

Betty and Veronica

Betty, laboring for hours over a sewing machine, a *Vogue* magazine spread open on her lap, crafting the next best thing to a designer dress. When she's finished she stands before the mirror, drapes it across her front, unties her pigtails and lets her yellow hair fall onto her shoulders. The dress, only a knock-off of the one in the picture in the magazine, speckled with white and pink polka-dots, its hem stitched carefully just above the knees, is so close to perfect not even Veronica will be able to tell the difference when Betty wears it to the homecoming dance on Friday.

A photo is taped to the top left corner of the mirror: Betty and Veronica in younger days, before Archie came along—or at least, before either she or Veronica noticed him—elbows on the counter and straws in their mouths, sharing a soda at Pop Tate's Chok'lit Shoppe. In the mirror, Betty catches herself gazing at the photo.



Veronica, lying supine on a chaise longue in front of a blaring TV set. A bevy of personal assistants model for her the latest fashions of Lady Maria Grinchy, the world's most chi-chi designer. The assistants have been carefully chosen so as to appear no more attractive or svelte than Veronica. She looks through the triangles of their legs at the TV screen: Dwayne Hickman posed like Rodin's *The Thinker*.

"I'll take that one, I suppose," she says, pointing to a white and pink polka-dotted number. "And what is that

statue I'm thinking of? You know, with the thinking fellow, like on *Dobie*." She waves her arm at the TV. "I'd like to own it. It'd look perfect against the wall next to my Brian Bebop eight-by-ten, don't you think?"

"Yes, Miss Lodge."

"Here," she says as she holds out her pocketbook. "Have it charged to Daddy's Diners Club. That will be all."

The assistants file out of Veronica's capacious bedroom, stepping gingerly to avoid tripping over any of the precious teenage artifacts—makeup cases, 45s, comic books, teen idol magazines, bras, school books—strewn about the carpet. Once alone, Veronica locks the door and removes her blouse and capris. Standing before the mirror in her underwear, she pinches the skin of her abdomen, cups her small belly in one palm, thinking of that chocolate malted she let Reggie buy her at Pop Tate's the day before.

She goes into the private luxury bathroom adjacent to her room, kneels before the toilet and vomits, so good at it now that she doesn't even flinch when her fingertip pokes the soft palate of her throat. *Dobie Gillis's* brassy theme song carries in through the crack in the door.



Betty, walking arm-in-arm with Jughead Jones into the Riverdale High gymnasium. Balloons litter the dance floor. Mr. Weatherbee stands stiffly against the speakers listening intently for innuendoes in the song lyrics. Betty, proud of her dress, the craftsmanship, the detail, but embarrassed by her pride, folds her arms against her chest. Jughead tips his beanie crown and gently takes her wrist. For a moment she's happy, relishing the passing glances of the other kids.

For once she doesn't worry that they stare because they've found out about her. It's only the dress, she knows, it's only that she looks beautiful in it.

Nervously she scans the room for that familiar brunette bob, breathes in the stuffy air hoping to catch a whiff of Veronica's perfume, the saccharine bouquet that's been her signature since elementary school, what Betty's always thought of as the scent of the rich. Finally she spies her, instantly jealous at the sight of Archie's hand on her slim waist, at the way the other boys dance around her.

Betty unclasps Jughead's hand. He nods, smiles knowingly, and still she feels guilty for abandoning him where he must feel he belongs as little as she does. But when she pauses outside the ring of bodies that circle Riverdale's star couple and looks back, she sees Jughead laughing by the refreshment table, clapping Moose Mason on the back and pouring him a glass of punch.

Betty squeezes unnoticed into the inner circle and watches the couple from behind. Her heart drops into the pit of her stomach, and she has to concentrate to breathe. Archie pulls Veronica closer as Reggie Mantle, Riverdale High's resident smartass, paws at her. "Aw, come on," he begs. "Just one measly dance! Give ol' freckle-snoot the boot for a minute. I'm tellin'—" Reggie glances over his shoulder at Betty, runs his gaze up and down, and then turns back to Veronica. "Oh boy," he mutters. "This is gonna be good."

Veronica's eyelashes flutter in disbelief when she sees that Betty's dress is identical to hers. She springs forward, Archie and Reggie clearing the way, and claws at Betty,

tearing her ribbon from her hair. “Why, you,” she yells. “Daddy promised me Lady Maria would design me a one-of-a-kind.” Betty, face flushed, feeling already the ball of warmth spread over her, digs her hands into Veronica’s shoulders and sends her into the wall. They struggle in a cartoon fight cloud, pushing one another toward the door.

Archie and Reggie clear the way, cheering, “Batten the hatches, mate. We’re in for a blow!”

Betty shakes free and lets Veronica chase her out into the halls and into the girls’ restroom. Once inside, Veronica checks under the stalls to make sure they’re alone and Betty locks the door.

They kiss. Like always, it’s different than with boys: wetter and softer, almost—it’s silly to think it but Betty does anyway—like marshmallows soaked in hot chocolate. Where a few minutes ago Veronica pulled at Betty’s hair, now she runs her fingertips along a loose strand. Betty, suddenly ravenous, clenches Veronica’s hips and leads her to the sink. Veronica sits on the porcelain edge, letting her high heels drop off her feet. Betty draws her hands up Veronica’s thighs while outside the boys holler and pound on the door.

Afterward, Betty lies sweating on the linoleum floor, resting her hand on Veronica’s shoulder. They use a stack of paper towels for a pillow. Betty sighs, all but ready to fall asleep. Veronica’s body tenses. She clears her throat as if to signal something. Betty bites her lip, thinking: Why does she always get like this?

“Remember, Betty. Don’t tell anyone.”

“You know I wouldn’t.”

“Does *he* know?”

“Who?”

Veronica sits up so suddenly that Betty’s head drops, missing the paper towel and kissing the floor. Veronica groans. “That fairy. Jughead.”

Betty rubs her forehead, lies now on her side, cheek resting in her palm. “He won’t tell.”

Veronica slips her shoes on, stands before the mirror and begins to straighten up. Her dress, like Betty’s, is tattered: split seams, a rip in the skirt, a hole exposing a patch of pink cotton panties. Even now, in their damages, the dresses are identical. She crouches, kisses Betty’s forehead. “He’s a freak. Everyone knows.”

“What about us?” Betty stands. Let everyone see her ragged dress, she thinks. Let them guess what she’s done to me.

Veronica’s hand on the door handle, she turns back. “Don’t talk right now, okay? Wait five minutes. Then you can come back to the dance, if you want.”

But Betty doesn’t wait. She checks the mirror, musses her hair, and rushes after Veronica, greeted by the hoots and whistles of the boys who’ve been waiting in the hall. Archie and Reggie emerge from the bowels of the cluster, Reggie’s eyes bulging from their sockets. “Chee! You girls really did a number on each other,” he says. “Why not call it even and you both take off your dresses.”

Archie drapes his letterman jacket over Veronica’s shoulders. “Gee, Ronnie. Your dad’s gonna murder me when he see what he thinks I’ve done to your dress.”

Betty looks to Veronica, but Veronica, her neck stiff,

refuses even to acknowledge Betty. “Oh, Archiekins, come off it.” She cradles his cheeks in her palms. “Daddy won’t notice a thing. I’ll tell him the dress is *supposed* to look like this. What does he know about teenage fashion?” She slips her arm around him and together they push through the crowd. “Now, let’s leave these peasants to their common dances. Drive me out to Pinkney’s Pond.”

“Gladly.” Archie takes his car keys from his pocket and, whistling, strolls with her out into the night.

Betty, back in the gymnasium, searches for Jughead, but he’s gone, probably hiding with Moose under a lab table in the chemistry room. A few boys ask her to dance. She refuses them but they keep asking. She walks the perimeter of the room, scanning the mass of heads for Jughead’s beanie. But soon she feels their eyes—the boys and girls—on her again and realizes, looking down on her torn dress, what she must look like. What was she thinking? They’ll know. They’ll know about her. And then what?

She must leave. She’ll walk home. It’s not so far.



Veronica, sitting on the edge of her four-poster bed, the smell of Archie’s cologne and sex wafting to her from the dress balled up on the floor, a small rectangular picture frame facedown in her lap. She glances at the door to be sure it’s locked, then unscrews, with perfect, manicured fingernails, the felt-lined back and removes the photo inside: she and Archie sharing a soda at Pop Tate’s. A quivering breath escapes her mouth as she unfolds the photograph’s edge to reveal Betty on Archie’s left, sipping a third straw. Veronica presses the photo carefully against

the edge of her dresser. Making a new crease down Archie's opposite shoulder, she brings the two ends together like a *Mad Magazine* fold-in, erasing Archie from the image and pushing her cheek against Betty's.



Betty, at band practice, shaking a tambourine and singing backup—sugar, baby, honey—teenage words of love and devotion, her lips kissing the metallic honeycomb of the microphone. On the other side of the garage, by Archie's side, Veronica stands over the organ, harmonizing. She turns to face Betty, who drops the tambourine, grabs the mic off the stand and turns toward Veronica. Their voices meet midair, over Archie's orange-checked hair, trembling in the boom of Reggie's bass amp. Oblivious, Archie stares into the garage door, out at an imagined stadium audience, and Veronica, smiling, giggling maybe—Betty can't hear over the music—bounces along with the keystrokes so that the top button of her blouse unfastens. Jughead crashes down on the cymbal as if to alert Betty to Reggie's thoughtful gaze. She returns the mic to the stand and finishes the song, taking care to focus on the back of Archie's head, to pretend she thinks of him as she trills. As the band packs up their equipment she allows herself one quick glance at Veronica, who catches Betty's eyes and flushes red as she rebuttons her shirt.



Veronica, flanked by Archie and Reggie, tailed by an entourage of football players, basketball players, and baseball players, as she enters Pop Tate's Chok'lit Shoppe only to spot Betty and her little fairy friend sipping sodas

at the counter.

Don't they know their place? Don't they know they look like a couple of weirdoes? There are halves of Veronica's life that must never intersect. Betty should know better. Veronica can fake it—not even fake it exactly, more like turning off a switch—but Betty, with her earnest round face, her glossy doe's eyes, can't help but betray her every desperate longing, no matter how hard she tries or how well she thinks she hides it.

“Look, gang,” says Archie. “There's Jug and Betty.” The entourage behind Veronica disperses to the red leathered booths, and Veronica's high heels glide along the waxed floor as Archie and Reggie propel her into the stool next to Betty's.

Betty swivels, smiling too brightly as her knees brush Veronica's, says hello in such an obvious way. Jughead tips his hat. “Buy me a burger, anyone?” he asks.

Reggie, in a sour mood because Veronica turned him down again, guffaws meanly. “Yeah, right. I hear with guys like him, they don't even have to buy each other dinner first.” He laughs again, elbowing Archie to laugh with him, who looks to Veronica for permission to laugh. Red hot steam spreading into her cheeks, Veronica swivels her chair to face the waiter and orders a malted, which appears on the counter almost instantly. She focuses her eyes on the spoon as it disappears into her mouth, feeling Betty's nervous glance poking her.

Jughead stands now, arms akimbo, face to face with Reggie. “What's that supposed to mean?” He raises his arm.

“Don't touch me,” Reggie yells. “Wouldn't want to

get your delicate hands dirty.” He lifts his fist and knocks Jughead’s crown onto the floor.

“Veronica,” Betty whispers. “Do something.” But Veronica just keeps at her malted. This isn’t what she came for. Let it be a lesson to Betty, what happens when separate halves intersect.

“Yeah,” says Archie. “Maybe you should cool it, Reggie.”

“Aw, come on, I’m just foolin’ around.”

And then, with a movement as swift and thoughtless as a yo-yo trick, Jughead’s fist collides with Reggie’s nose. It’s not like in the movies—the sound of a cracked egg and the perfect straight-arrow trajectory of a turned head—no, fist and nose meet almost noiselessly at a single, concentrated point. In an instant blood dapples Reggie’s lips and chin like ketchup.

Reggie charges Jughead, screaming, “Faggot! Fucking faggot!” but Archie holds him back, pins him to the jukebox, bearhugs him so that droplets of his blood settle on the white R of Archie’s sweater. Betty retrieves Jughead’s beanie, brushes him off, though he’s hardly mussed; it’s a symbolic act more than anything. Betty’s always been a drama queen.

Veronica stays seated, sucks the last of her melting malted through a candy-striped straw. Between Archie and Reggie’s half of the Shoppe and Betty and Jughead’s, she will not look at any of them. She will not move. There can be no choosing when both choices are lies. Still, Betty should not be here, where she doesn’t belong. If she could, Veronica would keep Betty in one of the myriad closets of her deluxe, condominium-style bedroom. They could

both have what they wanted—occasionally—and live untroubled lives.

But is that what Betty really wants, Veronica wonders, an untroubled life? No, she thrives on trouble, a whipped puppy trailing her master. Even now, Betty looks at her with such pathetic, pleading eyes that Veronica must be cruel.

“Ronnie,” Betty calls. “Let’s go.”

Veronica stands, exits the threshold between what she doesn’t want and what she can’t want. “Please, Betty. This is tiresome. Get it through your blonde skull. I’m not like you. I’m not—that.”

Betty opens her mouth, her pink lips quiver, her eyes lined with moisture, but she doesn’t speak. She breathes the softest, most tremulous sigh and collapses into Jughead’s chest. He holds her, strokes her hair, and leads her out of Pop Tate’s, pausing once to brandish Veronica a look of disapprobation.

“Gee, what’s *her* problem?” says Archie, who has deposited Reggie in an isolated booth in back to sulk and sip soda. Veronica ignores him, sits back at the counter and orders another malted, with a deluxe cheeseburger and king-size onion rings.



Betty, lying on the carpet and looking up at the paper glow-in-the-dark stars taped to her bedroom ceiling, listening to the “Runaway” 45 on the record player in the corner, daydreaming, thinking of when she was only twelve, hardly older than a Little Betty, Veronica an austere thirteen.

Betty had been to Veronica’s house—not just a house,

but a mansion, the sprawling Lodge estate—before, but never for a sleepover. They'd listened to records—Ronnie had everything, and her own jukebox, too—watched the late movie on TV, done each other's makeup, played with the Ouija board, all the requisite sleepover games. And then, as Betty lay in her sleeping bag on the floor, so exhausted she could barely keep her eyes open, Veronica lifted the veil of tiredness from her, poking her head out from the bed above so that her breath settled on Betty's forehead like dew, and asked if she wanted to share the bed. Betty crawled dutifully under the covers and Veronica hugged her like a teddy bear. It wasn't until then Betty realized that Veronica wore no pajamas. Veronica put her hand on Betty's stomach, still plump with baby fat, whispering, "Shh," and touched her for the first time.

"Hello? Earth to Betty." Jughead's hand slices over Betty's face, drawing her out of reverie. She sits up and he kneels on the floor next to her.

On the record player Del Shannon cries why-why-why-why-why over a syncopated beat, and the sound of it makes Betty crumple, like a deflated balloon, into the S of Jughead's sweater. "Oh, Juggie, why would she say that?" Tears slide along the edges of her upturned nose.

Jughead raises her gently by the arms and deposits her on the bed. Then, as he lifts the stylus to start the record over, he says, "Now don't be sore, Betty, but maybe she's being honest. Veronica's always been—"

"Don't say that," Betty chokes, but maybe he's right. She and Veronica never talk about it. It's never been something they've done that often or with any regularity. But it always

happens the same. Betty waits, thinks constantly of it, reads fruitlessly for signals in Veronica's every gesture, waits more, waits until she is sure Veronica has changed her mind and decided to be normal like everyone else, until finally Veronica appears on Betty's doorstep or pulls her into the coat closet at Ethel's party or invites Betty over for a sleepover. But what if Veronica really means it this time?

Jughead sits on the edge of the bed. "Don't think I don't know how it feels. Moose and me, it's over for us." Betty wipes her cheeks, clears her throat, and turns to face Jughead. He only nods. They sit silently for a moment, letting the organ notes of the song flitter around the room. "We thought they'd be out for the night," he continues. "But Moose's parents—I guess they got back early. They walked in on us."

"Oh, Juggie."

"They're sending Moose to military school. He's set to go next week."

It isn't fair, Betty thinks. Moose and Jughead aren't like she and Veronica. They talk, they understand each other. Something between them works in way that Betty and Veronica do not. And Betty's always looked at them in a hopeful sort of way. If Jughead and Moose could be together, maybe Veronica would see that she didn't have to fake it anymore and she and Betty could work, too.

"Do you ever wonder, Betty..." Jughead sighs, drops his arm so that his hand lands on Betty's knee. "Wouldn't it be easier if we were like the others?"

She nods. "But we're not."

"Is it so difficult to pretend? Maybe we can play normal,

too.”

“Sure it would be easy, but—”

“I mean, we like each other as friends, right?”

Betty is silent. Jughead must have scuffed the record; it skips now, repeating the same three organ notes. In Jughead’s frightened bead-eyes, she sees that he doesn’t really mean it, but Betty—replaying in her mind what Veronica said at Pop Tate’s, what she’s said so many times before just when Betty had thought she’d given in—doesn’t care.

She pins Jughead to the bed and kisses him. It’s not at all like with Veronica. He tastes ashy, like liquid smoke, his tongue a dry lump, his lips soft but cracked and without the vaguely medicinal taste of Veronica’s lipstick. She sucks the skin of his neck now, though she feels his muscles stiffen in discomfort, eyes his woeful face.

“Betty, no,” he whispers, so quiet that she can pretend not to hear him over the skipping record. On her knees she slides lower. Brushing herself against Jughead’s crotch, his legs, she begs her body to feel something. She pops free the waist button of Jughead’s trousers and begins to pull the zipper down. Jughead forces his legs up and knocks Betty off the bed and onto the floor so that she bumps her head on the dresser.

Jughead brushes himself off, tucks his shirt in. When he speaks he looks past Betty, at the photograph taped to the mirror. “I’m sorry. I—I can’t do this.” He slips almost silently out the door. Betty lies face-up on the floor again, staring at the ceiling, listening to Jughead’s car trailing away, forcing herself to focus on the throbbing in her head.



Veronica, foot resting on the edge of the bathtub, drawing a razor along her calf, although her legs are as bare and smooth as the porcelain tub. Silently she repeats Betty's name as she slides the blade up her leg and lets it sink slowly into her thigh. She watches the blood, as red as her lips, crawl down her ankle and then swirl into the drain. Not satisfied, she takes the razor to her shoulder and marks a small X.

Emerging from the tub, she kneels and vomits into the toilet. She brushes her teeth three times before the taste of stomach acid has dissipated.



Betty, lying terrified in the passenger seat of Reggie Mantle's convertible—the top up and heat on full-blast—parked on a hill overlooking Pinkney's Pond.

Reggie passes her the flask, holds it to her mouth as she sips, then puts it back in the glove compartment. He tips the seats back, slides his arm under Betty's neck and says, "I knew you'd come around, blondie. After spending so much time with that fairy you need a real man. You need what ol' Reggie can give you."

Betty closes her eyes, lets Reggie glide his tongue across her neck, lets his saliva drip into a puddle at the base of her clavicle. She doesn't speak, just lifts her arms as Reggie claws off her sweater. If she forgets herself, if she closes her eyes and thinks only of Veronica, it will be bearable.



Veronica, lying with Archie in the backseat of his jalopy parked at the opposite shore of Pinkney's Pond. Exhaling,

in a tone more bored than sensual, she cranes one leg over the seatback and rests the foot of the other on the floor, freshly littered with fast food bags and Archie's condom wrapper. His orange plaid pants sagging to his thighs, he lifts Veronica's skirt and starts to pull her stockings off. But she stops him, slaps his fingers. "Leave them," she whispers.

It's not so bad. If she doesn't look at him, if she looks at the windshield reflection of the glistening surface of the pond, if she focuses on the car ceiling and imagines the one she really wants, she can almost enjoy it.



Betty, not enjoying it, crying, hurting, though it only takes a minute before Reggie rolls off her and into the driver's seat, where he promptly falls asleep and begins to snore. As quietly as possible, Betty dresses, tries to sop up the blood on the seat with napkins left over from the drive-in. With Veronica, there's never such a mess. It's easy and clean and right.

Reggie snorts awake, pounds the steering wheel with his fist when he sees the napkins balled up in Betty's hand. "Aw, goddamn it. This is brand new upholstery, and that sure as shit ain't ketchup." He grabs the napkins with two fingers, rolls down the window and tosses them onto the beach.

Betty fastens her bra and says, "Take me home. I have a curfew."



Veronica, being driven home by Archie, who whistles with the radio as the car spurts along the forest-canopied road through Pinkney's Park. Two headlights shine in the

distance, glowing brighter and larger as the car approaches. The road is narrow enough that Archie must pull over to the shoulder and stop to let the other car through.

It nears and slows, illuminated in the jalopy's headlight beams. And in the moment that Reggie's convertible passes, through the glare of their windshields, Veronica's eyes meet Betty's. Betty, scrunching her eyebrows in the brilliant light, sees Veronica and smiles—barely, slightly, but not shyly, the corners of her mouth drawn up almost imperceptibly. Veronica feels the strand of her gaze held and carried by Betty even as Archie urges the jalopy onward toward the rich side of town.



Betty, with nothing to lose, searching the halls of Riverdale High this Monday morning for Veronica. The warning bell rings as she nods hello to Mr. Weatherbee and Ms. Grundy on their way to the teacher's lounge, unlit cigarettes clenched in their mouths. Around the corner she sees her, puckering her lips and admiring herself in the locker mirror, surrounded by the usual crowd, Archie, Reggie and the others. Jughead's at his locker nearby. He waves sheepishly, and she waves back but doesn't stop to talk. She decided to do this Saturday night as she passed Veronica in the road, and she's going to do it. So what if they stare?

When Betty approaches, Reggie puts his arm around her and says, "Same time this weekend, doll?" But she shoves him out of the way, and nudges aside Archie too, stretching her arms to touch the lockers on either side of Veronica so that she's trapped.

Veronica blushes, tries to shrug and look to Archie and

Reggie, but Betty won't let her. Desperately, she whispers so only Betty can hear, "Not here."

Betty takes her hips and pins Veronica against the locker, pinches her chin, delicately opens her mouth and kisses her. And kisses her. She won't stop, although Veronica struggles to squirm free. Betty closes her eyes, but she can sense a crowd gathering, hear the hollers, the voices. Reggie: "I knew it!" Archie: "Come on, girls. Is this—now is this—is it supposed to be some kind of gag?" Reggie again, chanting: "Dykes! Dykes! Dykes! Look, everyone." But no one joins him. Betty opens her eyes. The boys that usually comprise Veronica's entourage elbow each other and laugh. The girls cup their mouths in their hands and whisper to one another.

It's obvious that no one knows what to do. No one even considers, it seems, getting between her and Veronica. In the periphery of her line of vision, Betty sees Jughead and Moose lightly touch hands, watches them walk together down the hall. At some point—Betty doesn't notice—Veronica stops resisting and starts kissing back. She snakes her arms around Betty now as Archie watches helplessly. Homeroom bell rings. At first no one moves, but Archie and Reggie are the first to go, scuffing their heels and muttering about "crazy dames." Then the other kids fade away, off to class and to gossip. Still they kiss, until the last of the gawkers have gotten their fix and they have nothing more to prove. And they kiss, no one to watch them, just Betty and Veronica, Betty and Veronica.

I Am a Magical Teenage Princess

by Luke Geddes

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