**my heart is like a labyrinth (it’s gotta be you)**

by **writing_as_tracey**

**Summary**

*My name is Betty Cooper; I'm 16. I asked out the boy that I like, and he gave me his autograph instead.*

In a classic case of miscommunication, Jughead Jones - a prolific and successful (although secret) author of a murder mystery in the monthly literary magazine *Written Words* - mistakes Betty's confession for her discovering his secret and obliviously enlists her to help him write his monthly serialization.

**Notes**

Based on the anime *Gekken Shoujo Nozaki-kun/Monthly Girls Nozaki-Kun.* You can watch [the first episode on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=) without Crunchyroll or any other stream, if you're interested. The title comes from the English translation of the opening song.

See the end of the work for more [notes](https://archiveofourown.org/works/11267634).
My heart is like a labyrinth leading to you

I think too much, go down a different path

Left or right, it’s all a bad joke

Oh, it doesn’t matter now

...

That’s right, I want to see you right away

I want to see you so that I can be sure

The rejection of this world, the definition of love, the categories of happiness

I want to know more and more about you

That kind of line isn’t like me, but

No matter how I change myself, nothing starts

I think it’s gotta be you

*I:

Oh God, he’s gorgeous, she thought, peering through the classroom door on her toes, inhaling deeply and quickly. She fell back to the flat of her feet in her pink Keds and squared her shoulders. She then pushed open the door to the classroom, noticed he was alone, and gulped.

Jughead Jones. Sixteen years old, in her AP English class – and AP Calculus, and AP Chemistry – and friends with her childhood friend, Archie Andrews. After a disastrous freshman year when Betty thought that high school meant Archie would finally notice her (he didn’t), and a strange sophomore year when Betty made a new best friend with transfer student Veronica Lodge, she was sure that the beginning of her junior year at Riverdale High School was going to be perfect.

She was Elizabeth “Betty” Cooper, sixteen years old, straight-A student and on nearly committee possible at school as well as fast-tracked for valedictorian and head of the Blue and Gold, the school newspaper. She was well known, well liked, and on friendly terms with nearly everyone.

At the beginning of the last school year, she noticed him. She had sworn off men to her friend, Kevin Keller, after the awkward Archie situation, but there was something about Jughead Jones that captured her, from the moment she first saw him.

It was the first day of school, and her mother’s list of demands as a sophomore had exceeded two sheets of paper as well as thirty minutes, leaving Betty late. She raced out of the house, her bag dangling down her arms. She was still some distance away when the first bell rang, and she knew that she was about to mess up her perfect attendance.

However, as she turned the corner, the school appearing and looming before her like a behemoth, she spotted another figure sauntering up the steps slowly, without a care in the world. She slowed down as she approached, curious.
He was tall, lanky, but hunched slightly forward to hide his height. He wore a denim jacket layered on top of a hoodie and flannel, as well as dark wash jeans and Doc Martens. A gray beanie on his head kept most of his black hair contained, except for a single lock that curled and hung in front of his right eye.

The second bell rang.

He reached for the door to open it, but the door didn’t budge. He paused, and Betty stopped a few steps below, watching, with her head tilted to the side.

He wriggled the door handle a bit more, and then again, his whole body involved in the movement. He sighed, and she ventured, “Are we locked out?”

He started, turning and her breath hitched. He had the most gorgeous blue eyes she had ever seen, framed by lashes long enough to make her envious and a pale face.

He cleared his throat. “Evidentially.”

His voice was gravelly – as if he didn’t speak much – and held a sardonic lilt like everyone was beneath his notice.

Betty pointed to the side. “The Blue and Gold office is on the first floor, and there’s one window that never locks properly. We could try to get in that way.”

He gave her an appraising look, and then slowly nodded. She turned on the step, her carefully chosen skirt flouncing behind her as she strode off to the right and down the side of the building, alongside the side street and away from the track field. He followed.

She stopped by one window, the sixth one down the long line, and peered in to make sure it was the right one. She had to stand on her toes – the ledge of the window was on par with her nose, and she wasn’t exactly short, either – to look in. She spotted the old clunker Macintoshes covered with plastic, and the far wall with floor-to-ceiling shelves with unevenly stacked paper and albums and filo-folders.

“This one,” she said, stepping back and turning to face the tall teen.

He stood next to her and replaced her, peering into the empty room. He dropped his satchel on the grass by her feet, and pulled a switchblade from his pocket. He flicked it open and used the blade to slide it under the window frame, and began to wriggle the blade back and forth until a tiny sliver between the two frames appeared.

He kept at it until there was enough room to wriggle his fingertips underneath and then, with a heave of his arms – Betty ogled – he was able to slide the window up fully. He hoisted himself onto the ledge and then tumbled in first.

“My bag?” he asked, once inside and turned to face her, on the other side of the window.

Betty knelt and hoisted it up, carefully handing it over.

He took it and put it somewhere behind him on the floor of the room, and then turned back to her. “Ready?”

Betty grimaced. She may be a cheerleader, but her role was designated as lift spotter and bottom of the pyramid. Still, she firmly placed her palms on the ledge, and then pushed with all her might to hoist herself up. She fell heavily against the cement ledge and expelled an “oof!”
She felt the teen’s large hands slip under her arms, underneath her grey cardigan that perfectly contrasted and matched with the checkered pink of her skirt. She was too startled to tense at the sudden touch of his hands on her back, his palms warm, as he pulled her into the room.

Unbalanced, she toppled into him, her chest pressed firmly against his, their faces inches apart – she was startled, eyes wide and mouth open; he was stoic, his eyes coolly and firmly fixed on her. And as he held her against him, it was like she was frozen in time: she was airborn, just inside the Blue and Gold office, cradled in his arms and his hands searing into her skin.

Then, he gently placed her down.

She stood on wobbly legs, still staring at him and impressed that her backpack didn’t fall off at all during the entire lift. He bent and looped his satchel’s strap around his chest and over his shoulder, one hand gripping the strap.

“Thanks,” he said, and then he was gone.

She was left with a bright red flush across her cheeks and down her chest, heart pounding furiously and the eruptive beginnings of a crush.

It took her two weeks to learn his name was Jughead Jones, they had four classes together, he lived on the south side of town in Sunnyside trailer park, and he didn’t like to talk to people, but he was friendly enough with *her* childhood best friend Archie.

After pumping Archie for information, she utilized Kevin and his gossip, and then Veronica (who had two other classes with him) to build an image of him in her mind. Overall: he was a loner, quiet, studious, and very, very aloof.

She was smitten.

She watched from afar.

Then, that summer, she vowed to tell him how she felt. She had spent the majority of it in Los Angeles, at an internship for a literary magazine she applied for and won. While there, she spent her time being free labour for the magazine, editing, working layout, lugging equipment behind journalists, or helping plan literary events.

Her favourite part was reading the magazine’s biweekly submissions, and then comparing it to her favourite monthly literary magazine, *Written Words*, located out of New York. The articles in *Written Words* ranged from hard-hitting journalism to ‘true crime’ fiction – which was her favourite, as she was following a murder mystery set in a small American town about a high schooler who was murdered, called *By the River*.

It was gripping. It was suspenseful. She already incorrectly guessed the murderer twice. The exposition was tight, vibrant, and poignant. The threads of nostalgia for a safer time lingered between the tense provocation of the characters and their motives and secrets.

She was hooked.

She wanted to write like the author of *By the River*, but fiction wasn’t her strong suit – she excelled in facts. So she placed emphasis on reporting facts rather than creating stories, daydreaming of attending university in New York where she could mingle with other like-minded individuals – not just cheerleaders and jocks.

(In moments of weakness, she imagined that Jughead was like her, but she never worked up the
courage to have a conversation with him, asking him what he enjoyed. She knew he was good in AP English though; he beat her out for the highest grade with their capstone project last year.)

Which led her to that day. That specific moment, outside the AP English classroom, where Jughead Jones was standing with his back to the door, looking out the window, at the football field.

She turned the knob, entering the room. He turned in surprise at the noise, looking at her curiously.

Neither spoke for a moment.

Then—

“I don’t usually get letters asking me to meet with them after school in an empty classroom,” he began, his voice flat but his eyes betrayed his interest. “It seemed intriguing though, so I took the chance.”

Betty swallowed thickly and wondered if he remembered her from a year ago.

He raised his eyebrows. “So... what did you want to talk about?”

She shuffled forward a bit more, and clenched her fists tightly at her side as anxiety rose in her.

“Mr. Jones – Jughead – I, um...” she took a deep breath, glancing up at him quickly from underneath her lashes and then back down. She wet her lips, and her fists began to shake. “I, ah – I’m...”

Oh, god, oh, god, oh, god, oh, god, she thought, I need to do this! I promised myself I would! I can!

She squeezed her eyes shut, took another deep breath, and then burst out, “I’m a big fan!”

Silence.

Oh shit, she thought, her eyes popping open in a panic. That wasn’t what I wanted to say! I wanted to say ‘I like you’! How freaking hard is it to say that?

“Oh,” said Jughead, blinking in surprise. He rocked back a bit on his heels. He then mumbled, “Hmm. Well, I suppose it was going to happen sooner or later.”

He then reached into his ever-present satchel, pulling out a slip of paper and a pen – it was a nice pen, Betty noted, a distant part of her completely removed from the absurdity of the situation as she died of embarrassment. He began to write something on the paper, and then handed it to her when he was done.

“Thanks,” he said, and she looked down at the paper, which read: Thank you for your support, Betty. From Forsythe Jones.

“Uhhhh,” replied Betty with a minute cringe as her eyes skimmed over the note to her crush. “That is to say – um – that’s not quite—”

“It’s okay,” he said kindly, a small twitch of his lips indicating his sincerity. “Take your time.”

She flushed. “Um, I mean – I really, really want to help – uh... that is, I want to spend time with you!”
There, she thought with some relief. *That’s a bit closer to what I was trying to say.*

Jughead’s eyes widened a bit. “Oh. Well. Are you free now? You can come with me to Pop’s.”

**WHAT? LIKE A DATE?** Betty was breathless. She nodded eagerly. “I’m free now. Totally free. Free as a bird.”

He looked at her strangely. “Alright then.”

He led the way out of the classroom, and she trailed after him, wondering how she was going to explain to Cheryl why she was missing River Vixen practice. Subtlety, she whipped out her cell phone behind Jughead, who was staring straight ahead and not even acknowledging her walking just slightly behind and to the side of him, as they left the school and began down the sidewalk.

**Won’t be at practice today,** she texted Veronica.

*Y?* Her friend replied immediately.

**Heading to Pop’s with Jughead.**

**OMG B. DETAILS!!** Veronica typed back, including several emojis.

Betty bit her bottom lip to hide a grin. *Later.*

**Np. I’ll cover. Hv fun,** and she included several winky faces, lips, and hearts.

Betty glanced up at Jughead, just to her side and in front, and gazed at the four dark freckles on his cheek. They were like a constellation from a galaxy she had no knowledge of and she was eager to discover more.

They arrived at Pop’s quickly, and Jughead moved directly to a specific booth – near the back, tucked in the corner with a clear line of sight of everyone who was coming into the Chock’lit Shoppe from the window. The view also meant he could see everyone inside as well, especially when he took the seat facing the other patrons. Betty slid in across from him, her back to the restaurant.

“What’ll it be, kids?” a waitress asked shortly after they sat. She was elderly, with wispy white hair but laugh lines and friendly disposition. “Or your usual, Jug?”

“Usual, Frances,” replied Jughead with a small smile.

**Whoa, he must come here a lot,** thought Betty. She turned to the waitress and beamed. “Strawberry shake for me, please.”

“Anything to eat, sweetheart?” asked Frances.

Betty bit her lip but then shook her head. Skipping practice meant no exercise, which meant her mother would kill her if she ate anything over her daily calorie count.

Even Jughead was looking at her strangely, but when she met his eyes, he gave a shrug.

**God, he must think I’m the cheapest date ever,** she thought with a frown, glancing away from him. She didn’t see him pull out his laptop or turn it on, or pull out a tagged and battered notebook, she was so focused on her thoughts. **But this is a date, right? I mean, he asked me to come with him.**
She looked up and saw that he had his laptop out, the screen turned slightly for her to see it. Confused, she leaned forward as he used his finger on the track pad and opened a document.

“You said you wanted to help, right?” he asked, gazing at her across the table. His eyes were intense, a deep blue that she couldn’t decide if they were indigo or navy.

She felt her heartbeat increase. “Uh huh.”

“Great,” he said, as he flipped open his notebook and then passed her a few books on rural Virginia. “Then can you read these books and make notes on the landscape? I need information on climate, vegetation, seasonal temperatures for spring, summer and fall, and topography.”

Betty’s brows furrowed. However, she had been raised all her life to be polite and accommodating, so she nodded and flipped open the first book – *A History of Virginia* – and dug out a lead pencil from her backpack, and began taking notes.

She worked in silence with him, glancing up only occasionally to watch him devour two double-stacked burgers, a side of fries and onion rings, and drink four cups of coffee in the same time it took her to finish her one strawberry shake.

He, while she was taking notes, was typing away on his laptop, sometimes stopping to stare thoughtfully out of the window before returning to the screen, and other times muttering to himself under his breath as he flipped through a different notebook.

Eventually, the afternoon daylight faded into the evening gloom, and streetlights flickered on in the parking lot. He stretched his arms above his head, catching Betty’s attention, and Jughead then popped his back.

His hooded eyes landed on her sitting quietly across from him, on the final book he pushed towards her. “Are you almost done?”

Betty nodded, putting her pencil down and then sliding the notebook across from him. Jughead took it, rotating the notebook and began flipping through the pages, skimming the notes she took. He made a few thoughtful ‘hmm’s.’ “This is great; it’ll really save me some time. Thanks.”

“Oh, um, you’re welcome?” she replied, though the final inflection rolled up in a questioning tone. She still wasn’t sure what had happened – she had gone from blundering her crush admission to saying she wanted to spend time with him, to taking notes on a state they didn’t even live in.

Frances dropped the bill off at their table, and she and Jughead spent a few seconds awkwardly staring at each other, wondering who was going to take it and pay for it – would it be him, since he asked her to Pop’s, or was she going to pay for it?

Finally, unable to stand the tension, Betty reached forward and checked the bill total, withdrawing the correct amount of bills and change, including tip. As soon as she was done, Jughead began packing up his notebooks, the books, and laptop. Betty hurried to follow him, standing when he did so.

Outside, he turned to her under the warm red glow of Pop’s large sign, and offered her a small smile. “Thanks again. I appreciate it.”

“Oh!” said Betty. She blushed. “No, really, thank you – it was lovely spending time with you – it’s so nice –”

*Ugh, you moron, what are you saying now? SHUT. UP.*
“Well, see you tomorrow,” said Jughead, after a few more awkward moments of silence between them, as Betty stared furiously at the gravel of Pop’s parking lot. She spent the time wondering how someone with a 4.0 GPA, someone who could elegantly win for the debate team at regional’s, whose prose on the Blue and Gold won their school paper an award, could not just say “I like you” to her crush.

He turned and began walking away, towards the south side of the town.

_Shit, no! I can’t lose my chance! I messed it up already!_ Her eyes bulged and she took a few frantic steps after him. Stone skittered and he turned.

“I really am your biggest fan!”

_GOD DAMN IT._

Surprise – as well as embarrassed pleasure – crossed Jughead’s face. He brought a hand up to rub at his neck.

“Oh. Well – that’s – that’s really nice of you,” he finally said, pulling a scrap piece of paper out and writing on it again, handing it to her.

Betty took it, completely red in the face for failing a second time. The paper trembled in her hands, and she wrinkled the edges a bit, as she gripped it tightly.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Betty,” he said, then waved goodbye. She stood rooted in the spot, staring at him until he disappeared in the dark.

She looked down at the paper, reading his block letters that progressively became smaller as they sprawled across the page. It was the same he wrote earlier to her with some variation: _Thanks for being a big fan, Betty, and thanks for your help today. Forsythe Jones._

She sighed, folded the paper and slipped it into her backpack, and began to trudge home.

Veronica was going to go apeshit over a wasted evening, Betty was sure, and Kevin was going to be so annoyed that she failed to articulate herself properly.

_Forsythe Jones, though, she thought. That name is familiar._

She was almost home.

_Forsythe Jones. Forsythe... Jones..._ 

She was at her door.

_Wait. FORSYTHE JONES?_

She burst through the front door, gasping and panting as she ran past her parents who were sitting on the couch in the living room (“Elizabeth, what on earth, young lady?! DON’T RUN IN THE HOUSE!” yelled her mother after her), nearly tripping on her way up the stairs. She crawled across the top few steps and the landing, hauling herself into the bedroom and went straight to her bedside table, where there were several stacked copies of _Written Words_. She pulled off the top issue – the most recent one from that month – and began flipping through it to the fiction section until she reached _By the River._

She glanced at the byline.

_Forsythe Jones._
She then looked up at the title of the monthly serial to confirm: *By the River.*

She then threw her backpack on her bed and pulled out the recent slip of paper Jughead gave her, and then the one he gave her earlier, comparing the two signatures. Both read, equally perfect copies of one another, *Forsythe Jones.*

She then looked back at the *Written Word* byline.

It was the same person.

Jughead Jones – the boy she was crushing on at school – was Forsythe Jones, the murder mystery mastermind of a popular detective story, also her favourite author.

“*WHAT?*” her shriek echoed through the house and was loud enough that next door, Vegas, Archie’s dog, began to howl.

A cold sweat broke over her entire body. She stared at the autographs. *My name is Betty Cooper; I'm 16. I asked out the boy that I like, and he gave me his autograph instead. To be fair, I did say I was a “fan” but... this can’t be happening. How is this even my life?*

* TBC...

End Notes

Check me out on Tumblr: [*writing_as_tracey*](https://writing_as_tracey.tumblr.com)! I love making new friends, take prompts, or just chat about anything and everything!

Please [*drop by the archive and comment*](https://archive.tumblr.com) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!