

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

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Hey weirdos, I'm Ash.

And I'm Elena.

And this is Morbid.

It is.

Did you hear my whistle with my S that just happened?

No, I didn't.

I literally, it was like very slight, but that did just happen.

Yeah, that felt embarrassing for some reason.

It wasn't.

Don't worry about it.

I didn't even hear it.

Okay, I didn't even hear it.

Okay, I didn't.

Guys, we're at our home away from home.

We are.

I'm not going to say where that is.

No, we're not.

But we are finally getting some time with our fam.

Exactly.

We're spending time with family.

Yeah.

We're just chilling out, you know, relaxing all cool.

There we go.

Shooting some b-ball outside of the school.

When a couple of guys.

You know.

We're going to get to that.

That's what we're doing.

Um, yeah.

And we had our live show, our virtual live show last night.

Yeah.

Thank you guys so much to everybody who like logged on and watched, who like logged on.

What a fucking, what a fucking century.

What a cool fucking location that was.

That was the coolest location.

Yeah.

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We filmed literally every live show from there.

I want to live there.

You should.

I belong there.

We got to get ready in this like old tiny bedroom where like all the furniture is like exactly as it was.

And like, I think it was, that place was built in like 1910 or something.

Yeah.

It was, it was so cool.

Yeah.

It was awesome.

And you guys rule.

And we're glad that you were there.

In spirit.

Yeah.

It was awesome.

I also want to dress like I did every single day of my life.

I also told Ash when we left, I was like, you should just come to work like that every day.

Yeah.

Like you were literally made for that.

I was.

You were.

I really was.

I believe that.

I feel that very strongly.

Not super comfortable.

No.

Tool.

Yeah.

I mean, it didn't look super comfortable, but it looked great.

I was wearing two robes technically.

Not technically I was.

Technically.

Technically.

I had like a silky one underneath.

That one was like super comfy, but yeah, but the tool was like a lot.

The tool of it all.

So always scratchy.

And I have very sensitive skin.

So.

I was itchy.

I was itchy.

And then we both got crooks in our neck.

Yes.
Because.
Crooks or crooks?
Crooks.
Right?
Crooks.
I don't have like crooks in my neck.
No.
I don't have like criminals in my neck.
Let me say it.
I don't have thieves in my neck.
Naver.
But I have crooks.
Yeah.
Because we both were looking at each other for so long when we were telling the stories.
And it was so cold in there that I think like it fucked with my neck like a lot.
Me too.
Wicked bad.
I was sleeping last night and I was pissed off because no matter which way I moved I couldn't get my crick out my neck.
Me too.
It still hurts tonight.
But you know mine really doesn't.
Mine still hurts.
I feel like I'm whispering a little bit because it's really late right now.
It is really late.
We're just like sequestered in a corner somewhere that we set up like a makeshift.
That sounds so bleak.
It is.
We're just sequestered into a corner somewhere set up like a temporary you know recording studio.
We're in a little cubicle.
Yeah.
We're in a little cubicle and it feels right.
I love it.
Well this is like pretty long for me.
For me.
For me.
So we should get into it.
I didn't kind of just really not kind of want to sleep guys remember.
No but seriously I did want to put a little bit of a trigger warning at the top of this episode because this case has very very heavy themes and a lot of mention of suicide.
So if that's not something that you're in the headspace to listen to right now we completely understand and respect that.

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You can sit this one out and we'll see you next episode which will be listener tales I think right.
Which is always a fucking good time.
Yeah.
Yeah.
It will be.
So this is a Wednesday episode.
Yeah.
So know that.
It'll be okay.
So stay in today we are covering the murder of Betty Williams.
I loved that murder.
It is a murder like it is but it's complicated.
All right.
Okay.
And also it's like a bit of an old timey case because it did happen during the 60s but it's one of those older cases that weirdly feels like it could have happened yesterday.
Yeah.
Like it's got those vibes and the reaction from the public in this case though that's definitely dated.
That's very old timey.
Yeah.
That's very old timey because along with again the heavy themes of suicide there was also heavy themes of slut shaming and victim blaming.
Cool.
All at the expense of Betty Williams.
Sounds fun.
Yeah.
We love it.
So it all starts when Betty's boyfriend Mack Herring breaks up with her and he broke up with her during their senior year of high school.
That's shitty.
Really, really sad.
Her entire world obviously felt like it was collapsing in on her and she had already been struggling with depression and anxiety for a good while at this point.
And at the center of all of her problems was the fact that she was really living in a time that in a lot of ways just was not meant for her.
Oh, that's sad.
I feel like Betty was very ahead of her time in a way and I don't really know how to explain that but I do feel like you'll also get that sense listening.
The vibe is just there.
Yeah.
Definitely.
She was progressive, she was outspoken and she was really in tune with her sexuality.

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But she had all of those qualities as a teenager living in the 60s.

Yeah.

So like you were not as a woman or a girl supposed to be sexual at all, outspoken at all or progressive in any way, shape or form.

Because we're coming off the heels of the 50s.

Yes, honey.

So no one around her really knew what the hell to make of her and they really only paid any attention to her when they were talking shit about her or making her feel like an outcast.

Wow.

Yeah.

So things got to the point where Betty felt like death was the only way to free herself from kind of a losing battle that she felt like she'd been fighting.

Oh, that kills me.

This is a very, very sad case.

Very sad.

They put me in a weird headspace for a few days.

Oh, great.

Yeah, just so you know.

But it's also like, it's such an interesting story and it's like, I think it's so important to be told.

Yeah.

So she was by all means determined to put an end to her life, like very determined to do that.

But she was afraid to do it alone.

She didn't want to leave this realm and enter the next by herself.

Oh my God.

She described it as not having the fortitude necessary to go through with it.

So instead of facing the end of her life alone, she begged for one last thing from the guy who had just broken her heart.

She wanted him to pull the trigger for her.

Wow.

Yeah.

The shooting of Betty Williams by Mack Herring, which is sometimes referred to as the kiss and kill murder.

It's really been largely forgotten by a lot of people who live outside of the West Texas city of Odessa, where the killing took place.

But the case really does remain among one of the most complicated cases of the 20th century.

And still a lot of people have questions.

And the most discussed question is, when is a death a killing and a killing a murder?

Huh.

Okay.

It's convoluted this one.

I told you.

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This is going to be a lot.
And that's the thing.
I'm like, this was a murder, but like it wasn't.
There's more to it.
But it was.
Like I'm still so conflicted.
I don't know how to really say label this.
Yeah.
How to label it.
Exactly.
But let's start at the beginning.
Elizabeth Jean Betty Williams.
She was born on August 11th, 1943 in Marion, Illinois to John and Mary Williams.
Her early life was pretty good.
Her dad was a carpenter.
And when there wasn't any contracting work for him to do, he was also able to get work in the coal industry.
Now the coal industry went from being a constant for John to fall back on to completely unreliable work very quickly.
Then he injured his back in 1954 and neither job was something that he could physically do anymore.
Oh man.
Yeah.
So while he was talking to his brother about what he could do to support his family, the brother suggested that he move out to Texas, which had a booming oil industry at the time.
So surely John could find some kind of job in the oil industry and get his family back up on their feet in no time, surely, or maybe not.
In Illinois, this family, they were a family of five and they lived in a really large house that John had actually built himself.
They had all the space that they could ever need.
But in Odessa, the house that they had moved into, which was on Henderson Street, it was definitely more modest.
It was only about 10 to 20 years old at that point, but it felt, quote, old and well-worn to the family.
Oh wow.
They were also constantly having to pick up trash from the front lawn because the house was across from a factory and the trash at the factory was just constantly blowing into their yard or getting stuck on their fence.
Ew.
So like, you're already down on your luck.
Yeah.
You've already crammed a family of five into a much smaller house than you were used to, and now you're picking up trash from your front lawn and fence every day.
Because trash is literally just wafting over to your house.

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Like, you're...

That's rough.

You're not feeling great about that.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And just to put the cherry on top of things, the job that John was hoping for never really materialized itself.

He could still keep the family afloat on the money that he had made as a carpenter, and he kept picking up side jobs and everything, but Mary ended up having to get a job at J.C. Penny to help even more.

Sadly, the move was just not everything they had hoped it would be.

So according to Betty's cousin, Shelton Williams, which I think is the cutest fucking name on the planet.

That is an adorable name.

Her father, John's employment problems, might have had something to do with his attitude. He came off to many as a self-righteous man, and he came off very arrogant.

Oh.

Shelton actually later wrote a book about this case.

It's his cousin's murder.

It's called Washed in Blood.

And he wrote about John saying that he, quote, seemed to always either to be preaching in a holier than now way, or he seemed to be bragging.

Wow.

Those are not great things to hear about yourself.

No, definitely not.

And then the other thing on top of that was that things were just never John's fault.

We all know people like that.

Never ever.

Also, I am really smearing and tarnishing the name John lately.

You are dragging the name John through the mud.

I think I've had three cases in a row.

One of them was the live show where the John's have been bad.

Yeah, where you've just been like, and John came, and I was like, I love a John, and you were like, not this one.

And it's like, damn, all right.

Yeah.

Sorry.

Wow.

Well, this John sucks, and things were never his fault.

And most of the time that he spent out of work, he actually ended up blaming on his children.

Cool.

Yeah, you should do that.

It's their fault.

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Really?

Yeah.

He was a religious man.

He was described as a strict Baptist.

And he wanted to make sure that his children followed the same faith.

And he told them whenever the family was going through some kind of hardship or he was out of work, that it was their fault and that they had done something, quote, to bring God's punishment down on our household.

Wow.

What an asshole.

Like, maybe it's your fault because like, I didn't ask to be here, dad.

Yeah, you're a straight up asshole.

Like, you brought me into this.

Yeah.

Like, that's for your bullshit.

Like, you're an asshole.

And then you just say, like, it's their fault and God's mad at them.

Like, go fuck yourself.

Shut the fuck up, John.

Exactly.

So as Betty got older and she became a teenager, she became the main focus of her father's outburst and just pure disdain.

Pure disdain.

Oh, I hate this man.

Mm-hmm.

Me too.

He, quote, often preached to Betty about sin and eternal damnation.

And on more than one Sunday morning, he prayed that she might learn to be a more obedient daughter.

Ew.

Like, in front of her.

Ew.

Yeah.

Oh, God, I hate this man.

Me too.

Now, somebody else, especially again in that time period, would have tried everything they could have to make their father happy or avoid his anger, but Betty let it feed her.

By the time she turned 14 or 15, she realized that her dad's belief system, all of his rules and morals, were going to be everything she stood against.

That's amazing.

Everything is fucking awesome for her.

So when she was entering high school, she was immersing herself in everything she could to expand her world.

She was reading books by John Kerouac, an author who many people probably know, but

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if you didn't, he basically led a movement in the 50s that was later called the Beat Generation.

I was going to say the Beat Poets.

Yes, exactly.

Now, the people that made up this generation were people like Betty who rejected conventional society, and this is a quote, and favored Zen Buddhism, modern jazz, and free sexuality, baby.

Oh.

I love it.

Now, Betty loved all of the Beat Poets, and she also loved the comedian Lenny Bruce, whose comedy style was mostly satirical.

It featured jokes about politics, religion, sex, things that she had no business listening to back then.

No.

And she also wore what was considered as too much makeup, and she did basically everything she could to reject conforming to the world around her in small town Texas.

I love that for her.

I do too.

If you look up a picture of her, I think she's the cutest little bee.

Oh, she's adorable.

Right?

But she didn't dress like you were supposed to back then.

We'll get into it.

To some people, she probably sounds like a typical teenager, just kind of going against the grain to establish her independence.

And I definitely agree that there is a piece of teenage innocence and resistance here.

She did have something to prove.

But at the same time, like I've already said, she was really just more progressive than most people around her.

According to Pamela Koloff, quote, Betty disdained conformity and reserved particular contempt for the girls with matching sweater sets and saddle shoes who seemed to look right through her.

Oh my God.

I love Betty.

I do too.

She was supposed to be unique and she expressed that through her appearance.

Sometimes she would dress in all black.

Sometimes she would just wear jeans and a t-shirt, which was like fucking wild.

Oh yeah, back then.

And other times she would wear very revealing clothing, which like she probably like showed her shoulder or something.

I was going to say her ankle.

Yeah.

But more than just dressing differently and reading those kinds of books, she also spoke

freely about her ideas and opinions.

I mean, clutch the produce.

What does she think she is?

You know?

And that definitely had more than a few people clutching their pearls back then.

Absolutely.

She would talk to her teachers and other adults around her and try to get them to see where she was coming from when it came to topics that they simply were not talking about back then.

She wanted a lively debate.

She did.

She wanted to talk about racial segregation.

She wanted to talk about sexism.

She wanted to talk about equality.

She wanted to get your fucking mind moving.

Hell yeah.

Guys, I have a lot of like full blown fixations, obsessions if you will, and one of them is HelloFresh.

I'm obsessed with HelloFresh because with HelloFresh you get farm fresh, pre-portioned ingredients and seasonal recipes right to your jaw.

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I'm a real life example of this.

The other night I got home so freaking late, I was like, I'm not cooking dinner.

I love Drew so much, but I don't really think he cooked dinner.

I opened the door, you guys.

He had prepared for me the sheet pan parmesan chicken and it came with green beans on the side.

It was freaking delicious.

Drew cooked the whole thing.

He even cooked the chicken thoroughly.

And he said, Ash, that was so easy because I had all the steps right in front of me.

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Again, that's HelloFresh.com slash Morbid60 and use code Morbid60 for 60% off plus free shipping.

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A few days before Christmas, Janelle Matthews disappeared from her home.

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Now her cousin, Shelton Williams, remembers the urgency and passion with which she would talk about any kind of social issue.

She loved getting engaged in like a heated debate.

And she would tell her cousin, there are too many secrets in the country.

You can't just tell people that racism, war and poverty are wrong.

You have to make them feel it.

Where is Betty now?

Serious.

Like we need Betty.

And that's the sad thing because I think she, I mean she did leave a mark on the world obviously.

But I think had she been able to live into like adulthood.

It sounds like she would have done, she would have moved the needle.

And it's so sad because she just didn't have people around her that made her feel heard, made her feel respected, made her feel like she was worth being alive.

Yeah.

And that's awful.

So sad.

Now to Betty, the most effective ways of making people understand her quote unquote progressive ideas was to address the issues through drama, comedy and art, just like her idols, the beat poets, Kerouac, Lenny Bruce.

But unfortunately where she lived in Odessa, progressive politics and edgy artistic influences only made her more of a social outcast.

Wow.

Outside of school and outside of her part-time job at the local Woolworths, she dreamed of a glamorous life, which you know, that's like a center theme in all of my stories.

She wanted to get far away from Odessa.

She loved films and she absolutely devoured the Hollywood tabloid magazines.

I want her, I know how this is going to end very tragically, I know.

But I just, I'm like, oh, I want you to get out, I do too.

Like I know it's going to end badly, but I just want to be like, woo, rewind.

She was just so young.

And promising.

Yeah, so promising.

And I just love that like she would like read the beat poets and she would engage in all these like topics that she wanted to spread the word about and like really get into.

But then at the same time, she's your typical teenager, like flicking through a people magazine.

Yeah, I love it.

Obviously not people back then, but you know.

She would also hang all kinds of photos on her bedroom wall from magazines like Confidential.

And next to those, she would hang movie posters and play bills, like she was just fucking cool.

Yeah.

And like the stars and the tabloids, she really dreamed of becoming a famous actress one day.

And in the meantime, she joined the drama club at school so she could like kind of get that going.

And her cousin remembered, quote, she loved to be on the stage where she could be anyone, but herself.

So in many ways.

That's why I used to love drama.

Yeah.

Because I had like not a great experience in school.

Yeah.

And that's exactly why I love drama clubs.

You could be a character.

Yeah.

You can be whoever you want to be.

And it's literally just like disassociating.

Yeah.

Oh, that hurts my heart.

I get that.

I love you.

I love you.

No, like seriously, that really hurt my heart.

But again, in many ways, she was a typical teenager.

She lived in emotional extremes.

She felt like nobody understood her and she longed for something greater than what she saw around her.

Yeah.

I could have related to that.

Yeah, we were all there.

Yeah.

She was also an outsider in her community and everybody from her own fucking dad to her classmates and even some of her teachers reminded her of that on the regular.

That's so fucked up that no one around her valued her.

And then on top of everything else, if anything about Betty made her a not so great fit for where she lived or just about anywhere else in the late 1950s, it was her unashamed interest in sex.

Yeah, it, you know, it rocked some socks, didn't make her a lot of friends.

According to her cousin, she was so bright and natural discussing sex, it almost seemed to be okay to do so, which it almost seemed like it was all right and healthy, weird.

It almost seemed like we could communicate like two grown people, honestly.

So some nights after her siblings and her parents went to bed, she would sneak out of the house and she would go down to Tommy's drive-in to flirt and talk with boys, get out of town.

And unlike the chased good girls in Odessa, she was assertive when it came to her interest and her desire to have sex.

Yeah.

And by the time she was a junior in high school, she was meeting up with guys regularly.

She would meet them at the drive-in or she would just hook up casually with them.

I mean, get it, whatever.

It was this though, this really set her outside way more than her outfits, her attitude, her progressive ideals.

This made her an outcast.

Awesome.

We learned nothing from the Scarlet Letter.

Literally nothing.

Her former classmate, Jean Smith Keeker, put it, if a girl had a steady boyfriend, then she could have sex as long as she didn't advertise it.

But if she did it with someone who wasn't her boyfriend, then she was a pariah.

Betty was a pariah.

It's so wild because that's all based in like religious ideals.

Of course it is.

Like not everyone's religious.

Oh, my back.

So why does that?

It's so weird that that tracks against like such a large demographic of people.

Like it's so strange to me.

To me, that's like a very weird way of thinking.

It is.

I mean, I agree with you.

That you should judge someone about that when it has literally no effect on you.

Well, think about people that hate on like the LGBTQ community.

That's exactly what I was just saying.

That's literally just you giving a shit about who I have intercourse with.

Literally who I fuck.

It's like, why does that matter to you?

You'll sit there and you'll bang your head against the wall about it and ask, it's the question I ask constantly.

I'm like, why does it matter to you?

It doesn't affect you.

Right.

Like if I'm cool with like going to hell, then why do you care?

Exactly.

Like let me burn, motherfucker.

What's the problem?

Like you're so good to go to heaven.

Are you worried I'm going to run into you down there?

It's like, if you're so sure you're going up there, then why the fuck do you care that I'm going down here?

It's so true.

It's so weird to me.

I could go on for like hours about it because it infuriates me because I don't give a fuck what anybody does.

No, I don't give a shit as long as it's legal, like legal in the sense that like as long as it's like you're not hurting someone and as long as it's like, that's it as long as it's a consenting adult.

That's literally all I care about.

No, it's so true.

I was lucky to come from this family and like Drew was so lucky to come from his family, but we've made friends over the years like in the LGBTQ community and you're like, what? You hear the experience and even people that you're not friends with that you know what their experience was coming out to their family and you get disowned, you get thrown on the fucking streets and it all comes down to who you're bumping ugly with.

That's it.

It's like you're disowning your child because of who they care about.

Yeah.

What?

Like wild.

On what planet and also the psychological fuck aptitude of that is done off the Richter scale because it's like you shouldn't give a shit as long as the person your child cares about is a good person, is kind, respects them and treats them correctly and makes them happy.

Literally.

That's all you should care about.

And if you care beyond that, then there is some deep seated issues happening.

Say a louder for the people in the background.

It makes me crazy.

It makes me crazy.

It's like the whole like, you know, if you go near my, you know, my son is not allowed to date any like hoes out there, you know, like you see all those tiktoks and you're like, you can't fuck your son, you know that, right?

Like that is against the law.

And then you see it on the other side with the guys being like, I'll have a shotgun if some guy comes to why you can't fuck your daughter like it's just what are you all doing? Like why did you have kids to do this?

It's so weird.

It's very, very bizarre.

I hope my children, I hope my daughters come home with wonderful humans.

Yeah.

Whoever they are.

And also I want to get to know that person.

I want to love that person.

I'm like, to me, I'm like, cool.

I can't wait to have like more humans that I love in my family.

I'm like, I'm excited.

That's just more kids.

My future mother-in-law the other day, I literally almost cried because I know she considers like me and my like sister and brother-in-law like her kids.

She literally says that she has six kids.

I love that.

And like, I feel like she's setting an example for me as like how I want to be like when my kids get married.

Exactly.

Like I can't imagine having a different experience.

No, like my mother-in-law has been giving me like every card that she gives me always says to my son and quote unquote daughter.

Like, because it's like a daughter-in-law card, but it's like she always finds the one that say quote unquote daughter.

And then she writes in it, thank you for making my son so happy.

Like that's the energy you want to bring here.

That's not a mother-in-law.

That's a mom.

Yeah, literally.

It's just, I know that was like an off-tangent like, you know, whatever, but like that kind of stuff bugs the shit out of me.

No, it's just weird.

But again, live your life because it doesn't affect me.

But live and let live.

Exactly.

But that's not what happened to Betty.

Nobody was letting her live at all.

That makes me sad.

Me too.

That's just for Betty.

Honestly.

For all her non-conformity and dreams of getting out of Odessa, what she really wanted the

most, the absolute most was to be loved and accepted, the bare fucking minimum.
Yeah.
That's what everybody should be able to have.
Like at home, starting out there, but she didn't even get that.
But finally in her junior year, she felt like she had finally found that acceptance and that love that she craved in a sophomore named John Mack Herring.
He went by Mack.
Mack Herring was a year younger than Betty, but he was everything that she was not.
He was tall.
He was handsome.
He was well liked.
He was popular.
And he had absolutely no trouble fitting in with his family and peers.
And this is another John.
Oh my God, fuck, I didn't even think of that.
Shit.
I don't know how to feel about this, John, to be honest with you.
All right, we'll leave it hanging in the ether.
I'm not really sure how I feel.
It's going to leave you feeling so conflicted.
But anyway, he, by all accounts, was a very typical Texas boy.
He played football.
He hunted.
He fished.
He went to church and he did well in school, but he was also kind.
He was thoughtful and he liked to be alone, like he liked his alone time.
And his sensitive side was what appealed to Betty because she's a fucking artist.
Hell yeah.
And then she, quote, sensed in him a kindred spirit and she thought there was something lonely and romantic about him.
Oh.
That's beautiful.
Like young love.
Yeah.
Now, they started out as friends.
But by the summer after Betty's junior year, they started dating.
And Betty fell in love and she fell hard and she fell fast.
She told her friends all the time how Mack just seemed to get her.
He really listened when she spoke.
He wanted to hear what she had to say.
But Mack, on the other hand, didn't really talk a lot to his friends or really anybody else about his relationship with Betty.
Come on.
He was very, very aware and very self-conscious that his relationship with her could affect

his social status.

Come on.

As her cousin Shelton put it, Betty never wore his football jacket, never went to the Scott Theater with him on a Saturday night and never met his parents.

Come on.

But she was like his steady girlfriend.

It's like you're hiding her away.

Exactly.

You're treating her like everyone else in her life.

Yeah.

What the fuck?

So she got pissed.

Yeah.

She really liked Mack, but the fact that he just had, he lacked outward excitement and it started to piss her off.

So in response to his distant and discreet, fucking annoying ass behavior, she tried to make him jealous one night because that's what teenagers do.

Of course.

If I had a fucking dime for every boy that I tried to make jealous and it didn't work, I would have a fucking home full of dimes.

So she tried to do that and she parked with one of his good friends.

Oh.

Yes.

And then he was another football player who was more popular and had actually been voted the most handsome in his class.

And also is apparently an asshole because he's doing that to his friend.

I mean, like what the fuck?

Most handsome in class is always an asshole.

Like that's to be real.

Also, superlatives are the weirdest fucking thing ever.

They are so weird.

They end them now.

Yeah.

They're like, talk about setting up some just fucked up issues going right out into, they used to leave high school with all these shitty judgments and issues all over you.

And like it's really likely to see you up to like plateau there.

That's my favorite.

It's most likely to succeed because it's like all you other idiots.

Fuck all y'all.

Like only these two are going to succeed.

I was nowhere near most likely to succeed.

And I would like to say fuck all y'all because I am succeeding, okay?

I am success.

I am succession.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

I also watch it on TV.
Oh, that's coming back in like a month and I am stoked.
I am still on season two.
I'm ready for more shiv.
Oh, I love shiv.
Oh, I don't know if I should say that, but I do.
I'm only on season two.
I love shiv.
I don't care what she does.
I love her.
I don't care what she does.
Yeah.
All right.
Anyway, this is one forever.
If we keep sidetracking, I don't know where we are right now.
High school, parking with other boys, trying to make your boyfriend jealous, whatever.
Whether she was trying to make Mac jealous or get his attention or just get some kind of reaction from him is unknown.
Whatever her intentions, the stunt backfired.
And by the start of the school year, Mac had ended things with Betty, which I understand.
I can't say I blame him.
And he started dating another girl.
And this is what sucks.
He was much more out there with his relationship with this new girl.
That sucks.
Everyone knew he was dating her.
And in a weird way, and certainly to Betty, he seemed to be more proud of dating this girl.
Oh, that makes me sad.
It's awful.
And the breakup devastated Betty.
She finally had felt that real connection to somebody, and it was ripped away from her right after it had started, whether she was partially at fault or not.
Yeah.
It was stupid teenage shit.
Exactly.
It's so impulsive.
Yeah.
Of course.
I am one of the most impulsive people, so I can relate heavily to that.
But she told a friend, oh my God, this hurts my heart.
I've never been so humiliated and torn to pieces.
I feel so lonely and deserted.
I don't care what happens now or ever.

And it only got worse.

And you just want to be like, it gets better.

It will get better.

Once you get out of this town and out of this high school, it will get better.

And she would have.

She would have.

She would have.

Yeah.

So the end of her relationship with Max set the new school year off on a terrible note, but that was only the beginning of a slew of disappointments.

During the school year before this one, Betty had really fostered her love of the theater. The theater.

By performing the lead in a lot of the school plays, like multiple.

Get it.

But this year, there was a new drama teacher at the school.

Her name was Enid Woodward.

And she didn't seem to see much talent or ability in Betty.

And instead of giving her the lead in the school's production of winter set, she gave them, I was like, we're falling off there.

She gave Betty the role of stage manager, Enid didn't even get a act like an actual role.

She made her stage manager, Enid.

I'm unimpressed.

Me too.

And this is the thing for years.

Theater was the thing that fueled Betty's dreams of getting the fuck out of Odessa and her fantasy of making a name for herself on Broadway.

That was her dream.

It probably seemed like small potatoes to the adults around her, but Betty not getting any kind of part in the school play.

That would be devastating.

That's devastating.

And then you add that on top of her breakup with Mac, things were just making her feel like the world was crumbling around her.

She was hopeless and she was feeling desperate.

So that fall in a letter to Mac, she wrote, well, I guess you accomplished what you set out to do.

That would hurt me more than you'll ever know.

I've done a lot of things.

I know that were bad and cheap, but I swear before God that I didn't mean them to be like that.

I was just showing off.

I know it's much too late with you, Mac, but I swear that another boy won't get the chance to say what you've said to me.

You've made me realize that instead of being smart and sophisticated like I thought, I

was only being cheap and ugly and hoarse.

Forgive me for writing this last note and thank you for reading it.

I'll not trouble you again.

And Mac, I haven't forgotten all the good times we had.

When you think of me, try to think of the good times we had and not of this.

Oh, so sad.

That is devastating.

So sad.

Now, if losing Mac and her dreams of stardom weren't enough for Betty, things escalated at home when her dad started snooping around her room while she was gone.

And one day he found her diary tucked away in a dresser drawer and Betty had detailed her experiences with boys in this diary.

So to John Williams, the discovery that his daughter was sexually active and not married was just outrage and further proof to him that she was turning away from God and couldn't be trusted.

So now this only added to tensions at home.

So Betty has literally no fucking safe space.

She doesn't have the stage at school.

She doesn't have the theater.

She doesn't have a boyfriend she can go hang out with.

And now she is not happy at home and probably getting prayed at, literally, literally.

So as fall turned into winter and Betty's loss has piled up, her mood just got darker and darker.

She was just sullen, really.

And in that letter, what really struck me was that she said, instead of being and she named all these positive things like I thought I was, you've shown me that none of that is true.

And it's like, oh, no, no, no, hold on to that.

That is what you are.

You are all those things.

And it's like, don't let anybody make you feel like you are not those things.

But we all know, especially, even now, that can be hard.

Even when you know who you are, I'm 37, I'm 37, right?

Yeah, I'm 37 years old.

I know who I am.

Of course.

I am who I am now.

I'm fine with it.

I'm comfortable.

And that's all that I am.

I'm Popeye, the sailor man.

But it's like, you can see like a really nasty comment.

Yeah.

You know where you are.

You can see a really nasty comment.
And it can make you second guess yourself because it's just, you shouldn't see that shit.
No.
Like, you know what I mean?
And you shouldn't be told that kind of stuff.
What people think of you is none of your business.
And that's the thing.
And it's like, and especially when you're a teenager, it means so much more because you're not there yet.
And you're not in a place most of the time.
Like if you're one of the lucky ones that as a teenager was just completely awesome, comfortable with who you were, but like nine times out of 10, you're not there yet.
No.
And it's like, you are fragile.
You are in the building phase.
And it's almost like a baby's head in the beginning, how it's fusing together and it has a soft spot and anything can fuck that up just while it's building itself to be your strong ass head.
That's exactly what it is.
She is that soft spot.
Well, and she would have gotten to a really strong fucking skull if she was able to.
Great point because also her frontal lobe is still developing.
Her decision making skills are not quite there yet.
Exactly.
Not quite there.
It's just really sad.
And that's my excuse for everything I did in my school and after.
It makes me sad.
It does.
So she was just really pulling back from everything.
And she told her cousin Sheldon she wanted to die if she couldn't be with Mac.
I think it was a lot that I don't think I know it was a lot more than just not being with Mac.
But I think it's weird.
I think like when you're going through like so much, you just crave a person.
That's exactly what I think it was.
You know, like you said, I don't think it was just not being with Mac.
I think it was with all of this happening.
I need Mac.
Yeah.
Like that's the thing I need.
Yeah.
And if I can't have that then.

Like do you remember when everything was, I had like a very tumultuous time in high school where I was literally moving into my grandparents house because things had gotten so bad.

And I was not really dating this guy, but like we were, we were like about to date.

And then I invited him to your wedding because he was going to be my plus one.

And then he said, no, I felt like the fucking world was crumbling beneath my feet because of that one incident, like that was what set it all off.

But it was really that like, no, the world was actually just crumbling around me in many different ways.

But when you're a teenager, you put it on that because you like, you need a person to get through everything with, you know, but you don't, you're an independent woman who don't need no man.

You've got this.

You do.

But when you're 16, you don't feel that way.

No way.

So she was desperate to get Mac back, but he had already moved on with that other girl.

He felt bad, but he didn't want to be back together with Betty.

So eventually she started expressing suicidal thoughts to friends at school and in the drama department very regularly.

One friend remembered, Betty said the situation at home was bad.

I wanted to help, but I didn't know what to do.

I was 16 years old.

Exactly.

And like, I remember my friends being in shitty situations and being like, oh my God, you have to move in with us.

But like, I couldn't, like, that wasn't going to happen.

Yeah, like it's on my house.

I don't know what to say.

Nothing I can do.

So unfortunately, Betty had spent years reveling in the reactions that she received from her provocative behavior, her unfavorable opinions.

So to those around her, these cries for help just sounded like Betty looking for attention.

That's what they thought.

So it's like a boy who cried wolf kind of situation.

Kind of.

Yeah, exactly.

They thought she was just trying to stir up some kind of drama.

But there were countless times that Betty told her peers working on that play that she wanted to kill herself.

Yeah.

Like, you can never let that slip.

No.

You can't let that go away.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

Like, you can't just be like, well, she's probably just looking for it.

Like, don't do it.

No.

Overreact.

Overreact.

Always.

You will always feel better if you overreact versus underreact.

And she was constantly telling people this and saying that she just didn't have the nerve.

Oh, see.

Yeah.

You got to tell someone.

Like, she was very, like.

She's being very clear about it.

And she's right up to her breaking point.

On at least five separate occasions, Betty asked another student if they would be willing to help her do this.

And no one told anyone.

Worse, they all laughed it off.

They thought it was a joke.

That's a lot of fucked up people.

Yeah.

Like, I'm sorry.

Yeah.

I don't understand that.

I don't get it at all.

Like, I don't get that.

If one of my friends in high school said to me, like, I want to kill myself, I'd be saying something right away anyway.

Yeah.

But if they added onto it, would you help me do it?

I mean, come on.

I don't get that.

I don't either.

That's fucked up.

I think it was a combination of the time period, the age of the people she was telling, where they lived, and the fact that she had been quote unquote dramatic in the past.

Just like, it's so wild to me, though, that even those factors can factor into just like, what is right and what is wrong.

Yeah.

You know?

Yeah.

But it's like, what you think is right and what you think is wrong.

That's the thing.

It's, you know?

Yeah.

You're absolutely right.

What I think is right and what I think is wrong.

You are wrong.

Like, we, I think we are right.

Yeah.

But it's, I know it's so, it's so hard.

You could be a completely different person and have a completely different view of this.

Which is, which is crazy to me.

That's just like how there's different for you pages on TikTok.

That blows my mind.

That's true.

Like, not everyone's for you pages like mine.

Yeah.

Like what?

Yeah.

Like you don't just constantly get parenting things.

No, I do.

I know you do.

Yeah, ours are very like, they are.

But sometimes you, like, you get those stitches from like another side of TikTok and you're like, that exists.

Oh yeah.

Sometimes you get real scared and you're like, am I on, and then all of a sudden the stitch comes through and you're like, okay, you're like, what did I talk about last week?

What the fuck did I just get into?

Yeah.

I think that we're going off on like side pieces here.

I'm sure it kind of feels a little bit weird, but I think it's also just us trying to get through this.

100%.

This is like very heavy.

It's very heavy.

It's a little stressful.

It is.

So back to it.

One night, Mac agreed to give Betty and another friend a ride home from school and Betty actually ended up posing the question to Mac, would he be willing to kill her?

She asked him.

Wow.

She said, and this is, this is a lot.

So if you'd like to skip forward, I understand.

She said she would be the one to hold the gun to her head and all he would have to do

is pull the trigger because she couldn't.

Oh my God.

And he assumed that she was just being melodramatic and he laughed at the suggestion, which made

Betty and her friend laugh as well.

I think at that point she was like, oh, like, no, she's like kidding, you know.

But she wasn't going to give up that easily.

That night she wrote out and signed a document that she planned to give Mac so that he could be absolved of any responsibility in the event that he was arrested for her murder.

Oh my God.

Just the sheer amount of time that she thought about this is like so sad.

Months and months.

That she was just sitting there thinking about killing herself.

Yeah.

I know that probably sounds ignorant because I'm sure that is like a lot of people's experiences.

It is.

But I'm just like, it is a lot of people's experiences.

Yeah, it's just like, but it's just like, whoa.

Like that just like thinking about that just like gave me a pit in my stomach.

It's really heavy.

Yeah.

And I think it's also, it says a lot about where she was that no adult realized what she was going through.

That's the thing though.

Like no one came to her aid.

No one was listening to these conversations.

Nobody overheard this.

Yeah.

Like what the fuck?

All the adults just failed here.

They did.

Everybody failed here.

Yeah.

They truly did.

Everybody did.

Now the next day during play practice, Betty actually pulled Mac into the prop closet and she again asked him, will you please help me?

She told him about everything that was going on at home, how lonely she had been since they broke up and how she just had no hope for the future.

And she believed that death was the only way to avoid a life of misery.

Wow.

I have to believe that she thought she was going somewhere else.

Yeah.

I don't think she thought it was everything just like so black.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

Like I think she thought she was escaping to a more beautiful place.

Yeah.

And I hope she did.

Now, maybe he still thought Betty was joking, I don't know, or maybe he felt guilty for contributing to her misery.

We'll never know.

But whatever was the case, Mac agreed to kill Betty Williams.

Okay.

Nuts.

Okay.

Nuts.

So on the evening of March 22nd, Betty waited until her parents had gone to bed and then she snuck out of the house and down the street where she actually met up with her new boyfriend, Eichnael.

Oh.

She was waiting for her in his car.

The two of them sat in his car, parked her on the corner from Betty's house for a while until Mac finally arrived to meet them.

And when Mac pulled up to Betty, or excuse me, when Mac pulled up, Betty said to Eich, oh my God, I didn't think he'd come.

Oh, man.

And she told Eich what she and Mac had been planning to do that evening.

But even when Mac's car pulled up, Eich remained convinced that she was only joking.

Guys, she is not like a stand-up comedian.

No.

Like what is this?

Like, oh, she must be joking.

Like is she just constantly joking?

Also, where's the joke?

That's the thing.

Like tell me what the punchline is here.

Like where's the funny part?

Like I'm failing to see this.

These people are shocking.

Shocking.

Like really shocking.

It's because they're teenagers.

So she opened the door and she stepped out of the car and she turned to Eich and said, I got to call this bluff even if he kills me.

Whoa.

Like she was, I think she was joking around it because I think she was probably nervous, but she was, she was ready in her own way.

Oh, that hurts my heart.

So she got in the car with Mac and Mac drove out to his family's hunting cabin in the woods.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

Betty was dressed in pajamas and a duster coat and she told Mac that she'd been thinking about this for a while and that she had even tried previously to do this herself.

She tried to take sleeping pills, but it only made her sick.

She continued her line of thinking, talking about how she was going to be sorry to leave Eich so soon after they started dating.

She allegedly told Mac how happy she was going to be dead.

Oh my God.

Like a direct quote.

It's like, did you try to convince her otherwise?

We have to hope so, but I don't know if Mac had the capacity to do that.

That's so sad.

You know, like I, I don't know him, but from what I do know of him, I just picture him sitting there like quietly and just like absorbing or maybe even disassociating, you know.

So they arrived at the hunting cabin.

They sat in the car and they talked for another 15 or 20 minutes.

But then at the same time, I actually, I guess I don't picture him just sitting there quietly because I don't think Betty would have found him to be like attractive if he just sat there quietly and like not, not giving her anything.

Yeah.

Like she, she wanted to have profound conversations.

So they talked a little bit and then Mac drove the Jeep down by the pond and parked on the shore and when they reached the pond, they both got out of the car and they started walking toward the shore, but Betty had left her duster in the Jeep and it was really cold by the water.

So she actually went back to the car to get her coat and then walked back down.

And when she came back, she removed her shoes and she told Mac she was ready and Mac told her, give me a kiss to remember you by.

She leaned in.

She kissed him.

She said, thank you, Mac.

I will always remember you for that.

She was standing there with bare feet and she took the barrel of the hunting rifle that Mac had held in his hands.

She drew it to her left temple.

She said now and Mac pulled the trigger.

Oh my God.

She was 17 years old.

Holy shit.

17 years old.

Oh my God.

That is the most chilling account I've ever heard.

I have goosebumps telling it.

Yeah.

I had goosebumps writing it.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

I've had like nightmares about this case.
I'm like picturing it in my head.
Me too.
It's playing like a movie.
It is.
It is.
It is.
This is such a haunting case.
Yeah.
Like my whole body is chilled right now.
I think this is one that will absolutely stay with me for many, many years.
That's the sadness.
And just the fact that she found somebody willing to do this.
She couldn't find someone that was willing to value her.
She could find someone that was willing to kill her.
Like how fucked is that?
Like God.
She just, man, you just want to go back in time, pick her up and just be like come live with me.
Like let's go for a drive.
Let's go.
We're going to take you somewhere where people are going to think you're fucking rad.
Let's go run away.
Yeah.
Like I'm going to get you out of this shit place.
We'll do what we need to do.
Like are you kidding me?
Ugh.
Yeah.
It's awful.
So when it was done, Mac returned to the car and this was a plan because he came with, she brought along with him, two large lead weights.
He tied them around Betty's waist and after removing his clothes, he dragged her body into the pond.
He later told reporters she sank right away.
She had 50 pounds of lead tied to her.
Okay, Mac.
He's very blunt.
Matter of fact.
Now after she sank, he returned to the car and he got dressed and he sat in the parked car with the heater running so that he could warm up.
And with all the walking back and forth, his boots had gotten muddy and he didn't want to get the interior of his Jeep dirty because priorities, I guess.
Wow.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

Like that's the fact that his head could even go there after murdering somebody.

Yeah.

Like I mean, it's just killing somebody.

Yeah.

At the very least that you could even think like, oh, like your life just goes on.

Like you don't want your car to be dirty tomorrow when you wake up and you're happy life.

Oh my God.

Like what?

And so because he didn't want his Jeep to be dirty, he left his shoes by the pond in the mud, excuse me, and they would be found by the police the next day.

Wow.

So once he was sufficiently warm, Mac drove home and went to bed.

Just went to sleep.

Just went to sleep.

A few days later after Betty's body had been recovered, reporters asked Mac how he felt about what he had done and he said, I never felt worse in my life, but I know she's better off.

She's better off?

Like she's better off dead?

Like what?

I don't know what they had to have talked about for her or for him to feel convinced that like that her life wasn't worth living.

Oh, that's the thing.

Like that's what's so shocking about this.

Like even he didn't have the capacity to look far ahead enough into the future.

Yeah.

Like he had no hope for.

Like none whatsoever.

Like how do you not see like the, the brilliance here?

I, and he did.

That's the thing.

That's why he wanted to be with her.

Yeah.

But then at the same time he was ashamed of her.

Yeah.

It's just complex.

It is.

And it only gets more complex and it only gets more fucking jaw dropping.

Oh, wow.

So on March 22nd, two days after Betty had snuck out of the house to meet Mac, her mother, Mary Williams called the police to report her daughter missing.

Two days later.

Okay.

Thank you for repeating that.

Cause for a second I was like, I think I heard that wrong.

You didn't.

Two days later.

Okay.

I don't fuck these people.

I don't know about that.

Yeah.

So the police visited the high school and with the cooperation of the school principal, they interviewed anybody who might have any information about where Betty had gone. Eventually detectives got to the casting crew of the school play, which included Betty's new boyfriend, Ike, who told the police about the exchange that he had with Betty the night he dropped her off in the alley to meet Mac herring.

No.

And it's like, Ike, it's been two days.

It's been two days and like, did you not think?

Like, I mean, she literally told you.

You haven't heard from her.

You haven't heard from her.

Like, I tells you everything you need to know.

The silence.

Come on.

So at first Mac told, and this is interesting to me.

It's just strange.

He told police that he had driven Betty home after play practice on the evening of the 20th and that he dropped her off at her front door around 8 30 p.m.

So he lied immediately.

Yeah.

Now he maintained for a little while that that was the last time he'd ever seen her.

But the more Mac talked, the more the interviewing officers noticed inconsistencies in his story. And their suspicions were enough to move their conversation from the nice familiar surroundings of the principal's office to a way more intimidating downtown police department. After about 45 minutes of additional questioning downtown, Mac finally broke down and he admitted to killing Betty.

He told the Odesa, Odesa police youth officer, Bobby McAlpine, Bobby McAlpine, he said, there is no motive.

I think I'm crazy.

Oh, yeah.

Now he later explained to the officer that during play practice two days earlier, Betty had again begged him to end her life because quote, she couldn't take living anymore like she had been living, which is so sad.

And he said he agreed to her request with the intention of talking her out of it.

But after talking with her on the way to the pond by the cabin, he decided to go through with it.

Like what?

I don't know.

I wish that we could know what the intent was, like what the conversation was in that car.

Like, bro, why do you even bring the gun?

Yeah.

Why do you even load it?

If you were going to talk her, why did you have lead weights with you?

If you were going to talk her out of it, like that's the thing.

It's like, why'd you load that gun?

If you had to bring it to show her like, I'm going through with this plan just so she would get in the car and you could talk to her, but like not loaded, but it shouldn't have been loaded.

No.

It should have been that thing where you go.

There's no gun bullets in here.

And also...

Like you're not doing this.

Parents.

Yeah.

Why is your 16-year-old son getting into his car with a hunting rifle?

That's fucking the question.

Do you want to ask the question?

Like...

And weights.

Like wouldn't you question that?

Where are the adults?

Yeah.

So to the interviewing officers, Mac's story was completely fucking unbelievable.

Yeah.

They had never seen anything and probably never would ever see anything like this again.

What sane person would shoot and kill somebody simply because they asked?

Like what?

Yeah.

But when he talked about the shooting at the pond, his story never changed and his tone never changed.

It remained flat and consistent.

So they were like, okay, we're going to drive down to the hunting cabin and like see what happens.

Yeah.

Even as they were driving down, they were still convinced that he wasn't telling the truth.

They were still skeptical when they arrived at the pond and Mac pointed toward the area where he left Betty's body.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 439: Kiss and Kill Murder

But the story became more convincing when he directed them to the shore where they found spots of blood and tissue on the ground.

Oh God.

Mm-hmm.

Now, whether because they were unconvinced or unsure where to look, the officers actually asked Mac if he would go into the pond and retrieve the body.

Whoa.

So he undressed and entered the water.

Are you kidding me?

Standing in nearly four feet of water, he signaled that he had found Betty and he reached down to grab a hold of her and dragged her back to the shore.

They just had him drag her out.

Yup.

I don't, I don't, I have literally, I don't know what to say.

This is, I don't know what to say.

By far and wide, the most brutal case that I've covered with like-

In the strangest way.

In the strangest way.

Like everything about this is bleak and brutal and fucked up.

I'm rendered speechless by that.

Mm-hmm.

And that's something.

That is something.

So he stood on the shore with the officers and told and retold the story of how, of what had happened.

And he explained that he asked Betty for a kiss to remember her by and then everything had happened.

Now, days later, the pathologist would confirm his story in the preliminary autopsy report.

It stated, the girl died from a shotgun blast which tore into the side of her head and partially decapitated her.

Oh my God.

It's a hunting rifle at point blank range.

So soon additional officers and technicians were called to the scene along with an ambulance to transport the body and a large number of photographers and reporters because this is the 50s.

Anybody can show up.

Yeah.

Or excuse me, it's the 60s.

The story was true, but to everybody in Odessa, it still seemed fucking unbelievable.

And you want to know why it seemed so unbelievable?

Oh, why?

Because Mac was such a nice boy, Elena.

Oh, my favorite thing.

No one could ever picture him doing something like that.

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One student told the reporters, I just can't see Mac.
Something terrible must have happened that drove him to do this.
Oh yeah.
He had such a bright future.
And then there were other students who confirmed at least some of Mac's story and they told reporters that Betty had also asked them to do the same thing for her.
One student claimed that Betty had even offered to pay him to.
Oh, that's horrific.
Which I don't know if that's the truth.
I think that could just be somebody wanting 15 minutes of fame.
That is horrific.
Another student said that Betty told them, I want to die, but I want to die pretty.
I don't want my face disfigured.
Oh.
Just like awful.
Which is not what happened.
No.
She claimed like literally everyone in the school play had at one time or another been asked by Betty to help with this plan.
My God.
But as one classmate put it, she had a morbid sense of humor.
Nobody took her serious, but she acted serious.
It's like, so if she was acting serious, then why did nobody take her seriously?
Yeah.
Everybody needs to have a moment with themselves here.
This story.
You've got to have a moment with a mirror and you're a therapist, whatever it is.
You've got to just have a moment.
Yeah.
So everybody recognized the tragedy and the seriousness of the situation, maybe.
But I don't really know about that.
But nobody seemed willing to say an ill word about Mack Herring.
Even Ike Nail, who was dating Betty and had literally delivered her to her fate that evening, refused to talk to reporters and the only thing he would say was anything I might say would just hurt Mack.
What the fuck is going on?
What about Betty?
What does he have on all of you?
He's popular.
Like, damn.
He's a football star and he's popular.
That's literally it.
I got to go.
He rules the fucking world in high school.

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I got to go.

So Betty's death prompted an outpouring of support for Mack.

Yep.

I was just going to say.

And that support included everything that it really shouldn't have, quote, concerned phone calls to him, visits from friends, and no seeming diminution of his popularity.

I think I said that right, by the way.

I think you did.

Yeah.

Now, while students and friends were completely shocked to learn of Betty's death, they were also surprised to learn, quote, that Mack and a lot of the other boys we knew had been spending time with Betty after they had taken their girlfriends home.

So people are shit talking her still.

Cool.

She has been killed.

She has gotten so desperate and so lonely and so sad that she begged somebody to end her life.

They agreed.

She's not here anymore.

And y'all are still talking shit when people show you who they are.

Believe them.

Oh, my God, because, yep, like it is that tells you everything you need to know.

It is beyond disgusting that this is the information they were spreading about her.

All around Odessa, it seemed the consensus was Betty was odd and provocative, the kind of girl who would do something like this.

That's what they were saying.

Jesus.

Mack, on the other hand, though, Elena, quote, Mack would break his arm before he would hurt anybody.

Then why didn't he?

So show me that broken arm.

Where's your broken arm?

Yeah.

Like, who said that?

Yeah.

He would break his arm before he hurt anybody.

He shot someone in the head, so he killed someone.

I don't know what you guys are talking about.

Jesus.

Now, after the body had been recovered and the statements had been given, John Mack Herring was taken before a justice of the peace in Kermit, where he pleaded not guilty to charge of murder with malice.

Hmm.

Now, his attorney, William Dierdrich, waived his rights to an examining trial, and he was

taken to Winkler County Jail and held on a \$10,000 bond.

He was released on bond the following day, so that tells you a lot about this, and returned home with his parents to await news of a hearing.

Good.

Like, whoa, that seems right.

Also \$10,000 back then, I actually didn't look up what it was going to say.

That must be a lot.

That was rich, rich, apparently.

Yeah.

Funeral services for Betty were held on Friday, March 24th at Odessa's Friendship Baptist Church, which pisses me off because she wouldn't have wanted that.

Attendance was at capacity.

The fact that it was at capacity, it's like she was more popular in death than she ever was in life.

And that's so fucked up.

And it just like, oh, it is just fucked up.

It really speaks to this situation and how shallow everyone is.

The preacher read a passage from the book of revelations over Betty's closed casket, and her father, filled with regret, I'm sure, wailed uncontrollably in the front pew, like lost it.

On more than one occasion, her sister had to literally hold her father back from hurling himself on top of the casket.

It's like, well, dude, you didn't give her the love she needed in her whole life.

You can't just do it now.

I think a lot of that was regretting the way that he had treated her in life and guilt.

You know?

Now elsewhere that same day, District Attorney Don Sullivan was examining a note that had been given to him by Mac's father, which he believed exonerated his son.

The letter was dated March 20th, 1961, and it was written in Betty's handwriting.

It read, and this is a lot.

I want everyone to know that what I'm about to do in no way implicates anyone else.

I say this to make sure that no blame falls on anyone other than myself.

I have depressing problems that concern, for the most part, myself.

I'm waging a war within myself, a war to find the true me, and I fear that I'm losing the battle.

So rather than admit defeat, I'm going to beat a quick retreat into the no man's land of death.

Because I have only the will, and not the fortitude necessary, a friend of mine, seeing how great is my torment, has graciously consented to look after the details.

His name is Mac Herring, and I pray he will not have to suffer for what he is doing for my sake.

I take upon myself all blame for there it lies on me alone, sincerely, Betty Williams.

She's also a brilliant writer.

She's a brilliant.

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I think she would have had a fucking phenomenal career in writing.

Oh, that's heart-wrenching, though.

And just the fact that she sat and still, there was no one knocking on her door, peaking their head in while she was writing this.

She knew there wouldn't be.

Why?

Yeah.

Why wasn't anyone there for her?

So the DA's office was hesitant to discuss the case publicly because they worried that it would affect their ongoing investigation negatively.

But the prosecutor, John Banks, did explain the seriousness of the charge to the press, and he said, I understand he got his shotgun, his lead weights, and his rope, and then picked the girl up.

This constitutes murder with malice of forethought.

Yeah.

It does.

It does.

And according to Banks, the obvious planning that went into this execution was grounds for the most serious of punishments, and as such, he was recommending to the DA that the death penalty be attached.

Yeah.

I don't know about that.

I also don't know about that.

Yeah, I don't think that was a good idea.

I don't either.

Now, as weeks went by, the DA's office really wrestled with how to go forward, because Mack had confessed to the killing, but his explanation still to everybody seemed completely far-fetched and completely unbelievable, because by all accounts, he was this normal boy who did really great in school, never caused anybody trouble.

The principal of the high school literally told reporters, if I were asked to name my most cooperative student, I would pause a minute and then say Mack Herring.

Wow.

Like, wow.

And it's also so sad that everybody is talking about Mack and what a great person he is.

Cool.

He's still here.

You guys can tell him that later.

Yeah, exactly.

Anybody want to say a word about Betty?

Yeah.

A kind word.

Why don't we let Mack get through his murder trial?

Yeah.

We can wait on the compliments, and then why don't we talk about Betty while we wait?

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Maybe.

No.

No, other school officials had to chime in too, because they felt similarly.

Oh, yeah.

They referred to Mack as fairly quiet, very friendly, well-liked, and real clean cut.

Oh, yeah.

Always has a haircut.

You know what?

I feel like school officials in the 50s and 60s just loved a football player.

In the 50s and 60s?

Just loved a football player.

In the 50s and 60s?

Like, it was still the case when I was in school.

It's like he was well-liked, and it's like, oh, okay.

He could tackle someone and catch and throw.

Woo!

Wowie-kazowie.

Yeah, it's just, ugh, America.

Now even Betty's parents told the police and the press that they had actually always liked Mack, and in the months since Betty's death, her father's quote, Hart, was too filled with grief to harbor hate for the slayer of his daughter.

Oh, that's just sad.

It is really sad.

I feel badly that he had to spend the rest of his life wondering what had happened.

Not wondering what had happened, but living with guilt.

Yeah, living with the whole situation.

So the sentiment among the students was also similar.

One girl said, we must feel sorry for Mack now.

We can feel sorrow for Betty later.

Go fuck yourself.

And what about that makes sense?

We have to feel, we have to show up for Mack right now, worry about Betty later.

It's like, oh, that seemed to always be the fucking issue, y'all.

That's why we're here right now.

Yeah, worry about Betty later.

Like, I hope you stub your toe later.

Now, others just didn't even bother to mask their bias.

One day, literally like barely after Betty had died, her uncle overheard another guy, overheard a guy tell another guy, everyone knew that girl was no good.

She tricked that boy into killing her.

Oh my God.

But like, what was the trick?

Is this sound like footloose?

What's going on?

It sounds like it.

Like Jesus.

I think it kind of was like that.

Yeah.

Also like, but like, what's the trick?

She tricked him into doing this.

Well, that's the thing.

It's like, okay.

She tricked him into getting the lead weights.

Like, well, and it's like, she's got the ultimate punishment here.

She's gone.

Like what?

Like what?

Ridiculous.

Yeah.

Also, he's a hunter.

He knows what happens when you pull a trigger.

I don't know where the trick lies.

Now, despite the disbelief and bewilderment from staff and students and law enforcement and the press and every investigating officer ever, people couldn't help but notice how seemingly unaffected Mac was by everything, specifically investigating officers.

As he told the story to these officers on the night after his arrest, Officer McAlpine was completely put off by his flat, emotionless tone, while he literally told of killing his former girlfriend.

Seriously?

Officers who had accompanied Mac to the location of the body, they were also disturbed by his lack of emotion.

One highway patrol officer recalled, it didn't move him when he pulled her body out of the water or when he said that he had put a shotgun to her head.

My God, something's wrong there.

Something's deeply wrong.

Now, his seemingly remorseless attitude also struck reporters as unusual.

The swell of character references and just support for Mac really didn't align with somebody who had just killed another person without explanation.

And the descriptions of him didn't match the flat, remorseless killer who had been cooperating since day one.

He was like a dichotomy in and of himself.

Yeah.

Now, according to the sheriff, Bill Eddins, he said, something's missing somewhere.

You don't just take people out and shoot them like rabbits.

No, that's exactly how I feel.

Something is very much missing here.

Some kind of human empathy and compassion piece of this.

But the lack of motive was holding up the case from progressing to trial.

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But that also didn't stop anybody from speculating as to the reason for the death. Officers in the sheriff's department actually started to speculate that Betty wanted to restart her relationship with Mac and was asking classmates to kill her so that she could gain some kind of sympathy from Mac and win his love back.

Wow.

Now, their theory, if you can even call it that, suggested that this entire thing was just a melodramatic game rather than a serious desire to end her life, which she went through with.

Which she went through with, yeah.

And the students at Odessa High, they had similar theories.

They said this whole thing, they were like, I think it was a joke.

I think it all started as a joke with Mac and Betty trying to outbluff each other.

What?

They said, and then he must have just cracked up and killed Betty.

Like, what?

But he's a great guy, so don't think anything different.

Awesome, dude.

Yeah.

Now, after months of looking for any kind of explanation for Betty's death, the DAA's office finally gave up looking and they just filed papers to take the case to trial.

Now on June 23rd, 1961, Judge G. C. Olson of the 109th District Court set the trial date for September 18th.

There were all kinds of delays, all kinds of holdups, but finally, his trial got underway in mid-February of 1962.

Wow.

Now, because he had confessed to the killing, the question at hand was if he was of sound mind at the time of the killing and could be held accountable or not.

His defense team filed a motion to have a sanity hearing held separately from the murder charge, which was actually granted by the judge on the grounds that if Mac was deemed insane at the time of the killing, he could not be held accountable and then they wouldn't have to have a criminal trial.

Okay.

Now, the DAA's office immediately objected and they filed a motion to have Mac evaluated by a psychiatrist who was far more qualified than a jury to determine sanity, but the judge actually rejected the motion.

What?

Isn't that bananas?

There it is.

No, the jury can do it.

No.

In opening remarks, the defense team took the position that no sane person would do what Mac had done, and through evidence and testimony, they said they would show that he was just a tool in Betty Williams' scheme.

Oh, so now she's scheming.

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To end her life.

Yeah, she's dead, but now she's scheming.

Let's totally slander her in court now.

Now, the prosecution, on the other hand, told the jury, and this is a quote, John Mac Haring planned, prepared, and executed a horrible offense and was of sound mind at the time. This was a cold-blooded, premeditated murder.

And Dan Sullivan said that to the jury, and then he added that the prosecution was going to prove as much by demonstrating that John Mac Haring was cool and rational just one day after the killing.

Yeah.

Sounds like he was.

He literally was.

Now, opening statements were followed by a ton of character witnesses testifying on Mac's behalf, because everybody was just dying.

Yada, yada, yada.

He's so great.

There was also a handwriting analyst verifying Betty's letter to the police, and Dr. Marvin Grice, a psychiatrist, who actually had evaluated Mac on multiple occasions and the days after the killing was also there.

And he told the jury that he believed Mac was insane at the time of the killing.

He noted that he believed Mac was, quote, suffering from gross stress reaction at the time of the tragedy.

And he said, based on his discussions with Mac, Grice concluded that Betty was, quote, in a condition of death wish, and that her persistent request led Mac to being dethroned of his reasoning.

What?

And his professional opinion was then echoed by nine character witnesses who were mostly students.

Yeah.

That agreed, Mac was not in his right mind at the time of the murder.

Like, cool, we're just going to take a bunch of 17-year-olds' words for it.

Yeah, I was going to say, all right.

Cool.

Well, not as a psychiatrist or a psychologist supposed to diagnose anybody that you've never seen.

No.

Exactly.

The psychiatrist had never seen Betty.

That's 101.

Had never seen Betty.

So how was he supposed to talk about her frame of mind?

Yeah.

Ridiculous.

Now, on cross-examination, he admitted he hadn't even talked to Betty's parents or

friends, and he was basing his understanding of Betty's emotional state entirely on interviews with Mac and some of the handful of students that had visited him for treatment.

That are obsessed with him.

Cool.

He said that.

That sounds like a great pool to choose from for totally unbiased reviews.

Like you haven't even spoken to her family, dude.

He said that her persistent pleadings, that's what he called them, had caused Mac to become, quote, so mixed up and so sick that he felt pulling the trigger was what he should do for her.

He was deprived of the power of applying logic.

Wow.

No.

Did you limber up before you stretched that far?

He was deprived of the power of applying logic.

Literally no one can do that to you.

If you have a way of like figuring something out, you do.

Yeah.

Or you don't.

Like you could apply logic if it's there.

And he's implying that it was Betty who robbed him of that.

Skemen.

And it's like, oh, so we're just going to keep stiff, like just, it's all Betty's fault.

Yeah.

So everybody was just coming on the stand to being like, well, she was dramatic and she was always saying this stuff and blotty, blotty, blotty, blotty, blotty.

So like the gossip that began circulating in the wake of Betty's death and the communities rushed to support Mac, the defense's case relied heavily on victim blaming to just absolve Mac of any kind of responsibility.

Under normal circumstances, he was a good boy who would have gone above and beyond to help anybody, they all said.

It was only after Betty's ceaseless, melodramatic badgering that he lost the power to apply logic.

Ugh.

And it's like, no one's really arguing here that much about like whether this is how it happened that like Betty asked and he did it.

Yeah.

No one's really arguing that.

Or arguing is, are you fucking kidding me that someone asks you to kill them and you do it?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Like that's honestly the pure thing that we're really looking at here.

No one's really arguing that Betty was suicidal, that she had expressed suicidal ideation.

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That she had asked several people to help her do this, including Mac several times. The problem here is that all those people said no and you said yes.

Yup.

And then you did it.

Like that's, that's where the problem lies.

That's a problem.

Like nobody does that.

And now the problem is that we're relying on a bunch of 17 year olds to say whether he was sane or not.

Exactly.

Like do you even know what sane means at 17 years old?

I sure didn't.

No.

No.

Like Mac was actually called to testify on his own behalf and the prosecution asked him, when was it that you lost contact with reality?

Excuse me.

What?

Objection leading the witness.

Thank you.

Like Jesus Christ.

Mac couldn't recall.

He said, he had no idea.

Cause he was like, cause I didn't.

Like that.

I don't know what that means.

Exactly.

He was also pretty evasive when Sullivan pointed out that he had told at least one person his girlfriend, his current girlfriend that he planned to kill Betty.

So this suggested that at some point before it happened, Mac knew he was going to kill Betty, which meant that he wasn't insane at the time of the murder because he was full well planning to do it days before and actually told his girlfriend that he was, wow, and she didn't do anything either.

These are, so he was like, Sullivan was like, what's the deal with that?

And Mac responded, I didn't, uh, I didn't know as you speak of knowing, I didn't want to kill Betty.

I just wanted to help her.

What?

You know what?

Maybe all these people do need Jesus.

I don't know.

Like something's, something's awry.

Well, like, what does that mean?

I didn't know as you speak of knowing what are you, Dr. Seuss, like what is this?

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He also testified that Betty had asked him on three separate occasions if she, if he would kill her, and he estimated this consumed a total of some 28 minutes.

So this prompted Sullivan to ask, in 28 minutes, was she able to wear you down and dethrone you of your reason?

And Mac replied, no, sir.

Wow.

So that tells you everything you need to know, people.

He admitted it.

He admitted it.

Like 28 minutes on, like over the course of multiple days, you were not 28 minutes.

That was just, I think he literally pulled that out of thin air.

Now the jury deliberated for almost 11 hours.

And at one point they even sent the judge a note saying that they had become hopelessly deadlocked.

Wow.

And the judge responded by telling them that the note was premature.

It's been like nearly 11 hours.

And he said, the evidence presented during the trial would indicate that further deliberation of this matter might result in further progress being made.

Okay.

So he's basically saying, like, if you deliberate too much in this matter, we might go forward to a criminal trial.

I think that's exactly what he was trying to say.

Now Mac literally disagreed with the psychiatrist assessment of his temporary insanity.

But the jury returned a verdict finding that he was temporarily insane when he fired the bullet that ended Betty Williams life.

That's bananas.

So when the verdict was read, Mac's family erupted into tears and applause.

But before the judge even-

Into applause.

Into applause.

That is so fucked up.

So disrespectful.

Yeah.

So disrespectful.

But before the judge finished reading the verdict, John Banks, the attorney for the prosecution, objected and moved that a mistrial be declared on the grounds that the jury had made a mistake in filling out the forms.

But Judge Olsen immediately denied that.

Wow.

So.

Shocked.

So in the wake of the verdict, the DA, Don Sullivan actually filed an appeal of the ruling, arguing that Mac Haring had been indicted for murder and that Judge Olsen didn't have

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the jurisdiction to set aside the indictment and pursue only the question of the sanity.
Yeah.

Like a whole mistrial, basically.

Essentially, he was arguing that Mac's sanity should have been a factor for consideration when it was determining whether or not he was guilty or innocent, but saying that the court never had the jurisdiction to determine that factor separate from the trial in the first place, making the verdict completely illegitimate.

Boom.

So after hearing the case, the state Supreme Court agreed with the district attorney's office, reverse the verdict, and prompted a new trial for Mac.

Damn.

And it was as though the first trial didn't take place.

So the retrial started on December 2nd, 1962 in, I think it's Beaumont, Texas.

Yeah, I think you're right.

Cool.

I didn't look it up.

Yeah.

The judge was on one count of murder with Malice, and if he were to be found guilty, he could receive the death penalty that was still on the table.

Again, he was represented by the same counsel, and basically, everybody was the same.

The DA was the same, Mac had the same lawyer, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Yeah.

Also, this was Dan Sullivan, the district attorney, his second murder trial.

Oh my God.

This is your second murder trial?

The first one was Mac's previous trial.

Wow.

Yeah.

Now, from the jump, it was clear that this trial was going to go exactly the same as the first one had gone.

That sucks.

The defense team's position was that Mac did shoot Betty, but only after she had worn him down by repeatedly begging him to do so.

It was literally the same trial over and over again.

Now, once again, though, Betty's letter absolving Mac of responsibility was the anchor for the defense.

And as was the testimony of Mac's dad, O.H. Herring, so you know he's rich, his name is O.H.

O.H.

He told the jury his son, quote, was a happy boy before, always smiling.

Now that old smile is missing, it's not there.

It's like he's trying to make up for the sorrow he's caused.

Good.

I was going to say, I hope he is.

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Bully for him?

I don't, okay.

So Mac's mother just basically echoed her husband's testimony and told the jury that she had directly asked her son whether or not he had done it.

And he said, I must have, as if he couldn't remember.

Oh, okay.

So she was trying to be like, he wasn't saying.

Yeah, he blacked out.

Now, even though the arguments from both sides were pretty much the same as they had been in the first trial, the second trial quickly became a media circus.

There were multiple occasions where the defense objected to a certain seemingly innocuous piece of evidence that was being admitted, but later on they asked that that same piece of evidence be admitted for no other reason than to just undermine and manipulate the public's view of it.

So they're just like gaslighting people.

They're like, get out of here.

That does nothing.

And then they're like, bring that back on in.

Why did you take that out?

Why would you do that?

Awesome.

At one point, the judge also seemed to think that district attorney Sullivan was implying that the court wasn't being fair because he'd spoken out against the defense's court romantics, and the judge told him that he would hold him in contempt of court for three days if he ever suggested anything like that again.

Holy shit.

I'm like, you guys are losing sight of what we're here for.

You guys got to chill.

Now, aside from the antics, it was all the same.

There was no new information or evidence, so it was hard to imagine any kind of different outcome.

And there wasn't.

After deliberating for several hours, the jury delivered a verdict of not guilty.

Now, for a time, it seemed like there would be another deadlock jury, especially when the judge ruled that the jury couldn't review the transcript of the witness testimony when they requested it.

That's shady.

I don't think that's OK.

Yeah.

But the next day, they all reached a unanimous decision.

And upon hearing a verdict, Max parents rushed to the jury box and started thanking the jury, telling them, it's going to be a merry Christmas.

Wow.

Not for Betty's family.

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But thanks.

And her father, on the other hand, was overheard to mutter, it is a gross miscarriage of justice, which it is.

I agree.

So it's just awful.

Now, from the moment Betty was pulled from the pond, where she was literally weighted down and dumped by somebody that she had loved once.

The residents of Odessa, both young and old and everything in between, they had already made up their minds about what had happened, why it happened, and who was to blame.

Mac was just a normal kid, played football, got good grades.

He was always quick to help when anybody needed anything.

But Betty, she was challenging, she was defiant, she was a progressive misfit.

And worst of all, she engaged in sex.

Oh, worst of all, now, in the absence of an explanation, the people of Odessa, and pretty much all of Texas, maybe, did what they had always done.

They just assumed that whatever had happened, it was almost certainly Betty's fault.

They said she had harassed Mac to the point that he was powerless to apply reason, and he would never have done this if she hadn't been so manipulative.

Wow.

Yeah.

Wow.

Now, the truth is, the only person who really knows why Mac pulled the trigger is Mac.

And he died in 2019.

Oh.

So his motive will likely remain a mystery.

Wow.

But what we can say is, regardless of what she thought she wanted or what Mac felt like the right thing was, Betty's death could have been avoided if even one fucking person, one fucking person, was there to help and responded to her with sympathy, compassion, and a solution, instead of literally rolling their eyes at her or laughing at her.

Mac obviously fired the gun that ended Betty's life.

But when all was said and done, it's really hard to say who should take all the responsibility for her murder.

Yeah.

Because I don't think it's just Mac alone.

No.

I don't think so either.

I think where she lived is responsible.

Yeah.

I think her home life was responsible.

I think teachers were responsible.

Students were.

It was a systematic failure on every level.

Exactly.

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I think everybody felt her.
And this is quite possibly the saddest case I have ever personally covered.
That is unbelievably tragic.
Isn't it?
And I had never heard of this case before.
No.
I had never heard of it.
Dave brought it to my attention.
So shout out to freaking Dave.
Shout out to fucking Dave.
He's amazing.
This story, I can't believe I've never heard of this story.
I know.
Me either.
Like truly wild.
It's so sad.
I feel like we're going to be talking about this for like months.
I know.
It's so sad.
So it's all about the poor Betty.
Yeah.
So guys, that was really heavy.
Yeah.
Obviously.
So we're going to be back with Listener Tales in a couple days.
Please go do something that makes you happy.
And if you are struggling right now, please know that there are people out there that you can talk to.
Yes.
And it's going to get better.
You can talk to anybody.
Yeah.
But someone will help you.
Someone is around that will care about you.
Exactly.
And yeah, that is the case of Betty Williams.
also known again as the kiss and kill murder, which is so fucked up.
Yeah.
But we love you and we hope you keep listening.
And we hope you keep it weird.
I don't think I need one to close this out.
You don't.
I think you all know not to keep it as weird as any of that.
It'll get better, everyone.

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