

Seventeen

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Summary

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Now that he thinks about it, he was kind of hoping she'd talk him out of it. That she, Veronica, the one standing pillar of good in this fucked up world, could tell him not to do this. Maybe he would've listened to her. She stopped him from killing Heather Duke, she stopped him from taking down the whole lot of them when the rumors about her were spread; the part of him that can leave the house without a gun had been begging that he didn't break his promise. If anyone out there could ever, *ever* convince him not to take down Westerburg High, it would inevitably be Veronica.

One problem: Veronica is dead.

JD isn't the type of person to let despair get in the way of his work -- if anything, it's forcing him forward. Sure, it hurt to see the only person who's ever loved him hanging there in her closet. It hurts more to keep questioning why she did it. Was it the guilt, the fear of being caught? The realization of what she'd done by leaving him? Did she plan to join Heather Chandler and the jocks in Heaven or Hell or wherever people like them end up? And did she not consider for a second as she tied the noose that she still had a chance until this, until she decided to leave for good? Thinking about it makes him sick to his stomach. The nausea comes in waves, as does the pain in his chest. It wasn't so bad until he saw her there. He could fight through it before, as long as he had Veronica. He wasn't afraid with her.

Now he's terrified. He wouldn't admit it, but the world bears down on him with such weight that he's afraid he might collapse even as he keeps his head down on the way to the boiler room. No one can stop him, that he knows, and he can't seem to frame it as a definitively good or bad thing. He just wishes she were here to see his masterpiece. If Veronica won't finish the work they began, he sure as hell will. He knows the pattern now, sees the way things *refuse* to change. Heather Duke's end will only give life to the next red-scrunchied bitch, whether it be McNamara or one of the other cheerleaders or someone entirely different. Westerburg is doomed to a cycle of Heathers and Marthas, harsh words and harsher stares. Well, it *was*. Now it's just flat-out doomed. No one looks at him, even though he's rushing; they're all on the way to the pep rally, so they've got bigger things to worry about. Who they'll be sitting with, whether it'll be any good, if this time they might get to see up the cheer team's skirt. Mourning their beloved Heather Chandler.

His hands don't shake when he sets it down, perhaps because he can't connect with the nervousness that he's feeling. The thermals upstairs won't fail, he knows that much -- taken from his dear father's trusty supply. Maybe his dad will be pissed off about that, when he finds out. He knows how the conversation will go, because he speaks as his father so often. The ashes of Westerburg will appear on the news and he'll think, *wish I could've done that one*, and take a nice walk through his store of explosives just to make himself feel better about the fact that he didn't. He'll see what's missing and remember the sound of his son punching the wall of his room and be unsure of whether or not to think *oh, shit*, or *nice one, son*. JD only wonders where they'll go next. He wants to take Veronica with him, he thinks, but it hits him all over again. She's dead. She killed herself, to get rid of her guilt or her fear or *something*.

On second thought, maybe this time *she's* the one taking him with her. Maybe he won't leave. She's up there, he's sure, in Heaven, and maybe if he's lucky he can go that way too. There

won't be any reason to kill then, and everyone will know, they'll realize that he was doing them a favor! Saving them from their ignorance, their hatred, their cruelty. Maybe they can just be seventeen, even if they're all dead. Like it was meant to be. Like Veronica hoped for.

He commits himself to this the moment before he hears, "Step away from the bomb."

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