. Ravi needed to go.”

She examined her chipped toenail polish. “I know.

“Actually, about Ravi, I have my own news.”

“Spill.” She replied. “What happened?”

Kevin took a deep breath. “We’re engaged.”

“Shut up.” Veronica said, genuinely caught completely off guard.

“It’s not official yet but- these past few days in Riverdale, they really threw things into sharp focus. He hated every second here, but, but he didn’t insist we leave, that was me, I didn’t want him to stay here when it was making him miserable. And I don’t know, it made me feel like our relationship was ready to handle anything. So this morning, after we’d slept off the plane ride, I just turned to him in bed and told him I wanted to marry him. He didn’t say anything, just scrambled to his sock draw and pulled out a ring box. Turns out he’d been planning on proposing anyway.”

“Oh Kev.” She melted at his story. “That’s amazing.”

“I know.” He laughed like he couldn’t quite believe it.

“I’m so happy for you. You’re getting married!”


“Now, who do you want me to get to photograph the ceremony, Mario Testino or Annie Leibovitz?”

There was a pause and then, “Ronnie.” He breathed out. “I’m so glad your life fell apart and you fell into Riverdale.”

“Honestly, me too.” She snorted.

“We’re totally revisiting this conversation, and also you aren’t allowed to take that offer back now you’ve said it, but tell me about Cheryl.”

“It doesn’t really seem like such a big deal after your news.”

“Come on.” He teased. “You know you want to gush.”

Veronica couldn’t stop herself from smiling. “It’s absolutely crazy. She’s absolutely crazy. But god, it’s honestly worth every second.”

“Eurgh. You’re too fucking cute.”

“We’re really going to try. Long distance. We want to try.”

“Ronnie, yes. I’m so happy for you!”

“We’re all happy for each other.” She laughed. “I get it.”

“Really though, I know you haven’t been dating super seriously since Archie.”

She took a deep breath, shutting her eyes, holding the phone tighter to her ear. “I’m scared Kev.”

“Oh, Ron.” He said. “I get it. Cheryl Blossom is scary enough when you’re just friends, dating her
must be even worse. But it’s a good thing to be scared. Scary means it’s real.”

“Yeah.” Veronica said softly. “It’s real.”

“Where is Cheryl? She not around to hear you go all mushy?”

“No.” She sighed. “She’s out with Josie. The Pussycats just got into town.”

“Ooh.”

Veronica could hear something in his tone, a little high pitched, something not right, and she latched onto it. “What?”

“Nothing.” He said quickly.

“Kev.. what?”

“No. They just had a thing in high school.”

“Josie and Cheryl?” She asked, shocked.

“Yeah. They used to ‘hang out’ for a while. But like, a decade ago.”

“Hmmmm.” Veronica hummed, fake nail tapping against the back of the phone.

“Ronnie, pretend I never said anything. I didn’t mean to.”

“How did you even know this? It definitely wasn’t common knowledge at school.”

“The gays of Riverdale was an exclusive club. We had weekly meetings where we bitched about all the straight people.”

“Er, where was my invite?” She asked.

“You were way too far back in the closet Ron. Sorry!”

“Hmmph.” She laughed, pretending to be annoyed.

“Now, please give me the real juicy details instead of this PG stuff.”

Veronica sighed, sensing this was going to be a long talk. “What did you want to know?”

Betty found herself curled up on the sofa, feet, again, resting in Jughead’s far-too-comfortable lap, her laptop balancing on her stomach, and the sound of the TV, playing some classic moves quietly, providing some ambient background noise.

She should’ve felt relaxed, wrapped up in the warm embrace of this domestic play they’d stumbled into, but she didn’t. Because, instead of scrolling on Facebook, writing another article, or doing some other mundane task on the computer, she was scrutinising the face of Gunner, head Serpent and epitome of macho entitlement.

He was looking at her through the photo with the same dead-eyed stare she’d been treated to during their brief encounter in her car, a stare that was too scarily reminiscent of the serial killers she’d interviewed to do anything other than send a cold shiver creeping down her spine, and the caption
beneath the mugshot declared him to be James ‘Gunner’ Shaw, arrested on assault and drug charges, but never convicted due to the victim rescinding his claims, and any evidence mysteriously going missing.

Gunner, a criminal who’d never been formally charge, Gunner, a man who’s rotten breath she remembered so well, Gunner, who she’d given his own space on their murder board – that was growing more convoluted by the second - and who now occupied the forefront of her mind.

Could it really be him? Could this be the guy who murdered Dilton Doiley? And if so, why? What had he gotten himself mixed up in?

She sighed, rubbing at her tired eyes, the images and reports on her screen blurring in and out of focus.

Jughead placed a soothing hand against her calf, stilling the motion she wasn’t even aware she was doing. “You okay babe?” He said, the endearment just slipping out of him, she could tell from the way he froze, that he hadn’t meant to say it.

She looked up at him through her long eyelashes, eyeing the blush that was beginning to appear on his cheekbones, and decided not to mention it. “I’m fine.” She replied, instead. “I just- I don’t know.”

“Did you find something?” He asked, pushing his own work away from him. Whilst Betty’s task had been all about Gunner, Jughead had been trying – in vain – to discover who owned the house that Dilton was looking to buy.


“Serpents can be pretty good at not leaving a trail.”

“I don’t know Juggy.” Her stomach twisted as she spoke. “Somehow, I just don’t think it’s him.”


Betty looked away and towards the mass of paper they’d accumulated, all the people they’d spoken too, all the facts they’d learnt, closing in on her. She wondered if her experience on the Blossom case had somehow sensationalised her instincts, made her less likely to reach for the obvious conclusion, made her question everything that was presented to her. It seemed the simplest option, the scary leader of a gang threatening the journalist working a murder case was a well-worn trope she’d seen played out again and again, but it didn’t seem like the right option. Not yet at least. “I don’t know.” She repeated. “I just don’t.”

“Classic detective move Bets.” He replied, sliding his hand further down her leg. “You’re going with your gut, I respect that.”

She opened her mouth to say something, but was interrupted by the sharp, shrill shriek of her mobile phone lighting up on her lap. It was lighting up with a number she didn’t recognise, and an area code that meant it was definitely not from Riverdale, and, cautiously, she picked it up. “Hello. Betty Cooper speaking.”

“Erm, right. Hi. I’m Colin Carlton.” There was a pause. “I worked with Dilton back at Haven Tech?”
Betty jolted up immediately, suddenly alert, gesturing frantically for Jughead to toss her the notebook and pen that rested on the coffee table, forgetting the perfectly functioning laptop in front of her, which he did with only minimal smirking, his eyes lighting up just as hers were. “Colin.” She said. “It’s so nice of you to get back to us.”

“Yeah. At first, I wasn’t sure but ah- yeah. You seemed nice in your email. And I er- I looked you both up.” The guy on the other end of the phone sounded distinctly uncomfortable. “And I thought, you know, for Dil. I’d do it. You want to know stuff about him right? That’s what you said in the email.”

“Yes.” She said, slipping effortlessly into interview mode. “We want as much information about who he was as possible. It’s better to have too much information than not enough, that way we can paint as clearer picture as possible, and if we can do that, we have a better chance of knowing who might’ve killed him.”

“Alright.” Colin said, sounding just slightly reluctant. “What do you need to know?”

“How well did you know Dilton?”

“Not well. We were colleagues for a year. But he got fired, and afterwards, we lost touch. Dilton didn’t trust email or anything, if you wanted to talk to him he told you to write. And I just didn’t have the time, or effort I guess, to write a letter. So I haven’t seen him for years. Not since his goodbye drinks.”

“Why was he fired?” She asked, head cocking to the side, feeling Jughead’s gaze on her.

“He was caught trying to buy a gun.” Colin sighed, as if ashamed by just his proximity to such a sordid story. “Illegally. Some cousin of this guy we worked with ratted him out, not to the cops or anything, just to us, he knew some guys in the gang who’d sold it to him and had thought it was funny that this little geek was wanting a weapon.”

“He tried to buy a gun?” She repeated, scribbling notes down on her page.

“Yeah. I don’t know why he didn’t just buy one normally like the rest of America, it’s not like it’s hard. But he said he didn’t trust the government, he didn’t want there to be a record that he was armed. I don’t know. He said something about his dad. He wasn’t really making sense. But he promised to leave quietly if the cops didn’t get involved. And that’s what happened. It was a shame. Dil was weird but not- not a bad guy. I’m sorry he’s dead.”

Betty finished writing, hand flying across the book balanced in her lap, hand clutching the phone so tight her knuckles were almost white. “Thank you.” She breathed out. “I know that’s it difficult. We went to high school with Dilton, we didn’t know him well but- I’m sorry he’s dead too. Is there anything else you can think of that might be helpful?”

“No.” He replied, and she could practically hear him shaking his head through the phone. “Not really. I don’t even know why I called. I just- I didn’t want to regret not helping.”

“I understand.” Her voice was soft. “It’s a difficult thing to do, thank you so much. You’ve been very helpful.”

“Alright.” Colin said, and she could hear the noise of him shifting in his seat. “Good luck I guess.”

“Thank you.” Betty had time to reply, before the line went dead.

Jughead was still looking at her intently as she slid the phone into her pocket, and she relayed
everything she’d learnt from the man on the phone, the guy who barely knew Dilton but still gave them more information than nearly anyone else, replying to their last-ditch email from that morning.

“So it wasn’t out of the usual then?” She finally summarised, but phrased it more like a question than anything else, directed desperately at the universe. “The fact that he tried to buy a gun from the Serpents might not mean anything at all. Something about his father. Something about his distrust of the government. It made it a normal thing for him to do.”

“The perfect mix of paranoia and past experiences leading to suspicious, criminal activity.” Jughead drawled. “And leaving us with no leads.”

“I don’t know.” Betty replied, moving her laptop to the desk and swinging her feet from his lap, their warmth and weight he immediately missed, and moving to examine all their evidence. Uncapping the marker with a flourish, she added the information, standing back to admire their work with a hand on her hip. “Crossing something out is doing something. It’s the furthest we’ve gotten in a while.”

Jughead had approached her from behind, and suddenly she could feel his warm body hovering just an inch behind her. “I’m not sure if that was meant to make me feel better or worse.”

“Me neither.” Betty sighed, spinning round and planting her face in his comforting chest. His arms came to wrap around her, and she sighed at his touch.

They were both quiet for a while, breathing each other in, wishing things were always as simple as needing to hold someone and having them there to be held.

“Did you ever used to just assume that things would work out when you got older, that you’d finally have things figured out when you were an adult? It would just be instinctive. You’d be an adult so you’d know what to do.” She said, voice vaguely muffled by his shirt.

“With my role models?” He spoke into the top of her head. “Not likely.”

“But didn’t you have that teenage naivety and arrogant? I know I did. I looked at all the adults around me, and I thought that will never be me. I’ll have everything figured out and things will just fall into place. I would never be my parents.”

“You aren’t your parents Bets.”

“No.” She said thoughtfully. “But I don’t have everything figured out. I doubt I ever will.”

He paused again, fingers nimbly playing the ends of her hair. And then he sighed. “The world is a liar. You think when you’re young, that life will be a certain way, and it never is.” Another pause. “But that doesn’t make what it is unimportant. Life is messy. And no one has everything figured out. That’s what makes reality so fucking real and awful and unfair. But it’s what makes it worth it.”

“You know Jug, you should be a writer.” Betty said teasingly.

“Ha.” He muttered dryly. “That idea has never crossed my mind.”

She laughed at that, and immediately it made the room feel brighter.

“C’mon.” She pushed herself off his chest, breaking free from his touch. “Work beckons.”

He was about to pull her back to him, get one last touch, one kiss, before they turned their minds to more serious things, but he was distracted as both their phones buzzed simultaneously. “What is it?” Jughead asked, leaning over her shoulder.
“It’s Ginger.” Betty said, still looking at the message on her phone. “The reunion dance has been moved to tomorrow night.”

( )

Dear Riverdale Class of 19’,

The time has come for you all to let your hair down and shake your ass with the Blast from the Past Riverdale High Reunion dance! Whilst our reunion hasn’t gone exactly to plan, we can’t let that stop us from having fun, and raising a glass to our dear departed friends.

Due to an unforeseen schedule change from our entertainment (our very own celebrities Josie and the Pussycats!!) and low attendance at the daily events, the dance will now start tomorrow evening instead.

Bring your date, your formal wear, and your memories to boogie the night away.

Riverdale High.

7.30 till late.

Dedicated to our loved and lost classmate:

Dilton Doiley.

I’ll see you there!

Ginger Lopez.

( )

Veronica was curled up on her sofa answering work emails, a task she’d neglected on this strange holiday from her real life, when there was a knock at the door. Moving lazily, she crossed the room to answer it, swinging the door open to reveal Cheryl Lodge, as poised as ever, leaning against the doorframe.

“Miss me?” Cheryl said, haughtily, challengingly.

“Like the plague.” Veronica bit back, but in one fluid motion she’d yanked her inside, slammed the door shut, and pressed her up against it, hard.

They kissed like they did everything. Like it was a battle only, somehow, they were both prepped to surrender, if only the other would lay down their weapons.

Veronica detached their lips with an audible pop, hips still pinned against her. “How was your date?”

Cheryl rolled her eyes, looping her arms around Veronica’s neck, and letting her long, fake nails scratch the sensitive skin she found there. “There’s only one girl I date now. And she happens to be much less famous.”

“Yeah?” She replied, breath ghosting across her face. “But does she also happen to be much more talented at the much more important things?” Her hands inched down her dress.

“Jealous Lodge?” The redhead cocked her head, arching an eyebrow in satisfied amusement.
Veronica pulled away, shrugging out of her grip, leaving Cheryl feeling momentarily bare and alone, slumped against the door without a warm body holding her there. “I don’t know.” She sauntered back to her seat on the sofa, tucking her legs beneath her. “Would I have reason to be?” There was a momentary flash of hurt in Cheryl’s face, before it resolved into its steely exterior, and Veronica suddenly felt as if she’d made a terrible mistake. She held out her hands, beckoning her over. As soon as she was close enough, Veronica pulled on her, tugging her down so she landed in her lap. “Sorry. I’m being combative. And not in a sexy way.”

“For the record,” Cheryl said, shifting so she was more comfortable, ending up straddling her, hands idly stroking the side of Veronica’s face. “We did hook up in high school, which I think is the kind of thing I’m meant to be telling you now.” She said, like no one had ever taught her if it was true or not.

“Maybe.” Veronica shrugged. “But it’s fine. I know I’ve got nothing to be jealous of.”

“Good.” Cheryl said, gripping the dark haired girl’s chin so she could control their kiss.

“Tell me.” She said, panting as they broke apart. “Tell me how it was.”

Cheryl shot her a sceptical look. “You really want to talk when we could be doing this?” She bent her neck to press sticky lip-gloss kisses to her jaw.

“Mm.” She replied. “I like talking and sex. The Veronica Lodge girlfriend experience involves a healthy dose of both.”

Cheryl sat up, her façade fully faltering and slipping from her face, leaving her looking surprised and vulnerable, like the teenager they’d once both been. She seemed to be looking at Veronica for a long moment, as if waiting for the rug to be pulled from beneath her but when nothing happened, she started to speak. “It was nice.” She said. “I haven’t seen Josie in a long time, not since the Pussycats last LA stop.”

“Yeah?” Veronica asked, listening attentively, one hand holding her by the small of her back.

“She told me all the gossip about her latest celebrity hook up etc etc.” She shrugged. “And then her plans for the next Pussycats album. I don’t know. It was nice. Then there was some drama about Ginger and the Riverdale dance and I just left.”

“I’m glad you’re back.” Veronica said, cupping her face, and leaning up for a tenderer kiss than they’d been indulging in.

Jughead woke up to an insistent finger, poking him in the side, he groaned reaching forward to pull the warm body closer to him, trapping her hand between them.

“Juggy.” Betty chuckled, voice low and breathy with sleep.

“Yeah?” He replied, eyes still shut, fingertips skittering across her bare expanse of back.

“I was trying to wake you up.”

“Why?” He groaned, cracking an eyelid open, taking the image of her face, resting on the same pillow as his, green eyes almost darker in the early morning light. She was breathtakingly beautiful, a fact that couldn’t be missed even in his half-asleep state, and unconsciously he tightened his grip.
“Because we need to go see the Sheriff.” She wiggled her hand, trying to find a way to poke him again.

“Oh baby, you know exactly how to tempt me. If you really want to get me up, you should tell me we’re going to watch a Nicholas Sparks movie, or maybe be tortured by a group of highly trained CIA operatives.” He murmured sarcastically.

“We can do those things afterwards.” She laughed. “But justice comes first.”

“But this is so much better.” Jughead replied, surprising her by leaning down, lips grazing against the juncture of her neck and shoulder, then dipping into her collarbone, kisses searing her skin.

“Jughead.” She said, in a voice that was too breathy for her liking. “We’ve been doing a lot of that.”

He held himself up over her body, propped on one elbow, wiggling his eyebrows and grinning goofily, an expression on his face so carefree and rare that she could’ve sworn it was only her that had ever seen it. “Didn’t anybody ever tell you Bets? Practice makes perfect.”

The slight amount of distance his movement had provided her with gave Betty the chance, and the willpower, to wiggle away from him, so she sat up, swinging her legs over the side of the bed and standing up. “Practicing can come later.”

From amidst his covers, he watched her move around his room with a practised ease, a kind of grace that he’d never seen another human possesses. His shoddily made blinds let in beams of morning light that crisscrossed against her skin, making the pale, white of her bare back look even more impossibly beautiful, like the sunset, like something he couldn’t name despite how many times he might’ve tried. She always left him that way, scribbling out odes to the birthmark on her hip and her bright green gaze, but always crossing them out, never finding a way to capture reality.

“You’re making me feel nervous.” She said, looking over her shoulder, now stood in a new set of bra and panties – white and peach spotted ones that were so cute it was almost ridiculous. “I can feel you staring at me.”

The Jughead of a few days ago would’ve brushed it off with a sarcastic remark, but the Jughead of a few days ago didn’t know what it was like to want Betty Cooper and to be wanted right back, he didn’t know how bold it could make a man feel. “I’m staring at you because you’re beautiful Betty.”

A rosy blush spread across her cheekbones, and her eyes crinkled affectionately. “Thank you.” Her lips crumpled into a soft, smile, before it melted into one of amused scepticism. “But that doesn’t mean you get out of going to the Sheriff’s.”

“Damn.” Jughead launched himself quickly out of bed, pressing a kiss to the top of her head as he moved past her towards his wardrobe. “You saw through my dastardly plan.”

“I always see through you Jughead Jones.” Betty said, and he refrained from telling her just how true her statement really was. “Now, up and at em!” She pointed in the general direction of his things, and he had no choice to obey her, he was all in, whatever that would mean.

Less than an hour later – thanks mainly to Betty’s poking and prodding – they were cruising through the quiet suburban streets, on the way to attempt to tell the Sheriff everything they’d uncovered in the past few days. It wasn’t that they had any firm leads to clue him in on, but they’d had enough experience with the Sheriff and his men to know it was better not to be seen as hiding things, to be as transparent as possible.

It was deserted at the station when they arrived, just one wistful looking deputy manning the front
desk, and there were the noise of something that sounded oddly like celebration drifting from one of the back rooms.

Betty and Jughead exchanged concerned looks, before moving through the empty room towards the lone woman with masks of polite professionalism.

“Hello. My name is Betty Cooper and this is Jughead Jones.” She gestured to Jughead and he couldn’t stop himself from giving a sarcastic wave. “We really need to talk to the Sheriff.”

The woman was about to open her mouth, but was stopped by the sound of heavy doors swinging open and slamming into the wall. Large footsteps sounded, and the pair of them swivelled round to take in the new entry.

Sheriff Keller strode in looking like every cop’s fantasy hero, eyes blazing and muscles bulging, lips curled into the perfect victory smirk. It was incongruous to see someone look so happy, smug almost, in a place that – to Betty and Jughead – had never really signified anything good. “Ah, just the dynamic duo we were looking for.” Keller said jovially, not like he resented them as he had previously. “But you’re a little late, he’s already been arrested.”

They both just stared at the Sheriff in shock for a moment, before Betty recovered first. “Who?” She demanded.

At this, Keller seemed genuinely confused. “You mean, you don’t know? He’s been asking to speak to you.”

Chapter End Notes

eeeeeek! Shorter than usual I know but I couldn't resist ending it on a bit of a cliff hanger, plus I thought you guys would want it sooner rather than later haha. So close to the end. I think next chapter the killer will be revealed... and then only two more after that maybe to tie up our loose ends.

Thank you for reading this crazy fic, and if you want to leave a comment, I'd love it! Xx
Chapter Summary

“You’re right. No more murders in Riverdale. I’ll make it the new town motto.”
“I guess that’s better than the old one.”
Jughead gasped in faux-surprise. “You mean you don’t like ‘The Town with Pep’? But it means we’re the peppiest!”

Chapter Notes

okay guys. it's happening. I truly hope you enjoy <3

ps. as per usual sorry for any mistakes :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Betty Cooper was no stranger to interrogation rooms.

As a journalist she’d been privy to a few rooms in a few different situations, in small time jails and big prisons alike, in fact – for a piece she had been writing about the nation’s obsession with serial killers – she’d probably accumulated a fair amount of time staring down the face of potential and actual criminals in places just like this. And the rooms were always the same, grey, and dingy, designed to make you feel like life outside that room had ceased to exist.

The feeling she got when she was in them never changed either.

She was not usually scared by the people she sat across from, despite the horrendous things they’d done, trusting in the security that kept her safe, but she was scared about how easy it might be to become them. Not them, not someone who really was a deviant, but someone else, someone vulnerable, someone like the teenager Jughead had been, alone and poor and different and scared, waiting to find out if those facts were enough to convict him.

Betty thought about how it might be if she was less pretty, less middle class, less white, less fortunate, how any of those things might have landed her in the position opposite. It was what made her writing so effective, and it was what kept her up at night.

And, in Riverdale’s own room, she felt much the same, staring into the face and someone she barely knew, and wondering why, out of everyone in Riverdale, it was her that was being summoned.

Paul ‘Fox’ Patten sat before her, the old Serpent and remnant from Jughead’s gang affiliated past, the man who’d led them into and then out of the Whyte Wyrm due to his loyalties, now found himself in much the same position as his old leader, FP Jones, once had. “Betty Cooper.” He said, leaning forward, before thinking better of it and stopping himself. “I can’t believe they’re actually letting me to talk to you.”

“I think they’re hoping you’re going to confess.” Betty admitted, looking at him intently, but not
unkindly. “And I hoping you’ll tell me what is going on. Why were you asking for me?”

“Because I thought you would listen.” Fox replied, his voice sounding hoarse. “I thought maybe you could fight for me on the outside.”

She furrowed her brows. “Why not Jughead? Or the Serpents?”

“You know why I won’t go to the Serpents with this. Not with Gunner. He doesn’t trust or like me. I’m from the old days.” He shook his head at her words. “And Jughead’s too close to this. He knows me. I wanted someone who’d listen not just cos’ it’s me, but cos’ that’s what they do, and you were the only person I could think of.”

“Okay.” Betty nodded thoughtfully. “Tell me. What is happening?”

“They think I killed Dilton Doiley.” Fox replied, rubbing a hand across his weary face.

She spoke very frankly, palms flat against the table. “And did you?”

“No. God. No.” He shook his head, face twisted into a sign of revulsion. “They don’t even have any evidence I just- I didn’t do it.”

Betty leant forward involuntarily. “They have something. Otherwise why are you in here?”

Fox slumped back into his chair, momentarily looking as guilty as his position would indicate. “I knew his dad okay?”

“No. Not his stepdad. His dad. Theodosius Tadpole.”

Betty’s eyes widened in surprise. “His biological father? How? He’s meant to be in prison in Ohio.”

“He is.” Fox replied. “And I was too.”

“In Ohio?” She repeated.

“Yeah.” He sighed. “I moved around a little after FP skipped town and the gang fell into other hands. So yeah, I ended up serving some time in Ohio, and Tadpole was my cell mate. Afterwards, when I got out, I made a promise to my daughter to get clean, which meant coming back to Riverdale where I knew I had the Serpents to help.”

“And Tadpole knew you were from Riverdale?”

“Yeah.” Fox confirmed. “And he knew that his son’s family lived here. He said- if Dilton ever came around, that I should just look out for him you know, just keep an eye out and write him a letter or two about how he was doing.”

Betty’s faced turned steely. “His father was abusive Fox. He made Dilton’s life a living hell, turned him into a paranoid survivalist. You were aiding Tadpole in his quest to ruin his own family’s life.”

“I know that now okay?” Fox snapped, before slumping back into his uncomfortable seat, seeming defeated. “But you don’t know what it’s like. Most of the guys on the inside, they don’t get to see their kids, not ever, whether because of time or because their kids hate them for being locked up. If my daughter refused to speak to me, I’d want to know that she’s okay. I’d want someone to do that for me. So I did that for him.”
Betty bit at her bottom lip.

“If I’d have known, I wouldn’t have done it.” He insisted.

She shook her head sadly, but it was more aimed at the general circumstances than at Fox’s words. “You watched when Dilton came to visit then?”

“The thing is, he never came back.” Fox said. “Not to Riverdale. Not until the reunion.”

“Then why are you in here?” Betty asked, gesturing to their dismal surroundings.

“Multiple reasons.” He rubbed at his face again, as if he could wipe away the exhaustion. “But the main one is the footage they found of me arguing with Dilton the night before he died. After they got their hands on that they searched my car and found a letter from Theodosius Tadpole, about looking out for Dilton, it looked bad, I get it. They think I killed Doiley for his dad. But I didn’t Betty. I didn’t.”

“What were you talking about, and where?”

“Outside the Whyte Wyrm.” Fox said. “When he came to buy a gun I told him to come back and I’d help him out privately, but when he arrived I told him I wasn’t going to sell him a gun. I wanted to talk to him. I told him about his dad.” There was a long pause, where Betty just watched him, eyes narrowed, before he sighed. “He told me about what his dad had been like. I swear- I hadn’t known, he was, weird, quiet guy in prison, but I guess he was just a good actor. But the thing was, Doiley wasn’t even mad, he told me he’d been working through things, and his father no longer scared him. He was using his old name, something Tadpole, at different places as a way to reclaim his past. He told me that’s what I should tell his dad.” He paused. “Honestly, I admired him.”

“But the next day he was murdered.” Betty said

Fox looked down at the table. “Yeah.” He swallowed hard around something in his throat. “He was.”

There was a long stretch of silence between the two of them, where neither of them were able to think of something to say, before Betty spoke again. “They can’t keep you on that.” She said. “There’s not enough evidence unless you confess.”

“They’re searching my apartment.” Fox replied. “And they won’t find anything, unless they’re the ones that put it there.”

“What are you saying?” She asked. “What do you want from me?”

“They want to have the right guy so badly, I don’t want to them to make it true.”

The door flew open at that, and both their heads snapped to look at the intruders. A nondescript officer stood in the doorway with a face that was both apologetic and awkward. “Times up.” He jerked his head at Betty.

She stood up slowly, pushing her chair in neatly, and giving Fox one last look.

“Even if you don’t believe me, you have to keep digging Cooper. You and Jughead, you can’t give up. Don’t do it for me, do it for Dooley.”

“You can trust that we won’t stop until we’re sure who killed Doiley. Until there is justice.”
“Alright. Alright.” Fox said, tension releasing from him as he slumped down onto the table, looking very much like a man without hope.

As soon as the door swung open, Jughead leapt up from his cramped position in the plastic chair, rushing to where Betty was being led out. “What happened?” He asked, eyes searching her face. “What did Fox want?”

“He wanted to tell me he didn’t do it.” Betty sighed, feeling exhaustion wash over her.

“He didn’t.” Jughead shook his head. “I know Fox. He stuck up for me back when I was one of them. He stuck up for us the other day. He didn’t do it.”

She grabbed his hand, entwining their fingers together and squeezing, just a little too tightly, to get his attention. “I know Juggy. I believe you.”

Just those three little words, I believe you, sucked some of the tension that lingered in his limbs, because they were things he wasn’t used to hearing, having spent most of his life living in a town that had its own Jughead-centric brand of nihilism, where belief in him was as pointless as belief in unicorns. But Betty had never been one of them, the people who looked at him and his family only when they needed someone to accuse, and she never would be. “Alright.” He finally said.

“Let’s get in the car Jug.” Betty said, tugging him towards the exit.

Sheriff Keller watched them leave. “No hard feelings eh? Let’s all just be glad the killer’s been caught.” He gave them what one could only assume was meant to be a friendly and reassuring smile.

Jughead wanted to tell him that the killer hadn’t been caught, that whatever evidence they thought they had couldn’t be true, if Betty had spoken to Fox and believed that he was innocent, then he was innocent, and whatever the Sheriff thought he could produce to prove otherwise was likely to be bogus, but he held his tongue.

“We’ll talk when someone’s been charged.” Betty flashed him a polite smile, and if you had simply cursory knowledge of her you might not have noted the snark that lingered beneath her authority-approved tone of voice, but Jughead did, and he smirked as the Sheriff’s expression faltered just a little.

They walked briskly to Jughead’s car and as Betty sunk into her passenger seat, she let her head fall against the cool plastic of the dashboard, breathing out deeply.

“Hey.” Jughead said, leaning across the console to stroke as finger soothingly across her hair.

“I hate police stations Jug.” She turned her head, peaking out at him from behind a curtain of hair. “And jails and interrogation rooms.”

He tucked her hair behind her ear. “I’ll make sure you never get arrested then.”

“Ha.” She said, humorlessly, but with a touch of softness to her features.

“Or I’ll break you out.” He looked around as if he was about to impart a deep secret, leaning closer. “I don’t know if you know this, but I was in a gang.”

This pulled the hint of a smile from her pink lips. “Yeah. For three months.” She teased, finally sitting up and back against her seat, forcing Jughead to pull his hand back. And then her face
crumpled again. “Not that that’s helped Fox much.”

Jughead’s face twisted to match her expression. “What did he actually say? Why was he arrested?”

“He knew Tadpole. Dilton’s biological dad.” Betty sighed, eyes cloudy.

“How?” He demanded.

“They were in prison in Ohio together.” She said, repeating all the details she’d just learnt. “And Fox agreed that if Dilton ever came back to Riverdale, he’d pass information on about him. He thought he was just helping out another locked up father, he didn’t know about the abuse.”

“Fuck.” Jughead cursed, but at who or what it wasn’t clear.

“And the Sheriff found footage of them arguing outside the Whyte Wyrm before he died. Dilton found out what Fox was doing, but he didn’t even care. That’s why he used that name Juggy, at the Inn, he didn’t care anymore, he decided to stop living in fear.” To both their surprise, she found that she was crying.

“Betty.” He brushed a tear from her cheek.

“It’s just so unfair.” She sniffed. “It’s so goddamn unfair. He was trying- he was trying to move on with his life, and someone had to kill him.”

“I know. It’s so fucking unfair.”

“He didn’t deserve to die. No one does. But not now- not when he seemed to be doing good things. I just-“ Her voice broke and she shook her head. “I just wish he wasn’t dead.”

“Me too Bets.” He said roughly.

She blinked at her lap for a moment, saying nothing, before turning her gaze on Jughead, she placed her palm flat against his cheek. “Jughead I- I don’t know what I’d do if you hadn’t come to this reunion.”

“Betty-“ He began to speak, but something in her eyes stopped him.

She kissed him, a warm and steady pressure against his lips. “Thank you.”

“Thank you.” He insisted, brushing the hair off the nape of her neck. “For being Betty Cooper.”

She flushed, pulling back from him with a sigh. Her eyes turned back to face through the window where the Station still loomed, a reminder of everything that was at stake. “Let’s go.”

“Where to captain?” He placed a hand against her knee, squeezing.

“Home.” Betty replied. “We have a murder board to look over, and then a dance to attend.”

An air of frantic determination sank into their entire day, Betty was precise and thorough in the way she combed through all the notes she’d accumulated, desperately trying to ignore the twinges of anxiety that her medicine couldn’t dampen, the thoughts of Dilton, dead just as he was harnessing his past, and of Fox, a man she’d agreed to believe but whose fate and actions clouded her thoughts still.

But Jughead’s constant as a presence by her side was enough to steady her, whenever the words
began to blur, one look at the boy next to her, sprawling with his beanie askew on the ratty couch, and she felt clarity wash over her.

They passed notes back and forth until both of them were secure in their knowledge about every classmate and suspect’s motive and movements before and after the murder took place. They were arming themselves with as much information as they could before entering the reunion dance, where they had planned to take the chance to casually interrogate and observe everyone possible before they might flee back to all their lives they’d built outside of their hometown.

An hour before the reunion, they paused their sleuthing to ready themselves for the dance. It took Jughead five minutes to pull on his battered black suit, shirt, tie, and suspenders. At the last minute, he tugged off his crown beanie, ruffling his hair until it lay in a semblance of a style, still messy, with that one damn curl hanging over his eyes. He waited for Betty on the sofa, lying across the cushions with their last minute work across his lap.

His eyes flicked almost lazily over to her as he heard her light footsteps on the stairs, but he was snagged as soon as his eyes found her, as she hovered just in front him. She was dressed in a plain light pink dress, fitted tight to her body, elegant in its simplicity, baring the expanse of her shoulders and back, it was enough to make his mouth go dry.

“Does it get the Jones seal of approval?” Betty joked, tugging on the hem nervously, before their eyes locked and she felt her breath hitch at his expression.

It only took a second for him to scramble from his seat and pull her smoothly into him, lips hungry, hands roving from the back of her neck, to her back, to dig into the silky fabric at her hips.

He was still holding her tight enough that it hurt, just slightly, when she pulled away enough to speak. “I guess that’s a yes.” Betty said, breathlessly.

There was something beginning and ending in his throat, something he couldn’t put words to yet. He swallowed. “More than a yes.”

“You look pretty handsome yourself.” She teased, hands twisting his hair.

There were no words to respond, just action and movement, just a clashing of tongue and lips again.

“We’re going to be late.” Betty protested, but without real urgency.

“So we’ll make an entrance.” He murmured into her skin, walking her backwards, until she hit a low cupboard filled with books. It shook a bit at they’re impact but they were too busy with each other to notice. That was until Jughead pressed his hips to hers, hard, and they inadvertently sent a cardboard box that had been lying on the top tumbling to the ground.

“Shit.” Jughead cursed as they sprung apart.

It was Dilton’s stuff, all the belongings that his mother had been given scattered carelessly across the floor.

Betty flushed, immediately feeling guilt swelling in her stomach as she bent down to help Jughead gather up everything and put it back in its place. She reached for the unassuming box that had held some newspaper clippings, but paused, noting a crack in the design that had previously been flawless. “Oh God. Jug. I think we broke this.” She stood up, holding the box in her hands. As she peered closer, she saw something slightly off in that conclusion, poking a fingernail in that crack that appeared she prised the top of the lid open.
“Jughead.” Betty said, sharp and urgent.

In a second he was there, looking over her shoulder.

“Holy shit. Doiley was more Bond than we thought. Is that-“

“A secret compartment.” She nodded eagerly.

The thick lid, which they’d previously taken as an aesthetic choice, was in fact hollow, and filled with thin, folded sheets of paper.

“Get me the gloves.” Betty said, as she gently placed the box down on the table.

He appeared a moment later, wearing his own pair of gloves and holding out hers. She slipped them on, gingerly removing the sheaves that filled the hidden space they’d revealed.

It was clear as soon as she unfolded the first one that they were letters, and long ones at that, filled with a dense, neat scrawl. Flicking through each sheet, and they were a fair few, as much as could fit in the compartment, it was clear that they were all written by the same person. She focused on the bottom one, assuming that chronologically that would be the first.

_Dear Prince Yagami,_

_I’m writing because I know you don’t trust emails or the message boards, and I want us to be able to speak again. It’s been so long Y, too long, and I’ve missed you for most of it._

_I thought this would be romantic. And you know how I was always a bit of a hopeless romantic. So let’s only talk like this, okay? Don’t text me. Or call. Or anything like that._

_It’s safer too. Like I said. I remember what you were like. Please picture me here doing that fond, exasperated expression that I always got around you._

_I wanted to know what you’ve been doing for all these years, and to ask if you saw the message about the reunion? What do you think? I know we were never the ones with the most school spirit, but I’d brave those cheerleaders and mean girls again if we could talk once more._

_Please, write back? _

_Love_  

_Queen Seles_  

_(You know who)_

_P.S. Burn this after you’ve read it. I know that’s what you used to do, and I want you to feel safe._  

_Xxx_  

“What the fuck.” Jughead said, after he’d finished reading over her shoulder.

They scanned through the rest of them and the content was much the same, filled with nostalgic romantic sentiments, one half of a conversation that he was meant to have destroyed, but instead had been kept inside this box, because even people like Dilton weren’t immune to that sentimentality. It was filled with frequent references to the reunion, needling and questions about his attendance filled the pages, as well as to shared memories of a past at the high school, and they were all addressed and signed the same way, with those false names.
“Where have I heard those names before?” Betty mused out loud. “Queen Seles and Prince Yagami.”

“In a terrible, nerdy porno?” Jughead offered.

She shook her head, and a faint tug of her memory caused her to remove the lid and place it by the side of the box, looking at the clips of paper that he hadn’t bothered to hide. They were all announcements about the development of a new video game – The Four Blades – and scanning the smudged print she could see that the main characters, the hero and his heroine, were those very same nicknames. “What does this mean?” She asked, body alight half with frustration and half with excitement that they’d discovered something new.

“She was receiving anonymous love letters?”

“Not anonymous.” Betty said, thoughts bubbling to the surface as she spoke. “They clearly knew who each other was, just coded. It was obviously someone he had known well back in high school…” Her voice trailed off, and as she looked at Jughead she could see they were both thinking of the same person.

“Ethel.” He said. “It has to be Ethel.”

She grimaced. “That does seem… likely I guess. That doesn’t necessarily mean anything but-“

“Why wouldn’t she have told us?” He finished for her.

“And there are an awful lot of references to the reunion in here. Almost like she needed him to come.” Betty bit her lip.

There was a heavy pause as they both came to terms with what that might mean.

“It’s always the redheads.” Jughead sighed dramatically, breaking the tension. “Next it’ll be Archie bumping someone off.”

“Has he been acting strange lately.” She went along with the joke.

“Sure. Next murder, my suspicions will go right to him.”

“There’s not going to be a next murder.” She said firmly, but something about the tension in her shoulders betrayed her thoughts.

His hand rested, warm and heavy on the bare skin of her shoulder, making her look up from where she’d been staring at the letters. “You’re right. No more murders in Riverdale. I’ll make it the new town motto.”

“I guess that’s better than the old one.”

Jughead gasped in faux-surprise. “You mean you don’t like ‘The Town with Pep’? But it means we’re the peppiest!”

She had to laugh at that. “You’re the least peppy human in existent.”

“I’m aware.” He said. “Why do you think I moved?”

“Same reason I did, because this place takes a person, and it crushes them.” Betty said, frowning as she placed the letters she was still clutching back in the box, and then on the table, staring at them as if she could force them to make sense.
“Chin up.” He whispered, tapping her beneath the chin to illustrate his point, before wrapping his arms around her and tenderly kissing her forehead. “It’s not crushed you yet Cooper. And it never will.”

Betty shut her eyes, allowing herself, momentarily, to sink into the refuge of his warm embrace. “You too Jughead Jones.” She whispered, before forcing herself to stand up straight, take his hand in hers, and march them to the door, towards the dance, and towards the truth.

There was a perverse sense of rightness that accompanied the Riverdale reunion dance, if Jughead had wanted to write all this tension, this push and pull between the truth and the lies, into a novel then he couldn’t have picked a better setting.

The familiar desperation to connect and have fun mingled with nostalgia as the near-thirty somethings paraded in their dresses and played at being a teenager again, giggling at the guy they were crushing on, eyeing up who would go down as best dressed, trying to win at the game they’d somehow found themselves in without ever being told the rules.

Cheryl Blossom found herself leaning against the makeshift bar - one vast improvement on the high school version was that no one had to pretend they were sober – watching Veronica talk to some dumpy looking girl she vaguely remembered as not being memorable enough to have been in her line of fire.

“Blossom.” A guy crowed in her eye. “You are looking good tonite!”

She flicked her gaze from checking out Veronica, towards the new arrival. “Hello Reggie. I’m super gay, so your attempts at flirting are going to be even less effective than normal.”

“Damn.” Reggie Mantle replied. “That’s awesome. You can check out all the hot chicks with me.”

Cheryl said nothing, crossing her arms beneath her chest, lips curving into an almost amused smile.

“Josie is looking smoking.” He nodded to where their old classmate was dancing onstage. “Celebrity looks good on her.”

“Been there, done that.” She said coolly.

“High School was a fun time.” Cheryl said. “And her band is not the only pussycat she likes.”

Reggie actually whistled, low and impressed. “Man, teach me your ways Red.”

“Not possible. I’m the only one with the stamina for it.”

“Imagine you’d been out in high school we could’ve bro’ed out so much.” He flashed her a brilliant white grin.

She scoffed. “Um sure I would’ve loved hanging out with the king horndog. I imagine you’d have been super respectful.”

“Hey,” Reggie said, a genuine tinge of hurt to his voice. “I wouldn’t have been that bad, my aunts’ are gay and totally married and everything. I’d have been cool.”

Cheryl shrugged, eyes lighting up as she spotted the girl making her way towards her. “Oh.” She said, as if an afterthought. “And I’m dating Lodge now.”
“Ronnie?” He whispered. “Respect.”

Just as she spoke, the girl in question arrived, snaking one arm around Cheryl’s waist, she leant forward to place a quick kiss against her cheek. “Ew lipgloss!” Cheryl protested, but, contrary to her words, she only tightened her grip on Veronica.

“Babe, you know I use kiss-proof lipstick.” Veronica grinned.

Cheryl rolled her eyes, and was about to respond when she spotted the couple that had just entered. “Oh look,” She said, with as little enthusiasm as possible. “The depressing detective duo have arrived.”

Betty and Jughead stepped through the door and took in the tangled mass of former classmates that filled the middle of the old school gym. The dresses were tighter, the waists thicker, and the conversation much more centred on careers and marriage than it might previously have been, but it was familiar enough.

Josie and the Pussycats were centre stage, playing one of their now well-known hits that had originated during their high school years and they spotted their esteemed hostess – Ginger Lopez – was off to the side, surround by a small entourage and grinning in a blinding, glittery dress.

“Yup.” Jughead nodded, as he watched people mingling. “Just as torturous as I pictured it.”

“It’s just a dance Jug.” Betty said, but she too was scanning the crowd with a certain level of apprehension, the letters they’d just discovered still burning in her mind.

“Just a dance? Haven’t you ever seen Carrie?” He muttered, and then, sighing, placed a warm hand against the small of her back. “C’mon, this is bad enough without my sarcastic commentary.”

“I like your sarcastic commentary.” She said. “But you’re right, we need to look for Ethel.”

“I have a feeling we’re going to have to endure some social interaction first.” Jughead said, nodding to the other side of the room.

Betty turned and spotted what he was gesturing to, their friends were all gathered by the refreshments, and Veronica was waving at them in a manner that didn’t give them much choice but to walk over to her.

“Betty.” Veronica cried, pulling herself away from Cheryl and wrapping her best friend in a warm embrace. “I’m so glad you finally arrived.”

“Hey V.” Betty replied, returning the hug. “You look great.”

“Right? The dress is going to be available on next year’s Lodge exclusives, it’s in collaboration with Calvin Klein.” She pulled back. “And you! Very young Jennifer Anniston. I love it.”

“Thank you.” Betty blushed.

“And Jughead, you’ve cleaned up quite nicely.” Veronica turned her attentions to the man behind her, opening her arms for a hug. If Jughead had believed he had any say in the matter he would’ve declined, but he had long since learnt that Veronica merely gave people the illusion of choice, so he allowed her to briefly wrap her arms around his neck. “I’m really happy about this you and Betty thing Jug. I’m rooting for you two.” She whispered into his ear, taking the opportunity whilst Betty was busy greeting Cheryl and Reggie.
“What? No warning that if I hurt your girl you’ll bust my balls?”

She took a deliberate step back, brushing invisible lint from his jacket shoulders. “No. I didn’t think it needed saying.” She shrugged. “You knew it already.”

Jughead shifted uncomfortably, refusing to look Veronica in the eye, and the dark-haired girl returned to pressing Cheryl against her side with a satisfied glint in her eye. He was pleased when Betty appeared to be done receiving a stiff bro-hug from Reggie Mantle and stepped closer to him again, hoping this meant their socialising was over and done with.

“Where’s Archie?” Betty asked, Veronica.

“Backstage.” She replied. “He’s doing one song with the Pussycats. Old times sake.”

“That’s nice.” Betty smiled. “I always liked when they worked together.”

“He’s good.” Cheryl allowed. “When he remembers that Josie’s the real star.”

“Archie Andrews.” Reggie sighed. “Now that was the guy who was really a player in high school. I don’t know why I was the one with the bad reputation.”

“He did give his heart away fairly often.” Betty said diplomatically.

“What do you say Blondie, you gave Andrews a turn in school, how about you give Reggie a chance now we’re all grown up?” He wiggled his eyebrows, giving her a look that suggested he was joking, but serious if she wanted to take him up on the offer.

“Um.” Betty flushed red, eyes involuntarily flicking to look up at Jughead’s carefully impassive face.

“Oh shit.” Reggie cut in, having noticed the small exchange. “I didn’t know you guys were together, that’s cool man. I was just messing.”

There was an awkward silence that went on for far too long.

“We aren’t dating.” Jughead said abruptly, words spilling out of him before he could stop them.

Veronica rolled her eyes, letting out a purposely loud sigh, and hand on the hip that wasn’t pressed against her girlfriend.

“Okay.” Reggie said slowly, looking between everyone, clearly picking up on the strange vibes that were passing between all the old friends. “Whatever. Betty’s too good for me anyway.” He winked playfully.

“Damn right.” Veronica teased back.

But Betty and Jughead were still shifting awkwardly, both flushed and confused, not looking at each other. “Anyway,” Betty said finally, hands clasped in front of her. “We’re looking for Ethel, do you know if she showed up?”

“Black widow’s over by the portrait.” Cheryl said, pointing vaguely in the direction of a spot over in the other side of the room.

The pair nodded and gave their thanks, before heading in the direction they were pointed. They pushed through the crowds in silence, both of their minds stuck on the words Jughead had spoken, stuck on each other, and stuck on the case. As they managed to manoeuvre their way across the makeshift dance floor, they spotted the woman they were searching for, and the sigh of it cause
something to catch in Betty’s throat, and for shivers to race down Jughead’s spine.

Ethel was stood gazing up at a large, blown up portrait of Dilton Doiley. It was propped up on a table and the area next to it was filled with flowers that definitely wouldn’t have looked out of place at a funeral. Even in still image, one that looked to be from their high school yearbook, Dilton looked uncomfortable, like he was looking down on the students with a sense of unease masked with annoyance. It was either heart-breaking or creepy to see Ethel stood there, alone with arms wrapped around herself gazing at his face, depending on whether or not she was guilty of something.

“Ethel.” Betty said softly, as they came up behind her.

The redhead started, turning round to fix the newcomers with a stare that looked straight through them. “Oh. Hi, Betty, Jughead.” She turned back to the picture.

“We just wanted to see how you were feeling Ethel.” Jughead said.

Ethel turned her head back to look at them. “He would’ve hated this you know.”

“I know.” Jughead nodded thoughtfully. “I get that. A group of old classmates pretending to mourn me in a high school gym wouldn’t be my idea of a good send off.”

She rubbed at her eyes, shoulders slumping, and suddenly looking forty years older than she was. “He hated them all. He had one extracurricular with Ginger and he always hated her. He hated the jocks for teasing him about his Scouts. He hated you for exposing his gun hobby. The only person he didn’t hate was Cheryl, because at least she didn’t pretend she wasn’t evil.” She sighed. “And me. He didn’t hate me.”

“This whole event, it must be so difficult for you.” Betty said.

“They arrested someone. Did you hear?” Ethel sniffed.

Jughead and Betty exchanged glances.

“We did.” Jughead begrudgingly admitted.

“Do you think it’s them?” Ethel demanded. “The guy? The Serpent?”

Betty paused, as if considering how much of the truth she was willing to divulge, before her resolve solidified. “No.” She said finally. “We aren’t convinced.”

“I thought so.” She said, bitterly. “I knew you would’ve got in touch with me if you thought you’d found him. I just- I guess I hoped it was over.”

“Ethel,” Jughead said urgently. “If you want this to be over, it’s important that you’re honest with us. We need to know. What kind of contact have you had with Dilton since high school?”

Ethel frowned. “None.” She said. “I saw him two years after we graduated at a diner on the edge of town. But that was it. He was difficult to get in touch with. He sent me one email just before the reunion, told me not to respond, and then- then- before I could speak to him here, he was dead.

“You didn’t write letters?” Betty asked, scrutinising Ethel’s face for her reaction to that suggestion. Her face crumpled into one of confusion. “No? I don’t think I even knew his address.”

“Listen,” Jughead said. “We found them. A whole pile of letters addressed to Dilton, using code names from a video game, and it seemed like it was from someone he knew well back in high
school.”

“It seemed like they might’ve been from you Ethel.” Betty said, gently.

A look of naked shock filled her eyes. “Me? No I- I didn’t, someone was writing to him? Using names from which game?”

“It was called The Four Blades.”

At that, tears welled up in Ethel’s eyes. “That was Dilton’s favorite. They were just about come out with a remake.” She wiped angrily at the tears that spilled over. “But I didn’t write to him. I don’t know- I have no idea who could have. Unless, he had- some secret relationship before me that he never told me about.” And the idea of that she broke into real sobs. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I want to be helpful I just-”

“Hey.” Betty surged forward, wrapping the redhead in a comforting embrace. “Okay. We know that.”

Jughead looked back across the crowd, waving from a familiar raven haired woman to come over.

“It’s okay Ethel. We’ll figure this out.” She said soothingly, suddenly startlingly reminded of her older sister Polly, and the times she’d held her grieving in her arms for a boy taken too soon.

Only a second later, Veronica arrived, concern in her eyes and a wild Cheryl straight on her heels.

“Can you look after Ethel for a moment?” Jughead asked, quietly. “Keep an eye on her. For her safety, and, other reasons.” He coughed. “Me and Betty need to talk.”

“Of course.” Veronica nodded, determinedly, but surprisingly it was Cheryl who approached the other girl first. She gave Betty a reassuring look, and tapped Ethel on the back gently.

Ethel pulled back from the embrace of the blond, turning to look at the new girl in surprise.

“Hey.” Cheryl said. “I know I was a bitch to you in high school. But I know what it’s like to hate the whole room for not caring like you do.” She took a deep breath, hard façade melting in a way in normally only did around Veronica. “I know what it’s like to grieve Ethel. And I know what it’s like on the other side. Come on.” She tossed her hair over her shoulder, before holding out a hand. “Let’s sit down and you can tell me about all the things we missed about Dilton, the things only a person who really loved him could notice.”


Cheryl smiled, softly, and not like she was going to take a bite out of someone, for once, grabbing Ethel’s hand she guided her to a quieter section of the gym with Veronica close behind, leaving Betty and Jughead alone.

They leant against the wall of the gymnasium, once again eyeing up their old classmates and wondering which one might be a suspect. Watching them dance – carefree and laughing – flirting with people they shouldn’t, gossiping, comparing lives, Jughead wondered how different their outlooks must be. They’d all grown up in Riverdale, but not everyone had come out marked by it, not like he had, not like his friends, they were peripherals in a story they pretended wasn’t happening, not till he wrote it down and sold it back to them.
“I don’t think it was Ethel.” Betty said, stubbornness lacing her voice.

He sighed, rubbing his jaw. “Me neither.”

“But I don’t know if that’s because we know her.”

“Shut your eyes.” He said, and her obedience to follow his command made him shiver just a little. “Picture her reaction, compare it to other people you’ve interviewed Bets. People who you know were lying. People who weren’t.”

He was pleased to see she was taking his made up exercise seriously, so seriously that he could practically feel her thinking next to them.

“She didn’t seem like she was lying.” Betty said, eyes still shut. “All the indicators that might normally give it away weren’t there. Her grief felt genuine.” She finally opened them, glancing up at them through her thick lashes. “But I don’t know if I can trust my instincts with this.”

Jughead had given up believing in most things a long time ago, in God, in his family, in Riverdale, but somehow he’d never given up on Betty. “I trust you Bets.” His hand moved to grip her shoulder tightly. “And I agree with you. I’ve had enough experience with liars to give me a pretty good feel for things like this. But either way, we give the box to the Sheriff tomorrow and see what he makes of it.”

“And what now?” She asked. “We just have fun at this stupid party?”

“Of course not.” Jughead scoffed. “We tolerate this stupid party, having fun would be impossible.”

The corner of Betty’s lips quirked up at that. “Or we could scan the room for Dilton’s potential secret high school girlfriend from Ethel’s theory?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “That sounds more like us.”

Betty laughed, but was stopped in her tracks when she pulled her gaze away from Jughead and spotted a flash of a familiar dark bob. “Tomoko!” She exclaimed.

“What?” His head turned to follow her gaze, and he too spotted her, standing out in a dress that was too juvenile, a face that was too juvenile really, hovering in the corner of the room. “How did she get in?”

“This doesn’t feel right to me Jug.” Betty said, voice low.

“Agreed.” Jughead said quickly, and then they were off, tearing across the dancefloor, pushing past unsuspecting revellers to reach their intended destination. Just a few metres from her, they spotted her slipping into a side exit, bright glowing sign like a kick in the teeth. “Damn.” He muttered, but they were undeterred, simply moving faster, until they were by the door, pushing at the heavy bar until it gave and they stumbled outside.

There were two things that were immediately apparent: that it had grown freezing in the darkening evening, and that Tomoko was nowhere to be seen.

“How does she do that?” Betty cursed in frustration.

“Magic, youth, and sheer determination.” Jughead replied. “Also, a car.” He pointed into the distance where the blue mini was retreating.
“She must’ve literally sprinted.” She complained.

“Yeah. And having to move around Tina and Moose’s mating ritual lost us precious minutes.”

Betty quirked an eyebrow at him. “Isn’t Moose married to Midge?”

“Pretty sure, yeah.” He ran a hand through his hair, leaving it messier than ever.

“I guess the reunion has brought out the worst in everyone.” She mused, wrapping her arms around herself and shivering.

“Hey.” He moved closer in to her, replacing her arms with his own, rubbing warmth into her bare arms. “Not us Bets.”

“Hmm.” She murmured, leaning forward to press her forehead against his suit.

There was a pause, and then Jughead spoke, carefully. “About before,” He began. “With Reggie, I didn’t meant to – I just – I didn’t know what to say.”

“It’s okay Juggy.” Betty lifted her head up so she should could look at him properly. “We aren’t dating.” Her eyes flicked down to her feet and then back up again. “Casual remember?”

“Casual.” He nodded, hands moving to clutch at the back of her neck, they kissed tenderly once more.

They pulled apart just slightly, still tight against each other, Betty let her eyes flutter open, and she spotted someone over Jughead’s shoulder. “Ginger?”

“If we’re going to go for nicknames, I’d really prefer something else.” Jughead muttered dryly.

The light still streaming in from the gymnasium door refracted off Ginger Lopez’s ridiculously eye-catching dress leaving her looking, just for a moment, like some otherworldly being, but then the door swung shut and the illusion was shattered, it was just their esteemed and enthusiastic host. “Sorry guys.” She giggled. “I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“It’s okay.” Betty smiled politely.

“I’m glad I found you.” Ginger said. “Archie was looking for Jughead, and I thought you guys might be out here. I thought you might have wanted some private time.” She winked.

Betty and Jughead looked at each other, a wordless moment of communication, before he moved away from her. “I’ll go see what he wants.” He gave a lacklustre wave, one last reassuring look at Betty, before leaving her in the cold and walking back into the warmth of the dance. The door slammed behind them, and it was now just Betty and Ginger.

“How are you doing Ginger?” Betty asked, head tilted as she contemplated the girl before her.

“Fine.” Ginger nodded. “It’s kind of amazing to see everything come together after I’ve worked so hard.”

“So it’s how you pictured it huh?”

“Oh sure.” She rocked back and forth on her heels. “Almost exactly as I’d imagined.”

“I’m glad.” Betty replied. “You worked hard.”
Ginger seemed to be looking off at some spot in the distance, but when Betty followed her eye line there was nothing there. It was just the empty and deserted back of the high school, as eerily quiet as one might imagine. “I have worked hard.” She nodded, and then began to fiddle with her clutch as if she was looking for a lipstick. “Did you hear they arrested someone for Dilton’s murder?”

“I had yes. Me and Jughead went to speak to him today.”

“Gosh. It’s crazy huh?”

“Nothing is certain yet.” Betty replied carefully.

“Whatever.” Ginger sighed, looking back out at the empty space. “The reunion’s almost over.”

“Almost.” She nodded.

“My kingdom almost gone.” Ginger giggled. “I feel like Queen Seles.”

Betty felt her blood freeze, shiver running down her spine like she was living out some terrifying cliché. She stepped closer. “What did you say?”

“Oops.” Ginger whirled round, laughing again, more high pitched somehow, terrifying. “Guess I’ve been caught.” In one smooth motion, the hand that had been fiddling with her purse was out and Betty felt hard metal pressed against her belly.

It was gun. She knew it immediately. A gun so close that only one small layer of silk from her dress stopped it from digging into her bare skin.

“Surprise.” Ginger grinned.

Chapter End Notes

um, so that happened? Thanks for reading, two more chapters left maybe?

Feel free to yell at me in the comments, I'm dying to know what you think! Xx
The Person Who Shot Betty Cooper

Chapter Summary

Betty had thought she’d kept her heart hidden, locked in a box after a childhood trauma in a place that no one could reach, not Archie, not her ex-fiancé, but the reality was that she’d given it away without knowing it, a long time ago, to a boy with a battered heart and a stupid beanie, to days bent over research, to a love she’d been too confused to reach for. But, now that she knew this, not even a bullet to her chest could change it.

Chapter Notes

um hey guys, im not dead? Im SO sorry for the long wait, the truth is the past few months have been really crazy for me - in good and bad ways - and while I've had most of this finished for months I couldn't find the time or motivation to complete it. In fact, this chapter isn't really complete it's half of what I'd put in a normal chapter, but I figured since it's been so long people would rather a little of something than nothing at all. So I hope you like it! And again, I wrote this sleep deprived and haven't really proof read it so I'm sorry for any mistakes haha.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Betty couldn’t stop looking at the weeds.

They’d sprung up sometimes in the past decade between the bricks of the school’s façade, little sprigs of green amidst the browns and greys, unasked for and unwanted, something that the Alice Coopers of the world might want to stamp out. But in that moment, Betty was supremely grateful for them.

They were beautiful, she thought, in their own little way. And if this was how she died, then at least she died looking at color, at something natural that had found a way to survive in a place that was all artificial. Green had always held a special place in her heart anyway. The color of the trees that kept her steady. The moss that clung to the river bank. Her own eyes when she stared in the mirror.

“I bet you’re a little confused.” Ginger said, her face in a mocking mask of faux-concern. “Oh, and don’t bother screaming. The Pussycats are playing a real loud one.” It was true, the music from the gym was loud enough to make the walls vibrate, muffled guitar filled their ears, and with the door shut, the likelihood was that no one would hear her.

Betty dug her nails into her palms, reopening old scars as a way to survive, red blood a reminder that she was still alive. She turned her gaze from the bricks, the weeds, to face down the woman in front of her, surprised to find how steady her voice was. “You killed Dilton.”

“Yes.” Her grin was blinding. “Say it again. Who killed him?”
“You.” She spat out, anger flooding the numbness away, the metal of the gun against her stomach feeling even colder in comparison to the burning beginning in her belly. “Ginger. You murdered him in cold blood. Why?”

“Why?” Ginger laughed, pushing into Betty with the gun, causing her to stumble back against the crumbling wall of the school. They were no longer close enough to touch, but Ginger had her weapon trained neatly at her heart. She pouted. “I wasn’t even mentioned, you know?”

Betty’s mind had been getting clearer, now she was no long touching what would probably kill her, but still Ginger’s words weren’t making sense to her. “What?

“Jughead’s book!” She exclaimed, free arm flailing in anger, it would’ve been almost comical, if she wasn’t a murderer. “I was Cheryl’s best friend, and I barely got a mention. Jason was my first kiss! But reading yours and Jughead’s account, you’d think I was nothing. You’d think I didn’t even exist.”

“This is about how much you were mentioned in Jughead’s book?” Her face twisted into incredulity, despite the imminent danger, she couldn’t help it.

“It’s about how much I’m ever mentioned. I know it’s difficult for Betty Cooper to imagine.” Ginger said with such derision that it made Betty hate her own name. “Not when you’ve always had this entire town so fucking enthralled with you. Betty Cooper, the Ivy League grad. Betty Cooper, big city journalist. The girl who was just good enough and kind enough and perfect enough to get all the praise for unmasking a murderer, and none of the criticism for being a tenacious bitch.”

There was now enough blood from the fresh cuts in her hand that her palms felt slick with it. “That’s not true.”

“Oh bullshit.” Ginger’s face was red with fury now, but the gun was still steady. “Look,” She took a deep breath, and was back to smiling again, which was more unsettling than the anger. “You don’t get it. But I am sick of being the afterthought. In high school there was Cheryl, and even before she became a sob story I was forever in her shadow. But not this time. Not again. This time, I’m the entire story.”

Betty wanted to say that, no matter what, it was Dilton that was the story, it was his life, his world, which people cared about. But she was still conscious that her life was in the balance, though more like an abstract thing, as if she was floating above the danger, only aware enough not to say more to get her to trouble. Instead, she spoke softly, trying to draw her out. “And that’s why you killed Dilton?”

“Duh.” She tossed her hair across her shoulder. “I wanted to throw this reunion right? And I knew you and Jughead would be coming, or at least you. You are such a reunion kind of girl. I wanted to make an impact. I wanted to give you something to write about. I wanted it to be about me.”

“This was all about being known?”

“Famous. Infamous.” Ginger shrugged. “It doesn’t matter to me.”

There was a choked up sob in Betty’s throat, and she honestly didn’t know if it was hysteria or tears. “Why Dilton?”

“He was a dick.” Ginger said bluntly. “But an interesting one. Before him and big Ethel got together to bump hideous uglies, we hooked up a few times, we were in the Computer club together before Cheryl made me quit.”
“You and Dilton dated?” Betty said, trying to keep her talking, prolong the moment so she could form a plan.

“Ew, not really. But kinda. I knew enough about him to fill my letters with enough convincing detail, plus, I’d stolen Ethel’s dumb diary when we were teens so I had all her ‘intimate’ thoughts with my old Riverdale stuff. It wasn’t hard to read through her Facebook like once and make it seem like the letters were from her. She was an open book, unlike her Dilton.” She snorted, like that fact was endlessly amusing to her.

“Why do that? Why Dilton?” She repeated, shuffling against the wall.

“Don’t be boring Cooper, don’t make me shoot you before the fun is over.” Ginger said, noting the movement, and Betty froze. “And I told you. He was a dick. And a challenge. I didn’t want to just kill a fucking nobody. He was kinda connected enough with the Blossom case to make it interesting, but not too much, he was a paranoid fuck, honestly I thought delving into his life would make an interesting case for you. With the letters, I convinced him to come. At first, I thought it wasn’t going to work and I was just going to have to kill Tina instead. But he pulled through.”

It was startling to hear someone talk about murder as if it was as simple as finding a pair of shoes that had gone out of stock, even for someone as world weary as Betty.

“So you lured him to the bar early?”

Ginger grinned, feline like. “I know you think you’re using some great journalist ploys to buy yourself time while I give my villain speech, but just know, I want you to know all this before I shoot you. The endgame is I kill you, and Jughead kills me in revenge, then the press would have a field day. But I’ll take him just writing a grief filled novel.” She shrugged.

Betty shivered. “Jug would never kill someone. He isn’t like you, he isn’t a sociopath.”

“Sure.” She drawled out the words, elongating them. “But people do crazy things for love. Dilton was gonna move back here,” Ginger jerked her head at their surroundings. “For fake-Ethel. He even broke his own rule and emailed real-Ethel, which caused me a minor headache for like five minutes.”

Her mouth tasted like copper, but she found she was still steady, the situation unreal enough that she wasn’t breaking. She shook her head. “He wouldn’t. He knows that’s not what I’d want.”

“You won’t be alive to find out anyway.” Ginger smiled. “Now, back to moi.” She gestured to herself with the hand that wasn’t occupied with the gun. “I told Dilton to meet me at Hop’s Bar. I’d been scouring the place out for weeks, and I knew all about its lax security. It was pathetically easy to kill Doiley and string him up, ready for the big reveal. It was sad, that he spent his whole life ready for a war, and died at the first hurdle.”

“You’re sick Ginger.” Betty said, firmly. “You killed someone, another human life, just to get your name in the press.”

“I’m aware that I’m fucked up.” She said. “I always have been. It doesn’t bother me to hear you say it. It doesn’t bother me that I am about to put a bullet straight through your heart.”

There had never been a more apt time to use the phrase ‘now or never’ and Betty knew that her next actions might mean her instant death, or her freedom. This might be it, and she’d known it from the moment Ginger had pressed cool metal to her stomach, and while they’d been talking she’d been thinking of it, keeping it in the back of her mind. She’d been thinking of her mother, who was no
longer alone in that too big house, of Polly and the kids, of how she’d miss them, she thought about
her friends, about them finding her body, but mostly, she thought about Jughead. She thought about
how she loved him, and had always loved him, and how she’d wished she’d been brave enough to
tell him before it might be too late, to insist that this idea of casual was ridiculous, that the clichés
were right, and she wished she had enough confidence in him to know that he’d know it anyway,
she only hoped their friends would help him see, if she was really gone, that he was the only person
she’d ever been in love with.

Betty had thought she’d kept her heart hidden, locked in a box after a childhood trauma in a place
that no one could reach, not Archie, not her ex-fiancé, but the reality was that she’d given it away
without knowing it, a long time ago, to a boy with a battered heart and a stupid beanie, to days bent
over research, to a love she’d been too confused to reach for. But, now that she knew this, not even a
bullet to her chest could change it.

“Aany last words?” Ginger asked, looking at her politely, as if now was the moment she was
choosing to show some humanity.

There were a thousand things that rushed through Betty’s head, but she didn’t say any of them,
instead, she gave a final push to the brick she’d been slowly moving with one hand during the
conversation, and watched it crash to the floor. It was a dumb plan. It was nothing but action driven
by instinct, but the crash of the rock hitting the ground was enough to distract Ginger for a split
second, and in that moment, Betty charged for the gun.

A gunshot can sound like a lot of things to a group of people who aren’t expecting it. It can sound
like a car, a crash, a strange beat choice on the part of whoever was mixing the music, a figment of
the imagination, but Jughead was someone who’d learnt to expect everything and nothing.

His mind was already whirling with suspicion, after finally finding Archie in the makeshift backstage
he’d been told that Archie hadn’t asked for him at all, that he he’d barely spoken to Ginger all night,
and certainly not called for Jughead. There was a sinking feeling settling its way into his stomach,
one that would only be solved when he laid eyes on Betty again. Therefore, he was already making
his way across the dance floor when he heard the muffled bang.

It could’ve been something else, but he knew it wasn’t, and his polite fast walk turned into a sprint as
all pretence fell and he pushed through the streams of half-drunk adults. He crashed into the side
exit, the door swinging open with a loud thump into a scene that might’ve come from one of his
nightmares.

Betty and Ginger were locked in a bizarre and violent embrace, limbs entwined and thrashing, nails
digging in, skin white with tension, but there was no blood, no wound he could see. At the sound of
his entrance, both girls turned, and the moment of soft, relief that graced Betty’s face when they
locked eyes was short lived, because Ginger took the opportunity to wrench her arm free, causing the
gun to clatter the floor.

All three of them stared at it, and were jolted into action by the movements of each other. Betty
lunged towards the gun and Jughead lunged for Ginger, who was fast on Betty’s heels.

On instinct, he grabbed at Ginger, the weight of his body hitting his, causing them both to end up
sprawled inelegantly on the ground. He could feel her wiggling beneath him, thrashing under his
weight, but he didn’t let go, couldn’t, despite not knowing what was happening, not knowing
anything but the rush of adrenaline in his blood, and a clanging metal taste of panic in his mouth.
“The gun.” Jughead was yelling, a voice that sounded nothing like his own. “Do you-“ He risked glancing up from Ginger, and spotted Betty, silent tears falling down her cheeks, holding the offending object in surprisingly steady hands.

“It’s here.” She nodded, a sharp jerk of the head. “I-“

Ginger laughed, long and hard, right into the gravel of the old school parking lot, long and hysterical. Unconsciously, Jughead tightened his grip, hands pressing hard enough into the girls bare shoulders, the weight of his knees heavy on her back, that she began to gasp for breath, choking on her own twisted mirth.

“Jug.” Betty said, voice tinged with real fear. “Jug, loosen your grip-“

He was looking at the girl beneath him, his own hands marring her flesh, as if he wasn’t really sure what they were, what she was.

“Jug.” Betty pleaded. “Please- you’re going to really hurt her. We need to- the police- we need-“

For a moment he was stock still, and then in one rush he was off her, weight moving to her legs, pulling her hands tight behind her back, but leaving her with enough space to breath again. He felt sick. He felt dizzy. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t- I’m sorry.”

The door flung open for the second time that night, revealing a petrified looking Veronica illuminated by the lights, a gaggle of onlookers behind her.

“Ronnie!” Betty cried out, the sound of pure relief. “The Sheriff, we need the Sheriff. Tell him we found who killed Dilton. Tell him they tried to kill us. There’s a gun and-“ She looked down at her hands, surprised, as if she’d forgotten that it was she who now possessed it. “Tell him we need him.”

“They’re on their way.” Veronica said, forcing the words out, stunned by the sight before her. “We heard- screams.”

Betty looked down at her hands again, small palms wrapped around the gun, smearing it with blood, and realised that it had probably been her. That in the midst of all of it, she hadn’t stopped to realise that the screeches had come from her own mouth. “Good.” She nodded.

It was all so surreal, and uncomfortable, and numb, the buzzing of the dance, the band coming to a screeching halt as people migrated to the door to see what was happening. But Betty could take none of it in. The only thing she really saw, before the Sheriff and his crew descended, was the face of Ethel Muggs, chalky pale, crying silent tears.

() 

It hadn’t been like Jughead might’ve pictured it, or written it down later, there was nothing cinematic or beautiful about it, nothing that a skilled director might underscore with perfect music, might intersperse with another scene, there was nothing but dirt and grit, and bruises gained, his body crushing a girl who was laughing and laughing, Betty holding a gun with shaking hands, tears streaming from clear green eyes, a voice screaming raw for the police, people, more and more people swarming, until the lights of the Sheriff’s car lit the scene in an otherworldly haze.

And then the interviews, the repetition of basic facts, the statements and shock and pity. The taste of burnt waiting room coffee. More faces, peering into his, searching for inconsistencies, for some way that Jughead could help the make sense of the story that was being told.

By the time the whole charade was done, it was the early hours of the morning and Betty and
Jughead hadn’t had a moment alone with each other, in the back of the Sheriff’s car they held hands, grip tight enough to hurt, clinging to the solidness. They were deposited on Jughead’s driveway and were finally – finally – alone.

Betty wouldn’t let go off his hand, she wasn’t even really aware that she was doing it, only conscious of the fact that he was near and she wanted to it to stay that way. He held her back just as tightly, and that comforted her, made her feel a little less like falling apart. They were silent as he unlocked the door and let them in, and it was only when they were alone in the dim light of his corridor that Betty let herself collapse into him.

Warm hands came up immediately around her back as she buried her face in the crook of his neck, pushing his jacket off and then letting her hands splay across his chest, she took a moment to be still, slumped into his body.

“Bets.” He whispered, one hand in her hair, stroking softly. “I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be.” She breathed against his skin, inhaling the mixture of shower gel and natural scent that immediately made her feel better. “Just don’t.” There was a long, long pause where they just clung to each other. “I’m fine.”

“You almost – almost died. I don’t,” Jughead’s voice was choked, his body stiff. “But you wouldn’t- I couldn’t- I wouldn’t have let that happen.”

“Jughead.” Betty said, pulling back so she could look him in the eyes, see the pain that lingered there, the worry. Her hands slid until there were resting on the back of his neck. “I’m in love with you.”

There was something almost comical in the way his mouth went slack, the exhaustion of the night that clouded his eyes suddenly dissipating with the shock. “Betty I-“

She cut him off. “And I get that you can’t say it back, that’s not why I told you Juggy. I know we promised casual, but then- then I was staring down at a gun and all I could think about was dying without telling you the truth. I love you. I’m in love with you. And I need you to know that.”

“Betty,” Jughead shook his head. “I’ve been in love with you since fifth grade.”

“You have?” She startled, wide eyes growing even wider.

“As much as I hate romantic clichés, I’ve long accepted that I am one.” He paused. “It’s always been you Bets. Always.”

There was a determined expression that graced Betty’s features, and one less versed in all things Cooper might’ve mistaken it for something darker, something bad, but it wasn’t, it was passion and shock and relief and love all rolled up and spilling out onto her face. She leant upwards and in one smooth motion, captured his lips with hers, pulled him into her, all over her, let them entwine so that neither could be sure that they were one whole person without the other.

Betty scrabbled with the buttons of his shirt, slipping his suspenders off his chest, the rough bandage across her reopened scars chafing against the skin her movements revealed. He placed his larger palms over hers, stopping them in their exploration, eyes shut he brought them to his lips and kissed them, eyelashes fluttering. She watched him, feeling like something was breaking in her chest.

“I love you so much Betty.” His voice was rough. “And I don’t- I don’t love casually, if there’s anything my family taught me, it’s that love can’t be casual, that love is a promise, and it’s one I can never afford to break.”
“I know.” She said quietly. “I understand.”

He opened his eyes again, and suddenly she found herself locked into his gaze. “I’m scared Betty. I don’t know if I can give you what you’d need from me.”

Betty felt her face freeze. “I thought we learnt that you aren’t meant to be making decisions for me anymore. I make my own choices.” She pulled her hand from his, whacking it lightly against his chest. “And I chose you. I’ll always choose you.”

“I know.” He shook his head, and his voice broke as if he was about to cry. “This isn’t about making your choice for you, this is about me. I need to know I won’t be my father Betty,”

“Oh Jug.” She replied, cradling his face, her thumbs swiping at the soft skin of his cheekbones. “You aren’t your dad. We aren’t our parents.”

“Just-“ He took a big breath. “I need some time. I’ve had a lifetime of getting used to loving you knowing you’ll never love me back, I’m going to need some adjustment.”

Betty looked at the surroundings, at the shadows that were being chased away, at the sun she could spot rising through the window, and all the things that had happened to them in just the last twenty four hours, at the dark bruises beneath Jughead’s eyes, the scrapes across his forearms from hitting the gravel, and at the own marks her body bore, and she nodded. “It’s late.”

“I think you’ll find it’s early.” He gave an almost attempt at a quip, lips quirking upward in a way that made Betty’s respond.

“Let’s go to bed.” Betty said tenderly, threading their fingers together and tugging him gently towards the stairs.

They got ready for bed in tandem, barely tugging off their formal clothes and pulling on t-shirts before slipping beneath the covers. Jughead climbed in first, opening his arms to let Betty burrow into his side, let her lay her head close against his chest, right about his heart so in the still quiet she could heart it beating.

“The worst part was knowing we didn’t even do anything to help.” Betty said, after such a long moment of silence Jughead almost thought she’d fallen asleep. “It wasn’t us that found out who killed him. She told us. She’d wanted us to do the digging. Nothing we did helped.”

“I don’t know if that’s true Bets.” He whispered into her hair. “Sometimes you help things in a different way than you expect.”

The sun was startlingly bright the next day, too bright, such a sharp contrast to the feelings that had washed over them the night before, the things they’d seen and heard. Betty still slept, blond hair free and splayed across the pillow, face smoothed out in her slumber. It was unusual for Jughead to be awake before, not a regular occurrence in this semi-regular routine they’d set up for themselves, and it had only been the insistent buzzing of his phone on the nightstand that had woken him and, once the terse conversation with his agent was over, he took advantage of the moment.

She really was beautiful, and not just in that superficial, supermodel way – though of course, she was that too – but there was a glow within her that lit her up from the inside out, even in unconscious it was there, warm and lovely.

Jughead slipped back into the covers, hand sliding just beneath the hem of her t-shirt, lips resting
against her hairline, breathing her in.

“Morning.” Betty grumbled, moving closer, head dipping so she could snuggle into him.

“Morning.” His voice felt strange to his own ears, and he hoped he could play it off as having just woken up. “Although it’s technically afternoon.”

“We slept that late huh?” She spoke against his skin, the warm puff of her breath against his bare skin making him want to shiver.

“You slept that late, you’re getting lazy Cooper.” He murmured, hands tightening their grip around her waist, he tugged her closer to him.

“I learnt from the best Jones.” She smirked, pressing a firm kiss to the dip in his collarbone before sitting up, moving just enough so that she could look him in the eyes, still close enough that their breath could mingle.

There was a weighty pause.

“Hi.” Betty said finally, breathlessly.

“Hi.” He replied, softly.

“I love you.”

Jughead shifted, reaching to brush a strand of hair behind her ear, before kissing the tip of her nose. He rested his forehead against hers, eyes fluttering to a close. “So that wasn’t a dream.”

“No.” She said, voice simple, letting him fill in the meaning.

“I didn’t think so. My dreams are never that good.”

His words pulled a smile from her that was still somewhat sad, and if he’d have seen it it would’ve made his gut twist with guilt, but his eyes were still shut.

Betty kissed him, sleepy and languid. “They should be, you deserve all good everything.”

It was a kiss he could’ve sank into, would’ve lived in if that was possible, it was a kiss that was as beautiful as it was sad.

It was a kiss that was ending even as it began.

“You are the best thing that has ever happened to Riverdale.” He said, pulling back, head resting against the pillow so he could really look at her.

“Jug-“

“You are the best thing that ever happened to me.” He said. “And I – I love you. I really do. I always have.”

Suddenly, she felt like crying, not for herself, or for what was happening between them now, but for the people they had been, for the teenagers who were so lonely and so confused and too scared to reach out and touch.

“I’m sorry that it’s not enough.” He said. “And I’m sorry that I’m a coward.”
“You’re a lot of things Jug, but you aren’t a coward.” Betty whispered, moving to cup his cheek. “You’re scared, so am I, but I want to try with you.”

“I have to go.” He blurted out, taking a deep breath, eyes fluttering shut and then open again. “Today. My agent called – this whole thing Betty, it’s huge, all over the news. The Blossom case got so much attention and this whole thing was just so insane that I – I don’t know, but he said I’d have hell to pay if I wasn’t in his stupid conference room in his douchey LA offices tomorrow morning.”

“You’re leaving?” She stuttered, wide eyes opening even further.

“Yes. Tonight.” As if to emphasis things, his phone buzzed on the nightstand, he glanced over at the lit-up screen before turning his attention back to her. “And Archie and Veronica want to meet for lunch at Pops.”

“Pops?” Betty asked, teeth nibbling on her bottom lip.

“Um yeah.” Jughead replied, fingers unconsciously tightening on her hip.

To both their surprise, Betty began to laugh, shakily, but truly. “Betty?” He furrowed his brow in pure bewilderment.

“Oh god.” She bit out between laughs. “My life is ridiculous.” Slowly, so seamlessly that one might not have noticed, her laughter turned to sobs, and she was crying.

“Oh Bets.” Jughead said, dragging her against him, her head fitting so perfectly against his shoulder that it was almost cruel.

She pressed her face hard enough against him that it almost hurt. “I’m sorry.”

“Jesus, don’t apologize.” He said into her hair. “God- I should be the one apologizing. I should be whipping myself in the town square for the amount of stuff I’ve dragged you into.”

“Now you’re the one that’s ridiculous.” She said, voice muffled, a second later she took a breath and pulled away. Jughead let his grip slacken so she could sit up, watching carefully as she swiped at her cheeks.

“I don’t even know what I feel.” She said, after a moment.

“Betty-“ His arm jerked, as if he was moving to wrap it round her but had thought better halfway through.

“I’m gonna get a shower Juggy.” She said, cutting him off.

“Okay.”

“I don’t- I’m just confused and-“

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Betty said, quietly, chin trembling as she tried to smile.

That was probably the worst part - that she was so kind - even while he was breaking her heart.
Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to say I am so grateful for everyone who reads and comments on this fic, the fact that I have people who care enough about it to slog through the ridiculous length and to wait for me for months really means a lot guys!

I can't promise I'll update super quickly, I'm aiming for before Christmas but we'll see. Sorry there was such a long break and that this chapter is so much shorter than normal!
It Happened One Reunion

Chapter Summary

There would never be a version of him that wouldn’t want to kiss her, wouldn’t worship the mole on her thigh, the slight downturn of her lips when she was trying not to smile, even as the fear of his past gripped him he wanted to close the gaps between them.

Chapter Notes

I can’t apologise enough about the wait for this chapter, but I hope you guys enjoy it anyway <3. As always, there was no BETA and i basically wanted to get it out as quickly as possible because I’d left you waiting so long so I'm really sorry if there's any mistakes. Here we go..

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jughead lay on his bed, eyes shut listening to the sound of the hairdryer in the spare room blare, the room that had been Betty’s until they’d stumbled into whatever this had been, the least casual situation that anyone would’ve dared to call casual. He knew he should getting ready, ready for Pop’s, for milkshakes, and Archie and Veronica, for letting this go, for learning to leave this whole reunion behind. But he wasn’t, he was just sat listening to the sound of the girl he loved, who loved him back, and savouring it while he knew he still could.

He squeezed his eyes shut.

“Jug?” Betty’s head appeared around the corner.

“Yeah?” He forced himself to open his eyes, to sit up and take her in.

It was unfair for her to be this beautiful, with her blond hair down and slightly messy, tight black jeans, sneakers, and a collared white shirt dotted with tiny, yellow flowers that would’ve annoyed him on anyone else but looked down right adorable on her.

Betty took a proper step into his room, a steely glint in her eye that was unnerving and a sharp contrast from the look she’d given him when she’d left the room. Now, there was just a hint of a quiver around her lips, and no one but Jughead would’ve noticed the wavering. “We’re going to talk about all this.” She said, like it was a command. “After Pop’s, I won’t leave it like this Jug.”

She’d moved close enough that her thighs nearly brushed against his knees, and Jughead had the simultaneous yet opposite urges to both pull her into his lap and push her away. But he did neither, settling simply for looking down towards his feet. “I don’t deserve your patience Bets.” He muttered.

“Jug,” Her voice was a soft whisper, as gentle as the hand she tangled into his hair. “You don’t get to decided what you deserve.”

“Ha. Sure.”
“I mean it.” Her hand migrated from his hair to cup his face.

Jughead caught her wrist, tugging gently so he could kiss the soft skin of her palm just beneath her thin bandage, where old wounds had been wrenched open. “We’ll talk.” He spoke against her hand, voice muffled.

“That’s all I’m asking.” Betty replied, her hand falling out of his loosened grip as she stepped back. “Now, c’mon, get into the shower so we can go to Pop’s. Veronica won’t stop texting me, I think last night has given her separation anxiety.”

“Can’t blame her Bets.” He tried to keep his voice as light as hers, but he knew his cracks were showing.

“I’m fine.” She said, and he could almost hear the eyeroll in her voice.

Her back was to him as she walked out the room, and he couldn’t stop himself. There was so much churning inside of him that he felt sick with it, the events of the night before, her voice she’d told him she loved him, his own love, his own fears, but he had to say something, had to make it clear. “Bets.” He stood up, reaching out to tug on her wrist so she’d spin round to face him. “I do love you. I am in love with you. And no matter what fucked up father issues I have or stupid agents or – or anything else in my life that is conspiring to make us miserable, none of that changes it. There aren’t many things I’m sure of but I’ve always been sure about how I feel about you.”

“Juggy.” She melted into his body, as his arm came to wrap around her body, engulfing her. “I know, I promise, I know.”

There would never be a version of him that wouldn’t want to kiss her, wouldn’t worship the mole on her thigh, the slight downturn of her lips when she was trying not to smile, even as the fear of his past gripped him he wanted to close the gaps between them.

Then, she did it for him, reaching up to kiss him like they were two doomed heroines in some cinematic masterpiece, clutching tight to a piece of happiness before they boarded the plane to Africa or Germany or somewhere else that took them far away from what they loved.

He stored so many different parts of his life into these convenient genre tropes - the broken childhood, the high school drama, the noir murder mystery – that it only made sense that he would paint his love life into a tragedy.

But then, she pulled back and she was smiling in a way that wouldn’t have been fit for closing credits and giving him a playful poke in the chest, reminding him that reality was more confusing and messy and unpredictable than a movie education had prepared him for.

“Go get ready Jug.” She said, and he did as he was told.

()
just her words could break the girl in front of her. She reached over, grabbing Betty in a hug so fiercely tight that it was a sharp contrast to the vulnerability of her voice.

“Hey V.” Betty replied, sounding more tired than anything else.

Veronica pulled back but left her hands clamped protectively on Betty’s arms. “How are you doing?”

“Fine.” Betty said firmly, resisting the urge to roll her eyes or let her exasperation tinge her tone, after all, it wasn’t exactly ridiculous for Veronica to be concerned about her well being after the past twenty-four hours she had experienced, but receiving sympathy or the worried glances of her friends had never been among her favorite pastimes.

“Hey Jug, Betty.” Archie nodded on them from his corner of the booth the couple slid into, not bothering to get up and add to the slightly dramatic greetings – something both Betty and Jughead were grateful for. “How are you guys?”

“Absolutely filled with joy.” Jughead deadpanned.

“Tired, mainly.” Betty filled in.

“Keller kept us up most of the night at the station.” Jughead elaborated. “I guess when you’re this intimately involved with a murder case there’s quite a bit of questioning that occurs.”

“Me and Cheryl were there for a while, but we decided to take Ethel home when she came out of the station.” Veronica said.

“How did she seem?” Betty’s body had tensed at the name of their former classmate and currently grieving friend, leaning towards Veronica without even realising it.

“She wasn’t doing amazingly.” She admitted. “But I think Cheryl was a great help, she understands.”

Jughead was spared from having to resist making a snarky comment about the redhead by the arrival of a waitress, who dutifully took their orders but stared at them a little too long in a manner that suggested she was all too aware of what had transpired the night before. Betty and Jughead exchanged glances as she retreated, both familiar with the looks that lingered in the way that hers had, and he slipped his hand beneath the table without overthinking, resting it on top of her leg to provide a solid weight to anchor her.

She did not want to be grateful for his presence, knowing he would be gone soon, but she could not stop herself from feeling it in much the same way as she hadn’t been able to stop Ginger placing the cold metal of a gun to her stomach.

“How are you feeling?” Betty said swiftly, wanting to deflect the attention away from all her trauma.

“How about you Arch?” Jughead asked.

Archie looked up from where he’d been staring into the void of his coffee, blinking like he had just emerged into sunlight. “Yeah. You know I’ve been fine. I mean – not fine but I’m okay.”

Jughead crumpled his brow at the other boy’s words, watching as he fumbled over his words in a
way that Jughead recognised from far too long living together. He’d behaved almost exactly the 
same when he’d told Jughead that Betty was engaged. “You sure?”

“Yeah.” He said, and then – taking a deep breath – continued. “I actually have something I really 
should have told you guys. And I know now might not exactly be the best time-“

“Timing’s never been your strong suit Arch.” Jughead interjected.

“It’s just- I got a call just when we got to Riverdale, the day we went to that pizza thing, that I- I’m 
gonna be a dad.”

Jughead felt himself physically freeze, as did Veronica, and in a rare moment of shared horror and 
comradery, the mismatched pair exchanged looks of incredulity.

Only Betty managed to recover herself enough to offer a beaming smile, and if there had not been a 
-solid table separating them it was a sure fact that she would’ve had her arms wrapped around her old 
friend in a second. “Wow, Archie congratulations!”

“Thanks.” He returned the smiled, rubbing his face as if he himself had just received the news and 
was still in shock. “It wasn’t exactly planned so I’ve been kinda freaking out for a while, you know, 
that’s why I’ve been a little off my game.”

“My god, you’re gonna be a dad. You’re gonna turn into your dad and grow a beard and teach your 
kid how to play catch. You’re gonna have a kid to teach.” Jughead said, speaking outloud as if It 
was the only way he could process. Betty gave Jughead a quick kick to the leg, and he quickly 
moved to say something a little more supportive. “But wow, I mean that’s great.”

“Yes!” Veronica said, recovering with a quick shake of the head. “A little Archiekins running 
around, it’s going to be way too cute.”

“We’re all so happy for you.” Betty said, managing to her infuse her voice with just the right amount 
of sincerity.

“Thanks Betty.” Archie replied.

“Who’s the lucky mother of this soon-to-arrive offspring?” Veronica asked, glancing sideways at her 
ex-boyfriend.

“Her name is Suzy. Hang on.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, flicking through 
until he found the picture he was looking for. “This is her.”

Veronica plucked the phone out of his hand before he could offer it, smiling at the image she found 
there. “Oh, she is definitely out of your league.” She teased as she passed the phone across to Betty 
and Jughead.

The girl in the picture was laughing, head titled to the side, warm brown skin glowing in the light 
from the sunsetting behind her. There was something so open and inviting about the crinkle of her 
eyes that she almost looked like an advert for a dream future, something comforting and full of love. 
But that only served to reinforce the fact that she was a stranger to them all bar Archie, and yet 
gazing at her they knew she was about to change their worlds for good.

“She’s beautiful Arch.” Betty smiled, suddenly feeling as if she was about to cry but doing her best 
to conceal it as she gave the phone back.
“Yeah, but I wasn’t aware you were seeing anyone?” Jughead raised an eyebrow.

At this, Archie shrugged. “She’s an artist, the band were thinking of commissioning her for the cover of our next album. She’s based in Chicago so, you know, we hung out a few times.”

“Hung out, is that what the kid’s are calling it these days?” Jughead murmured

Betty rolled her eyes.

“We’ve decided we’re going to try to make it work though.” Archie said, jaw clenching afterwards as an almost physical manifestation of his determinedness not to be a bad father.

“Good.” Veronica nodded decisively. “I’m proud of you for stepping up.”

“With Fred Andrews as a role model, how could he not.” Jughead said, conceding to his first bit of sincerity since they’d sat down at that booth, and the soft smile he shared with Archie was an acknowledgment of how much the elder Andrews had done for them both.

“Mom and Dad are both thrilled.” Archie admitted with a hint of exasperated fondness. “Mom is already trying to arrange a lunch with Suze as soon as I get back, and Dad even talked about flying in.”

“She’s one lucky gal to about to be inducted into the Andrews’ clan.” Betty teased.

“Thanks Betty.” He gave her a small smile and within it all the conversations they’d ever had, of futures, of weddings, of being the picture perfect fairy-tale people they’d dreamed they could be, dissipated like the wisps of clouds in the sky.

“So,” Veronica clapped her hands together, breaking the moment that had settled like dust upon their shoulders. “Baby names?”

“I’d give you Jughead but I’m afraid it’s sacred. Family name.” He shrugged with fake solemnity.

“Wow. We are definitely not at the baby naming stage yet.” He looked almost ready to faint at the suggestion.

“God I love all the baby prep you’re about to do.” Veronica said wistfully, now fully recovered from her initial surprise. “The name, the gender reveal, the baby shower. Do you think Suzy would let me help plan it? I know that we used to date but that’s all water under the Brooklyn Bridge and I was so hoping to expand the brand into baby wear. This could be the perfect opportunity!”

“V slow down a second.” Archie laughed with just an edge of panicked tension in his voice. “I don’t think we’re there yet.”

“Typical man Archie.” Veronica tossed her head. “You know if you think about the details now you’ll be ready for whatever comes. And I think—”

“Anyway,” Betty said, a little louder than she might have normally. Archie shot her a grateful look and being saved, resisting the urge to kick Jughead under the table for being too busy supressing laughter to be of any use. “I thought you had something you wanted to tell us too V?”

“Ah.” Veronica nodded, leaning back against the booth. “Indeed I did, but now it seems dreadfully underwhelming in comparison to Archie’s news. This must’ve been how Madonna felt at my thirteenth birthday when she announced she was going to sing a song dedicated to me and then was upstage by Christina Aguilera having written an entire song all about me.” She shook her head as if...
remembering the terrible affair. “But I suppose I still have to divulge.” She sighed, but there was no denying the grin that was building. “I’m moving to LA for the rest of the summer. Perhaps longer.”

“Veronica that’s great news.” Betty broke into a matching smile, once again wishing the tables at Pop’s made it easier to scoop her friends up into hugs. “How come?”

“Well I think I’ve been in London long enough to have established my team properly and I’m sure they’ll get along fine without me, now we’re looking at expanding into the luxury fitness market and LA seemed just the place to try break into the market.”

“Fitness?” Jughead said, lips curled into a suspicious smirk.

“Yes.” Veronica answered primly.

“Nothing else?” Teased Betty, her eyes sparkling.

“I hear our resident She-Devil haunts the West Coast.” Jughead murmurs under his breath.

“Careful now Jughead, that She-Devil is my girlfriend and a thousand times sharper at insults than you.” Veronica said, playfully. “And okay, yes, enough with the coy act, Cheryl being in LA with me is a huge plus, not to mention I’ve missed the social scene and suntanning that California provides.”

“V,” Betty leant over, placing a hand on her best friend’s arm. “That’s really great.”

“I know.” Veronica grinned. “And how about our favorite odd couple? What are your plans?”

At this, Betty grew subtly quieter leaning back and removing her hand from the table.

“I’m leaving.” Jughead said quietly, and before he could stop himself “Tonight. Work stuff. Would your dad be able to look after Hot Dog until I can bring him back home?” He addressed Archie, who nodded.

“Work stuff?” Veronica repeated, now it was her turn to repeat after Jughead in a mocking manner.

Betty shot her a look that suggested it was in her and everyone else’s best interests for Veronica to leave that particular question alone.

Jughead felt the atmosphere shifting around him and knowing that it was all entirely his fault, this public drama, this sadness that lingered, it was everything he’d tried to avoid for years and yet had found him in the end. Riverdale always caught up with him and brought everything else along with it.

“My agent called, non-negotiable.” He said, and unconsciously he squeezed Betty’s leg, to say I’m here, to say I’m sorry, to say I don’t know what I’m doing anymore. To his surprise, she slid her hand beneath the table to join his and entwined their fingers and when he looked up from where he was steadfastly examining a mark on the table it was to see her smiling at him.

“We’re figuring things out.” Betty said firmly, and while Veronica didn’t look entirely satisfied with that answer she let the whole ordeal drop.

“Well, I for one will be glad to be leaving Riverdale, as much fun as it has been to catch up with you guys.” Veronica said, taking it upon herself to fill in the lingering pause.

“Me too.” Archie admitted. “It feels like lifetimes ago when we first got here and all met up for
drinks at Pop’s.”

Jughead nodded in agreement, sneaking a glance at the girl beside him. The people they’d been just a short time ago felt like strangers from a foreign land, inaccessible in his current state, he remembered how determined he’d been to avoid all the messiness, the emotions, that emerged in him when Betty Cooper was around. But, the truth was that that had always been an impossibly herculean task.

Before anyone could add their own commentary, the moment was broken by their waitress arriving laden with burgers and fries, she still looked at their group with barely concealed pity and interest and her gaze made them all curl into themselves just a little bit more.

They ate beneath a blanket of quiet understanding. There was an unspoken acknowledgment that the four of them might be the only people in Riverdale that didn’t need to either awkwardly bring up the horrible events of the night previously nor avoid it with such fanfare that it only placed more emphasis on what was being unspoken, instead they could let it hover, occasionally mentioning it, but also moving forward, pushing past the worst like they always did with jokes or teasing comments.

“We should get going.” Betty said finally when all that remained of their food was crumbs. “Jug has to pack.”

He glanced at her sideways, as if confronting what was happening head on would be too much.

Veronica nodded and stood up causing everyone else – as per usual – to follow in her footsteps. She pulled Betty into a tight hug beneath leaning back, hands still clutching tightly to her forearms. “I’ll see you soon B.”

“That’s a promise.” Betty said softly.

Veronica matched her look and then let go, moving past her to where Jughead and Archie had finished their more understated goodbyes and pulling a surprised Jughead into another hug. “I’ll see you soon too.” She said firmly. “Because I know you’re going to make the right choice.”

Jughead looked at her with a stoic expression covering his face. “Thanks Veronica.” He said carefully. “I hope you are too.”

She smirked. “Oh I am. And you will.”

With that, they all parted ways: Archie lingered at the counter with Pop as if clinging to the last vestiges of youth before he had to board a plan back to Chicago and responsibility and fatherhood, Veronica was already gone before they had time to blink leaving the sound of her heels against the hard floor reverberating as she leaped into her future, and then it was just Betty and Jughead, leaving hand in hand and heading towards a car that held nothing but uncertainty.

Jughead had his hand on the car’s door handle as a shout of their names from the parking lot halted their planned getaway. They stiffened in unison, turning around to lock eyes with Tomoko who was standing breathlessly just a few steps behind them, as if she’d chased them to that spot.

The teen looked different than before, her titled chin less defiant and more trembling, as if her entire body was crumbling with the effort it took her to hold herself together and approach then. Her wide, expressive eyes seemed murky behind her glasses and her usual overconfidence seemed replaced with anxiety. Behind her stood Adam, Tomoko’s boyfriend, who was watching the whole scene with an air of resigned authority, as if he was a harried father who’d brought his child to apologise.
for being mean to the other kids.

“Jughead. Betty.” She repeated. “I need to talk to you two.”

“What is it?” Jughead asked, with even less patience than he normally reserved for his biggest fan.

“Tomoko, now isn’t really the best time for you to get a scoop.” Betty said, as per usual, gentler and more understanding than Jughead had been.

Tomoko shook her head, “That’s not what this is, I came –“ She took a deep breath. “I came to tell you something that I really should have told you a long time ago and honestly I don’t know like-how I could’ve been so wrong and the police told me they were going to tell you anyway but I thought you should really hear it from me because–“

“Tomoko.” Jughead interrupted. “What are you talking about?”

“I was following you two.” She said, words tumbling out in a single rush of breath,

“We know.” He replied. “Your blue mini wasn’t exactly the subtlest of getaway vehicles.”

“No but-“ Tomoko seemed to be struggling with her words. “I wasn’t just doing it for me, Ginger was paying me.”

At the mention of that name, both Betty and Jughead tensed.

“What?” Jughead said flatly.

Tears were beginning to form in the teens eyes as she spoke. “Look, I know it seems dumb and stupid and I should’ve known but the way she explained it made so much sense. She was worried you were going to ruin the whole reunion. She even kinda implied you guys could be hiding something. All I had to do was keep her informed if I like happened to see you guys. I was basically getting paid to do something I wanted to do anyway. I just – I never imagined she had anything to do with this.” Her nose crinkled. “She seemed so innocent. But I get it now. I was so stupid. Beyond stupid. And I won’t forgive myself. I’ll hand in my head editor badge for the Blue and Gold.”

“There’s a badge for being editor?” Jughead asked.

“I made it myself but yeah.” Tomoko sniffed. “But I’ll hand it in.”

“Tomoko.” Betty said, gently touching a hand to the teens shoulder. “Don’t. You weren’t stupid, you were a little reckless yes, but not stupid. Ginger had us all fooled, me and Jug had no idea until yesterday.”

“But you’d have known.” Tomoko insisted. “If she’d asked you to spy on someone you’d have known something was up.”

“Maybe.” Betty conceded. “But maybe not. I don’t know what I’d have done now or when I was your age. All I know is what happened, and you can’t blame yourself for it.”

“I don’t know.” Tomoko shook her head again, eyes drifting to stare at the ground. “I just wanted to apologise. I really am sorry. I didn’t want you to hear from Sherriff Keller. I wanted it to come from me.” Steeling herself she lifted her chin, looking them in the eyes once more. “I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted.” Betty said swiftly. “And please try be kind to yourself.”

“Keep the badge Tomoko.” Jughead sighed. “The Blue and Gold needs someone who can admit
they’ve made a mistake and learn from it.”

“Thanks.” She practically hiccupped out the word, almost taking a step back out of shock. It was probably the nicest thing Jughead had said to her yet.

“Tell the Bloomers you have our blessing.” Jughead continued. “But don’t brag.” He lifted his hand in a half-hearted wave and then made for the car.

“Bye Tomoko.” Betty waved too, following Jughead and sliding into her own seat. As soon as she was situated, Jughead started the car, and together they left Tomoko in the parking lot with an expression stuck between gratitude and regret.

They drove back home in the quiet, Betty’s head turned towards the window as she watched the town of her childhood rush past them in a heady daze. She didn’t look angry or upset – as Jughead might’ve feared – just contemplative, meditative almost.

“Will you miss it?” Jughead couldn’t help himself, eyes darting from the road to search her profile.

“What?” She turned her gaze to him.

He was looking straight ahead now. “Riverdale.” He replied, but what he meant was him, this, us.

“But Riverdale isn’t reality, it isn’t my life anymore.” Her head tilted back to lean against the headrest, shutting her eyes. “Will you miss it?” She said, after a beat too long, cracking her eyes open sleepily.

“Yeah.” He answered. “More than you know.”

His words lingered in the air as they turned the corner into his familiar street, as they approached his home – their home for the past few days – he noticed Betty getting more and more alert, no longer slumping but with her shoulders firmly pushed back, gaze sharp and resolute. He had no idea what she was thinking, and it amazed him that anyone in their long ago teenage past had ever labelled her as simple, easy to understand, the ‘typical’ girl next door, because – although he felt he knew her better than most – sometimes she still felt so impossible, so unfathomable, that he was lost.

“You want to talk?” Jughead asked as the engine died down, though it came out less question more statement.

“Yes.” Betty nodded. “Inside?”

“You don’t think this is a conversation we should be having in public? I know Mrs Doberman next door would love to eavesdrop on every detail of my love life.”

Her lips twitched into that perfect smile he wanted to trace beneath his fingertips. “C’mon, let’s head inside. Hot Dog will have missed us.”

By the time he’d followed her through the front door, she was already pacing with all the energy she’d been tramping down finding desperate ways to escape.

“I’ve been doing a lot of thinking.” Betty began, they hadn’t even made it past the hallway before she launched into it.

“I can tell.” Jughead replied. “And I have too, I don’t want you to think that I don’t mean it or-“
“Juggy,” She came to a stop right in front of him. “I know you love me.”

The way she said it, so plain and simple, send something jolting right into his heart. “Okay.” Was all he could manage in response.

“I love you. And I want- I want to be with you. More than I’ve ever wanted anyone, more than Archie, more than my fiancé.” Betty paused. “But I understand why you can’t promise me that.”

Jughead ran a hand through his hair, struggling to reply.

“Being in Riverdale is like being in a dream.” She pressed on. “In some ways, in lots of ways, it’s been a nightmare. The parts with you, they’ve been dreams I haven’t wanted to wake up from. But we have to wake up, we have to know what we’ll be like in the real world.”

“I suck at living in the real world Bets.” Jughead shook his head.

“You don’t.” She replied, moving closer. “I know you wouldn’t, I know this would work, you just have to stop seeing me as a dream you don’t deserve.” She picked up his hand where it had been dangling at his side, pressed into against her cheek. “I’m real, and I’m here, and I love you.”

He couldn’t help himself, he let the soft pad of his thumb graze her cheek.

“You want time to adjust and I’m willing to give it. We’ll go back to the real world. I’ll give you two weeks Jug, two weeks where you don’t have to contact me, we don’t have to talk about it, and you can decide if you think what we have is worth risking something. But after that if you can’t decide, then it has to be done. Anything more will hurt too much.”

His hand had moved to the nape of her neck know, and his grip tightened. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

Her eyes were wet now, with tears nearly floating to the surface. “I know. I don’t want you to hurt either Jug.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologise.” She said firmly. “But I want you to ask yourself something when I’m gone.”

“What?”

“Why are you so scared of every good thing that is given to you?” Betty asked, eyes searching his face. “Why are you so determined to make yourself miserable?”

“You can’t lose if you have nothing.” He shrugged, though there was nothing casual about what he was saying or how he was saying it.

“That’s not the way to live.” She replied, and then delicately looking up she kissed his cheek. “I hope you realise it.” The scent of her lingered though she’d stepped back – sweat and perfume and the shampoo he’d grown accustomed to seeing litter his bathroom. “I packed this morning after my shower. I’m going to drive to New York. And I’m going to give you two weeks.”

“Two weeks.” He repeated, while she nodded. “That’s more than I deserve.”

“You deserve more than you’ll let yourself have.”
After that, Betty left abruptly. Her bags were already packed, so there was nothing more to do other than savour a lingering kiss and watch as she drove away into the real world. A place that felt as inaccessible to Jughead as it always had.

His plan ride back to San Francisco passed by in a blur, his thoughts were still in Riverdale, even if he – and Betty – no longer were. As soon as he landed, he switched on his phone to a volley of missed calls, with a resigned sigh he selected call back.

“Bro, what the fuck.” Jellybean answered on the first ring. “I go on one fucking Yoga retreat and I come back to see you nearly got murdered.”

“Nice to hear from you too JB.” He pressed the phone to his ear, hailing a cab with his free hand.

“Yeah, it would’ve been pretty fucking nice to hear from you too after I turn on the news to see your ugly mug plastered over everything. And then you can’t even be bothered to answer your phone.”

He moved his phone away from his face to give his address to the driver, sliding inside the cool air-conditioned interior of the taxi. “I was on a plane.”

“Apparently someone was murdered at the beginning of the reunion, did I get a text about that?”

“No.” Jughead admitted. “But-“

“No buts bro. Not cool. After the shit-show of our separate childhoods we agreed to keep in touch.”

“We keep in touch JB.” Jughead protested.

“Oh sure. You know all about my latest boyfriend, my last attempt to make a documentary, my current hair colour, but I don’t get to know shit about you.” She responded.

“Okay. I should’ve texted.”

“Yes.” Jellybean said. “A text. A phone call. A heads up to say ‘hey I just got heavily involved in another murder investigation, I hope I don’t die but be prepared in case it ends with a showdown with the killer where I tackle her to the ground in a move that the New York Times called heroic’”

“That would’ve been oddly specific.” Jughead deadpanned.

“Fuck off.” JB replied, but she sounded a little more good natured. “But I am glad you didn’t die.”

“Wow. More profound words have never been spoken, did Jean Paul Sartre himself speak through you in that moment?”

“Ha. Funny.” She snorted. “You think it’s cute to joke when I’m pissed.”

“Did yoga not relax you enough?”

“Please.” Jellybean scoffed. “I have always been the chillest, I just don’t take kindly to my brother’s non-responsiveness when I find out through CNN that he was nearly killed like two days ago.”

“You’re right.” He said, more serious this time. “I know I should’ve stayed in touch. I don’t have an excuse apart from things in Riverdale were crazy, and I didn’t want to worry you when I knew I was going to be alright.”

“Okay.” She said softly, sounding more like the younger girl she was. “Next time?”
“I hope there’s never a next time, but if there is you’ll be the first person I call.”

“Thanks Jug.” Jellybean, sighed and her head the sound of her settling into some cushions. “I’ll be holding you to that promise.”

“Noted.” He said, solemnly.

“And I’m holding you to the whole ‘keeping in touch’ thing by demanding you give me the details. What the fuck happened in Riverdale? That place is wild.”

Surprisingly, the idea of talking about everything that went down in Riverdale – the ugly and the beautiful – felt extremely appealing to Jughead, particularly because it was Jellybean whom he loved to the ends of the earth and who was one part understanding two parts straight talking, and who was close to him but distant enough from the whole situation to be able to offer a different perspective. So he told her it all, right from the very beginning, from loving Betty in high school to the reunion to watching her drive away in her car knowing he held the power to stop her but feeling too weak to use it. He spoke through the whole cab ride, through manoeuvring the luggage to his apartment, until his was collapsed on his couch with the entire sorry story laid bare.

JB had been fairly quiet through most of it, letting out only the occasional gasp and curse word, but when he was finally done she began to laugh. “Dude, you are not gonna last two weeks.”

“What?” He replied defensively.

“I’ll guess that it will take you maybe three days to realise you made the biggest mistake of your life by letting Betty go.”

“My biggest mistake was confiding in my little sister.” He grumbled.

“Jug.” She said with affection and exasperation. “I love you but you suck sometimes. You don’t actually want to be unhappy, so stop punishing yourself for having a shitty childhood and a shitty attitude.”

“Since when did you become a therapist? Will you be charging me for this appointment Professor Jellybean?”

“See, so defensive.” He could practically hear the eye roll in her voice. “Three days and you’ll be banging down Betty’s door. I’m never wrong.”

Only this time, JB was wrong, it only took him two.

()
She had a feeling that – if he never got in touch by the time the two weeks were over – she’d be comparing her lives a lot, pre-Jughead and post-Jughead. It seemed sensible to shape your life by its defining moments, where things would never be the same, and she knew she’d be kidding herself if that moment wasn’t Jughead. Jughead and Jason Blossom, Jughead and Dilton Doiley, touching her life and changing it irrevocably.

She sighed, blowing on the steam rising from her too hot herbal tea, wishing she could get back to her old, damaging, work ethic where she shoved any emotions she felt deep down and ploughed through no matter the cost. It wasn’t healthy, but sometimes it felt better than staring at an empty page with your mind across the country.

There was a tentative knock on the apartment door.

“IT’s open.” Betty called without looking away from the laptop, thinking it was the guy her roommate had warned her about, coming to pick up the last of her belongings that were piled in a corner by the day. “Liz left the boxes you need by the door.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know anything about any boxes.” Came the voice from the door.

Betty whipped her head round to drink in the sight of Jughead entering her apartment and shutting the door behind him, she stumbled out of her seat. “Jug, what are you doing here?”

“Fixing the stupidest thing I ever did?”

“You- it hasn’t even been two weeks.” She finished weakly. “It’s been two days.”

“Am I too early?” He joked.

“I thought- you’d text or call or-“ Betty found her eyes darting from her normal every day furniture back to the sight of Jughead, stood amidst a life she didn’t think he wanted to slot into anymore.

“My life is filled with every other bad TV trope I thought I might as well add in the grand gesture.”

She took a tentative step toward him. “So this is you saying…”

“I’m saying I’m in.” Jughead said decisively, gesturing to the luggage at his feet. “Whatever it takes I want to try this with you because I’m in love with you, and that conquers my crazy fears, and my bad upbringing every time. That’s if you still want to try.”

“I want to.” Betty said quickly, words tumbling over each other “I want to.” And then she was flying past all the mismatched furniture that stood between them and closing all the gaps, reaching up to drag his lips down to hers.

Jughead kissed every part of her face he could reach, first lips, then hair, then cheek, then soft skin by the earlobe, neck, collarbone, raining affection down upon her as if he was a storm that was just broken, and she was a flower unfurling at his touch. “It took me five minutes after landing in San Francisco to realise I resented the city just for not having you in it” He whispered into the top of her head as they paused to catch their breath.

“I hated New York.” She pulled back from his chest to look at his face. “It was too filled with pretentious hipsters and none of them were you.”

“We’re ridiculous.” He gently tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, letting his fingertips graze her
cheekbone.

“We’re in love.” She said simply, lips curling into the sweetest grin he’d ever seen.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of hearing you say that.” Jughead admitted.

“You don’t have to. I’ll say it as over and over again, and we have all the time in the world for you to listen.” Betty said, leaning upwards for another kiss.

If their lives had been a movie or a book, a tragedy or romantic comedy, some genre that Jughead had always framed his life by, then that would’ve been the fade to black, the moment the curtains closed, and the audience began to clap. But it was more than fiction, it was realer and sweeter and better than any story Jughead would’ve thought to write himself.

Instead of an ending, they gave themselves a beginning that promised a thousand sweeter things to come.

Chapter End Notes

Wow. Okay. tada! It's the end (I do have an epilogue planned but it'll be like super short and out within the next two weeks so this is pretty much the end.) If you have read this entire monstrosity then I want to thank you so so much for sticking with me, this is BY FAR, the longest fanfic I've ever written and I'm so grateful that people seemed to have enjoyed it. I love you guys <3. If you feel like making my day feel free to let me know what you thought, I hope the ending didn't let you down xxx
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

What Came After...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Betty watched him approach, flipping her sunglasses to the top of her head so he could bear the brunt of her unimpressed gaze, but instead of looking sheepish or guilty as she’d hoped, he smirked at her.

“Mommy!” The little girl cried when they were close enough, breaking free of her father’s hand and rushing to jump up at her mother. Betty hauled her up, grunting at the weight but smiling softly as she felt chubby hands come around her neck. “We missed you!”

“I missed you too peach.” She pressed a kiss to the wild, dirty blonde curls that sprouted from her daughter’s head. And then she glared over the top of her, addressing Jughead. “You’re late.” She pointed out.

“It’s nice to see you too.” Jughead said, bending down to peck her lips softly, mindful of the baby snoozing in the pouch at his chest.

Betty shifted the weight of her daughter so that she was balanced on her hip, attempting to glare at her husband, but finding there was too much affection in her. “It’s always nice to see you.” She said. “But you’re still late. We might not make it to Riverdale in time for the playdate.”

“Oh?”

She sighed. “If we’re late, you’re the one who has to explain to Cheryl why JJ and Marisol only had Freddy to play with instead of kids their own size.”

“Daddy told me to tell you that our taxi crashed because a giant alligator come onto the road and he had to get out and fight it.” Harper said, before her dad had a chance to respond.

“Jughead,” Betty said, exasperatedly. “Stop getting our kids to lie for you.”

“But it’s so amusing to see the lies come out from their little innocent faces.”

“You’re setting a bad example.” She laughed.

“And then two more alligators came out and Daddy fought them all off and then we had to get a ride in an police car.” Their daughter added, giggling.

“Daddy sounds very brave.” Betty mock-glared at him, and Harper nodded enthusiastically.

Jughead raised his hands up in protest. “Hey.” He said. “Don’t look at me, she came up with that one all by herself.”

“Hmm.” She huffed, and then placed her daughter down gently, brushing an errant curl away from
“Shall we get you and Teddy strapped in?”

“Have you remembered my colouring books?” Harper asked, hazel eyes almost as big and expressive as Betty’s, blinking questioningly up at her.

“Yes Harp.” She pressed another kiss to the top of her head, before straightening up. “And your books and Athena.”

“OK.” She clapped her little child hands together.

Betty led her to the car, lifting her into her seat, whilst Jughead – careful not to wake up their son – got Teddy safely ensconced in his own, tiny, car seat. As he shut the door, Betty waited, leaning against her own door and looking up at him with a sceptical look on her face. “Why were you actually late?” She asked, smirking.

“Lost the house keys.” He grinned, stepping closer to her.

“Your memory’s going, you must be getting old.” She teased, dancing out of his reach and climbing into the passenger seat.

Jughead groaned, before moving to take his own place at the driver’s side. He glanced back at his kids, feeling such a swell of pride and love for his family, Teddy still sleeping, snuffling just slightly, and Harper making her toy Owl fly around the back seat.

“Hey.” He said to his wife, once they were both strapped in, waiting until she looked at him before continuing. “Happy anniversary.” He said, at those words Betty’s face melted into a look of adoration, of pure love.

“It’s not exactly our anniversary.” She Pretend to protest, but the smile on her face betrayed her real feelings. “We didn’t officially get together at the reunion.”

“I’m counting it.” He shrugged. “Without that ten year reunion, who knows if we would have ever reconnected? That makes this twenty year reunion even more special.”

“I like to think it was inevitable.”

Jughead still felt his heart lurch, even after all this time. “Me too. But that’s the hopeless romantic in us Bets.”

“I love the hopeless romantic in us.” She said.

“I love you.” He said, leaning over the divide between their seats.

“I love you too Juggy.” Betty replied, closing the gap between them.
inbetween the last chapter and this epilogue, no promises are being made but it is a maybe, if that's something people would be interested in.
again, just thank you!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!