

Look at Me Mom, All Grown Up

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/55462633) at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/55462633](https://archiveofourown.org/works/55462633).

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	Heathers: The Musical - Murphy & O'Keefe , Heathers (1988)
Relationship:	Jason "J. D." Dean/Veronica Sawyer
Characters:	Jason "J. D." Dean , Veronica Sawyer , Heather McNamara , Martha Dunnstock , Heather Duke
Additional Tags:	HAPPY BIRTHDAY JDRONICA!!!! , my god you've got not idea how hard it has been to keep this secret , hints of Martha/Mac , characterisation based on the easily accessible OOBC boot , so like OOBC cast but Dan not Ryan , I literally rewatched the boot to research the characterisation , so I hope it's in character , although everyone who read this seems worried I've been held at gunpoint because I wrote nice JD , which like - fair , but can't a girl have layers? , JD's birthday is in November , I can accept JD being nice and giving up killing people but I draw the line at him being an Aries , Pregnancy , Slow Burn
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-04-26 Words: 10,854 Chapters: 1/1

Look at Me Mom, All Grown Up

by [deeplyshallow](#)

Summary

“You want a reason to let me survive, JD? I’m pregnant.”

Time stops. Not literally, the bomb is still counting down - but it suddenly seems irrelevant compared to the revelation up front.

“What?”

Notes

Happy Birthday jdronica!!!!

So I may or may not have been doing secret market research for this fic for the past month by asking you leading questions about the off Broadway boot: working out how to write Dan!JD and what you might like :) I really hope you enjoy it!

But yeah, to the devil on my shoulder who keeps telling me, “Yes, you definitely need to go to all the musical concerts!” I hope you have an amazing day, and thank you so much for just being an amazing and fun and generous friend, even if you are so much better at rhythm games than me :P

I hope you appreciate the nicest JD I have ever written in my life.

He’s still not an Aries though.

xxx

Disclaimer: all this including the bits in italics has been written by someone who has never been pregnant. My research included google, going “oooh this sounds like a dramatic idea that might happen during pregnancy, I think” and messaging my friend “hey, you were born in the early 90s in the US - what do you remember about it?” (she wasn’t that useful) - please do not use this as a comprehensive guide to what happens during pregnancy.

xxx

Title from the teen pregnancy song from Bare A Pop Opera that I’ve been listening to on loop.

The characterisations of all the characters are based on the Off Broadway Heathers bootleg that is easiest to find (with Dan Domenech playing JD).

Month 1

You are on the start of a magical journey! Although this early in the pregnancy you might not even know you are pregnant. For many women, the first symptom is missing their period, but others may suspect something is different, early symptoms can include morning sickness, implantation bleeding and abdominal pain.

It is an exciting time for both mother and father, and doubtless you will be celebrating together their bundle of joy on the way.

The first pep rally of the season is loud, the cheers and screams penetrate even through the concrete of the gym floor, echoing in the boiler room below. But, while the students above are preparing to fight the Razorbacks, the real fight has already started.

Veronica brandishes her croquet mallet fiercely, it's no match for the gun he's pointing straight at her, but she keeps advancing, as if she knows that he'd rather retreat than pull the trigger. It won't end well for her though, she must know that, either by the movement of his finger or the bomb reaching the end of the countdown, she will not make it out alive. Whether it be heaven or hell they are sent to, they are fated to go there together in moments.

She swings her mallet towards him, and he fires once at ceiling, a warning, he can kill her, he totally can kill her.

She flinches at the noise and her eyes flicker to the door for a moment, hoping maybe that they will have been heard, but the cheers continue uninterrupted.

"JD please," she tries once more, "don't do this. All these people, they can be nasty, they can be cruel, the whole world can be. But we can work out some other way to change things, not this."

She doesn't understand, she never has. He had tried, he'd tried to make something new, to create something good, he tried to make a new world for her, and all his attempts to save her had just led to more hurt. No, it's better to start again, to destroy him and her and the cesspool he knows, and hope that maybe it will be enough to inspire the good and the innocent to take up the fight, to win.

"It's too late, Veronica, Westerberg has got to go. It is the only way, we will die to start the new revolution, nothing you can say will change anything."

He looks up, hoping to see his passion reflected in her eyes - that he'd convinced her - that they can go to leave together knowing that, for once in his rotten life, they had started something good. He dreads seeing the opposite, to have her turn away, or worse, cry - his mind is set either way, but he really wants her there and willing for whatever lies beyond. It will be harder to do it alone.

But he sees neither when she looks back at him, instead her gaze is fierce, as if she can still defeat him.

"You want a reason to let me survive, JD? I'm pregnant."

Time stops. Not literally, the bomb is still counting down - but it suddenly seems irrelevant compared to the revelation up front.

"What?"

"You heard me. I missed my period and started feeling sick, so I peed on like five tests last night and they were all positive."

The gun is still pointing in her direction, but no eyes are on it, as instead they glare at each other, "How?"

"Turns out I'm not so good at taking the pill when I'm also trying to prevent murders."

He takes an unsteady step forward, "Veronica, if you're lying, I swear to you..."

She laughs, humourlessly, "I don't think I have the energy left to think of one more fucked up thing to add to my situation."

"Oh," he says, "oh right."

Reality is slamming into him in a way that it hasn't since the moment she broke up with him. He thought he had lost everything in that moment, that was why he'd pulled together one last desperate plan to try to destroy everything that had driven her away and keep her from falling out of his grasp forever, but it had been nothing compared to seeing her hanging body – knowing he had failed – he'd known in that moment that he would die with his last great revenge on the world that hated him.

Truth be told, he wasn't even sure she was real when he saw her in the boiler room, it seemed much more plausible that, considering she had left him just like his mother, she was also haunting him, close but not close enough to touch, not tender enough to care, just like it had happened in the month that had followed that awful day when he was nine.

This seems to have pulled him out of his stupor though.

She is alive. She is alive and something else is too – not a reason to live as such – but maybe a reason to not die right now. A sign, however small, that their love existed more than just in his delusional brain – another child about to be destroyed by its father turning its mother to ashes...

"JD, stop the bomb."

He continues staring at her, frozen, as the countdown ticks on.

"JD? JD!" She tries one last time, then huffs and stalks forward, with surprising confidence given his gun is still vaguely aimed at her.

"Which wire do I pull?" she says, forcefully.

"Red one." He manages to force out.

She narrows her eyes, as if trying to assess whether she believes him, before clearly deciding she has nothing to lose and pulling.

The timer stops, nothing explodes, and she sags with relief.

"The thermals in the gym, they won't go off without this, right? So I can just take them away after the rally?"

He nods.

Cautiously she steps forward, taking the gun out of his hand. He doesn't resist.

She sits on the stone steps of the gym, distrustful eyes still on him, gun placed in easy reach on her lap, "Guess we're waiting here until it's over then."

His legs still feel like jelly, but he manages to get to the nearest wall, sliding down it until he's sitting on the floor. Is this shock or relief? He's not sure - but it's not anger or grief - and given that's all he's felt in the last few days it seems almost foreign to him.

"What are you going to do?" he asks, after a long time.

"No idea," she says, "the whole baby thing didn't seem as much of an issue as it probably should have, given the imminent threat of everyone dying and all. I need to do some research, think it through, maybe write a pros and cons list in my diary. Oh God why me? How did I get into this mess?"

She puts her head in her hands, she's shaking. She looks so small, so vulnerable.

"Ronnie-" he starts but she looks up at him with such ferocity that he doesn't continue.

"No JD, shut up, I don't want your help or input and don't you dare tell me whether to keep it or not - you've already had far too much say over other people's lives."

"Ok," he says, without a fight. She's right anyway and he's just tired, defeated, trying to take in the rollercoaster of emotions that he's gone through in the last few hours. His grand plans seem so much less thrilling, less certain, with this cold dose of reality.

The world has changed today, but not in the way he expected.

Month 2

This is the month where many of those first symptoms of pregnancy really set in, and unfortunately, it will not all be fun. Nausea, vomiting, tiredness and headaches will continue as well as heartburn and leg cramps. You will also start to see changes in your body with your breasts enlarging and becoming more tender.

Support from your partner and family is more important than ever. Make sure you keep them close and updated on how you are feeling.

Recent funerals and graveyard murders aside, it has been a long time since he has gone to church. He never really liked it much in the first place, when his mother used to drag him along each week, and recently it felt a little antithetical to his whole "I am God" thing.

But with the chaos and noise of home and school, he's been here often in the last few weeks. Not during a service, obviously, he can think of nothing worse than being welcomed into a congregation, but in the early mornings and evenings when the doors are open for lonely souls. He needs somewhere quiet, he needs somewhere to think. He needs somewhere he can feel close to the one person who loved him unconditionally.

He is going to be a father, but he needs his mother.

He sits awkwardly in the pews, looking up at the painted ceiling and the flickering candles. The thought of old, familiar, easier, times do something to dull the chaos spinning around his head, to make sense of the madness of the world.

Veronica hasn't talked to him, not at all, since the day in the boiler room. He doesn't even know whether she's made a decision – though he hopes she would have let him know if they no longer had anything to worry about. He sees her at school, hanging out with Martha and Heather McNamara in their own little corner of the lunch hall. Meanwhile Heather Duke continues to be the most unworthy person to ever own a copy of Moby Dick, by teaming up with Courtney and Shannon to become head of a nice new clique of bitches casually terrorising anyone they deem not very enough.

Part of him thought, the day after the boiler room, that every subsequent day would be a challenge to not go on a murder spree again, as Westerberg continued to encompass everything that is wrong with the world. But honestly, he's just exhausted.

After years of numbness, Veronica had given him a purpose, he'd wanted to help her, wanted to save her like he couldn't with his mother. He'd tried, he'd failed, and once again he has lost the most important woman in his life. Ever since then, he hasn't felt like a God at all, just a sinner deserving to be punished for doing nothing but causing hurt to the ones he loves, beyond any chance of repair.

Slushies help, as always, he's currently drinking five or six a day, which will probably give him diabetes, but honestly that seems like the least of his worries.

So here he sits, grateful he hasn't been struck down just for entering, trying to ignore the thought of the three fresh graves in the churchyard, wondering how it ever got to this – whether there is anything he can do to make it right.

He wonders if this is how she felt too, all those years ago, when she discovered she was going to be a mother.

"JD?" a voice he hasn't heard in weeks, but still is as familiar to him as birdsong in the morning, "What are you doing here?"

He moves up so she can sit next to him, which she does, careful to leave a large gap between them.

"I could ask you the same question."

"I'm not sure, guidance I guess. Redemption. Peace. That kind of bullshit. The desire to be around a bunch of corpses whose death I am not directly responsible for too."

"You weren't, I saw you take the wrong mug, I had the gun."

She shrugs, not meeting his eyes, but she doesn't leave either – which probably counts as progress.

"I've decided to keep it," she says finally. He looks at her, she smiles sadly.

"You're not doing it because of him right?" he asks, pointing at the overly large figure of a man hanging from a cross above them, "because I think if he cared about shit like that he'd do a better job at not traumatising children once they were outside the womb."

She shakes her head, "No. I can't really explain it. I guess part of it is I can't bear anymore death, maybe part is self punishment too, but part is – I don't know – the chance something good, or at the very least living, might come out of this all – that it wasn't all for absolutely nothing."

He understands and he doesn't, it feels like a rosy view on what will probably be just another knot in their string of bad decisions. Like she is someone so broken that she will do anything, no matter how crazy, if she thinks it might repair her

Still, comes a sneaky thought in his head, it means she hasn't totally taken you out of her life, a part of you is still there. There's still a chance.

He tells that part of himself to shut up, Having a child is famously a terrible way to fix a struggling relationship and, given he was pointing a gun at her alarmingly recently, they're probably past the honeymoon phase – he could live in this church for the rest of his life and still not manifest enough goodwill for that sort of miracle.

"My mother was religious," he says, after a few moments of silence, "very Catholic really, I guess that was why she married dad when she got pregnant rather than... you know."

Maybe if she had, she'd still be alive.

Slowly her hand moves towards him, just for a second it brushes his. He's missed her warmth, "She loved you very much, I can tell just from the way you speak about her."

"You can love someone and still wish they'd never existed. I think you know that, more than most."

She looks at him, blinking, unsure of what to say, "Are you saying you think I'm making the wrong decision?" she asks finally.

He wonders what the thing growing inside her wants. Thinks about when he was inside his own mother, who chose instead to have a shotgun wedding with someone she didn't even like. Frankly he sort of regrets not being aborted, it would have prevented so much misery for so many people, for himself too. Maybe this child will be enough like him to want that for itself too, it seems like the adult decision, the mature one. Apparently they are no longer in the business of improving the world - so why bring one more unwilling life into this shitty mess? The problem is it's part Veronica too - and he's already had to face the world without her once, he knows how despairingly painful that was and how can he ask anyone to remove something that might be so alike to her?

"I don't know," he says, "I think you need to do what is right for you – I don't think you've been driven well following my decisions anyway. I will support you in any way I can, if you want me to."

"Thank you JD." She says, then after sitting in silence a little longer, gets up and leaves.

He spends a few more minutes enjoying the calm, then leaves too.

Month 3

Good news! As you exit your first trimester, your morning sickness should start to fade.

Your future child is changing too - by the end of this month your baby will be about the size of a hamster, fingernails, toenails, ears and teeth are beginning to form.

This is also the month of your first ultrasound scan, where you and your partner will get a chance to see the new life you have created for the first time!

"JD?"

He looks up from the essay he was scribbling down, while also sneaking in his lunch, at the back of the library.

"Finally! I've been having so much trouble finding you."

Veronica is standing over him, looking down at his schoolwork curiously – as if she was expecting something more nefarious. She's dressed for the season, long skirt, thermal tights (still blue) and a rather gaudy blue jumper with snowflakes and a red nosed reindeer on it – which he feels like Martha probably talked to her into – he thinks she's made sure it's deliberately baggy.

None of this makes her any less beautiful, nor stops his heart from racing when she just looks at him.

He shrugs, "Well, you see, librarians have this very unreasonable rule about not eating in a library, it's nearly as important to them as silence, so I thought I'd keep this all on the down low."

"No," she says, "I don't mean right now, just in general. I see you in class, but you leave immediately after school, and you're never in the lunch hall – because apparently you're hiding and eating here everyday instead?"

"Well you know me, any opportunity to be a rebel. Do you miss me?"

It's her turn to shrug uncomfortably, "I just needed some time to talk to you in private and you were making it surprisingly hard."

"I've been working a lot after school and on weekends, this is the most efficient use of my lunch break."

"Oh," she says, pulling up a chair to sit beside him, "I hadn't realised."

"Well last month I turned eighteen. My father wanted to move - I did not for obvious reasons - the main one being he's an asshole and I couldn't stand one more second with him. I had a little bit of inheritance from some uncle of my mother, which was in a trust so Bud couldn't get his grubby hands on it, enough for a deposit on a small apartment. Gotta earn money for rent now."

"Surprised I haven't seen you at 7-Eleven then."

"Nah, 7-Eleven wouldn't even take my application, apparently they already hated me as a customer because I creep everyone out by standing by the slushie machines all evening. Jokes on them though, I've been working on local building sites and now I have even more money to spend on slushies!"

"I don't know how you drink them everyday - you do know they're just sugar, ice and flavouring?"

"Uh, they are amazing sugar, ice and flavouring. A miracle cure for everything."

She rolls her eyes, "I'm glad you're away from your dad though, that must feel good."

"It feels amazing, if I'm lucky next time I'll see him will be at his funeral - when he dies of natural causes," he adds when she sees a frown start to crinkle her brow, but really, it's made a world of difference having somewhere safe he can go to when it all gets too much, rather than a bedroom with a door that gets kicked open whenever his dad feels like shouting at someone. "Anyway, you said you wanted to talk?"

She fiddles with her jumper, pulling out loose bobbles, "Well, it's three months, I've got my first ultrasound, coming up. Martha has said she's happy to come with me, but I want my mother there."

She doesn't say it, but he still feels the hurt at his own lack of invitation. He guesses, given everything, it's good enough that she has sought him out to tell him this.

"But, yeah, all this to say I'm going to tell my parents and I thought I'd give you a warning, in case my dad comes around to yours with a shotgun or something."

"I hope not. I hate guns."

Veronica's lips twitch, they share the same dark humour, whether she wants to or not.

"How are you gonna tell them?"

"Oh god, I haven't even got that far."

"May I suggest a best grandparents mug as their Christmas present?"

This time her smile comes more easily, "And here I thought you had stopped trying to kill me."

He lets out a chuckle. This was what he's always liked about Veronica, from the very day he met her. Obviously, he had very much noticed that she was pretty, and the fact she had climbed into his bedroom and demanded he get on all fours while she insistently took her clothes off had endeared her to him too – but it had always been more than that with them, they connected emotionally – talked and thought on the same wavelength, something that for him was surprisingly rare.

So many things with her had been hard, so hard, but communicating like this, just making each other laugh, had always been easy.

"I guess '*So speaking of immaculate conception, guess who else has conceived?*' is out of the question too then?"

That gets a proper laugh out of her, "Oh yeah, I'll follow it up with, '*It's ok, it's definitely Jesus, the father even thinks he's God.*' God JD, you are the worst."

He gazes at her fondly, still smiling, and she returns it – eyes soft. They've been broken up for longer than they were together now, but apparently they still understand each other.

The bell rings suddenly, pulling them out of the moment. He gathers up his stuff as she stands up and grabs her bag.

"Merry Christmas, JD." She says as she leaves, she moves towards him, as if to hug him, before changing her mind and suddenly drawing back.

He nods, "Merry Christmas, Ronnie, good luck."

It's not anything, but it's not nothing either.

Month 4

You're out of the first trimester! It's finally safe to tell friends and wider family about your new bundle of joy! I'm sure they'll be just as excited about it as you are.

This is also when cravings really kick in, so make sure dad is around to cater to your every desire.

He notices the hushed whispers around him from the moment he arrives back at school after Christmas. Little gaggles of students clustered around each other, giggling, sneaking glances at him but dispersing as soon as he gets near. So, when Veronica grabs him and pulls him into an empty classroom, he is pretty sure he already knows what she's going to say.

"So I'm guessing a few more people than just your parents found out over Christmas?"

She sighs, "Yes, apparently Courtney's aunt works at the hospital and her inability to keep secrets is genetic. Heather Duke was beside herself, naturally, and wasted no time throwing me to the wolves and in an attempt to further her mighty power"

He clenches his fists, it would be so easy to shoot a bullet through Heather Duke's brain, or drug her and slit her wrists in the bathtub - *who has power now, Heather?* That would distract the school gossip mill from sniggering about Veronica. But he feels like, despite everything, Veronica would rather be a martyr and sacrifice herself to the bloodthirsty mob that is the students of Westerberg than allow one drop of a terrible person's blood to be spilt.

"Urgh, as if Christmas wasn't already bad enough. Utter chaos, looks of disappointment from dad, my mother switching between hysterics and lecturing me. And I couldn't even run away to Martha's because I'm grounded for having sex or something. I guess my parents think if they do that I'll understand this sort of thing has long term consequences, clearly something I haven't learnt already."

"I assume everyone also knows I'm the father?"

She shrugs, "Well I haven't been with anyone else since, so I think they've drawn the obvious conclusion."

"I mean if you don't want us attached like that, there's always the option that you had a wild fling on your holiday to Canada..."

She snorts, "I'd rather not be labelled as more of a slut than I already am being, to be honest."

His shoulders slump. Why does everything have to be so hard on her? Why can't God, the universe, her peers, her teachers, someone, anyone, allow her a bit of a break? He hates seeing her this sad, hates knowing she would have none of this sadness if it was not for him.

"I'm sorry, Veronica."

"It's not your fault – well I mean only the first bit, I guess. This part was kind of inevitable the moment I saved them all from exploding in the Pep Rally - which I still don't regret," she says as he raises his eyebrows, and he decides to definitely keep his thoughts of slitting Heather Duke's wrists to himself, "I guess I just have to go out there and face the music until they get bored. At least I still have Martha and Heather Mac on my side."

Or maybe there's another way. Not as final as a bullet through the brain, but an idea that he has a feeling might just work...

xxx

"From hell's heart I stab at thee."

Heather Duke glares at him, it's taken him a few days and a few mad dashes to make it to work on time after trying to scout her out, but he's finally found her on her own in an empty school corridor. He knows that he is not the only one who finds the position they are in familiar, "I finished reading Moby Dick months ago." she spits.

"I never doubted it, I just thought this quote would be appropriate, given the conversation we are about to have."

"We're about to have a conversation?" She flicks her hair, turning her back to him and grabbing the last of her stuff out of her locker.

He moves to her right, leaning on the lockers so she can see his face the moment she closes her door, "Well, more of a reminder, if you want to get all technical about it. A reminder that I still have those photos of you are Martha Dunstock, including a charming one of you two at camp in the middle of a hot dog eating contest, and I'm sure your new friend Courtney would enjoy seeing them as much as I do."

Heather bites her lip, rocking slightly on her heels, she knows what's coming next, "Lay off Veronica?"

"Precisely, and make sure the others do too."

She scowls, but nods, "I'll see what I can do. You're giving me the negatives the moment your hellspawn is born though." Then turns on her heel and leaves as fast as she can.

xxx

"Cherry or raspberry?"

He looks up, and there she is, slightly rosy faced from the cold, but looking a lot happier than she did earlier this week.

"Blue raspberry, of course, better colour and flavour. Haven't seen you outside a 7-Eleven in a while." Not since they were dating as a matter of fact, but he doesn't add that.

"Well I thought I'd find you here, and I wanted to tell you something interesting that happened at school today."

He keeps his expression neutral, "Indeed, I'm all ears."

"Well, I don't know if you've noticed, but the gossip about all this seems to have died down surprisingly fast today. Then, at lunchtime, when I walked past her table Courtney made her typical *Veronica is a slut* joke and Heather Duke said, and I quote, '*Shut up, Courtney,*' and then asked if I could sit at her table, and what colour clothes I wanted for the baby shower, and generally made sure the school thought I was still very in her eyes.

"Oh how nice," he says, unconvincingly, "I guess she's had a change of heart."

Veronica looks at him, "A change of heart that you've had absolutely nothing to do with?"

He puts his hands up, "Nothing to do with me, she's still alive and healthy isn't she?" What Veronica doesn't know won't hurt her.

She looks no less suspicious, "Well, thank you anyway, Courtney looked furious though, I had half a mind to tell Heather to check her prairie oyster for drain cleaner."

She's smiling in a way he hasn't seen in months, he's missed the way it lights up her face.

"Again, nothing to do with me, I can't believe you have so little faith in the idea that Heather simply realised that she should stop being a raging bitch."

She frowns but drops the topic - as he tries to keep a smug smile from creeping onto his face - who knew that blackmail could be used for such good?

She moves closer to him, her blue coat brushing against his shoulder, "So, um, in a couple of weeks I have another ultrasound, this one they can reveal the gender. I wondered if you'd like to come?"

This time it's his turn to smile, "I'd love to. Give me the time and place, and I'll be there."

"Of course," she says, then pauses, as if she has something more she wants to say but doesn't quite know how to say it, "Ummm, JD, this is gonna sound weird but hopefully it's ok, because I feel I really need to ask..."

"What?"

"I hate to admit it, but I'm really craving that slushy you're drinking..."

He smirks "Told you, they're not just ice, sugar and flavouring, they're a miracle cure - better than cocaine! Here, let me buy you one, my treat."

She smiles and nods then they enter the 7-Eleven and he pours her a slushy, just like he did one night before a party, so many months ago.

Month 5

Time for your second ultrasound! This is the one you have been waiting for, where you can find out the baby's gender!

An exciting time for both you and your partner to bond over painting the nursery pink or blue.

The last time he met Veronica's parents he was telling them that he was scared about their daughter's suicidal tendencies, complete with a self annotated copy of Moby Dick. This time is even more awkward.

They are already waiting for him outside the car when he rides in, and he wonders if he should have bitten the bullet and taken the longer bus journey – because the motorbike seems to be doing nothing to thaw her parents' impression of the guy who got their teenaged daughter pregnant.

Nonetheless, he goes over, politely shaking both their hands and trying not to wince as Leonard Sawyer tries to crush his in response, before following them inside.

The hospital and nurses all make it feel very real, he supposes it's been like this for months for Veronica, but it's ended up being more of an abstract concept for him. He's barely even seen her bump under her deliberately baggy clothes, though they are talking politely at school now – mostly about baby logistics, but occasionally he asks her for help with school work or she asks him for a book recommendation.

It's here now though, bare in front of him, as she lies down on the table and the nurse smears gel over Veronica's belly, before moving the scanner over it.

And suddenly there on the screen is a small moving thing, it has an abnormally large head and comparatively small arms and legs, but it's still very recognisably a baby. Their baby.

"Do you want to know the gender?" Asks the nurse

Veronica looks to him, and only once he nods does she answer, "Yes please."

"A girl."

And just like that, without really knowing why, the entire world seems lighter. A girl, like his mother, like Veronica. He pictures her in little blue dresses with bows in her hair. She'll be beautiful, she has to be. She is an actual, real life little thing that he and Veronica created together, that he will be able to hold and love and...

He feels tears prick the corner of his eyes, and he tries to wipe them away before anyone notices, but he sees Veronica looking at him. She smiles.

xxx

She pulls him aside in the waiting room after, as her parents are sorting out costs and further appointments.

"How are you feeling?"

"Good, I think. Thank you for inviting me along."

"She's yours too. I knew you'd want to be a part of it."

"It's just a little overwhelming, I guess," he says, "seeing her, knowing her gender. It just feels like it's actually happening now? Like I've finally realised that this is something big, that's going to completely upend our life."

"Tell me about it," she says, and then, quietly, "I'm terrified, I don't know if I'm up to it."

Veronica, he's learnt, both while they were dating and in the time after, hides all her feelings under dark humour and sarcastic remarks – a technique that he's not exactly unfamiliar with himself. But here they are, her real feelings, the reality sinking in about a bunch of decisions she made when she was high on young love, and he was high on the idea of actually having some control in his life, and then a few more when she was trying to recover from the inevitable fallout from all that had occurred. Here are the consequences of it all, both great and terrifying.

"Hey," he says, lifting her chin up so she will look at him, he can see her eyes are glistening slightly, "you are the strongest person I know Veronica. You fight, you care, you win, if anyone can do this it is you. You're a little younger than my mother was, but you're still better off than her, you had supportive parents, friends, me too - for whatever that's worth - it's not ideal but you can do it and, like everything, you will excel."

She smiles, "Thanks JD," but her voice is still weak and he knows she wants to change the topic.

"So, do you have any girls' names you're thinking of?"

"Heather."

He nearly chokes.

Veronica laughs, "I'm kidding, I'm kidding! I do have some in mind, but I - well I guess it's something that we should do together."

He's taken aback, "Really?"

"I mean if you don't want to, I can-"

"No, I do I just-" it's been so much *this is my baby, JD, these are my decisions not yours*, that he's sort of surprised he's been given the option now, "don't worry, yes of course I want to."

"So, do you have any thoughts?"

"Well Veronica really is the prettiest name I've ever..."

"Absolutely not."

"Oh ok. How about Athena?"

"She'll get bullied horribly and, all things considered, I'm not encouraging you to think of our baby as a God."

"I guess Bonnie is out of the question too then?"

"Yes."

"Matilda?"

"After the Empress?"

He frowns, "No, she failed to take the throne of England, I'm not naming my daughter after a failure. I meant the heroine of the latest Dahl novel, who uses her intelligence to defeat the evil at her school."

"Does she kill anyone?"

"Karmically destroys a murderer's plans."

Veronica smiles, despite herself, "Well at least that part's fitting," she considers, "I do like the name though, let's put that high up on the maybe list then," she hesitates, "what was your mother's name?"

"Oh," he says, "it was Valerie, a bit old fashioned, and um," he pauses, trying to find the right words, "I'm not sure I'm ready to hear it all the time again, if I'm honest."

"How about a middle name?"

He considers, "Yeah, that would be nice." then, after a while, "Thank you. It means a lot."

"Oh!" she says suddenly, and before he can ask her what's the matter, she has grabbed his hand and placed it against her belly, "Do you feel that? She's kicking."

He does, he does, *he does*.

"I do," he says in awe, part of him – part of them - is inside her, living, growing and for the first time in all this mess, he's not just scared, or sad, or guilty.

He looks up and sees it reflected in Veronica's eyes too.

He feels excited.

Month 6

Your baby is now 12 inches long, can open its eyes, has fingerprints and can even hiccup! You will be starting to get a noticeable bump - so make sure you relax, have fun and treat yourself by shopping for some fashionable new maternity clothes.

He can see the sour look on her face from halfway across the lunch hall.

"What's the matter?" he asks as he places his tray on the table and slips in beside her. He's taken to eating with her, Martha and Heather McNamara, these past few weeks, partly to quell any lingering nasty comments about how Veronica is a slutty single mom, that occasionally appear, despite Heather Duke's best efforts, now she's really showing, but also because it's nice to be able to spend time with her – even just as a friend. It feels like, for the first time in a very long time, he has her back.

Martha and Heather are still a little suspicious of him – after all he and Veronica are still exes and, while the lack of policemen showing up at his door seem to imply that Veronica has not told them the full story of what went on during their relationship, he's pretty sure that they know enough to tell that it wasn't all sunshine and roses. But she's already promised them the role of joint Godmother, and they've taken to it with great happiness and excitement, spending plenty of time planning the baby shower together, and it's nice to hear them babbling about their plans for it and where they plan to take their little goddaughter after she is born when Veronica needs the night off.

It's almost as if he has friends, a very foreign concept for him.

Today though, Martha is in math club and Heather is at cheerleading practice, so Veronica is sitting alone.

"Ms Fleming is putting on an assembly about safe sex," she says in reply, her tone is monotonous, but he can hear the embarrassment she is feeling behind it, he clenches his fists in his pocket, wondering how much trouble he'd get into for punching a teacher.

"Well that sounds so fun."

She looks down, playing with her fingers, "Everyone is just going to be giggling and looking at me, aren't they?"

He hates it when she's like this, when for all her fight and bravery, she gets knocked down by idiots just trying to selfishly further their own agenda. She deserves so much better.

"Wanna ditch? I'm sure we can find something more fun to do than ritual humiliation for not staying a virgin until marriage from a woman who is sleeping with a married man."

Ms Fleming really needs to stop telling her entire class about her breakup with Steve and their messy rebound at an ABBA tribute concert.

"I'm not sure that's allowed, I think Ms Fleming might notice if we ditch the assembly put on in our honour."

"I mean, does it really apply to us anyway? We can have all the safe sex we want, you're still going to be pregnant."

She lets out a small laugh, "Are you hitting on me?"

He grins, pleased when he sees that it makes her smile more, "Only if you want to take it that way..."

"Oh shut up," she says without anger, already getting out her car keys, "but yes, let's go."

"So where are we going?" she asks once they reach the car.

He thinks, the ideal place for teenagers skiving off school is of course somewhere in the woods, where they can fuck in the car without being noticed, but he's not sure she's going to appreciate that suggestion, "We never did go bowling."

"Urgh, no, I *feel* like a bowling ball."

"Mini golf?"

"I'd rather slit my wrists."

"I'm guessing camping is out too then?"

She doesn't even bother to respond, just gives him a look.

"How about you come over to mine? We can make brownies and watch a movie or something."

"That sounds more like it."

xxx

Veronica, it turns out, is not very good at making brownies. She mixes too fast, making the flour and sugar fly everywhere - which she blames on her belly off balancing her, and then is more interested in scooping as much mix into her mouth as possible rather than the baking dish – which she blames on pregnancy cravings.

"I think you're just using this whole pregnancy thing as an excuse," he says, eyeing the pitifully shallow mixture in the dish, he swears he can see more around her mouth.

She shakes her head, giggling as a cloud of powdered sugar appears from her hair, "I am suffering JD, and this is all you can say to me?"

"Well, we're both gonna suffer when these brownies come out of the oven a thin, burnt mess."

"Whatever, the mix tastes better than brownies anyway."

"I wouldn't know, most of it is smeared on your mouth."

"I reckon there's still enough left for you to have a try..."

"Are *you* hitting on me?"

She grins cheekily, "Only if you want to take it that way..."

"And if I very much do?"

She leans over, planting a kiss firmly on his lips, she's right – brownie mix does taste much better raw, especially when licked off her lips.

The brownies never make it into the oven and they never get around to watching the movie.

You'll be feeling pretty big by now. And not surprising really, your baby is now the size of a butternut squash! Make sure you take it easy and don't be too active, as this is when you really start to feel the weight of the baby and insomnia is common. Spend it instead with your partner - after all, this is the last time it's going to just be the two of you!

"So, prom's coming up, wanna go?"

She looks up from where she's snuggled against him, as they idly watch a Killer Klown from Outer Space shrink a crowd of people then dump them in a bag full of popcorn, she looks a little surprised but not unpleasantly so.

They're not dating, at least not officially, unlike last time they have decided to take things slowly. They are not putting a label on it, giving big declarations of love or making it known at school. But she spends a lot of evenings, once he's finished work, over at his (Veronica's 18th birthday last month has at least stopped her parents having any right to ground her - although he knows they don't particularly approve) watching TV and bad movies, ordering chilli fries, trying to learn how to play poker, cuddling and making out. It's nice, it feels like a light breeze compared to the raging storm which was their former relationship. But then again, they are different people to the naïve, unhappy teenagers they were when they first met, and they need to discover each other, and themselves, on these new terms.

"In my state? I'd be the talk of the dance, and not in a good way, and that's if I even managed to find a dress that fit me."

"There are plenty of lovely dresses for pregnant women – there's a whole market for it – capitalism loves that kind of stuff. You'll look stunning, you always do. And you shouldn't let some Westerberg idiots' opinions make you miss a milestone high school event if you want to go. Who knows, you might even get Prom Queen on account of your bravery and courage or some shit."

She grins, "You know what? Any embarrassment over being a pity Prom Queen would be worth it to see the look on Heather Duke's face."

She's tempted, he can tell, so he pushes a little further, "Come on Ronnie, I know you would like to, it would be fun to just be teenagers for a while. I know Heather Mac and Martha would love you to be there too. We can finish the year showing all of them that none of this is going to stop us."

"You really want to go?" she asks, "I feel like you'd think prom is a bit too much of a cultish social gathering for your tastes?"

"I want to go if it makes you happy," he says simply, tightening his arm around her waist so she's snuggled even more snugly against him.

She thinks about it for a second, rubbing her fingers gently across his thigh as she does so, "Ok then, yes, let's go."

He grins, pulling her in for a kiss.

"Maybe you should meet me at school though, my parents still don't like you much."

He scoffs, "What do they think I'm gonna do to you? Get you pregnant?"

xxx

He was right, she does look stunning. She is in a blue silk empire line dress, it is sequined and sparkly and shows off her lovely pregnancy boobs while leaving her bump barely noticeable.

He meets her at the school gates, in a tux he hired especially, as she comes in with Martha and Heather Mac. Neither of Veronica's friends have a date of their own – at least not officially – but he's watched the two of them together in the last few months and he's got his own suspicions about whether the two girls are really going as just friends.

"You look lovely, all of you." He says, handing Veronica a corsage, a blue rose which spent all day tracking down.

Veronica grins, securing it on her wrist and then taking his hand, she sounds a little giddy, "Thank you. I really didn't think I'd be able to be here after everything, this means a lot, JD."

It does to him too, their life is still not going to be normal, far from it – but just for tonight it's so nice to be teenagers, participating in a school ritual that he never imagined he'd have any reason to go to.

"I've brought some spare soda – given I have a sneaking suspicion that the punch will end up spiked," he says, showing her the cans of coke stuffed inside his tux.

"I'm sorry, you're sneaking pop into prom so we *don't* have to drink booze?" she asks, laughing.

"Well, a slushie wouldn't fit in my pocket..."

He pulls her onto the dancefloor, holding her close, as they sway to *I Think We're Alone Now*, he's not sure if it's the pregnancy or just her natural beauty but under the disco lights she looks radiant, "Can I kiss you?" he mutters in her ear, "I know we're not officially dating and school doesn't know but..."

She pulls him towards her by his lapels, kissing him deeply.

"Mmmmm, I'm guessing that's a yes then?"

"I think it might be."

He grins before pressing his lips back to hers, getting lost in her arms until the song changes to *Holding out for a Hero* and they break apart to dance wildly to the upbeat music, he raises his arm and spins her beneath it, around and around as they both laugh hysterically.

"JD, you're gonna have to stop," she giggles, "I feel dizzy," and then suddenly her tone becomes serious, "JD, I feel dizzy." And, he only just has time to catch her before she faints.

"Someone get help!" he shouts.

xxx

"You can come in," says the nurse.

He rushes through. She's sitting up, hair still twirled up in her fancy updo – though the stunning blue dress has been replaced by a white hospital gown.

She looks fine. Thank God.

She grins at him sheepishly, "Sorry, there goes our night of being normal teenagers."

"Veronica, that doesn't matter at all, I'm just glad you're ok." He turns to the nurse, "She is ok, isn't she?"

The nurse nods, "Don't worry, these things can happen at this stage of pregnancy, if the bump presses against the wrong part of the blood vessels or lungs, it needs to be checked of course, but in this case all looks good. Mother is fine, and I've done a quick ultrasound to check on the baby, he's fine as well."

He notices first, sure he's misheard, "Wait," he says "*he*?"

"Oh the baby is a boy," says the nurse, slightly surprised, "sorry I thought you said you already knew the gender?"

"We thought we did," says Veronica, "we were told the baby was a girl."

The nurse takes one more look at the images, "No, definitely a boy. You do get that occasionally with male foetuses, they can be a bit shy."

Veronica recovers from the shock quickly "Oh," she says, "I guess it's a good thing I mostly bought blue stuff anyway, might need a bit of a rethink on the names though."

She's laughing but he can't see the humour at all, the room feels like it's spinning and he thinks Veronica might not be the only one who faints tonight.

He could deal with a girl, he wanted a girl, but not a boy. He doesn't know how to deal with boys. The only way he knows to raise a son is to shout and scream, to hit and punch. His son will look up to him, will try and emulate him – and all he will find is a broken boy who can't do anything right or a man who resorts to violence when he runs into a problem, who will muck up his own son the way his father mucked him up. If he is near this child he will just turn him into someone who will destroy everything he loves until everyone leaves him.

He can't do this. He can't do this. He can't do this.

His feet move of their own accord. Somewhere in the back of his mind he can hear Veronica calling him, asking what he's doing, where he's going, but he can't even process her words - never mind formulate his own to respond. He just needs to be as far away from this child and her as humanly possible.

He walks in the cold and dark not really knowing where he's going until he runs into a greyhound station at the edge of town. He gets on a bus not really caring where it takes him. And then when it arrives he gets another.

And another.

And another.

Month 8

You might be feeling a bit down and icky during this period - with an even bigger belly and lower back pains. But don't worry - you are so nearly there! Your baby looks very much like a baby now, with fully developed lungs and thicker and smoother skin - it should become more active too so be prepared for more kicks!

Maybe start reading your parenting books in preparation for the big day - though I'm sure in any case you will be a great mom and dad.

He takes the buses for days, weeks, gazing, milky eyed, out of the window, ignoring anyone foolish enough to try to start a conversation with him, subsisting off slushies and the odd 7-Eleven pizza. Hoping that maybe one day he will be numb enough that his brain will turn to ice and he'll never have to think again.

But it does not, he just gets thinner, colder and dirtier, and dangerously close to running out of money. When he finally comes to enough to work out where he is, he is in Texas. Of course it's Texas.

The same autopilot which drove him to get out with no destination in mind now pulls him towards exactly one place.

It's already evening when he gets there, the cemetery is dark and badly lit and he hasn't been there in the best part of a decade but still he knows the way. The headstone is less pristine than he remembers, it looks dull and is spotted with moss and the burial ground is mostly weeds, although there are still flecks of colour from the flowers that remain. He knows no one has bothered visiting her in years.

He sits there, cross legged in the middle of the greenery, noting how much more space he takes up than when he was ten. It's weird to think that now, even after all this time, she is so close, here below him - yet still as unaware of her son as his own son is of him.

"Hi Mom."

It takes him a long while to say anything else, instead he plays with the weeds surrounding him as he watches the sun sink below the horizon. When he does continue his voice is croaky from disuse.

"Things aren't going so great for me at the moment. I – well there's this girl, Veronica – she's great, she's perfect, you'd love her. She's pregnant – and it's mine but I don't know what to do,

Mom. I love her, I love Veronica so much and I love this child – my son. But how can I do it? How can I get close? I know nothing about being a father – God knows Dad didn't teach me anything – and I am a bad person Mom, just like him. I'll hurt him – I'll fuck him up. I'll drive Veronica to leave him too, to leave us all. I don't know what to do, Mom. What do I do?"

She doesn't respond. He doesn't know what he expected, he wasn't expecting her ghost to rise to give him guidance or anything, but perhaps a gust of wind or a leaf falling in front of him would have been nice, to let him know that she was listening. That she is anything other than a clump of cold bones buried in a coffin beneath him.

"I NEEDED YOU, I NEEDED YOU MOM, I NEEDED YOU THEN. I NEED YOU NOW, BUT YOU LEFT ME. YOU LEFT ME WITH HIM. YOU LEFT ME WITH NO IDEA WHAT TO DO, WITH NO ONE TO HELP ME."

His hands curl into fist, grabbing the remaining flowers and uprooting them, throwing them at her grave, at her, before kicking her headstone, screaming and crying, clawing at the dirt, wondering if maybe he can cover himself with it, if he could bury himself with her – would anyone even care?

Eventually, his shouts turn to sobs, clinging to the headstone – the only real proof that his mother had existed, he cries so much no more tears come out.

A boy needs his parents.

And he's not had any for so long.

He wakes up in the early morning, curled up in the dirt beside the headstone. What he did feels so silly, so weak, in the cold light of day. It's the kind of thing his father would take the piss out of him for, he would say he's pathetic, tell him to grow up and be a man.

His father would never understand why he'd done this, why he'd freaked out, ran away and pitched a fit on his mother's grave, all because he'd discovered he was having a son.

He frowns, realising something, he thinks the statement over, until his head feels clearer than it has for weeks.

He looks up to the sky. The sunrise is beautiful.

It's time to go home.

xxx

He travels all through the day and night, and gets back to Sherwood at seven in the morning. She'll be going to school in an hour, he needs to catch her before that, so goes straight to hers.

Her mom answers the door, and for a few long seconds, she does not recognise him, telling him she doesn't have any money or food to give him - and when she does realise who it is she looks even less impressed.

"Please," he begs, "I know I don't deserve it, but I need to talk to her."

Vivian Sawyer doesn't respond, instead turning on her heel and returning inside the house, but the door is left ajar so he waits.

Veronica comes out several minutes later, face as angry as the day she broke up with him, but when she catches sight of him it softens slightly.

"Jesus JD, you look dreadful."

She's bigger now than she was when he last saw her, maybe three weeks ago - it can't be long now, but her clothing, as always, is impeccable – he feels very out of place with his almost unrecognisable tux, dirty and ragged, his cheeks sallow from not bothering to feed himself much.

"I assure you I wasn't having any fun."

"Where have you been?" her voice is tart.

He shrugs, "Not sure, sat on buses, went anywhere they took me, ended up in Texas, visited my mother."

"Oh." She says, "Oh." Then more angrily, "You just left me JD. On my own, without a word, while I was still in the fucking hospital, anything could have happened! And I was so worried about you, I didn't know if you were coming back - if you were even still alive! Did you think about what the stress was doing to me? What it could have done to him? I thought you were getting better JD, I thought maybe I could trust you again - that we could have something together that vaguely resembles normal - but then you do this and I know you're just as thoughtless and selfish as ever. Why did you do it? Why did you leave JD?"

He blanches, speaking hurriedly, "It wasn't like that Veronica, I swear. I just- I don't know- It was a boy. I was scared."

"Scared of what?"

He looks down, making patterns in the dirt with his shoe, "Scared he was going to turn out like me. Or, worse, that I was going to turn out like my father. I thought he would be better off if he just didn't have me in his life at all. I thought you would be too."

"So why did you even bother coming back?"

"I didn't much enjoy having my mom not in my life either." *It's the reason I didn't just jump off a building.* Are the words that go unspoken, *I couldn't let my own child have that burden.*

"I want to be in his life Veronica, he's not even here and I love him more than my father ever loved me, I realise that now. I want to try."

She hesitates, "If you agree to this, it has to be forever, for the rest of your life, JD. I can't have you coming back and then flaking out again, that would be even worse for him than you leaving last time."

"I know," he says, "I couldn't."

"And go to a fucking therapist, please."

He nods, it's a fair request.

"I'm sorry, I really am, I can't even tell you how much."

"Val is a gender neutral name," she says softly. A peace offering, they both know it, but he takes it gratefully, even with some relief - his mother may be lying, unknowing, underneath a muddy piece of soil covered in uprooted flowers, but some part of her will be here now, not forgotten.

"I think it sounds nice." he says.

She gives him the smallest of smiles, "I'm glad you came back."

"Me too."

Month 9

And this is it! You're ready to pop. Try not to let the concept of labour intimidate you, you will get through it with all the love and support of your friends and family - and then it's on to your next great adventure - parenthood!

He paces outside the delivery room.

Logically, he knows it will be fine. She's a few days after her due date, went into labour naturally, and every update he's been given has been that it's going as expected, but even so, his mind is conjuring up a million scenarios of how this could all go wrong.

He wishes he was allowed in the delivery room, but Veronica has been very firm that, after everything, she wants her mother with her. They're not on bad terms as such, he's been doing his best to be good, checking in on her, doing everything he can to help, going back to school (though he's inevitably going to have to retake the year) but she's still a little frosty with him and he understands it's going to take a long time to regain her trust. Still, it's been hours and he knows that she's in pain and he just wants to be there with her.

The door swings open and he immediately turns towards the sound.

"How is she?"

"Come in," says the midwife, "she's asking for you."

He all but runs. He's hot on the midwife's heels as he follows her into the room,

Veronica is there, in her white hospital gown, face red and tired, but with that kind of unyielding determination that he saw on her that day in the boiler room. This time though, when she looks at him, her face is not full of fear or pity but relief, and he rushes over. Her mother looks at him, slightly thin lipped – he's still not her favourite person – but apparently

she has decided to call a truce for the moment, and moves out of the seat beside Veronica, allowing him to sit and take her hand.

This is it, a moment that will change their lives forever, he's glad he's with her for it.

"How are you feeling?"

"Awful," she says, "the contractions are coming so fast now, the midwives are saying it's nearly time to push."

And right on cue she screams and squeezes his hand so tightly he's pretty sure she's broken some bones.

"Come on babe," he mutters, "we started this together, we can finish it too."

xxx

For all the upheaval he has caused in their life, their son is a tiny little thing. Once the midwife cleans off all the blood, swaddles him in a blanket and puts him in her arms, he can see he's a pretty creature, with a wrinkled face, bright baby blue eyes and a surprisingly large mop of curly blonde hair. He can't take his eyes off him.

"He's beautiful," she breathes.

"He looks like you," he says, and he does, he's got her inquisitive eyes, cute little nose and her beautiful lips and he can't wait until he can see them form her smile.

She laughs, "Just like most babies, he mostly looks like Winston Churchill at the moment. The blond curls aren't mine in any case, my hair was nearly black when I was born."

It takes him a while to get the words out, "My mother had blonde curls."

"It was worth it," she says quietly, "all of the bullshit we went through was worth it for him."

"He was. He is. I would do anything for him. I would..." he hesitates under Veronica's weary, but still steely, glare, "fiercely, but non violently, fight anyone for him. You know, in a peaceful way."

Veronica's mouth twitches into a reluctant smile.

xxx

The chaos of a working hospital returns, the baby is taken away for tests and then passed around Veronica's parents, and Heather and Martha when they arrive, Veronica is checked and stitched up. It's hours before everyone leaves and it's just the two of them and a nurse.

"Do you know the baby's name?" the nurse asks.

JD looks at Veronica guiltily, he freaked out too soon after finding out that they were having a boy to discuss it then, and, in the weeks since his return, he's been too nervous to even ask

whether she decided the first name in his absence.

But Veronica just smiles and shakes her head, "Not yet, we wanted to talk about it once we'd seen him."

The nurse nods and leaves them with the form.

"So, any ideas?"

"How about-"

"We're not giving him a stupid name like Holden or Hamlet."

"I was going to say - how about Charles?"

Veronica narrows her eyes, "That seems suspiciously normal..."

"After Charles Baudelaire."

"Ah, of course," she says, raising her eyebrows, "we are all born marked for evil?"

He smiles gently, he's rather fond of that quote, "We'll just have to keep working on keeping his soul clean."

She considers, "I like it. Charles Val Sawyer has a nice ring to it."

"Sawyer?"

"For now."

"Until our marriage?"

"Let's deal with the more pressing issues at the moment, JD."

He grins, it's not a no.

And, when he leans in to give her a peck on the lips, she does not pull away.

He was so scared, and maybe he still should be – they have not made life easy for themselves choosing this path – but every doubt in his mind that he might hurt his son like his father or leave him like his mother, has fled at the sight of his little face. He could never, he will fight every demon he has, to protect him, to keep him and Veronica in his life – for good this time.

For the first time since his mother never walked out of that library in Texas, he has a family, an imperfect still slightly fucked up one - but more healthy than the one he lost - one with a chance of happiness and not just a foregone tragedy.

And, for now, that is enough.

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