

Choking on Dust and Lies

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Choking on Dust and Lies

by [MelonHeadzzz](#)

Summary

As the 1989 Pep Rally at Westerberg High School stomps on, Jason Dean (J.D. for short) wrestles with a Norwegian-style explosive. But, that bomb is not the only one. There are dozens more powerful than it just above him, strapped to the stands of the WHS gym. With a croquet mallet in hand, a dead girl walking marches to stop him, but her hope may be dashed just as easily as she was able to fool Jason Dean that she was dead. All that stands between his failure and her oblivion, is a Colt Python.

or

What if J.D. got what he wanted?

Notes

Ch. 1 Notes

Hey-hey! This is the first fiction I've worked on that isn't a bunch of short stories, so I'm happy you're here to read it!

- Please feel free to give whatever feedback you'd like, positive or negative. It helps me grow as a writer no matter what.

Enjoy!

and i'm not sorry. >:)

Chapter 1: Trigger Finger

The air smelled of heat, and the pipes that kept hot water running through the halls of Westerberg High School thrummed. The sound of pounding feet in a boisterous rhythm sent tremors through the concrete above him, as Jason Dean was hard at work in the bowels of this teenage hell. Steam hissed and steel rattled as J.D. pressed a brick of metal filled with explosive material onto a load-bearing post on the ceiling. The heat down here was so intense, it almost made him gag. With a roll of black electrical tape in his grasp, he wrapped lines across the stalk of his contraption, sticking it right on a metal post.

All he could think about was Veronica, with his rage simmering in his chest. Dead? How could she, after everything that she'd done for him, that he'd done for her? J.D. helped her, showed her what they were capable of, opened up like she asked him to, and not even *she* could stay with him. But, just like Bud the Bomber -- the father who made J.D. into the man he was -- he would destroy alone, like it was really meant to be.

She called me a poison pill.

J.D. punched in a few numbers on a jury-rigged calculator wired to a timer: **2:45**. - the Norwegian was set. The note was in place. Or, rather, *notes*. He didn't know how large the explosion was really going to be. He couldn't risk them burning up, so just to be safe, he made copies but mailed the original to the local news station. First, the shock. The awe would come tomorrow.

There was an industrial squeal somewhere, but J.D. couldn't tell what it was from. The pipes would squeal, sometimes - steam would make its way out of the metal rivets, but this sounded different. This was longer. This squeal didn't come from a pipe. When he looked at where the noise came from, the door was wide open.

"Step away from the bomb." And, there she stood, back from the dead. Dressed in that blue suit with stuffed shoulder-pads crossed buttons, those argyle socks. Her pendant was looser than it normally was, and her dress shirt collar was mangled and creased. Her hair was a mess. Held in her grip, tight, was a croquet mallet.

I knew that noose was too loose.

Everything came back so fast. Her voice washed over his ears with a wave of prickles consuming him. J.D. was consumed by so much at once. Hate, sadness, determination, joy - like a snowstorm, it fuzzed his thoughts even as he snapped his body around to stare at her. His coat draped beneath him, staring at her through the strands of hair that hung in his face. But, above it all, it was her words that conquered his mind the most. A bomb?

Oh, darling, if you only knew what else there was. "This little thing?" What started as a calm exhale bubbled out of control into a stifled, wheezing laugh laced in disbelief. "I'd hardly call this a *bomb*! This is just to trigger the packs of thermals upstairs in the gym!"

Veronica's eyes yawned wider, before twisting into a sharper look that J.D. could only translate as determination. " *Those* are bombs." She said nothing, but he could tell she had a lot to say. She was choosing her words, choosing when to say them. He knew her more than he knew himself. "People," he began, another stifled laugh leaving him before his tirade blossomed, "are going to see the *ashes* of Westerberg High School and think: 'oh, there's a school that self-destructed not because society doesn't *care*, but because that school *was* society!'"

J.D.'s hand rose, jabbing a finger into the ceiling. Something in him told him that this was the chance for her to change her mind. Right there, something screamed, she's right there. Come back, something ordered, come back to me. Be *us* again.

She needs more convincing.

"The only place that Heathers and Marthas can get along, is in *heaven!*" So why not be their Saint Peter, the Something wanted him to say. But, Veronica, with the swing of her croquet mallet into her hand, interjected.

"I wish your mom had been a little stronger," she snapped forward. Her voice was gentle, small at first. J.D. rose his head, the crooked smile on his face souring. "Tch—what?"

"I wish she'd stayed around a little longer."

It soured even more, the more she tried to talk. His face twisted into a scowl, piercing her with dagger-like eyes. "Don't talk about my mom."

"I wish your dad was good! I wish grown-ups understood!" Her voice broke as her rage unleashed. Rage at the world, rage at their circumstances, rage at all that brought them here. But, Something turned its coat. It didn't want her back anymore, like the flip of a switch. His hand drifted into his jacket, as his hand nursed the cold steel of a Colt Python.

Tears welled in her eyes as she clenched the mallet tighter. "I wish we'd met before they convinced you life was war!" Veronica's hand shot out, her eyes shining in the stark lights of the boiler room, almost steaming with how hot it was down there. "I wish you'd come with me!" she barked with pleading, tear-filled eyes. J.D. looked at it like it was some alien gesture, staring at her outstretched hand with confusion, at first. Then, with amusement. Did she really think he was that stupid, to believe her? And do what, turn themselves in? Give a free pass to the cannibals that devour people? Right when they were so close?

With heft, J.D. retorted. His arm swung out, fingers tightly wrapped around the handle of the Colt. There was a sharp click that came from his hammer while his eyes burned with the heat of thermite. " *I wish I had more TNT.*" Aiming high, the barrel stared Veronica down, pointed right at the bridge of her nose.

Veronica was the first to swing. Her mallet, that flimsy little thing, swiped in front of his face. Before he could pull the heavy Python's trigger, it came clattering out of his hand. His head shot aside, trying to follow the shining chrome revolver before she lunged with the mallet.

The mallet's anvil jabbed into his stomach as J.D. doubled over, spit flinging from him as he clenched his pain-throbbing hand tight to his stomach.

All the while, above their heads, the students who were none-the-wiser to the battle that raged beneath them chanted and cheered, stamping their feet and singing their fight-song. *"Hey-yo, Westerberg! Tell me, what's that sound?"*

Clouded by steam, Veronica rushed to grab J.D.'s revolver off of the ground. The cylinder had fallen open, and while fiddling with it, she tried to smack it back in and pull back the hammer. J.D. rushed up, hands outstretched - he grasped a clump of hair tight in his fists, dragging her back as Veronica let out a scream.

Stomp-stomp, CLAP! *"Here comes Westerberg! Comin' to put 'chu in the ground!"* Stomp-stomp, CLAP!

J.D. threw her aside, sending her slamming into a stack of paint cans that sent them tumbling all across the floor. He stumbled over them, and Veronica used it as her chance to scramble. She was going for the bomb.

"Go-go, Westerberg! Give a great big yell!"

J.D. backpedaled while Veronica rose to meet face-to-face with the bomb on the stalk, fingers picking at the electrical tape. He scooped up the Colt from the ground, the steel resting in his grip as he charged for Veronica, stomping across the concrete. Veronica strafed aside, only to kick him square in the chest when J.D. began to storm forth. His center of mass disrupted, he fell to his knees. Veronica lunged for the Colt, her hand on the receiver to try and wrench it from his grip. Sweat and steam swarmed in the air as the final vestiges of their struggle boiled over into a deadly arm-wrestling match.

"Westerberg--"

...their wrists fought to twist the revolver to either side...

"--will knock you out--"

...their fingers fenced to wedge into the trigger guard until...

"--and send you straight to--"

Someone pulled the trigger.

Red.

J.D. watched the color drain from her face in exchange for a deep red that spread from a single spot on her chest to almost all of her torso. He rose, staring at the sanguine hue that swept over her stomach while Veronica slumped on the ground. “You promised me.”

His hand reached for her jaw, holding her head up while J.D. stood. He heaved a few breaths. “It’s alright,” he whispered, his voice dripping with venom dusted in sugar. “Soon, everything will be okay.” Blood dripped from the corners of her mouth, Veronica’s eyes shimmering with tears, using her last ounce of strength to stare daggers into him. “Don’t look at me like that. You know, deep down, that this is how things had to be.”

He let go, stepping back from the wounded woman. His boots creaked on the concrete as he held the Python tight. Its rattle shook in his mind, as if the pistol itself was speaking to him, demanding to fire. It shook in his ears as his arm rose, the hand of death pointing right between her eyes. “You had your chance to fix things. We could’ve made things better, Veronica, to forge the revolution that people like Ms. Fleming were crying about. But you had to *throw it all away!*”

Veronica spat with fury in her tone, blood flicking onto his leather coat. “You think,” she gasped, “you’re some rebel!?” Veronica crawled for him, limping over the ground. J.D. backpedaled, the Python still raised. It was rattling louder to match her voice - “you’re not. You’re not a rebel! You’re just *fucking psychotic!*”

CRACK!

One bullet, right into her head. Veronica went slack; she fell forward, arm reaching across the floor. Blood splattered onto his shirt, onto the walls, on the floor beneath her. Her brown hair splayed on the ground as the red got worse and worse. Her blood pooled, soaking into the leather of his boots. The rattling stopped, and all that remained was the rhythmic pounding of feet. “You should watch your mouth next time, baby.”

Adrenaline kicked back in as a flash of realization trembled through his brain. He was running out of time. His eyes flicked over to the Norwegian; 45. Fuck. J.D. backpedaled, stuffing his Python into his jacket, rushing up the stairs. He flicked off the blood from his boot, turning and throwing the boiler room’s door open. 35. With hands stuffed into his pockets, he watched the Westerberg cheerleaders dance and leap, twirling through the air, dancing the dance of death. Principal Gowan was clapping and howling, Coach Ripper was punching into his fist to keep his athletes sharp and focused. Heather McNamara rose into the air like an angel, only to fall back into her cheerleader friends. Heather Duke – that damned false hydra, the one who couldn’t hope to have the same power as Chandler before her – crossed her arms, looking as bored as ever. He wanted *her* dead more than anyone.

20. J.D. spun on his heel, letting his hands free from his pockets to cut through the air as he ran. He crossed down the hallway as signs, trophy cabinets, mascot paintings, pictures,

diplomas hung on the walls passed him by. Society, because of him, would all fall away. 15. Down the steps J.D. rushed, along the path so many lost souls walked, but it was *he* who would travel against them all. 10.

He flung the doors open, rushing down the steps, his boots rushing as he went. Out in front, he'd parked stark-black motorbike, the same bike that had been his source of freedom. That bike was one of the few constants, one where J.D. truly felt at home. 5. As it sputtered to life, J.D. swiped the kickstand with his boot, unleashing the rumbling of an engine as he sped down the street.

And then the Lord said, "let there be light."

J.D. turned back to watch the fireball. First came the light, as he screeched to a halt in the street, peering at its black and orange beauty. Then, came the noise. The eruption tore a sound-wave through the school, it almost threw J.D. right off of his bike.

And, it was fan-fucking-tastic.

Chapter 2: Competition

Chapter Summary

At home, J.D. revels in the truth of what he's done in secret to not spur on any suspicion. We explore more of the life that he and Bud share, and we meet J.D.'s pet rat Gloria. Be warned, for here be parental abuse.

Chapter Notes

Chapter two is here! I'm riding the high of the prologue and getting into the nitty-gritty, so I hope you enjoy!

Exploring more about J.D. that we didn't get in the movie was fun, I had to rewatch a bunch of clips to get an understanding of what J.D.'s room layout may have been like, and in my research I caught that he had a pet rat, so I couldn't not include them! I named her after a book that you can see on J.D.'s bookshelf in the Heathers movie, *Linden Hills* by Gloria Naylor.

As shown in the summary, Here Be Abuse, so be warned, and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Bud got a new T.V. When J.D. came home, released the kickstand from his bike, and stepped into his unfinished frame of a house – the house that they half-built to stay in while Bud Dean Construction was here – Bud was hunched over a black, boxy console television. *PANASONIC* was embossed right below the screen, a corporate symbol for all to see. The VCR's blue-screen was on, only it wasn't blue. It was bright gray. Something was up. J.D. cleared his throat:

“Well, hey there, sport. Sorry I'm late, you know how work is,” J.D. stuffed his keys into his jacket pocket, talking in that classic, fake-father tone that they'd grown to love-hate. Ever since the death of his mom, things had fallen apart. Without her, Bud was a child. He was obsessed with explosions, the rush of life, and the beloved *big ka-boom*, whereas J.D. was the one forced to pick up after the house, to be the real adult. Bud made the money, sure, but J.D. was the one who did anything with it. J.D. was the reason they had a place to stay in in the first place, and he was just seventeen.

“Oh. Hey, dad! Welcome home; I was getting worried, I heard a *boom* outside. Thought it might've been you.” He gave a low, sadistic chuckle (to imply that his son would have exploded), before returning to his work. Bud hadn't looked at his son yet, too focused on the

T.V. He let out a grunt, before punching the bottom of his fist into the top of the black box. The cathode-rays flickered, wincing in pain as Bud laid down haymaker after haymaker. “Well, don’t get *too* mad at the poor thing. It’s not its fault it’s not in color.”

Bud snapped a frustrated glare up at J.D. “Don’t patronize me, kid. It’s *supposed* to come in color. But it’s not,” *smack*, “fucking,” *smack*, “working!” As Bud kept striking the top of the T.V., too focused on it to notice J.D. meddling, J.D. looked around the front for a color correction knob. Across the front console, there it was. It was all the way down. So, he twisted it back up, and the VCR’s home screen gradually changed to beautiful, brilliant blue. J.D. knocked his nails on the glass screen of the television. Bud’s attention rose, staring at the now-azure screen.

He shoved him back with the palm of his hand, his lip lifted in a snarl. “Back up. I know what I’m doing. Tryin’ to teach me somethin’ I already know - if you wanna fuck around, go do it outside. I don’t want you breaking *this* T.V., too.” J.D. pushed his tongue against his top teeth, glaring at him. Bud’s stare didn’t break. “I said, *back up*.” Bud flinched at him - within a moment, J.D.’s mind was overclocked. Every minute of every day of resistance against *him* came to life, and every mental training course he’d forced himself to endure came back. Before he could even see what he was doing, J.D.’s hands were placed in an x-shaped guard in front of his face. Peering above the guard of his arms, he watched Bud’s face twist into a villainous smirk. “We’re all good down here, pop. Why don’t you go rest your old bones?”

J.D. tilted his head up, taking in a sharp breath. He reached into his coat pockets. He could feel the steel of the Python in his hand, running over its engravings. His heart pounded, eyes flashed with rage, flickering. Like a fuse, his anger sparked, as the explosion that could end this whole relationship *right-fucking-now* was about to blow. But, as quick as it came, the fuse snuffed out. J.D. pulled his hand out of his coat pocket, letting it go. Now wasn’t the time. And then, there was just Bud’s face, crooked and smirking, eyes simmering even so. Finally, in the softest voice he’d heard Bud in a long time, he growled out a “you think you’re *so* fuckin’ tough.”

He had enough - J.D. spun, stomping his way up the stairs into his bedroom. But, even so, his voice followed him up. “And, hey!” he called, snapping his finger and pointing after him, “wash your shirt! You look like a pig, and I’m not raisin’ no lard-ass.”

J.D. slammed the door to his room shut. It was silent for a while. With his back pressed to the door, J.D. slowly twitched his head to the right, listening through the thin wood. Slamming your door was one of those 50/50 moments, moments where you knew that if you did something at the wrong time, you were about to have a *bad time*. With bated breath, he waited. And waited. No noise; he was in the clear. He let his mind free, free to think. What was that about his shirt?

J.D. looked down and... oh, goddamn it. All over his t-shirt, what was once pure gray was now covered in splatters of red. He flung off his coat – falling louder than normal when his revolver hit the floor – before dragging off his shirt, balling it up, and tossing it into his closet as if it wasn’t a shirt with its entire front splattered in blood. Veronica’s blood.

Before he could sit and think about the weight of what he'd done, he heard scratching. J.D. stood, following it. It was Gloria, his rat. She was a sleek, white rat with dark, beady eyes - the story goes that she was due to be shipped off to a laboratory, but she wasn't heavy enough to be counted as part of a control group. So, instead, she was gifted to a pet store in Bismarck, North Dakota and she stuck around ever since. J.D. felt for Gloria. She wasn't perfect, and so she thrown out by the world she was supposed to call home. Just like him. Her food bowl was empty; ripping another bag open, he poured out a bowl of some rat kibble for her to snack on. In the silence of his room, he sat and watched her eat. Outside of his window, he could hear the howling of sirens. They were far from here, but something told him he knew exactly where they were, sweeping down Russell Road to find the beauty that lay waiting for them at Westerberg. But, the beauty was interrupted when Bud's voice accosted J.D.'s ears from below.

"Hey, pop! What's for dinner?"

J.D. was hunched over the stove, stirring a pot of boiling water. In it, wisps of blonde pasta stirred, festering in the buttery water. Around the corner, he heard the sounds of an explosion coming out of the T.V., and what sounded like a voice coming out of the tinny speakers. The air smelt of beer, soaked into the carpet and couch cushions, and he knew that meant one thing. Bud was probably out there, in the living room, reflecting on the old glory days. The glory days he'd recorded, anyway. Dynamite, C4's, Primasheets, Semtex...

Norwegians.

"Say, uh... *champ* ," he craned his neck around the corner, trying to catch peeks at the T.V. screen, "what'cha watchin'?" There was a twinge of excitement behind his tone, listening to Bud's uncharacteristically uninterested tone.

"Bah, just some bullshit. Guess we've got demolition competition in-town, sport; gotta up our game. Jimenez is *not* gonna be happy, let me tell you." J.D. emerged from the kitchen, staring at the screen. And, there he saw it. Westerberg High School. Or, what was left of it, anyway. It looked like it was still smoldering, the remains covered in ash. Fire and black smoke spewed from the gas lines ruptured and set alight. Glass windows were shattered, the doors were all wide open; some were even thrown off of their hinges. And, he saw no one in sight. No one that mattered, anyway.

"Well, you can hear them talking, right? Turn it up." J.D. leaned on the pillar that stood beside the couch, looking on with an all-too-excited look on his face.

Bud buzzed his lips, reaching for the remote for the television. "You're the boss, kid," he sighed with a voice that smelled like eye-rolls. The voice, clearer and louder now, continued from its indentured silence.

“—*is unknown the true number of casualties as a result of this explosion, but none have yet emerged from the wreckage.*” On the screen, firefighters with patched shoulders and protective gear sprayed hoses into the burning building. Long, wide shots of the building’s destruction were dominating the screen. “*But, as we look back at the ruins of this local high school, we can only pray, however unlikely, that no one has been harmed.*”

“Hey—. Hey, this was your school, wasn’t it?” Bud motioned a lazy hand up, before knocking back a swig from his brewski. He reached up, and while he didn’t pat J.D. — he was too far away — Bud did tap the head of the couch. “Sucks. What a fuckin’ waste of a good blast-site.”

“Y’know, I could’ve done way more than what this joker pulled,” Bud gloated. J.D. made a noise of approval, an uninterested “uh-huh.” — already, the braggart was starting to boast about his talents, about the fabled big *ka-boom*. “Send the whole thing tumbling to the ground. I mean, look at this mess. It looks like someone just came and took a bite out of it!”

“I, uh, I don’t think it was construction, dad. They’re sayin’...” with that pause, a sigh deflated from him, “people died. Respect for the dead’n’all that.” Despite this somber moment, the deep and heartfelt tone of the newscaster, J.D. couldn’t help but quirk a smile at it all.

“Gah, whatever. I could’ve done way more with this, regardless of what it was. It’s not genius, it’s—*it’s pathetic.*”

That stung. J.D. rose his voice, the slightest bit. He couldn’t spoil the big surprise, not before they talked about it — the mail couldn’t have made it in time, especially not in someplace like *Sherwood*. Besides, all J.D. wanted, deep down, was for the Old Man to be proud of him. For something that he did — he did exactly what Bud did. Norwegian in the boiler room, thermals upstairs, sent the whole entire gym crashing down. Why couldn’t he just be proud of it? “Well, I mean, don’t you think it’s impressive? Y’know, it’s *one* guy, doing this *all* on his own, it’s clear he did *some* damage.” J.D. was talking with his hands, making chopping motions and shrugging his arm at the T.V. screen while the solemn newscaster droned over their argument.

“Not *enough* damage. The *point* of demolition is to take the whole thing out in one fell swoop, not take out a chunk and leave leftovers!” Now, Bud was talking with his hands.

“But, this *means* something, doesn’t it? To do something like this by yourself, it—it almost—”

“*It’s. Sloppy.* I couldn’t give a shit what it ‘means,’ as long as it makes a *boom*, and it’s gone, I’m happy.”

“Well, I guess that’s just your problem, then. Because clearly, you don’t see what I see in this. Clearly, you don’t see the *beauty* in this.”

“What fucking *beauty*, kid!?” Bud was shouting — he was turning to look. When he was looking, when he bothered to look at you, you knew something was wrong. But J.D. didn’t.

J.D. kept talking, so impassioned, so fired up that it was impossible to stop once the spark had been lit.

“A beauty that you *can't understand!*” J.D. pressed his hands into his temples, before flicking them out in a sharp emphasis. “All you care about is your goddamn *ka-boom*, but you know something? Your fucking business doesn't mean *shit!* You're not making a difference, you're not changing *anything!* You're going through the motions, you're making pointless cash to spend on pointless things that will never mean anything, but this—...” J.D. threw his hand at the T.V., to show Bud what he meant, “I—...” he swallowed spit. *I am killing dinosaurs.* That's what he almost caught himself saying, and now, there he stood with his arm outstretched, his eyes wide, his teeth clenched and hair frizzed, like an *idiot*. Bud jumped in, rising to meet J.D. where he was standing. “You're insulting my business? You're insulting my *fucking business!*? You're disgracing the only thing that's kept us alive since your mother died, is that what you fucking want!?”

J.D. slowly breathed in. “I've got a feeling,” he sputtered, “that this is the start of something big.”

“What?” Bud slapped his hand on his thigh, looking around the room, as if searching for what J.D. was talking about. “What could this shitty-ass explosion mean, huh? What's so *goddamn important about it* that it makes you think that you can insult our *way of life*, Jason Dean!?”

J.D. didn't say anything - his mind was racing, trying to dig through his alibis to find a way out of this. Bud's pursed lips curled inward as he took a breath in, preparing for something. Then, mid-breath, he stopped. Something smelt different.

If there was one word that could be used to describe burning food, it would be the word “acrid.” Stingy, plaguing every sensor and sinus in one's nose. It even sounded gross to say, with that short “a” and that choppy “d” at the very end. “Æk.rɪd.” Just gross, in all accounts. That smell was lingering in the air, coming from the kitchen. J.D. spun, watching as the steam that once rose from the pot of boiling pasta had smoldered into a deep black smell. It spilled from beneath the hood. Bud started shouting, shoving J.D. aside to rush for the stove and turn the burners off. He swiped a towel off of the oven, starting to wave the smoke away, coughing and hacking all the while.

“You— *KUFF-HACK*—” Bud coughed, “*ASSHEAD!* Insulting my— *hack*— business, ruining my *dinner!*” Bud swung his hand around, slamming his palm into the pot. Beside it, lay the sink. There was a shrill clatter from inside of the porcelain sink as a gallon of boiling water and pasta spilled into the sink's left side. The side without the garbage disposal. When Bud's palm struck the side of the bowl that was clouded by the heat beneath it, he grasped his hand tight and let out a scream muffled only by the biting of his teeth.

Bud crouched to the ground, holding his scorched hand while J.D. just stood there, watching his dad writhe in agony. Finally, shaking his wrist to get blood-flow going, Bud stormed past him, stomping past him and moving to the door. His non-scorched hand reached for the doorknob. “I'm—” he panted, wincing with pain. “I'm going out. And, when I get back,” he

huffed. There was a long, thoughtful silence that hung in the air... before, Bud came off of the doorknob. He strode in front of him, and...

J.D. was on the ground before he could register what happened. Bud swung a clenched fist so fast into J.D.'s stomach that he spat up bile, sending him down in one go. "Nevermind. You can think about that."

Bud threw the door open and slammed it behind him. And, with a view of the T.V. still broadcasting the wreckage of Westerberg High School, all he could think of was what would come in the morning. Clenching himself, trying not to sob, J.D. knew it'd be alright when the morning news came on.

Chapter End Notes

here's a fun thing from the last chapter I didn't include!
the song that I chose for the title of Chapter 1 is the song Trigger Finger by Coyote Kid,
it's pretty good and I think fits Veronica and JD's relationship

Chapter 3: Frozen Reunion

Chapter Notes

silly reveal incoming
the tags might give it away

The kitchen smelled briny with salt water and butter. With gloved hands, J.D. was spending the rest of the night with his arm stuck in the left-hand sink, the sink without a garbage disposal. Sitting beside him was a slack-sitting garbage bag that he carelessly tossed ruined pasta into, ounce by ounce. The only plan for dinner tonight was dashed, and it was getting later as the time went on. The moon rose higher in the sky with every minute that passed. With every flick of his wrist, more rage boiled in his stomach, sending heat to his face. He reached for the edge of the sink, glaring into the pasta-laced porcelain. His fists clenched tighter, knuckles whitening as he slammed his fist into the tiled wall. J.D. panted, chest heaving as he choked his fury down. And then, there was Veronica. Thinking of her made his heart pound with stress, knowing that he'd never see her again. They were meant to be, and she kicked him out. But he didn't want to *kill* her! She *made* him kill her! She lunged at him, she tried to shoot him! To know he'd never see her face again, and that she was lying in a pool of her own blood beneath the rubble of a boiler room... Veronica opened his eyes, she showed him what he was capable of, and now she was *gone*. He was stranded in an ocean of his own design, and she couldn't lead him through it anymore! His mind was racing, whirling in circles, heart pounding in panic, until—.

He needed a brain-freeze. J.D. reached into his jacket pocket, twirling his key ring around his finger. He locked the door – knowing full well Bud would barely be sober enough to unlock it again – before stepping off of the porch and climbing onto his bike with a smirk plastered on his face.

The bike was bulky, a 1987 low-rider painted black with steel innards exposed. She was fast, sleek, comfortable - she was like a home away from home, a place where J.D. could *be* for a while. She was like his child, better than anything he'd ever owned, and she'd stuck with him for around 4 years now. J.D. was surprised that Bud hadn't gotten rid of her after this long, thrown her in some scrapyard or crushed her under the weight of a crane, just for some petty revenge. But, hey, she was just a humble perk from that walking guilty pleasure Bud called a "construction company." His bike's engines purred as she roared down the street, down Lampkin, to the fabled brick of concrete, green, and white: 7-Eleven.

Stepping inside unleashed a waft just like every other waft he had felt. That beautiful, electronic chime sent him back to simpler times. Times before his duty to his generation, to be what they needed him to be. But, right now? That wasn't important. J.D. just needed his

fix, goddamn it. So, he strode over to the sugary, icy cornucopia that was the triple-S (Slurpee Service Station). Ripping a larger-than-normal cup from its receptacle, he reached for the swirling cherry dispenser and pulled the lever, watching the icy swirls fill the cup to its brim. When he was younger, there was one time he managed to get away with wrapping his mouth right over the nozzle and lettin' 'er rip. What followed was a solid *4 seconds* of delicious, vanilla-ish Coke flavor straight into his stomach, before Mama pulled him away, laughing. Mom.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw something dark was standing at the end of the taiga of refrigerators. It held the shape of a woman, but its features were mangled and charred. Its flesh was sallow and sagging, not with age, but with scars. Its hair, once dark-blonde now caked in ash, was missing in strange places... burned from its scalp. It wore sunglasses - one of their lenses shattered to reveal bloodshot brown eyes. In its face, J.D. peered into a generational mirror, and all he could do was scowl back.

But Annabelle Dean kept watching from afar, judging J.D. at every step, from the great beyond, where no one could hear her singing over the sounds of explosions and shrapnel ricochets. No one except the son she'd left behind.

Shaking his head to dispel the undead, he took the full-to-bursting Slurpee cup and stepped over to the counter. "Hey, yeah - can I get a turbo-dog, a pack of Lucky Strike Greens, and..." he set it on the counter-top, "this guy."

The clerk raised an eyebrow at him, nodding. He shuffled over to the hotdog roller, pulling one off and stuffing it into a bun. "You're the guy with the weird... *Slurpee* thing, right?" the clerk asked with an almost judgmental tone.

"I-," J.D. snickered a bit, leaning to place his hands on the counter. "I'm sorry, what?"

"The thing with your brain. You like brain-freezes or somethin'. I heard you talkin' pretty loudly about it not too long ago. With that chick." J.D. just squinted at the clerk. He looked young, but not too young. A bit older than him, some adult dashed aside by the woes of the world, chattered into wage-slavery. But, J.D.'s sympathies began to wane when he talked about her. "Yeah," he exhaled sharply through his nose. "She didn't get it either. No one ever does." He could almost see her by the Slurpee station, that gorgeous blue coat, the skirt, the argyle socks. Laughing, smiling, drinking, experiencing her first brain freeze. And he'd never see it again.

"That's a shame. Seemed like you really liked her. She was making doe-eyes at you, that's for sure." The clerk gave a reassuring jab of a pen at him, to which J.D. just laughed it off. He gave a shrug, arms up in the air for a moment before resting them on the counter. Feeling a shiver of sadness in his throat, he sighed with feigned confidence: "We were meant to be."

The clerk sighed, shaking his head side to side, punching in the rest of his order. "Sorry about that. You'll find someone else, I'm sure of it. That'll be... \$4.86."

“No, I won’t.” J.D. slapped down a 5, nodding up. “Keep the change.” J.D. sighed, reached one hand through his slicked hair before he reached for the cup, pocketed the cigarettes, and taking the hot-dog. With the electronic alarm punctuating his departure, J.D. leaned on his bike outside. Bathing in the neon lights in the window, he drank.

The cherry wave that coasted over his mouth was enough to make him forget about it all, chugging the Slurpee he’d bought through a straw, before finally the *real* high of the night hit. Battered, jabbed by the pincers of a brain-freeze, J.D. dipped his head, clenching his teeth as the frigid pain washed through him. But, as the initial ice began to fade and gave way to numbness... it got warmer. Uncomfortably so.

J.D. sighed, reaching for the pack he’d tucked into his jacket. He flicked out a zippo lighter, lighting it up as the cold of menthol and cancer-causing tobacco rushed through his lungs. “You know I don’t like it when you’re around.” J.D. didn’t turn his head. She’d know who he was talking to.

“You know *I* don’t like it when you *smoke*.” She sighed - a spectral hand laid on his shoulder, one that J.D. only felt as an uncomfortable, burning heat. The cold of the grave comes to mind when the touch of a spirit is imagined. But, the bodies of spirits emulate the moments before their death. Many beings, upon their death, were ensnared by the cold. Not so, with Annabelle Dean. Torn through by explosion after explosion, succumbing to her burns in the end. Her death was nothing but heat, and it shows.

“You don’t like when I do a lot of things,” J.D. clenched his fist, pushing it into his jacket pockets. “It’s not my fault you aren’t around to stop me. But I’m doing what you would want. The needs of the *many*, Mom. *They* were the few; and what’s one school in the scope of an *entire* generation?”

“I liked Veronica. I think she was good for you.” She reached her hand away when she felt J.D.’s shoulder tighten with hate. “I almost thought... things could’ve been like they used to be, with her.”

“But it didn’t. She didn’t do anything. She was *useless*. She wanted to be *passive*. To sit around, watch movies, and eat fucking *chili fries* all day. We were... I’m changing things! If you liked her so much, why don’t you just pass on? Float up to Heaven with the angels and prance with Veronica? Why can’t you leave me be!?”

“I just want what’s best for you, Jason, I—”

“You want me to change so *bad*, Mom? You’ve got such a problem with how I am? Talk to your husband. Haunt *him* for a change! Why couldn’t you torment the person who made you—” J.D. stopped. He clenched his fists tighter, before stuffing his hands into his face. “Just leave me be.”

“Okay.” She shrunk into the shadows behind her, her ashen features growing harder to decipher in the darkness. “I’m sorry.” Her voice was wispy, quiet as always. The voice she used for Bud. He remembered it, clear as day. “I love you, Jason.”

J.D. stared back through the void that she stood in, watching her shrink deeper and deeper into the inky black. He didn't know what to feel anymore. Against it all, all he could think of was Veronica. If Mom took his advice and met with Veronica in Heaven, what would she say? What venom would Veronica tell her about him? Would she think of J.D. the same?

And what venom didn't Mom already know about?

"I loved you, too."

J.D. looked into a puddle of colorful, shimmering oil on the floor. And in the reflection, all he could see was Bud's face. He could see it in his facial features. In his cheekbones, in his jaw, in his nose, in his hair color, made from beautiful jet-black strands, he saw that man. But, even behind those eyes, he saw more of Bud than he liked. And as his heart pounded in his chest, he placed his straw in his mouth, drinking in his Slurpee harder, drowning in the taste of cherry, fighting for the numbness that would make it all go away...

But not even the brain-freeze was working anymore.

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