

Healing

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Kapitel 1: Waking

First, all Betty sees is white.

The white becomes a ceiling. There's beeping. She's worried. Where is she? Wasn't she fighting? Wasn't there screaming? She was at the Farm, she-

"Betty? Oh god, Betty."

Her eyes move left and there he is. She knew he'd come for her.

"Jug." Her voice isn't quite there, but he smiles and holds her hand a bit tighter.

"You're okay, Betts."

Betty's in the ICU. A drip feeds liquids and pain medication to her. There are machines behind her, beeping away and keeping track of her breathing and the beat of her heart, displays blinking merrily.

Her hair is down and lays open across her pillow, skin pale and face sunken in. She looks small in the hospital bed.

Jug sits in a chair next to her, holds her hand and waits.

When the hospital staff tell him to take a break and go home, take a shower, eat dinner and get some sleep, he refuses. When they make him leave the room, he hovers nearby in the corridor until Veronica shows up to take his place and brings Reggie to take him back to Elm Street with strict orders not to allow him back until he took proper care of himself and ate for at least three people.

She doesn't have to stay in the corridor for long, a nice nurse lets her back into the room, where she stays for close to two hours, seated next to a sleeping Betty, staring at displays keeping track of vitals in ways she didn't quite understand, but interpreted no changes as good signs.

Jug, freshly showered, fed and with an overnight bag over one shoulder Jellybean packed for him, comes back so quietly, for a moment Veronica doesn't notice him. He just stands there half behind her and watches Betty with her.

She wakes again, later. It's darker. There's still beeping and she's still in the same room. Outside in the corridor, she can hear a few quiet steps. Is she alone? She tries to move her hands and touches another. Jughead is still there, sleeping, his hands holding her left.

He looks tired. She can't be sure in the dark, but there's a shadow on his face that could easily be a black eye. Was he hurt?

She lets him sleep and watches him breath.

Betty wakes. It's light. Over her is a white ceiling, a lamp. The walls are white as well and there's a window with daylight shining in. A table with flowers. She's definitely in a hospital. A real hospital. Not the Farm's Chop Shop at the Sisters of Quiet Mercy.

It's a new room. It's quiet. No loud sounds, no screams. She can hear a street somewhere outside and steps from outside of the room, as if someone walks up and down a corridor, rolling something around.

She tries to move and sit up, there's pain.

A pair of soft hands finds its way to her upper arm, gentle and slow.

"It's okay. You're okay. Now. And safe." It's not Jughead, it's Jellybean Jones, nervous but calm. "Hey. You're in Riverdale. At the hospital. I'll- I'll get you someone."

Jellybean makes eye contact with her once more then she's out of the door. It barely closes before it's opened wide and a stroller, she hasn't seen in use for way too long, is pushed in, Jughead right behind. Hat askew, he looks tired and way too young. In a way they all are.

"Betty. You're awake."

"Good morning, my brave Hellcaster." She wants to say, but all she manages are a few weird noises. She swallows and tries again. "Juniper's okay?"

Jughead parks the stroller and moves close to her. "Yeah." He smiles and brushes a few strands of her hair out of her face. "So's Dagwood. And so are you."

She looks at him and smiles. They were okay.

Jellybean brings a doctor with her when she reenters the room and smiles proudly at them both.

"I'll make sure these two find home okay." She says and leaves the room pushing the stroller carefully.

Betty looks up at Jug, obviously asking what that was about.

"Cheryl will be taking care of them for the next few days. Just until Polly's better."

The doctor coughs to remind them of his presence and demand their attention.

"Miss Cooper, you're going to be just fine."

Kapitel 2: Dying

After digging out Jason's casket, Jug tried to call Betty and when she failed to answer, he knew to worry right away. He wasn't a fan of her being at the Farm in the first place, and with her explicitly telling him to call right after... He tried calling her a second time and took off on his motorbike.

On the shortcut to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy from the Blossom Estate right through the forest, using barely-there paths and the good will of his bike, he met Toni. Clad in nothing but a hair band and a thin hospital gown, she was still running from farmies that gave their chase up long ago.

Concerned, he stopped and gave her his jacket, still heavy with grave dirt.

Toni was panicked and confused and struggled to catch her breath. She spoke as if she still had to sort her thoughts and what had happened.

"-Cheryl told me I had to flee. Because maybe Betty was right after all. They were-" She stopped, finally getting what was going on and stared right into Jughead's face. "It's an organ farm. They already took Kevin's and Fang's kidneys. Oh god, they've got Cheryl."

Jughead couldn't breathe for a moment. He couldn't reach Betty.

He grabbed his phone, called his father and while it rang told Toni to put the jacket on and get on the bike.

Just having put Hiram Lodge behind bars, FP still had a smug smile on his face when his phone rang. It was his son. Preparing to tell him how finally something good had happened in their town, he answered the call and stopped short at the panicked tone in Jug's voice. Listening he became more and more disturbed.

Agent Ardelia who was still at the sheriff station to finish the paperwork for Hiram's incarceration observed him with growing apprehension.

"Toni and I are taking off now. We need backup." Jughead finished and immediately ended the call.

FP made eye contact with Ardelia. "Worst case. I need all the help you can get."

Somehow, they organized a raid in moments.

Toni and Jughead left the bike at the edge of the woods and crept towards the back of the Farm, planning to get in through one of the doors. They were all locked. Without Betty and her bobby pins they busted through a wonky looking one by sheer force. It turned out to be not quite as wonky as they thought. Jughead had to ram his body -left shoulder first- against it a second and a third time, then the door opened with a clang and for a moment they worried it would bring the farmies upon them. They went in and when it stayed quiet, they move on.

They were in a cellar; it was quiet and dark and there was no one in sight. They made their way up, Toni leading the way and used what appeared to be a seldomly used staircase. They checked the dormitory floor, first Betty's and then Cheryl's rooms, but both were empty. What wasn't empty was the room across from Cheryl's: Kevin and Fangs were home and, having heard them run in, stood in the door waiting.

"Toni. Jughead. Edgar won't be happy with you disturbing the peace like that."

FP and Agent Ardelia were the first of the combined FBI and Riverdale police taskforce to arrive, their colleagues not far behind them. On their way, FP told her everything he knew about the building and the Farm which honestly wasn't all that much.

"All of this sounds absolutely... ridiculous, Sheriff Jones. Gay conversion therapy? Nuns testing drugs on orphans? Organ farming cult? Are you certain any of it is true?"

"All of it. This is Riverdale."

They secured the exits, stormed the grounds and took everyone into custody they found on sight.

"You're looking for Betty? She really wasn't feeling well today. We brought her to Edgar, so he's helping her right now."

"A treatment? She must be in the infirmary!" Toni was turning to another staircase, but before she could take off, Fangs had his hands around her upper arms and held tight.

"Not so fast Toni. Betty needs his help. And so do you."

She clawed against his hands, trashed and kicked her naked feet against his legs. Jughead balled his fists and planned on landing them in Fangs' face, but Kevin was there, caught his hands and turned them with the rest of his body until he had Jughead held tight and unable to move. In vain, he tried to smash the back of his head into Kevin's face or throw him off.

Fangs transferred Toni to a single arm and used the fist of his other to smash into Jughead's face. He screamed. Toni used the new position to ram her foot into Fangs' healing side, forcing him to release her. Kevin looked up, worried, and let his guard down for a single moment, so Jughead could throw him over and land a kick into his healed organ removal wound.

They took off towards the infirmary.

The orderlies who caught her locked Cheryl into a tiny windowless room on the ground floor. It was dark and insanely quiet. The only source of light was coming from the corridor through the keyhole and from underneath the door. She needed to get out.

The door was old but sturdy. She tried kicking against it, but nothing happened. She was sure Betty could easily pick the lock with a bobby pin, but she didn't even have one on her.

Betty. She hoped she managed to make Kevin and Fangs see reason and run. But then, when did something work out the way they wanted? And weren't Fangs and Kevin much longer with the Farm than she was? What if they were deeper in than her? What if Betty needed her help right now?

Cheryl stumbled a step back into the room and started to feel around in the dark, hoping to find something, anything that could help her get out of this room. She needed to get out. She found shelves full of bottles and cans. Somewhere amid them she found a few tools and grabbed something heavy and metallic.

She held it tight and started to crash it against the door, again and again. It wasn't fast working, it didn't seem to help at all, but she figured either the door would break, or someone would find her and let her out. Nothing really happened.

When she rearranged her grip on it she figured out what the tool was: a crowbar. Crowbars weren't for smashing; every kid knew that. And leverage would help. She positioned it just above the lock and pressed with all she had. Nothing, but she wasn't

giving up. She leaned her upper body against the door and pressed the crowbar away using her feet and every ounce of will she had. She wasn't head cheerleader for nothing. This door was nothing against her. It would give. It would.

When it did, it crashed open with a bang. She lost all equilibrium and fell after it and right into the arms of a very surprised Sheriff Jones. The man that covered for her brother's murderer and that welcomed her with open arms in the Serpents. Now a cop. She blinked. This was good.

"Check the damn infirmary!"

The girls leading the way, they met in front of the door to what was ridiculously named the infirmary. It wasn't locked. No one here would dare to open it without explicit permission.

Jug stormed in first, headless. FP drew his gun and was right after him. Toni and Cheryl who had picked up the crowbar stood behind him in the door and Agent Ardelia, professional if still disbelieving this actually was a case, gun in hand stood behind, securing their exit.

They found Edgar mid operation, arms-deep in Betty's guts, flanked by two nurses.

"Get away from the girl! I'll shoot." FP had his gun aimed at Edgar's head.

But he had no chance to react because Jughead already jumped him, pushing him away from Betty and towards a wall. Edgar, scalpel in hand, struggled and fought, trying to throw Jughead off and slashed his arms and hands.

FP used the grip of his gun to knock one of the nurses out.

Toni, having the better angle, grabbed Cheryl's crowbar and smacked the other nurse with it. She fell to the ground, stunned.

Jughead punched Edgar's face over and over until he stopped struggling.

There was blood everywhere. So much blood.

It couldn't all have been Betty's blood. There couldn't have been that much blood in her body. Never. Edgar's disgusting apron was red. So were Jughead's hands and arms and clothes, the floor and the stretcher Betty was still tied to.

Edgar had cut Betty open, meaning to take what organs he could and leave her to die.

She was dying. Someone screamed. Likely Cheryl but maybe it was Jughead or all of them, no one knew. They were so scared.

Agent Ardelia, the only one without personal stakes, made a call.

"I need an ambulance this instance!"

Once they had done for Betty what they were able to and had her safely in the back of an ambulance, Jughead tagging along, the FBI led by Agent Ardelia began rounding up everyone on the grounds.

Some of the farmies weren't really comprehending what was going on and some just stared with wonder and awe at the strangers on their grounds. Most acted timid and frightful but followed instructions or were so unresponsive, making them follow those worked fine. A few responded with aggression and violence, earning handcuffs and severity in return. All were taken into custody.

FP stood in the courtyard, starrng after the car for a second. Toni stood next to him, still barefoot but clad in Jughead's jacket and the first blanket FP could find. Cheryl was right beside her, arms around her girlfriend, trying to give her additional warmth.

"Get into my car, the FBI has this under control. I need to get you to the hospital, too." Just when they moved over, they heard a baby cry and all three of them stopped and looked up.

"Juniper,"

Cheryl acted first, rushing towards the officer carrying the child. "I'm her aunt. Please, let me take her."

The officer looked at her and stepped back, holding the baby safer and out of reach.

"It's fine, Jack. She's sane." FP said and the officer let Cheryl take the child. "Where's the twin?"

"Oh, Dagwood's safe. He's with my mother." Cheryl suddenly sounded elated. "He's so lucky! I never understood her, but Dagwood will! Edgar said-"

She stopped abruptly, horrified, and would have screamed angrily if she hadn't been holding a crying child she tried to sooth. "That horrible gnome and his brainwashing. Not enough I endangered Toni, he even screwed with that! Get into the car. We're needed at the hospital."

On the way Cheryl checked her pockets, looking for her phone but coming up empty handed. "Can I borrow a phone? We need a second rescue mission."

Toni offered her Jughead's that somehow found its way back into one of the pockets of his jacket. It naturally didn't have Cheryl's contacts, but landing on Archie right away, she messaged him first, typing rapidly.

"Emergency. Baby Dagwood is alone with Penelope Blossom. The left barn. Try the side-entrance. Save him, please."

Choosing a messaging app and logging into her own account she sent the same message to all the Pretty Poisons, following it up with an apology for abandoning them for a brainwashing organ stealing cult and ensuring them they were sane again. She thought aloud and narrated that she typed.

"Call Jellybean and give me the phone."

FP originally planned on being home by now. His daughter needed checking on.

Cheryl sent a last text with a plea to check on Nana Rose, who they left all alone at Thistle House, and did as she was told.

Archie told his mom he had a message from Jughead and had to go take care of something and was gone. His father took the car for the business trip he had spontaneously taken off for, so he only had two options to choose from: his old bicycle and the car he hadn't driven since he confessed to a murder he didn't commit. While it was cold, it wasn't freezing and the streets were clear, so he took the car to reach the Blossom Estate as fast as he could.

Right at the gates he met the Pretty Poisons, who were sent there with the same task by Cheryl. Were she and Jug working together? What was going on?

They teamed up assuming their best bet was to just pressure Penelope into giving the baby back, though they were all sure the Pretty Poisons would be fine on their own. Leaving their bikes and his car behind at the gates, the girls led the way to the barn in question. They were just turning a corner when a door was opened and all of them ducked into the shadows. It was late, nearly midnight. Who was still out and about here? They peeked around the building they used as cover and where shocked to be presented with the sight of Hal Cooper, the Black Hood. Archie clenched his hands into tight fists. Betty told them he was back but seeing him face to face felt different than just knowing he was around. They couldn't let him flee or endanger anyone else.

The Poisons made eye contact with each other and had a plan ready within seconds. They knew their way around the Estate, Cheryl used to have them over for archery lessons and tea dates with Nana Rose whenever they were in the mood. They split up into pairs, everyone armed with bows and arrows and crept in the shadows until they had Hal surrounded. Archie sneaked closer too.

They took aim and on Peaches' sign they shot. Hal screamed.

The Poisons had hit him in a shoulder and both legs. He grabbed for a gun he carried with him and of all the directions he could have taken stumbled towards Archie.

Archie knocked him out cold with a single punch into his face. Hal crumpled to the ground.

Peaches smiled. "Good teamwork, Poisons, Red."

She turned around and came face to face with Penelope Blossom, who came out of the barn after hearing the scream to check on Hal. Seeing the girls all over the place, she tried to run but didn't come far. The Poisons were on her and pushed her to the ground.

"No running night-hag." One of them said. "Not just a horrible mother but also living with a serial-killer? Nice."

"This is a civilians' arrest." Another Poison took her arms and twisted them to her back.

"Get me some rope. She's a kinky one, I'm sure she has some on hand."

With the Poisons having both stunned and bound tightly, Archie took out his phone to call the sheriff station. No one answered.

They took Penelope's car and loaded them both into the trunk, locking after them to make sure they couldn't flee. With them out of the way, one of the Poisons went to fetch Dagwood, who was peacefully sleeping in a crib somewhere in a backroom of the barn while another went to check up on Nana Rose who was found peacefully sleeping in her bedroom.

Peaches supervised the trunk and had other Poisons trying to call Cheryl, Toni and the sheriff station once more while Archie tried to reach first Jughead and then Betty. When both didn't connect, he tried calling his mother and was surprised to hear she was over at the Joneses' house and watching over Jellybean.

"Archie, Betty is hurt. Can you come and take us to the hospital?"

Betty? How could Betty have gotten hurt? Of course, he'd be going there.

He must have said something, because Peaches called him and told him to take Dagwood with him if he was going there. The Poisons who couldn't reach anyone, would take the criminals to the sheriff station themselves.

Not wanting to take the baby in his hoodless car, he borrowed Cheryl's.

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, staring 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.

Kapitel 3: Stabilizing

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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.

□

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.

Kapitel 4: Heisting

Tom and Sierra, still newlywed, left Riverdale about two weeks before. Officially, it was for their slightly belated honeymoon to Hawaii. They had organized Myles McCoy and Kevin's mother to watch their kids for a week each. With their tickets booked and suitcases packed they drove to Albany International Airport where they posted a couple selfies together on social media and checked in their luggage.

They've never gotten on the plane though. Instead, they've gotten a rental van under a fake name with a pair of burner phones and drove nearly all the way back. They were investigating the small-town Athens, where Griffins and Gargoyles had resurfaced and devastated the place for quite some time before it did in Riverdale.

Tom, always the police man even if he stopped working for the force, couldn't help collecting clues on who might be behind the new rise of Griffins and Gargoyles and the death of Darryl Doiley's son. He didn't keep a full-blown murder board but a small inconspicuous notebook. He didn't trust this town not to break into his house again.

When FP had found a couple disturbing pictures his son took while he and Fred's son were travelling through the area, he knew that was their chance to find clues about the identity and plans of the gamemaster. Trusting Fred with the information but not confident they'd be able to figure everything out by the two of them, they took a leap of faith. They were sure Tom was working the same case they were and was unlikely to be the Gargoyle King.

They started to work together. They wanted to take on the town's problem by its antlers and keep their kids safe.

FP planned to go visit Athens himself and so did Fred. They would have made a good team, but Tom was the voice of reason. Together with Sierra he could not only leave the town without arising suspicion, their kids also didn't have quite the same knack of getting into life threatening trouble Fred's and FP's sons had. In addition, FP was the town's sheriff and if Riverdale ever needed one, it needed one now. All left for them to do was hope the ruse about Tom's and Sierra's honeymoon was enough cover from the Gargoyle King.

It didn't turn out that well. They barely found anything worth of notice during their first week and called FP every day to report nothing in. When they finally found something, they couldn't phone in.

Certain Tom and Sierra could hold their own but worried nonetheless, FP visited Fred meaning to ask him to keep an eye on his kids and received a strict rebuttal. Riverdale and his kids needed him there. Fred called his wife to check on their son, claimed work-related circumstances and took off with his truck.

He found their van a day in and soon discovered who was responsible.

The town was pretty much deserted. Most houses stood abandoned and the streets were empty. Save for a pair of elderly women and a dozen young girl scouts, everyone had left. Later, he finds the newlyweds in the local elementary school, chained to the armatures of a shower stall. He frees them both and waits.

They didn't fight the kids or the old women. Fred talked with them. He asked them what had happened and what they wanted. He tried to help and made them see reason. They discussed options. He promised to take the grandmothers and the girls back to Riverdale and that he would do everything he could to find their lost families. No one would be left alone to take care of themselves again. Not under his watch. They'd be taken care of.

The girls agreed keeping a set of stand-in parental figures chained in a bath wasn't their best option and they decided to leave Athens the next morning, together, after everyone got a good night's sleep.

Early that day, Fred wasn't quite awake yet, his phone ringed. FP needed them to come back.

The regional police forces and the FBI were working hand in hand on all their cases for the time being. Agent Ardelia and the FBI seized everything the Farm owned and another FBI team from out of state was deployed that day to Riverdale to comb through everything they found on site and interrogate everyone they held in custody as well as practically everyone else in town. The horrors unearthed at the Farm made the case deemed a federal one.

They of course had tons of obvious evidence, including the walk-in fridge full of organs. It was already enough to send Edgar Evernever to prison for life. Then, there was a lot they needed to examine carefully and what might indicate blame on some of the farmies, too. They found weird chore rosters and members' guides stating what everyone was expected to do for the Farm, as well as meticulously kept books meant to document the movements of the Farm's financial matters and merchandise, also explicitly stating who did what and when. Then there were the tapes upon tapes of what the cult called testimonies. They hoped it'd help determining who had known and assisted in the organ farming and who was a to-be-harvested victim.

Agent Ardelia and her team were still officially working Hiram Lodge's case but had prioritized the emergencies for the time being. The Riverdale Police arrested the Gargoyles and recovered the body of the Gargoyle King before doing a quick sweep through the woods to see whether they had left additional clues or had a camp somewhere.

FP oversaw the Black Hood being sent back to Shankshaw Prison's security tract with a couple new murder charges on his record. Hiram Lodge and Edgar Evernever as well as his nurses were on the same prisoner's transport as him for their further imprisonment upon trial outside of the town of Riverdale.

He stared after the transport for a couple minutes, deep in thought.

Tom, Fred and Sierra headed straight to the Sheriff Station when they arrived back in Riverdale, driving the Andrews' truck, the rented van and a small bus they found on site. With them, they brought a dozen young girls and two elderly women.

FP awaited them at the entrance, looking tired and drawn. "It's good to see you back."

"It's good to be back, brother." Fred wrapped him in a manly hug, patting his shoulder.

"How're you holding up the fort?"

"The town still stands." He sighed and stopped them from getting in the station. "Let's head next door. The accounting company lets us use their conference room. In here it's still crowded hell." He looked over at one of his deputies. "Jack, can you have breakfast brought over? For about twenty people. Kid-friendly options, not just coffee."

"Is it too much to hope for a breakfast from Pop's?" Fred jokes.

"Not today. Probably for the last time in while though. This last night was crazy. I'll tell you later."

They headed over and were greeted by Ms. Weiss, the social worker.

The girls were nervous and a bit scared, the elderly ladies exhausted. Taking their statements after a big hearty breakfast to break the ice had been Ms. Weiss idea and it worked out well.

The girls spoke open and freely and the elderly ladies added what information they could. The case was still very odd, but they'd figure it out. For the time being they would be staying at the Riverdale Youth Hostel, the same place the boy scouts were staying at. Ms. Weiss would ensure they'd be taken care of until their families were found, and a deputy was deployed to guarantee their safety.

When they were just about done, FP got a call from Jack, it was for Ms. Weiss. They found another lost boy in the woods. His name was Ricky.

Sierra stayed after, wanting to offer Ms. Weiss her help as both a mother and an attorney.

The men waited outside in the corridor, and FP had a list of things burning in his mind he needed to catch his old friends up to speed with. He should wait for Sierra to join them for most of it, but there was one thing- "I know you've resigned from the job, Tom. But I need you on the team. I want you to lead the G&G investigation."

"Me? Why? I'm out." Tom said, leaning against one of the walls. "I coach boxers now."

"And you helped instruct the Serpents. It needs to be one of us. And you're the only one capable."

Tom laughs. "You are. You're the Sheriff."

"And I'm drowning in cases. I need you. It's pretty bad right now."

Just then Sierra left the conference room and viewed them worriedly for a moment. Her court poker face in place, she smiled at Ms. Weiss and waved her out. She turned back to the men. "What is going on?"

They moved back into the conference room and FP got another cup of coffee.

"First off, your sons are okay, and Josie wasn't involved in any of this." FP said it to sooth any incoming uncertainties, but his sentence had the opposite effect. Instantly all three were worried and at the edge of their seats they just took again.

"It's- Hal Cooper escaped from a prisoners transport two days after you two left town." He said looking at Tom and Sierra. "Then last night, as far as I know, Archie, Veronica and the FBI made up a scheme to get Hiram Lodge caught. There was a boxing match involved, Archie looks a bit worse for wear but he's okay. It worked out, Hiram's back in Shankshaw Prison. I got the call he arrived and was behind bars half an hour before you showed up. So is Hal Cooper. Sometime last night the Poisons and Archie met him at the Blossom Estate and subdued him and Penelope. She's in the Greendale Jail for now. Early this morning they and the Serpents took on the Gargoyle King and his goons. The King is dead, and we have incarcerated the others." He took a calming breath. That was the easy part. "Later yesterday evening I got a call from Jughead. About the Farm. It's- It's been bad. Real bad. They're an organ farming cult." His friends lost all posture. "We were just in time to save Betty's life. We have detained everyone involved and all their victims. We're still trying to sort through who's who."

They were speechless, nodding along, listening, thinking, but unable to voice their thoughts.

"Tom, Kevin is one of them."

Tom felt as if the chair he was sitting on and the floor underneath his feet just disappeared. "What?" He croaked.

"He appears physically okay, but he seems to be under the influence of drugs and hypnosis. Most of them are and a few have already snapped out of it. I think it's just a

matter of time."

Tom nodded and held on tight to Sierra's hand, trying to ground himself.

"He's still at the station. He was a bit hostile before but maybe seeing you will help to calm him." At Tom's nod he went on. "I should try calling your ex-wife again. She didn't answer the phone when I tried earlier."

Sierra jumped in. "I can do that. I'll have to check on Josie anyway."

FP smiled in thanks. She took one of their burner phones out and tried their house phone.

No one answered. She sighed. "I'll just head home and talk to her in person." Checking up on Tom once more she added in a softer voice: "Will you be okay without me here?" He nodded.

"We'll keep an eye on him." Fred said.

Sierra found their home empty. She didn't quite get it at first, but it had been vacant for almost the same time as she's been gone with Tom. There was old fruit out on their table and a single glass of milk in the sink, that seemed quite solid. Where was her daughter?

Grabbing their house phone, she tried calling her on her mobile, but the call didn't connect. She tried calling Kevin's mother, but the call went straight to voice mail. A robotic voice told her she couldn't reach her for the time being as she just left the country on an urgent short-notice tour and to try again in May.

Sierra looked stunned at their phone. Kevin's mother should have been in Riverdale this week. What was going on? She remembered they had an emergency number for her, somewhere. She was looking it up when the phone rang. It was Josie.

"Hey Kev, I was wondering when you'd finally call." She sounded relaxed and happy.

"Josie?!" Sierra sounded distraught.

"Mom? I thought you'd be coming back tomorrow?"

"Where are you Josie?"

Seeing Kevin in the cell was a shock.

Dressed in an off-white the Farm-themed shirt, he seemed relaxed and held hand with Fangs Fogarty, the Southside Serpent wrongfully accused for murdering Midge Klump. He looked in his direction and should have seen him, but even when Tom waved at him, he didn't react. Only his lips were moving constantly.

Tom stepped closer and heard everyone in the cells murmur over and over the same phrase.

"May the one become many, and the many one."

It was chilling.

"May the one become many, and the many one."

Since when was Kevin with that cult? He heard him sneak out at night all the time, but every time he assumed, he was meeting up with Moose and decided to turn a blind eye on it. Did he stop dating Moose? When did Kevin stop telling him such things?

It wasn't making anything easier, when his wife called and told him that his ex-wife never showed up and her daughter left town with Myles on day three to finally get a head start on her music career.

Why had everything worked out so horribly wrong?

"May the one become many, and the many one."

There was the sound of steps on heels behind him.

"God. Get those cultists to shut up! Sheriff Jones, finally."

He turns. It's Cheryl Blossom, hair a mess, pissed and tired.

"It's nearly noon. I really need to get my girlfriend home. We've been awake for over 30 hours and we're tired. You've seen her twelve hours ago. I'm worried she could get sick." She looks over into one of the bureaus used as interrogation rooms and back at FP. "And all your deputies do is treat me like a crazy person. I told them twice now that they have to separate those farmies. They can't have them infect each other again and again with Edgar's bullshit. Any sane thought they could have get instantly drowned in the others' insane mumblings. The only reason Betty got me to sanity again was that she talked to me on my own. Or maybe because she brought me a human heart as proof. That was really sobering come to think of."

The two of them watched the people in the cells for a moment together.

"The redheaded one over there is Evelyn Evernever. She's Edgar's wife. She's 26, but she went to Riverdale High pretending to be seventeen. To lure students to their chop shop." She looked directly at FP, invoking his compliance with honesty. "Please. Get her away from them. She's poisoning their brains with more mind control crap." She paused, rethinking. "Or get my LGBTQIA friends as well as my aunt and cousin out of there."

"Noted." FP smiled in thanks. "Jack." He called his left-hand deputy over. "Why is the redhaired one in the corner still with the others? Has she been interrogated yet?"

"We're still working on the statements of the girls from the woods." Jack explained.

"Why? I thought that case was clear four hours ago?"

"There stories didn't align-" Jack started but was interrupted by Cheryl.

"Your deputies were doubting every single one of my words ever since I told them I shot the Gargoyle King but couldn't identify the man under the mask. He claimed he was Jason. And you know as well as me that my brother is dead. It was dark and he stood in front of the fire. I couldn't see much more but shadows." She explains and obviously has done so a couple of times. "But it was the same guy the cult used on me during their hypno-abuse. They made me believe Jason was still alive and was talking with me. I even believed that murder video with my father was fake. The room they did that to me in was dark and they only lit a few candles. I've never seen his face without shadow. But I know what I saw. It was the same guy."

FP nodded and looked at Jack in question as if to ask where the problem was.

"Yeah. No one believes her because she said she shot him with an arrow between the eyes." Jack stated.

FP waited for a moment, but when he said nothing more, he couldn't help but ask. "And? What's the deal?"

As if the problem was obvious, Jack said: "There was no arrow. And who shoots anyone with an arrow?!"

"A skilled archer? And you said the upper body was burned, Jack. Wood burns."

"Maybe. But she's not a star archer, she's what? A cheerleader?" Jack said hot tempered.

FP sighed. "I know you're tired Jack, but don't be ignorant. If that's the only issue you've got, let the girls get home. Now." He groaned. "And Jack, for the record: Ms. Blossom would have better aim right now than you on a good day."

"And to think I didn't believe Alice when she said sexism was still a problem today." FP cursed under his breath, shaking his head.

Cheryl smiled in thanks. "Can I use a phone to call us a car?"

*"No need." Fred jumped into the conversation, having been privy to it as everyone else in the crowded corridor. "I'll drive you. Then, I'll check on everyone waiting at the hospital."
"Thank you, Mr. Andrews. Have there been any news on Betty?"*

Fred drove Cheryl and Toni home to Thistle House where Nana Rose was happy to see them again and then drove on to the hospital to check on the kids.

They're sitting close together in the waiting room and some were so obviously exhausted. Jughead looked up and gave him a forced smile. "Mr. A." Which caused most others to look up, too.

Archie sat on one side of Jughead and stood up to greet him. Both looked worse for wear, Archie's boxing match and a brawl or two on Jughead's side apparent.

"Dad. You're back." They hugged.

Jellybean was fast asleep and lay across a few seats on the other side of Jughead with her head nestled against him. Across from them sat Veronica and Marty Mantle's son, greeting him friendly. Mary sat next to them, two napping toddlers in baby car seats in front of her.

She smiled at him and he couldn't help smiling back.

"Polly's?" He mouthed in question and got a nod in return.

He sighed. The poor kids.

"Are there any news yet?" He asked quietly but got a mutual headshaking in return.

"Not really." Jug answered. "She's stable and out of surgery. They keep promising I could see her soon, but..." He sighed.

Fred put a hand on his shoulder in support. Looking at Jellybean he asked. "Shall I drive some of you home? Jellybean looks as if she's in need of a bed."

Jug nodded. "That would be great Mr. A."

"Good. Who else? The twins, Mary? I only have a three-seater, but I can take multiple trips."

"Oh." Reggie said. "I should have offered before. I've got a fiver. I can drive."

Before Jug can shake Jellybean awake, Archie's up and in front of him, offering to carry her to the car. Reggie and Mary take the twins and head the way.

Fred said he'd look for a doctor and try to find out what was going on and left them too, for the moment.

Just the two of them for the time being, Veronica got up and sat next to Jughead.

"I'm so scared for Betty."

He grabs her hand. "Me too."