

Headline

written by Maran Gullivan

FADE IN:

INT. HALLWAY

A well-put-together girl walks shoulders back with a purpose through the hallway with books and binders in hand. Her ponytail bounces back and forth, along with her swaying 50s-circle-skirt and clicking heels. This is BETTY.

A boy wearing a varsity Letterman jacket and slicked-back Greaser hair leans on the lockers snickering with his goons until Betty walks past him. This is the SOCCER CAPTAIN.

SOCCER CAPTAIN

Oh, no hello, Betty?

Betty ignores the Soccer Captain's pestering, but he follows.

SOCCER CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Wow, not nice at all. You know,  
Soccer's winning state this year.

The Soccer Captain steps into Betty, abruptly stopping her.

I know you have absolutely  
nothing going on, so I'll let you  
come to the game and cheer my  
name.

Betty pushes past him and makes it to her class right as the bell rings.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Students in 50s inspired, retro-style clothing sit legs-crossed on top of the desks. One reads the newspaper, another blows bubble gum, and the third files her nails.

Betty marches up with a grin to faculty supervisor MS. FERGUSON and hands her a piece of paper. Ms. Ferguson's desk is organized with pens and papers aligned. A fresh bouquet of white flowers sits at the corner of her desk.

BETTY

Here is the piece on the  
mysterious lunch meat in the caf,  
Ms. Ferguson!

Betty hands her article over to an annoyed Ms. Ferguson who studies it for a moment. Betty leans forward to catch a glimpse until Ms. Ferguson notices and pulls the sheet back.

MS. FERGUSON

Betty (sigh), your pieces are good. They always are. Editor in Chief of the Search Light is available and I do consider you a potential candidate.

BETTY

Oh really! I've wanted-

MS. FERGUSON

-But, these pieces are fillers. I need a story that attracts new readers. Give me a headlining story and just maybe that will push you over the top.

Betty's smile drops to a frown and her eyes narrow.

BETTY

POTENTIAL candidate?

MS. FERGUSON

(annoyed)

Yes, POTENTIAL candidate. I need what's best for the paper and Julie is consistently raising and achieving each bar that is set. Her exposés have made the front page three weeks in a row!

Ms. Ferguson gestures to a student and Betty whips her head to the side. She sees JULIE, a small freshman girl typing vigorously away on her typewriter. She pushes up her glasses to the bridge of her nose and squints.

BETTY

But she's a freshman! I'm a senior and I've been a journalist for years!

MS. FERGUSON

You can't teach this kind of grit, Betty. Julie puts everything on the line and the paper needs a new intensity.

Betty wears a disgusted look as she walks to Julie's desk. As she comes closer to Julie, Betty forces a fake smile.

BETTY

Julie! Hi, how are you? I guess we are the lead contenders in the race for editor in chief.

Julie stops typing to look at Betty.

JULIE

I'm well, Betty. Yes, very exciting.

Betty sits down in the empty desk parallel from Julie. She begins to type, but Julie peers over at Betty's typewriter.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Hey, what are you writing about?

BETTY

(annoyed)

Just trying to write an article.

Julie moves her desk inches closer to Betty's desk curiously.

JULIE

On what? Another "mysterious lunch meat" article? Fashion? Sports? A political piece?

BETTY

Are you always this nosy?

JULIE

I'm a journalist, Betty. I have to know about everything and be ready to report ON that everything. It's my duty as a writer.

BETTY

Well, I'm not really sure what this piece will be on yet.

Betty turns in her desk to open to Julie.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Usually I have at least an idea but currently I have nothing.

JULIE

But you have to have an idea! An editor in chief surely would, not to mention a senior journalist. A reporter always has a piece ready to go at a moments notice. I'm writing three articles right now!

Julie gestures to her typewriter and two others to the side.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Well, I must return! Best of luck with whatever you do decide to finally report on.

Julie resumes her typing and disregards Betty's presence. Betty sits at her typewriter with a blank page. She sighs, looks over to Julie who is typing away vigorously.

BETTY

(whisper)

I need a headline.

INT. BETTY'S ROOM - NIGHT

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Betty begins a self care regimen to relax. Despite being alone, she exerts a certain amount of perfection in every action.

--Betty puts on a record and a 50s style pop song plays and hums along

--Betty puts her hair in curlers and pins them

--Betty slips a robe on over her pajamas

--Betty paints her nails all different pastel colors and blows them dry. One paints onto her finger, but she fixes it immediately.

--Betty applies face moisturizer in a light up mirror

END MONTAGE.

Betty sits at her typewriter, but nothing she writes can satisfy her, crumpling up each draft and throws them over her shoulder. Her desk is accessorize with a single white rose in a small and delicate vase, almost eerily outcasted.

She stops writing from frustration and bitterness.

JULIE (V.O.)  
Reporters always have pieces  
ready to go at a moments notice.

MS. FERGUSON (V.O.)  
These pieces are fillers.

JULIE (V.O.)  
It's my duty as a writer.

MS. FERGUSON (V.O.)  
The paper needs a new intensity.

BETTY (V.O.)  
I need a headline.

Something snaps inside of Betty assumming a new expression of determination and revenge. Betty pauses and starts to type with a purpose. She pulls the paper off the typewriter and slams it on the table. It reads: WALPOLE HIGHSCHOOL STAR SOCCER CAPTAIN MURDERED AT 17.

Betty scurries over to her vintage phone and starts to dial a number. The phone starts to ring.

SOCCER CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
Hello? Who is this?

BETTY  
Hi, this is Betty.

SOCCER CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
Oh, Betty! Why are you calling  
me?

BETTY  
Would you meet me at the park?  
Alone...

SOCCER CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
Yeah, I knew you were playing  
hard to-

Betty hangs up the phone. She exits her bedroom, but not before grabbing the vase. Betty pours out the water and the flower with it, spilling it all over her desk.

EXT. PARK PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Betty stands underneath a flickering street light. The Soccer Captain leans on his car, but makes his way over to Betty with his chest puffed out in his stride.

SOCCKER CAPTAIN

(smugly)

I don't know why you pretend you  
wouldn't want to talk to me  
Betty. I mean, I get it because  
it's me, varsity soccer capt-

Betty reveals the vase from behind her back. With a thud and sound of shattered glass, Betty stares at the trunk filled with a heavy body bag. She is stunned while her heart races.

A bloodied hand reaches out, but Betty slams the trunk closed. Betty's eyes fill with fear, but a slight smile creeps upon her face feeling finally accomplished.

INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM

Betty stands at the bathroom sink and leans on it for support. It is blatantly obvious that she lacks her lavish look from the previous day. Her simple attire is now accompanied with dark circles drooping below her eyes.

Two girls in the bathroom talk about the death of the Soccer Captain.

GIRL 1

Oh I know, isn't it awful!

GIRL 2

What kind of monster could do  
that?

GIRL 1

It's horrifying what people will  
do to such a good person.

The girls exit the bathroom and pay no attention to Betty's distress. Betty is now alone. She stares at her reflection in the mirror, seeing an exhausted mess. She takes out lip gloss from her pocket and the label reads "BLOOD RED".

Her eyes widen and her hands shake uncontrollably holding the lip gloss. She stares at the lip gloss but leaves it on the sink. A tear trickles down her cheek, but she is quick to wipe it away.

She plays with her hair and smiles in an attempt to pull her self together. Finally, Betty leaves the bathroom and the lip gloss behind.

INT. CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

All the students gossip about the death of the Soccer Captain. Betty walks in the classroom and takes a seat at her desk. Julie sits next to her typing faster the light.

JULIE

This is a major story. No one has released any detailed information yet. I am skipping last block to talk with the family.

Betty is distracted and does not respond to Julie, but Julie does not bat an eye.

MS. FERGUSON

Everyone, I understand we've all heard about the death of a student here at Walpole High School. In crisis, people become desperate- and nosy. I must stress that we must not cross the fine boundary of insensitivity just to get this story.

Murmurs of the sadness of the death fill the classroom, but Betty sits alone and raises her shakey hand.

BETTY

Ms. Ferguson?

MS. FERGUSON

Yes, Betty?

Betty stands up from her desk and walk to Ms. Ferguson's desk to present her story.

MS. FERGUSON (CONT'D)

How do you have this already?  
This only happened last night?



BETTY

Our families are quite close: his mother called and was horribly distressed. I was able to interview the police and family immediately. I've had practically no sleep.

MS. FERGUSON

Very impressive Betty. See this is a headlining story. That's the initiative of editor in chief.

Ms. Ferguson looks at the paper with satisfaction of Betty's initiative and smiles. Betty's weary face forces a smile as students come up to congratulate her. She shoots a dirty look at Julie who studies the paper on Ms. Ferguson's desk.

JULIE

Betty... congrats.

BETTY

Oh thank you, Julie! You're only a freshman so don't worry you'll have another chance.

JULIE

I just have a few questions: Was the family confused? Did they know why he left? Did the police confirm a head injury?

BETTY

Julie, please. I just stayed up all night working on this.

JULIE

Would you meet me to discuss this case further? Tonight, perhaps?

BETTY

Umm... Sure, Julie. Tonight.

Betty sits back down in her desk with her heart racing.

INT. Classroom- NIGHT

Betty walks into the dimly lit classroom. Julie leans on the desk jotting notes down in a small, black leather notebook.

JULIE

Betty! You're here, finally. You know real journalists have pride in their punctuality.

BETTY

Well, I'm here now. So, what did you want to discuss?

JULIE

Some of it just didn't make sense, Betty. Here, look.

Julie points to a paragraph on the article.

JULIE (CONT'D)

You keep using present tense verbs. It's a little weird, it's not like you were there.

Julie chuckles, but Betty's eyes widen in fear.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Have you ever even been in an English class! Haha. Ok, and here.

Julie points to the date on the top of the page.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Also, there the date is noted the third, whereas you said you interviewed and wrote the article way into the early morning. Remember? You had no sleep, so it should be the forth. Sleep deprivation is no joke.

BEGIN FLASHBACK: (IN REVERSE)

--Betty closes the trunk of her car, with a body bag inside.

--Betty stands with the glass vase and there is a shatter.

--Betty grabs the glass vase before leaving. She slams her paper down on her desk. The date reads "November 3".

END FLASHBACK.

BETTY

Julie, it's just some mistakes.  
Can we please stop talking about  
this.

JULIE

Wait! please, I'm just very  
confused. How could YOU have  
wrote this? And in the time that  
you did?

BETTY

Stop. Please, Julie.

JULIE

Why "MURDERED" to describe the  
death? It's not wrong,  
necessarily, I mean- "Death" is  
more appropriate because its so  
recent. I mean, unless you knew-

BETTY

SHUT UP JULIE!

Julie is startled by the emotion and force behind the shout.

BETTY

I get it Julie. You are a REAL  
journalist. You are always  
looking for a story. But this,  
isn't one.

Betty starts moving toward Julie , while Julie backs up inch  
by inch. Betty smiles.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I get it, you're a freshman you  
have a lot to prove, so you are  
reaching for a new story. Let's  
go out to my car together where I  
have my second draft. I fixed all  
of my mistakes in it.

Julie is reassured and straightens up, but is still worried.

JULIE

OK.

BETTY

Yeah, I'll just meet you out  
there!

Julie exits the room apprehensively and Betty waits. She grabs the vase on Ms. Ferguson's desk, pouring the flowers and water out with it then leaves.

FADE OUT.