

Healing

An alternate season finale

Von Handtuch-Queen

Kapitel 3: Stabilizing

Once FP drove them to the hospital and they got to check in with a distraught Jughead -Betty was in actual surgery now but there was no news yet- their agency left them. They stood lost in the corridor to the operation room as a nurse spotted the still shivering Toni. She advised the others to move to the waiting area and led her to a room to get checked up in and warm up. Cheryl left the now sleeping child with FP and tagged along.

FP, one arm full of Juniper, put his other hand on Jughead's shoulder and steered him towards the seats. "She's a strong one. She'll pull through."

He sighed.

"It's what she always does."

She shouldn't have to. Not so often.

They sat for a while, silent, starrng at the ground or the clock at the wall and watching little Juniper. When Jughead leaned over to poke one of her chubby cheeks and left a filthy smudge in his wake, FP sent him to the bathroom to get cleaned up.

It was a good call. Jughead was filthy. There was the dirt of Jason's grave still and then there was blood. He knew some was Betty's, but he vainly hoped most of it was Edgar's or his own. He washed his hands and face and discovered shallow cuts on one of his lower arms. His shoulder throbbed. He was sure he was green and blue under his shirt. He didn't take it off.

When he stepped out of the bathroom, he saw his father speaking with a doctor. He rushed over and got to hear the tail end of their exchange.

"The surgeons are still working on saving her left kidney. She has lost a lot of blood, but she's stable now."

He stood next to his dad and kept listening, not fully processing what else was said. Stable wasn't dying. Stable was good. She'd surely be okay. Right?

Next he knew, he was seated again and Cheryl was leading Toni towards them, now dressed in a simple set of clothes with hospital slippers on her feet. Between the hem of her pants and those slippers bandages were visible. Right, she was barefoot when he met her, running through the damn woods. Last week they still had snow.

Just then, Archie and Jellybean came through the door and stormed towards them, Mary with Dagwood in her arms a few meters behind.

"Mom told me what happened. Any news on Betty?!"

Jughead's on his feet and nodded, Archie's arms warm around him. "Yeah. She's still in surgery. But stable. She's stable."

"Surgery." Cheryl sounded like she thought aloud. "Oh god. Did anyone check the twins

for surgery scars? What if Edgar took their organs, too?"

The idea sounded crazy and it probably was. But so was Edgar. They frantically scrambled to check both kids over. They didn't find anything.

Jellybean seemed a bit lost in between them, so Jug smiled at her and patted the seat next to him in invitation. She took it.

Wanting to pass the time waiting for news on Betty, FP started taking everyone's statements and was promptly interrupted by a sheepish Archie.

"Mr. Jones. The Pretty Poisons and I have detained Hal Cooper and Penelope Blossom. The Poisons drove them to the sheriff station."

"The Black Hood? Call me when you get news." FP slapped his son's shoulder in support and left for the station in a hurry. A few steps away he turned back and made eye contact with Mary. "Take care of the kids."

Hearing the name of her mother, Cheryl stared at Archie for longer than she realized, before she shook her head and stared at the retreating form of FP.

They watched after him long after he was gone. They only stopped because suddenly Mary had brought them all hot drinks. Consequently, their gazes transferred to the cups in their hands, the clock, the ground or the two tiny toddlers they had in their midst, both peacefully sleeping.

How timing so often is, the doctor came back just after Jughead went to the bathroom. Cheryl took charge and rushed towards him, holding Dagwood in her arms. "Do you have new information on Betty?"

The doctor looked at her and let his eyes wander about the room. "Weren't you with the Sheriff? I can't just give a patient's information out to strangers."

"We're family. I'm her cousin."

"I'm sorry but-"

"What are you saying Dagwood? You want to know if you're godmother is alright? Yes, I would like to know, too, how my should-be sister-in-law is doing." When she saw him shaking his head, not budging, she didn't miss a beat. She was always quick on her feet. "Fine, then please wait until her fiancé the Sheriff's son comes back. Her parents are in prison and currently insane, she doesn't have anyone- here he is. Jug, he has info on your fiancée!"

Hurrying to the doctor, Jughead rolled with it.

The news wasn't good.

Betty was still stable, but her kidney was hurt too much by Edgar's amateur surgical skills. They had to give up saving it.

Cheryl became vocal, Jug quiet, both not wanting to accept it, both worried.

Archie and Toni stood close behind them, he had a hand against Jug's back in support, she had both hands around Cheryl's upper arms.

Jug didn't know what to do, what to ask.

"Will she be okay? Can we see her?"

"Not yet, she is still in surgery."

"What is she still in surgery for?"

The doctor was patient with him and tried to help him understand.

Left in the back with a sleeping Juniper and a very quiet Jellybean who was so obviously scared and worried, Mary laid an arm around the girl's shoulder and held her close. Quietly she said. "Don't you worry, Betty is going to be alright."

The sheriff station was bursting with people when FP arrived. There wasn't just about everyone that worked for the Riverdale police. There were officers and deputies sent over to help by Centerville and Greendale, the FBI agents and then there was everyone they held captive. Even their parking lot was filled with activity. Sheriff cars and buses still filled with farmies that haven't been transferred to one of the holding cells inside yet, deputies keeping watch among them and close to the main entry a car with an all-girl biker gang around it carrying bows and arrows.

"Sheriff Jones."

It's Peaches 'N Cream, one of the girls he knew from her time as a Serpent.

"We have arrested the Black Hood and Penelope Blossom who had him live with her and probably played house with him and little Dagwood. She tried to run."

He took his phone out of his pocket and checked with Agent Ardelia where the prisoners' transport was, they had ordered hours ago for Hiram Lodge. He hoped they would take everyone they caught red-handed and give them a little more space for pretty much harmless farmies that hopefully just needed to give their statements and get a little helping of sanity.

He sent for more deputies to keep watch of the car and take over for the Poisons. With no secure cell to transfer Hal to, they decided to just leave him and Penelope in the trunk. FP went inside and getting a single view of the Cooper women in the holding cell, he decided to start with getting their statements. Betty could use their support.

Alice went willingly with him to one of their improvised interrogation rooms, but once there, she just sat down and seemed to wait for someone else to appear. When he asked her if she was alright, she said she waited for Charles to come.

She responded well to questions. Keeping them clear and easy, he was able to get a statement out of her, one tiny piece after another. He asked her about the Farm, the surgeries and treatments, everything that came to mind. Her answers were alarming, but he was more disturbed by the way she was answering. She was dulled down; he missed her wit. It was chilling. When he asked about Betty, she said she was having problems, but Edgar was helping her.

"Alice. Your daughter Betty needs you. She's in the hospital."

"Betty needs Edgar's help. He can help her." She answered as if she didn't listen to his words.

"Edgar hurt her. He nearly killed her. She's in surgery."

Alice just shook her head and stared at the wall beside FP's face.

What happened to her? How could she just be this way? "Alice, please."

"Can I see Edgar now?"

He brought her back to Polly.

Needing a breather, he went to the bathroom to hide.

He checked his phone and found a message from an unknown number; it was from Mary.

"She's stable but they couldn't save her kidney. They're finishing up the surgery now. Also, it seems like Betty and your son just got engaged by Cheryl. The doctor wouldn't give info otherwise."

Wondering what to answer, he shook his head. He felt like they were between rocks and hard places all over.

"I hoped Alice would step up, but I don't think she can any time soon. I hate to ask. Is there anything you can do to help with legal stuff?"

News were slow to come. They sat close to each other, waiting, Jellybean arranged herself half on Jughead's seat, so he put an arm around her shoulders, petting her hair. Cheryl and Toni were leaning against each other. Mary fussed around them and organized for the twins to get proper health check-ups. Before long, Toni started nodding off. Cheryl brushing through her hair worriedly.

Jughead smiles at them. "She's been through a lot. You should get her home."

Cheryl looked conflicted. She really didn't want to leave; she was worried about Betty. But Toni needed rest. And blankets.

He nodded in encouragement. "We'll be okay without you. And call if there's news. Go."

"Okay. Can someone call us an uber?"

"No need, I'll drive you. I've borrowed your car anyway." Archie stood up. "And then I'll get you a change of clothes, Jug. Oh, you should call Veronica." He's standing with his mother, asking her to call him if news came.

"Arch." Jellybean said and threw him her housekey. He caught it awkwardly.

They drove in silence and were nearly at the Estate when there's a sudden sound and the car came to a violent halt. Shaken, Archie got out of the car, followed by a fuming Cheryl. The front tires were busted. In best movie manner, they drove over a spike strip. It's late and Archie's always been a little slow, so his first thoughts were about how to fix those tires. He wasn't worrying about who put that strip on the road or if they were safe. He should have. There was a pain and he was gone.

When he came to again, he laid on his side, Toni shaking his shoulder.

"Cheryl's gone. Do you remember anything?"

She's got his phone in hand, already calling a number. He didn't know anything, so he shook his head.

"Sweet Pea, this is an emergency." She helped Archie up and they started running into the woods, hoping they'd find Cheryl before anything bad happened.

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Meanwhile and after quite a walk, Cheryl was brought upon the Gargoyle King.

She had been heralded along by people wearing shrouds and gargoyle masks, forcing her further and further away from the road and into the woods with spears and knives.

They were at a clearing with a bonfire and weirdly grouped poles and sticks forming bad mimics of antlers.

The Gargoyle King stood tall and proud, looking down at her. Right behind him the fire, his front was clouded in shadow.

"Finally, we meet again, Sister Cheryl."

The Gargoyle King took off his mask and there it was: Blossom red hair.

"It's me. Jason."

Her brain stopped. There was Jason.

"We can finally be together again. There's just one last quest left for you, sister. You can't have both of us, you know? She needs to be gone. It'll be fast. You never miss. Not since you were nine years old. Do you remember? I was so proud of you, Cheryl."

She did remember.

Her archery set is brought to her by one of the shrouded persons with gargoyle masks standing right next to her. There are two on each side of her and a handful others around the fire.

"You'll only have to kill that one. She's not good for you." He speaks gently to her, but his voice is firm and doesn't allow her to doubt. "Go and find her. She's still at the car. Kill

Toni Topaz and rule beside me, Sister."

"Yeah, sure, J.J." Her own voice sounded off to her. Like on autopilot she grabbed the archery set. "Of course, I will Jason." She turned to go and started walking. One step and another. The gargoyles didn't move to follow her.

Then, there's the sudden sound of motorbikes crashing through the woods. Frantically, the gargoyles watched around them.

She jumped back around and took aim. "Jason!" She screamed to get his attention. He did as she hoped and turned to her. She led the arrow go.

The Gargoyle King fell backwards, to the ground and into the fire. He didn't scream.

The Serpents and the Poisons were right on sight and engaged the last gargoyles in fights. In no time they were unmasked and bound.

Cheryl walked towards the fire and examined the body. She knew she hit bullseye, right between his eyes. But the upper body was already engulfed in flames.

It wasn't her brother; Jason had been dead for over 20 months. Instead, it's the same guy the Farm used to hurt her. He's dead now.

There were anxious shouts behind her. Toni rushed towards her and held her tight.

When they called Mr. Jones, he swore. Then he called Fred.