Sign of the Times

by strangled

Summary

At the ripe age of seventeen, the gang isn't doing so well. Things are falling apart and people are leaving and no one knows how to deal with it. Will they find their way through?

A Riverdale One-Shot

Notes

*not beta'd*
I'll probably re-edit this and possibly add some more stuff. There's also a possibility of me turning this into a series of one shots
-Laura

Just stop your crying, it's a sign of the times.
It had been a long night, and Archie Andrews could not sleep. He could not manage to keep his eyes closed for more than minutes at a time, and it was all because of this feeling that kept twisting and turning his stomach. A feeling he had felt many times before, but this one was so much real. He could not escape the feeling that something was going to happen, something bad. No matter what he did, he just could not shake the feeling. It was messing with his head, making him feel nauseous and his stomach twists in pain. So he was stuck with the feeling of bile rising in his throat and a feeling like he was being stabbed in the gut. There was nothing to help this feeling, he knew it. Nothing could ease the pain or stop the thoughts from running through his mind. So, there he lay in bed, staring at the ceiling.

It wasn't until three in the morning that his phone rang, a shrill noise cutting through the silence of the night. He jumped to grab at it, attempting to ensure it would not wake anyone else in the house. He didn't look to see who was calling, nor did he care. All he hoped was that it was something that would temporarily take his mind off of the fire that burned inside and filled him with worry and doubt. He answered with a grumbled hi, having no clue what he was about to be told. It was silent on the other line before the muffled sobs came. After that was the hoarse voice of Elizabeth Cooper, and the words that spilled out of her mouth changed his life for the worse.

"Arch, it's... it's V" she sobbed, the words catching in her throat.

He blinked, once, then twice more, confused, worried.

"Betty... what about her? What's wrong?"

Betty was silent again, not speaking, but he could still hear her crying in the background; a sound that broke his heart. He could tell that she was hesitating with what she was about to say, and he knew that there was something wrong. He knew that something was so wrong. He should have listened to the feeling in his gut, should have trusted his instinct.

"Betty, you can tell me, what's wrong? What about Veronica?"

He couldn't help but be worried, Veronica meant so much to him by now, his girlfriend of nearly two years. His everything. He just wanted to know what Betty had to tell him.

"Arch, I am so sorry. I am so sorry." she sobbed "I could have helped her. I could have done something, I... I just wish that there was something I could have done. Something I could have changed or fixed but I wasn't there for her Archie I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

He couldn't listen to this anymore.

"Betty, please tell me. Betty what's wrong with V?" he could her hesitation again. He could hear her breath hitch and she choked on another sob. "Archie, she's gone."

and in that moment, gone was such a funny word. Gone in what way? Gone as in she went to the supermarket? Gone as in she moved, far far away from the wreckful town of Riverdale? Or gone as in... a word he would not say. A word that was forbidden in his mind, because there was no way that his Veronica was gone. She couldn't be, it wasn't possible. Veronica was not a girl to die, everyone knew that. Veronica Lodge was strong and independent. But the next words Archie heard over the phone were the ones that broke him. They were the words he would have etched into his mind forever. Words that would haunt his dreams.

"She took her own life Arch. She's gone. She's gone arch, and she isn't coming back. She's gone archie. She... she's gone. Archie, I'm so sorry." and Archie wanted to talk, to say something and try to help his friend, but couldn't because his whole world was in slow motion. He didn't realize
it when his phone slipped out of his hand and to the floor, and he didn't see when the screen 
shattered on the hard floor, he didn't care. Veronica, Veronica. His sweet loving Veronica. She was 
gone. Gone and not coming back. It was her choice, her choice to leave after all the promises they 
made, she left him with nothing. Nothing but a broken heart and a shattered phone screen. And he 
had no clue why. He didn't understand it.

He didn't want to. Not now, because now, he wanted to sleep. He wanted to sleep and never wake 
up. He wanted to crawl into that cold bed of his that they had that they had shared so many times. He 
wanted to curl into a ball under the covers that still smelled of her and go to sleep. He wanted to fall 
into the deepest sleep of his life and never wake up. Not to this cold world without her. Not to 
whatever this town would be without Veronica Lodge. Because it just wasn't worth it. Whatever this 
cruel world had done to make her do this, he didn't want to be here to find out.

No, Archie Andrews no longer felt a fire burn inside him. Not with questions or doubt or love. Not 
with anything. Because someone had just taken a cold bucket of water and poured it over his head. 
The fire had been extinguished, and all that Archie Andrews wanted right now, was to be buried 
beside the girl he loved. All Archie Andrews wanted, was to die right there in the bed that she had 
been in. Because that was all he had to hold onto. Nothing would be the same for him again, not 
Pop's. Not school. Not music or even his own house. He couldn't step into this own bathroom 
without thinking of her for one reason or another.

Veronica Lodge would always be there to haunt him, and Archie Andrews understood that. But that 
didn't change his mind. No, not at all. He wanted to die. He wanted the ground to open and swallow 
him whole, just like it would with his girlfriend 3 weeks later. She would be missed, by everyone, 
she would be missed and loved so much more than she ever was than when she was alive. He 
already knew that. He already knew that there would be no forgetting Veronica Lodge. He couldn't 
let that happen. Because to the town of Riverdale, Veronica would be the new Jason Blossom, she 
would be just as worthy to be remembered as he was. Born and raises here or not, Veronica was just 
as much as Riverdale as everyone else who lived there was.

And that night, as Archie Andrews sunk to his knees crying like a child, all that he would be able to 
think of is all the two of them had done together. Everything that he had done to prove his love to the 
girl. Everything the had done to convince her that she was worth it, that she deserved to live. 
Everything he had done that didn't work, because she took her on life from not only herself but 
everyone else too. She did not know what it would do, and the downward spiral was coming upon 
the quiet town of Riverdale. But Archie could already see the memorial and the newspaper articles. 
He could see Betty's speech, and his own too. He could see what was going down in the future that 
he did not want to see he could envision it all despite the wish to die, and he wished he didn't. But he 
would live to see what would happen, despite the wishes that ran through his head as he lay in bed 
after hours of sobbing and remembering and just thinking. He would live to see what happened after 
Veronica Lodge died.

_Welcome to the final show, hope you're wearing your best clothes. You can't bribe the door on your 
way to the sky._

Three weeks later, they put Veronica Lodge under the ground. Both him and Betty made a speech, 
and nobody hid their tears on the emotional day. It was open-casket, and Archie made it so long until 
he saw her face. Pale and lifeless, but just as beautiful as she had been when she was alive. It wasn't 
obvious what had happened to the girl of only seventeen. It couldn't be told that she had taken her
life herself just by seeing her laying upon the casket, her hands crossed over chest, her pearl necklace and bracelet in their places. He had made it so far, he had said his speech, he had listened to Betty's. He had allowed the tears to escape his eyes, and he didn't care. Then, they opened the casket, and he saw her face. Then it all seemed so surreal again. It all seemed like such a lie, seemed so much like a cruel nightmare he couldn't wake up from. He heard Betty's breath hitch, and even Jughead let himself cry.

But Archie couldn't make himself care in that moment because all eyes in the room were on him or the love of his life. And he didn't care that they watched him stand and leave, he didn't care that they saw how much he cried or if they could tell he was screaming inside. He just wanted to escape, he had to leave. So he did. He stood and he looked at her one more time, looked at the pale face that would haunt his dreams, then he let an ugly sob escape him, one last time in front of everyone, and he left. He stalked back down between the aisle of chairs and out the white doors. He went back home and crawled back into the bed he spent the last 3 weeks in. People came and talked to him, they said they were sorry for his loss or tried to make him feel better, but he just laid there, and nobody wanted to make him move.

You look pretty good down here, but you ain't really good.

Things weren't going any better for Betty and Jughead either. Both were overcome with grief, trying to help each other and Archie through it. Nothing seemed to help. Two weeks after the funeral, the two of them stepped inside of Pop's for the first time since Veronica's death. They thought it had been long enough, but when Betty looked at the old booth where the four of them had had so many memories, she felt a sob wrench through her body. Her manicured nails pressed into old cuts that had yet to heal, making blood pour onto her palm. Jughead immediately wrapped his arms around her, turning her into his chest in an attempt to soothe her.

She had been trying so hard to make everything look like it was alright like she was able to move on but still hold the memory of her best friend with her, but she couldn't. She couldn't hide the fact that she cried herself to sleep every night or the fact that she couldn't sleep in a bed alone anymore because of the nightmares that crept into her mind soundlessly each night. She couldn't hide that the cuts on her palms grew by the day, each one getting deeper.

Then the day came when Jughead said those few words to her, the words that broke her so much more than everything that had happened over the past few months.

“Betty,” he whispered to her one late night when she couldn't sleep and laid in his arms, pressed against his chest.

“Yeah?” she replied with glassy eyes, her thoughts had always got the best of her at night.

“I... I have to tell you something.” a frown made its way upon her face

“What is it, Juggie?” she was so afraid it would be something bad, something that she wouldn't be able to take.

“I got a scholarship...” he hesitated “As an exchange student, in France. For two semesters. Nine months.”

And as hard as Betty tried to be happy for him, old fears stuck in her mind and her breathing became
slightly uneven.

“I’m happy for you Jug.” she said, ignoring her voice cracking and forcing herself to smile even though her nails pressed into her palms harder than they ever had before. She didn't realize it until she felt the familiar warmth of blood dripping out slowly, and she unclenched her fists slowly.

“I'll come back for you, you know,” he said pulling away from her and sitting up. “I'm not leaving you, Betts, I can't do that.”

Hearing his words, she could feel the sting of tears in her eyes.

“You kind of are, Jug.” she whispered and laughed sadly. She scooted herself to the end of the bed and pulled the first aid kit out of her nightstand drawer. “But I am happy for you. Just, promise me you'll come back to me.”

“Always.”

Just stop your crying have the time of your life. Breaking through the atmosphere, and things are pretty good from here.

She knew it would be their last date for a while. Nothing expensive, but something that meant so much more to the both of them. They sat in the movie theater, watching old movies together for what she could count as days, months even. She did her best to stay as close as she could to him at all times, constantly having some sort of physical contact with him. He knew that she was doing this intentionally too, and every time she put her head on his shoulder, he leaned back a little and pulled her closer than she was before.

Once it hit about ten, the couple left and headed to Pop's, and Jughead had to soothe her the whole way, telling her it would be alright, that they didn't even have to look at their old booth. When they walked in that door, Jughead had never seen Pop Tate so happy. He had made them their favorites, even a red velvet milkshake despite it being a seasonal drink. They sat in that booth for at least another hour before they told Pop to have a good night and headed home. Betty knew her mother expected her home, that she wouldn't be happy if she didn't come home, but she didn't care because tonight wasn’t about her mother. It was about young love, her and Jughead, and no one else. Tonight was theirs.

Remember everything will be alright, we can meet again somewhere, somewhere far from here. We never learn we've been here before, why are we always stuck running from the bullets?

Today was the day. Today was the last day she would see him for another nine months, and they already stood together in the airport, hand in hand, thirty minutes until departure.

“Promise me you'll call every day.”

“I promise,” Jughead said, pulling her hand up and placing a light kiss on it.

“And that you'll be safe.”
“Of course.”

“Don't get hurt.”

“I'll do my best, Betts.”

They sat in silence for the next few minutes until they heard the first boarding group being called.

“I'm in the second one,” he told her quietly, standing and pulling her up with him.

“I know.”

“I'll be okay.”

“I know. Promise you'll come back to me?”

“Anything for you, Betty Cooper, always. I love you.”

“I love you too,” she sighed

When he heard his boarding group being called, he leaned down and gently pressed a kiss to her lips. A kiss filled with so much love and desperation she thought she might explode with emotion.

“Wait for me,” he said and pulled her into a tight hug before getting in line. Neither of them cried until the other couldn't see them.

_Just stop your crying it's a sign of the times. We gotta get away from here, we gotta get away from here. Stop your crying baby, it'll be alright. They told me that the end is near, we gotta get away from here._

A week after Jughead left, Betty called Archie. She was nearly thrilled when he answered.

“We have to leave.” was the first thing she said, no greeting.

“Why?”

“We just can't stay. We need a new beginning Arch, we need a new atmosphere, one less corrupt and with less drama. Somewhere where we can start again, as just us.”

“What about Jug?”

“He can join us when he's back, but... I can't stay here any longer Arch.”

She heard him sigh and she felt her heart deflate, he wasn't going to come. Then, he replied

“I know what you mean. We need somewhere better, somewhere with less bad memories, no matter how many good ones there are.”

She felt so relieved, he was going to come with, she wouldn't be alone for the first nine months of this journey; And Archie deserved an escape, he deserved something better than he had.

“But, how are we going to afford this?” he asked and Betty smiled
“Don't worry, I've got it covered.”

By the end of the month, the two now eighteen-year-olds were ready to leave. All of their stuff was packed in the back of the old truck Fred had given Archie and Vegas sat in the middle between her and Archie. She pets him as he pulled out of the driveway, and she waved to the two sets of parents they had promised to visit regularly. By the time they had left Riverdale, the weight on Betty's shoulders had never felt lighter. By the time they were at the three bedroom apartment they had found in Vermont, she was about ecstatic, and Archie seemed happier than he had in a long time. Maybe all they needed was an escape, because things were easier, slowly, and each time they go back to visit, it isn't as hard as it was the last.

End Notes

Hey guys! I know I don't post much, but thank you so much for reading this! Comments and constructive criticism is always welcomed.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!