




RIVERDALE

THE MAPLE MURDERS



An original novel by Micol Ostow

SCHOLASTIC INC.

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CHAPTER ONE

FP Jones:

So we're a go to announce the Revels at the school today?

Hermione Lodge:

I'm en route as we speak.

FP Jones:

Gotta say, Penelope wasn't thrilled to hear about the tradition coming back. And she wasn't the only one.

Hermione Lodge:

The day I worry about what Penelope Blossom thinks is the day I voluntarily remove myself from office.

Hermione Lodge:

You know the drill—the time capsule was meant to be opened at Riverdale's Jubilee. We may have missed that boat, but nonetheless, I think the timing is perfect to resurrect a happy tradition of CELEBRATING our town. And not one person on the town council could give me a good reason why we shouldn't.

FP Jones:

It's your call, Madam Mayor.

Hermione Lodge:

Indeed it is. And I'll appreciate your support.

FP Jones:

You got it.



CHERYL

“Oh, *j’adore!*” I clapped my hands together, jubilant. “The Riverdale Revels! The Royal Maple pageant! What a delightfully OTT festivity we have in store, my darling TeeTee.”

It was Monday morning, and we were poised, waiting outside the school auditorium, clustered among throngs of anxious Riverdale High students, all as eager as we were to learn more about the Riverdale Revels. Principal Weatherbee had announced this assembly in an email blast late last night, and we’d all been abuzz with wonder ever since.

I could have done without the various and sundry sweaty elbows in my ribs, but I wasn’t exaggerating to Toni; I was absolutely *dying* to hear more about the Revels—such a fun

interlude in our oh-so-quaintly small-town lives—and therefore, willing to be more patient and tolerant of the proles than usual.

Toni, however, seemed less than convinced. She tilted her head and gave me some spectacular side eye. “I hear you, Cher,” she said. “Revels sounds like a good thing, sure. But—a pageant?”

I watched her face while she considered it, obviously not enthused. She’s not really one for pageantry, literally or figuratively (opposites attract, after all).

“Don’t get me wrong; I’m in for all the other stuff—a burger-eating contest? Fun times. Pie throwing? Sign me up. But seriously . . . a pageant?” She looked at me, askance.

“I know, I know, it doesn’t sound particularly empowered.” I bit my lip, tasting Chanel Rouge Allure. “But Weatherbee specifically said it’s gender inclusive, which fits perfectly within the mission of our new LGBTQIA group, *n’est-ce pas?* Promise me you’ll at least listen with a truly open mind.”

I felt a squeeze on my forearm.

“Whose mind is closed? That’s a travesty. Did you hear that supposedly it used to be called the Miss Maple pageant? But they updated the name to the Royal Maple to match the pageant’s new ‘all teens welcome’ direction.”

It was Kevin Keller, bright eyed as ever, looking every bit the earnest and stalwart do-gooder in his RROTC uniform. I gave him a look and pulled my arm from his grip.

“Careful, please. My skin is not only as pale as fine porcelain, dear Kevin—it’s equally fragile. I bruise easily.” The curse of being a titian redhead for the ages.

He rolled his eyes. “Of course. Sorry. There, there.” He patted my arm—softly this time. “But how fun, right? Quote-unquote ‘gender inclusive’”—he actually said *quote-unquote* as he made the gesture with curled fingers—“and I am *all in*.”

I smiled. His enthusiasm would have been infectious even if I hadn’t already been all in myself. “Likewise, *mon ami*. Now all we have to do is get this ravishing creature on board with us.” I gestured to Toni, who still wore that coy expression of strained-but-bemused tolerance. (I knew that look well.) “Frankly, I’m so determined to ensure her participation that I’d give up my own chance to compete in order to throw my full support and attention behind this goddess.

“You’re already my queen,” I told Toni. “It’s time the rest of the town recognized you as the royalty I know you to be.”

Kevin looked genuinely shocked to hear that anyone would need persuading to participate in a pageant of any kind. (It was refreshing to have at least one like mind around.)

“Wait, Toni—you’re not sold? But your dancing is *on point*—you’d have the talent portion totally sewn up. And obvi, you’re beyond gorg.” Now he seemed to reconsider. “Actually, I probably shouldn’t try so hard to convince you to sign up. Not if I’m hoping to take first prize.”

“Convince her? Do we have another conscientious objector in our midst?” It was Veronica herself, resplendent (I could admit, albeit reluctantly) in a black, lace-trimmed A-line dress that would have looked better in red, and on me. (Beauty is truth and truth, beauty, after all.)

“I don’t care how inclusive this thing is going to be; it still feels like a throwback to Neanderthal days, if you ask me.” Veronica was on a veritable warpath. And over something so silly.

“So you’re saying you *wouldn’t* want to see Archie take his turn in the spotlight during the swimsuit portion?” Kevin teased.

“Dude, that is *so* not happening.” Archie came up behind Veronica and kissed her on the cheek. “Sorry to disappoint you.”

“Oh, my Archiekins,” Veronica said, smiling at him. “Always such a heartbreaker.”

“There’s not going to be a swimsuit portion.” It was Betty, at Veronica’s and Archie’s heels, *quelle surprise*, blond ponytail bobbing, a flurry of dove-gray and millennial-pink cashmere. She turned to her hobo of a boyfriend, Jughead. “Wait—is there?”

Jughead shrugged. “No one knows anything about this so-called tradition. It’s all more of a rumor at this point.”

“A pageant is bad enough, but a swimsuit portion? I will not stand for the objectification,” Veronica said. “I’ll bypass conscientious objection and fast-forward straight to full-on protest.”

“Uh, I might have to start an opposing picket line, in that case.” It was Reggie, on cue, leering only semiteasingly.

I held a hand up to dismiss him, focusing my attention on Veronica. “A valiant thought, Norma Rae,” I said. “But I think we’re getting ahead of ourselves. As I told Toni, I think it behooves us to keep an open mind. I, for one, want to know more about these Riverdale Revels. Why don’t we have a seat and hear what our esteemed principal has to say?”



The air in the auditorium was thick and humid, and the seats were packed to capacity. My Vixens had saved seats for Toni and me in the front row, of course (location, location, location), so at least we had the benefit of some leg room in all the chaos and squalor.

Archie, Veronica, and Reggie were a few rows behind us, and from the corner of my eye I saw Betty and Jughead sidle along the edges of the stage, grabbing seats to the right of Weatherbee’s podium. Always so stealthy, those two—even when there was nothing particularly untoward underway. Betty had a look of extreme consternation on her face. I doubted it had anything to do with the lingering question of a swimsuit portion. I reached over and took TeeTee’s hand in my own, resting our clasped hands in my lap.

Once everyone was seated and the chatter had mostly subsided to a low, unobtrusive murmur, Principal Weatherbee stepped from the wings of the stage and up to a podium centered before us.

“Good morning,” he began, his voice smooth. “Thank you, all, for being here.” As if it weren’t a command performance. As if we weren’t dying to hear more about these so-called Revels.

“By now, you’ve all most likely read the email about the forthcoming Riverdale Revels, to be held this week, starting tonight and going through the weekend. We realize it’s short notice, but the decision to revive this beloved town tradition was only just confirmed as of our most recent Town Hall meeting last night.”

“Principal Weatherbee—” It was Betty, rising from her seat and chiming in with urgency. “Why the haste? And can you explain why a tradition you’re referring to as ‘beloved’ is something we’ve never even heard of?”

Weatherbee gave her a strained smile. “I understand that you have questions, Ms. Cooper.” He gazed out at the auditorium. “That you *all* may have questions. Luckily, we have a guest with us this morning who will be happy to tell you all about the Riverdale Revels.” He turned toward the wings, gesturing at someone standing just offstage. “Please give a welcoming round of applause to our visitor, Mayor Hermione Lodge.”

From somewhere just behind me I heard a derisive snort that could only be Veronica.

Louder than Veronica’s breathing, though, was the sound of Mayor Lodge’s killer heels as she strode onstage, her thick black hair falling perfectly over her shoulders as she moved.

Mayor Lodge certainly *looked* the part of elected official: poised and calm at the front of the room. She took over the podium from Principal Weatherbee with utmost grace.

“Hello,” she started, her voice loud and clear. “Thank you for having me today. And thank you to Principal Weatherbee for making the announcement this morning. And”—her eyebrows rose, as though she were only just remembering something—“to Evelyn Evernever, for her help in launching our revival of the Riverdale Revels. Evelyn was kind enough to volunteer her time to help us create the schedule, and she’s to credit for the document you all saw in your emails.”

Another disbelieving laugh—this time, Betty.

Everyone’s skepticism about the festival was perfectly understandable, of course—I could hardly recall an event in this town’s recent history that hadn’t been sullied by spontaneous bloodshed. But, I don’t know, something inside me clearly yearned for the simplicity of a straightforward celebration. It had been too long since we’d experienced unbridled joy. I, for one, was throwing caution to the wind and choosing to embrace enthusiasm.

“Normally, this is the sort of announcement we’d have made in person, rather than online. But in this case, the plans were only finalized yesterday at the Town Hall meeting, as

Principal Weatherbee just explained. Your parents have already received an email from my office detailing the upcoming Riverdale Revels, and they've seen the same schedule you have. But I'm here to give you a little more context about the history of the Riverdale Revels and why we're bringing them back some three-quarters of a century after they faded from practice.

“As you know, our town was founded in 1941, but the early settlers of what would eventually become Riverdale arrived well before that. And while we've always been a town very steeped in tradition, believe it or not, there *are* a few that slipped off our collective radar for quite some time. The Riverdale Revels are just one of those traditions, and we're so thrilled to be able to celebrate them now.

“When the first settlers arrived in this area in the earliest days of the eighteenth century, they had no sense of how hospitable the banks of the Sweetwater would be. There was no guarantee of prosperity to come. The winters—as you all know well—were brutal, and it was grueling work to cultivate the land beyond Fox Forest into suitable homesteads.”

I stifled a yawn, and I heard several others in the less-than-captivated audience do the same. I knew all about this; it was part and parcel of being a Blossom. Riverdale *was* the Blossom family, after all; its history begins with our own. But what of these Revels? Why were they so unheard of? It seemed so

unlikely that my own family wouldn't know about it. But then again, all *too* likely that Mumsie knew—but kept it from me, for her own odious, unknowable reasons.

“But these early citizens persevered,” Mayor Lodge continued. “After a few successful harvests, they decided to commemorate the occasion with a festival, a celebration of the land's bounty. They rejoiced, and feasted, in what would later be known as”—she took a deep breath for dramatic input—“the Riverdale Revels.”

“Points for alliteration, at least,” Toni whispered. I squeezed her hand.

“We don't know much about the early Revels. Those chronicles were sparse, and very little concrete information remains. What we do know is that, while Riverdale Revels are a tradition dating back to our first settlers' earliest harvests, before our town was officially founded, the event grew to a longer celebration, sometimes spanning a full week of feasts, concerts, and Town Hall dances.”

From the back of the room, I heard Kevin Keller call out, “And a pageant?” The hope in his tremulous voice was simply darling. A few students whooped in response. Clearly Kevin and I weren't the only ones excited for the festivities.

Mayor Lodge must have thought so, too. She smiled. “Yes, the pageant. A later addition to the lineup and an event tailor-made for our Riverdale High students. I'm sure you're all eager

to hear more about it.” Kevin led the cheers that rose up from the crowd. I snapped politely, unwilling to break the connection with my beloved TeeTee to clap like a commoner.

“At the center of the—well, pun intended, I suppose—revelry was the Miss Maple pageant. Originally, it was a traditional beauty pageant, but of course, with the advent of modern times comes modern ideals. So we’re giving Miss Maple our own twist. We’ve renamed it the Royal Maple pageant, and *all* are welcome to participate. We hope that many of you will.”

The buzz from the crowd was building now, as many people starting whispering among themselves, already making plans.

I raised my hand. “Yes, Cheryl,” Mayor Lodge acknowledged me.

“Madam Mayor, according to the email, the Revels begins tonight. And the pageant will be held on Saturday—*this* Saturday?”

She nodded coolly. “Correct. Tonight will be our kickoff event: the opening of the Jubilee time capsule.”

I waved my hand, still focused on my own issue. “That hardly seems like enough time to perfect our acts. And to find the perfect formal wear!” I protested. Others murmured in agreement around me.

Mayor Lodge smiled. “I appreciate the concern, Cheryl. But I have no doubt you, of all people, will be able to pull something inimitable together in the allotted time.”

“Why the rush?” Veronica called, challenging, from behind me. “The Jubilee has come and gone. No one mentioned a time capsule before now. I have to say, it feels a little odd that we’re hearing about all this so last-minute. Odd, and maybe . . . suspicious.”

The mayor took a deep breath, clearly considering her response. “Well, Veronica, I suppose you’re not wrong. In fact, in 1941, upon the event of the town’s official founding, the town council sealed a time capsule with the explicit intention of its being opened seventy-five years later, during our Jubilee celebration. This was how they honored their very last Riverdale Revels.”

“They just canceled their yearly festival?” Betty blurted, glancing first at Jughead and then over at Veronica.

Mayor Lodge tucked her hair behind her ear. “They *evolved*,” she said deliberately. “The Revels was a celebration that commemorated a more tenuous, fraught time. Since the town was ushering in what they anticipated to be great vibrancy and less uncertainty, they thought the time capsule was a fitting tribute. Soon, many other traditions would take over. Our midnight New Year’s pancake breakfast, for one.”

I stood up. I’d had enough. “And while normally I’d say, who doesn’t love a piping hotcake, fresh from the griddle, I think it’s time to lay off the interrogation mode, classmates. This is a gift festival. Let’s not look it in the mouth.”

Around me, cheers swelled again. My dour, do-gooder cousin and her rejects-from-a-John-Hughes-open-call cohorts were

clearly in the minority with their doubts and aspersions. The rest of us Bulldogs? We were ready to revel.

Mayor Lodge gestured for us to quiet down. Slowly, we did. “Of course, the time capsule was intended to be opened at the 75th Anniversary Jubilee. But, well . . .” She shifted for a moment, seeming to consider something.

She looked out at us, gaze set. “It’s no secret that at the time of the Jubilee, Riverdale was having a . . . *rocky* go of it. It was determined that it wasn’t the right time to open the time capsule.”

“Interesting use of the passive, there,” Toni said. I elbowed her.

“Since then, however, the”—she seemed to be grasping for the right phrasing—“the *challenges* we’ve faced as a town haven’t lessened.”

“Uh, understatement,” someone heckled. The audience laughed, but it was uneasy.

“There has been *plenty* to worry about and to stress over,” Mayor Lodge said simply. “And we in Town Hall thought—what better time to take a moment and recapture some of what makes Riverdale special? The founders wanted it this way, and it was our mistake to miss the specific milestone they dictated. But we’ll make our own milestone now: It’s the right time to bring the Revels back.”

“Mayor Lodge, I couldn’t agree more,” Principal Weatherbee said, stepping up and smoothly taking over the podium once

again. “Thank you so much for taking the time to come speak with our students. Students: Let’s show our dedicated mayor some gratitude, shall we?”

Dutifully, we applauded.

“There will be tables for signing up for the pageant located outside the cafeteria at lunchtime,” Principal Weatherbee went on, “alongside information and volunteer sheets for other events as well. It’s all in the welcome-letter packet that was sent to you this morning. We hope you’ll all loan your talents to as much of the Revels as possible.”

“If you can’t make it to the sign-up tables, but you still want to register for the pageant, just see me!” Evelyn Evernever hopped up from her own front-row perch. Her voice rang with energy. There was at least one student Mayor Lodge didn’t have to worry about bringing on board with this celebration.

The assembly drawing to a close, I turned back to my TeeTee.

“You’ve got a look in your eye,” she said, assessing me oh-so-accurately. “I recognize it.”

“Who, me?” I winked. “I’m just excited for the Revels.”

“You really want me to compete so badly that you’re willing to sit it out yourself?”

I blushed. “Why, Antoinette, am I that transparent?”

“Okay,” she sighed. “I’ll do it. You can . . . I don’t know, train me or mentor me, or whatever the right wording is for ‘guide me in the ways of pageantry.’ *If* you’re not weird about it.”

I squealed. “Oh, *merveilleux!* It will be grand. And it’ll be a formidable addition to your college transcript when you emerge victorious.” I could see it now: my beloved, onstage, resplendent in a crown and that killer smile of hers. “I do so love an opportunity to be opulent. I promise, I will carve you like a modern-day sapphic Pygmalion.”

“No, see—already a little weird. I’m open-minded, but I’m nobody’s Eliza Doolittle.”

“Of course you’re not,” I said, kissing her. “Even if you *are* my fair lady.”