

Can't We Be Seventeen

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/38125144) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/38125144>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warnings:	No Archive Warnings Apply , Underage Sex
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Heathers: The Musical - Murphy & O'Keefe
Relationship:	Jason "J. D." Dean/Veronica Sawyer
Characters:	Jason "J. D." Dean , Veronica Sawyer , Heather Duke
Additional Tags:	Teen Romance , Smoking , Underage Sex - Freeform , Underage Smoking , Unreliable Narrator , like just the most unreliable narrator , Delusions , Implied/Referenced Abuse , more Heathers musical than Heathers movie , Threats of Violence , a whole motherload of dramatic irony , Character Study
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-04-02 Words: 7,126 Chapters: 1/1

Can't We Be Seventeen

by [sparklyslug](#)

Summary

“Anyway, I don’t feel sorry for you,” she declares after a moment, like she hasn’t just caused his brain to shoot out the top of his head like the cap on a bottle of fucking mentos and Coke. “You’re actually pretty lucky, when you think about it. What if you’d had to read *The Great Gatsby* at *every* high school you’ve been to? Ten times in four years.”

“Oh,” JD says without thinking, “then I *definitely* would have turned to homicide earlier.”

Fortunately, a little surprisingly (possibly to both of them), Veronica laughs.

Noted, JD thinks with relief, as he slides an arm around her waist, grinning and reaching for the mixing bowl with his other hand. Nice to know pretending to be normal has its limits.

(Baking brownies, going bowling, and other attempts at being a normal couple of seventeen-year-olds in love.)

Notes

I wanted to build out a little time after "Seventeen" and before "Shine a Light," to dig into those efforts to be normal (and, yes, for JD to join the goddamn A/V Club). And also! Because I wanted! More time for these messed up teens to be happy together! Still managed to make myself sad with it! Also moved the confrontation between Martha and Veronica up as well, for plot reasons.

Obligatory blanket statement that the actions thoughts deeds general vibe of this budding serial killer are nOT okAY and we all know that. Right? Right??

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

We could just be seventeen, Veronica says. *That's what I want, okay?*

And JD trusts her. He absolutely does. So if she says that's something they can do, he can believe her. And if she says that's what he wants, he can try to want that too.

—

"I guess I could only fend off the inevitable for so long," JD muses. "I fought, *god* I fought, but it was no good. I'm just a cog in the great machine, helpless in the face of forces beyond my control. They were all stacked against me from the start: fate. Destiny."

"The lack of imagination of the American school system," Veronica supplies, turning away from the oven timer to face him.

"The most diabolical force of them all," JD agrees, and slaps the dog-eared copy of *the Great Gatsby* against his palm. "But after all this time, I've met my match. Senior English at Westerberg High. Oh, that it would end like this."

"Right, because scathing takedowns of a decadent materialistic society would naturally be your academic worst nightmare," Veronica's eyebrows lift devilishly, an impression she compounds by sliding a finger along the inside of the bowl on the counter, scooping up a generous amount of brownie mix.

"You're making fun of me," JD says, but he can't help how he's smiling at her.

"Maybe *just* a little bit," Veronica slides the finger into her mouth, keeping her eyes on his. JD slowly leans back, rests his hips on the island countertop behind him. Real marble, he's pretty sure. Even for a short-term stay, Big Bud Dean likes to have the best in materials. They're so much more satisfying to destroy.

His grin turns knowing, lifts to one side lazily as she slowly withdraws her finger.

"They almost got me, a couple times," he says, eyes on her lips. He knows how his voice sounds: confessional. Rough. Intimate. She does that to him, brings that out in him, so easily. "My closest escape was North Carolina. I was just one week away from the *Gatsby* unit, seemed like it'd happen that time for sure. But then dad's last 'contract' fell through, and we were out of there two days later. So it was hello Florida, bye-bye F Scott Fitzgerald."

"Until Sherwood, the green light calling you across the bay," Veronica says, offering him the mixing bowl. "Which, for the record, is a reference you'll *really* dig in about a week and a half."

He grins, and shrugs out of his jacket, tossing it over the back of the nearest chair. Brownie batter smeared across a lapel would really do a number on his Cool Guy vibe. And is possibly

a bitch to wash out, not that he would really know. Brownies are kind of outside of his limited culinary repertoire. Or had been, until Veronica had showed up with an armful of boxed mix and wooden spoons, taking command of his kitchen like a seasoned campaigner.

“I’ll take your word for it,” he says, and takes the mixing bowl.

He’s not totally sure how this ended up being their plan for the evening, but he’s not complaining. Things have felt a little raw since the funeral, a little tender, and he wants to keep his promise to her. He wants to try, to see if they can just abandon any kind of holy higher calling and just...be. Live like any other normal couple of kids.

He doesn’t really get *how* he might do that. But he wants to try. And if it involves Veronica filling up this cold, neglected kitchen with a chocolatey sweetness and cozy heat? He can handle that.

JD slides a finger through the bottom of the bowl, admiring the streak of silver left behind as he scoops up a gleaming glob of mix. Strands of the stuff slide down the side of his hand and his wrist, so he’s probably docked a few seduction points for how quickly he just jams his finger in his mouth. Veronica made it look so easy. She makes most things look so easy.

She also doesn’t seem to mind his lapse in suavity. She steps in close, hips swaying, eyes bright with a smile that lights up her whole face, just for him. The brownie mix is gritty, inexpertly mixed, the taste of vegetable oil strong against his tongue. It’s also sweet, and heady, and he absolutely loves it. Liked it even better when he could taste it against Veronica’s lips while she was mid-mix. But this is fine too.

He only has a moment to enjoy it though before Veronica has a hand wrapped around his arm, gently but irresistibly drawing his hand away from his mouth and— *oh*, and closer to hers. She examines the streaks of brownie mix standing out starkly against the pale skin of his wrist. And then she gently, slowly, licks it away.

“Anyway, I don’t feel sorry for you,” she declares after a moment, like she hasn’t just caused his brain to shoot out the top of his head like the cap on a bottle of fucking mentos and Coke. “You’re actually pretty lucky, when you think about it. What if you’d had to read *The Great Gatsby* at *every* high school you’ve been to? Ten times in four years.”

“Oh,” JD says without thinking, “then I *definitely* would have turned to homicide earlier.”

Fortunately, a little surprisingly (possibly to both of them), Veronica laughs.

Noted, JD thinks with relief, as he slides an arm around her waist, grinning and reaching for the mixing bowl with his other hand. Nice to know pretending to be normal has its limits.

The thing about Veronica is, she slipped past his guard before he even realized what was going on. She blindsided him. But instead of the shock, the anger, the fear that comes along with every nasty surprise in JD's life, it was just... *right*.

He's the kind of guy who (verbally, emotionally, and okay, also literally) arms himself against surprise. And yet. She tumbled through his bedroom window after all of one and a half conversations and he just... went with it. It only occurred to him to be worried when she was already finding her pace above him, her fingers tight in his hair. Then that dark flash of fear cut through him sharp and hot, that *wait, I shouldn't have even let her get through the window*, completely too late and completely unwanted and soon (since he kinda had better things to focus on in the moment), completely forgotten.

And listen. Veronica's his first in every fucking way that matters. But it's not just that she was someone who wanted him. It's not like no one hasn't ever been *interested* before. He's seen it often enough during each of his high school restarts that it stopped being a surprise: the shy eye contact, nervously bitten lips, awkward attempts to engage him in conversation, yadda yadda yadda. He knows he makes a certain kind of impression on a certain kind of girl. It's not like he cultivates the image on purpose or anything (okay, maybe a *little*), but he gets what it's really about. Some girls like that he's just a little *bad*.

By their limited, shallow, pathetic understanding of the word, of course: most of them wouldn't know real *bad* if it was squatting right on the tip of their shiny, spotless tennis shoes.

He could have entertained it at some point, he supposes. Sometimes they might have been smart, or cute, or even a little funny. From a purely animal-brain, male bullshit perspective, he could see the temptation. But it always felt like a lot of work, to fake whatever it was they needed him to fake in order to... what? Get a clumsy grope over the sweater in the backseat of her car, before he was inevitably on to the next town a few days later? Check his virginity off some ridiculous teenaged to-do list, when he was already too aware of how meaningless the *rest* of that list was? The very idea bored him stupid. Stuff like that, a life like that, wasn't for him.

First time he spoke to Veronica, he didn't know. Didn't know how different she was, from all those girls who didn't see him as more than a black t-shirt, a smirk, and a hint of violence. And yeah, maybe she got off on seeing him lay waste to the resident beef-for-brains a little bit. Maybe she likes that he's a little bad. But she's got no illusions about what that really means. She's looked right into it, she's seen how deep-down dark that *bad* really goes. And she loves it. She loves him.

She takes him by the hand and leans wordlessly against his shoulder in the hallway, tucking her head against his neck. Kisses him, before God and man and her third period chemistry class, and puts a little bite in it as she pulls away. Just for him, because she knows it sends him off with a little extra fizz in his blood.

He didn't consciously know all that, not right away. Except something made him open his mouth in the first place, didn't it? He didn't need to say anything to her at all, could've just observed the cruel bullshit the Heathers were roping her into without comment. Maybe noting the fact of her with a little interest, but certainly not doing anything in particular to

draw the attention of an unknown girl. Drawing *anyone's* notice in a new place being a thing he tries to keep to a minimum for as long as possible. But he didn't do that, didn't stick with the regular program. Something in him knew, right from the start.

If he's more uncertain lately, if he's— okay, if he's a little fucking *angry* sometimes— he can remind himself of that. He trusted her before he knew what he was doing. He trusted her before he knew just how right it was. He trusted her before he knew that he was meant for this and only this, from the moment of his first breath on his first day on earth.

He just needs to keep reminding himself of that, and it'll all be okay.

—

So bowling, uh, bowling's kind of a bust.

It's cute that Veronica is so all-in on this idea of them *dating*, going on dates. Movie nights sharing a bag of popcorn, kicking back on his couch and watching whatever's on TV. Sitting in the highest row of bleachers at a football game, paying next to no attention to what's happening on the field. He likes those moments with her, and likes the determination with which she approaches each date, like she's working through some checklist of her own.

Veronica With a Mission is among his favorite flavors of Veronica, regardless of the mission itself. He's just happy to be involved.

He was admittedly a little more apprehensive about the football game. But that turned out fine, free of douchebag interruptions or petty teenaged bullshit aimed their way. He certainly hadn't expected to get fucked up by *bowling* instead.

He's bowled before. Has vague memories of an earlier time, birthday parties and a ball he had to carry in both tiny hands. Food court nacho cheese smeared over his shirt, his mom dipping a napkin in a plastic water glass to wipe his face clean. Not a painful memory in itself, though also not something he particularly enjoys revisiting.

So it's not the associations. It's unfortunately the totality of the experience itself that ultimately sends him hiding out in the parking lot for a covert cigarette while Veronica apologetically returns their shoes after just one game.

Pathetic. Humiliating.

The place was an assault right from the jump. Not too crowded on a Thursday night, the alley was still echoing with shouts and laughter, the clatter of pins and tinny sound effects from the arcade sharing the space, loud and ceaseless and crashing around him. The neon and fluorescence pinned JD in place, turning him into a frightened rabbit under the glow of headlights, hoping in vain that stillness would save it. In the time it took for Veronica to walk

them through getting a lane assigned, JD's shoulders were already climbing towards his ears, eyes fixed on the floor.

He tried to stay focused. But it really only got worse from there.

There's relief out in the parking lot, at least. He doesn't feel *great*, his hands are shaking and he can't seem to loosen his shoulders, but he's at least feeling *better*. It's blessedly cool and dark out here, and free of the randomized *blam*, *crash*, *boom* of pins and balls. And not a single screaming kid anywhere in proximity.

Though, of course, what's actually in proximity could still be pretty bad.

"Awww, what's the matter, strike out already? Gotta be a feeling you're used to though, right?"

JD turns slowly, cigarette pressed between his lips, to face the gorgon herself.

Half-hidden just outside the glow of the nearest streetlight, Heather Duke flips her braids back over her shoulder, not apparently concerned at the way JD is glaring at her (she should be, though. She very much should be). He hadn't seen her inside, but then he had been focusing really hard on trying to get through the game without melting down completely, so his awareness of what was happening around him had been pretty dramatically narrow. The idea that she had been there, watching him without him realizing, makes him want to smash something to pieces.

"What, no posse?" JD asks around the cigarette, then withdraws it to blow a column of smoke in her direction. Maybe hoping she'll vanish along with it. "No pack of sycophants to prop you up?"

It's not his best, but under the circumstances...

"I don't see your little fan club around anywhere either," Heather snaps. "Bride of Frankenstein finally get wise to your gloomy act and split?"

God, he just has to kill her. There's really no way he can see things going otherwise. Now would—now would actually almost be a good time. Except Veronica could come outside any second. And, because he's really *trying* here, JD isn't armed.

Just as he gets around that thought, remembering how it had felt almost *romantic* to forgo any backup or protection, a stupid slick red sports car peels into the lot and straight over to the two of them.

He knows the type of guy who's going to get out of a car like that even before he sees him. And sure enough: carefully coiffed hair, spotless shoes, superior smirk.

"Sorry I'm late," the guy says, ambling over to Heather. "This guy bothering you?"

Heather smiles up at him, bats her eyes and runs a finger over his chest in a recognizably Heather Chandler move.

“What’d you do if I said yes?” She purrs.

The jerk looks over at JD, giving him a quick is-this-guy-a-threat assessment. Depressingly, JD knows what the result will be. Because the result is always the same.

Sure enough, the guy steps up close, puffing out his chest. He’s got a few years and a good four inches on JD, not to mention probably 50 additional pounds of muscle mass. The guy’s by no means a specimen of male intimidation, but JD can figure how it looks from the outside: next to a pale lanky *kid* like him, Heather Duke’s champion is practically an Adonis.

He doesn’t know, JD reminds himself furiously. *None of them know what I really am.*

“If he was bothering you,” the guy says, looking down into JD’s eyes with a lazy, confident stare. “I’d handle it.”

JD’s fingers are curling around his cigarette, ready, as the guy starts to raise his arm. To push, to strike, to shove—doesn’t matter. JD has an ember in his fist and he’ll meet him with it regardless of where he intends the blow to land. The cigarette is all he has, and he curses the stupid chivalric impulse that had him leaving his protection at home. But the cigarette is enough for now. He just can’t, he *can’t*, let himself get caught unprepared like this again.

He’s not prepared for the contact to come from behind though, as a hand touches gently against the middle of his back. JD jerks away and turns, cigarette raised defensively but—oh. Of course, he’s got a champion of his own.

Veronica smiles at him, an apology and a reassurance and more in her eyes, and steps forward to take the cigarette from his unresisting hand. She brings it to her own mouth, sucking in the smoke, as she turns to regard the enemies before them.

“Hey, Heather,” she says smoothly around her exhale. “Who’s your buddy?”

The guy scowls, but Heather Duke steps up quickly next to him, sliding her arms around his waist.

“This is Jason,” she tells Veronica, and JD wonders if there’s a little eagerness to please there, a little need for Veronica to be impressed, to be amazed. The thought strikes, before he can suppress it, that he and Heather Duke might have something in common. “He goes to Remington U.”

Veronica takes another drag, gazing at the two of them. “Okay,” she says, channeling Heather Chandler’s bored tone every bit as much as Duke had invoked her seductive manipulation. He doesn’t like this thought either: that Heather Duke and Veronica might have something in common too.

Heather Duke’s lip curls at the clear dismissal in Veronica’s voice, but maybe she’s not in the mood to fight without more numbers on her side.

“Let’s go,” she says, towing the silent Jason back to the ride he almost certainly didn’t buy with his own money.

They stand together in silence and watch them go. Veronica meditatively puffs on his cigarette, brushes the cuff of his sleeve with her hand (telegraphing the touch before it happens, maybe, something he's noticed her doing and wondering if it's purposeful, for his benefit) before lacing their fingers together.

"Sorry about that," JD says as the taillights whip out of view and off into the night.

"No," Veronica sighs. "*I'm* sorry about that."

He's not sure why she's apologizing, when she's the white knight here. But then she's turning to face him, fingers still linked together at their side, and raises the cigarette in her free hand.

Obediently, unthinkingly, his lips part for her at once as she carefully slides the end into place atop his bottom lip. Her fingers press against his mouth as he inhales, her thumb tapping gently against his chin. He looks in her eyes, panic and anger and fear emptied out of him all at once, and angles his head just a little to press his cheek into her palm.

He's rewarded with a smile, a little flash of desire in those bright eyes, as she withdraws the cigarette from his mouth.

He tilts his head back to send the smoke up into the night sky, his fingers still wrapped around hers.

"Come on," Veronica says when he looks back down at her, and flicks the cigarette onto the pavement. "Slushie time. You've earned it."

—

Okay it's just that, right, he believes in Veronica. He believes in her honesty. Her clarity. Her sincerity, her truth. Those are things that he loves about her. There's something about her, an absolute core of stainless steel. No— of gleaming platinum. She's powerful, and there's a purity in her determination in all that she does.

So he believed her, when she said she'd break up with him if this crusade didn't stop. And he, uh, he fucking hated it, okay? He hadn't expected that, and it had hurt. In the most juvenile, wanting-to-cry-like-a-kid way, it had *hurt* him. Still hurts him, even though seems like they're doing okay now (long as he keeps being a good little boy, of course).

Sure, she was mad, after she'd realized he'd a little bit lied to her about the "fake" bullets for Ram and Kurt. Sure, she needed time to adjust. She hadn't arrived at the inevitable conclusions (who they were, what they were, what they were entrusted with doing) as quickly as he had. Fine. Fine! And maybe JD could have been more patient, while she came around. It's just, he was thrilled, alright? By the town's reaction to Kurt and Ram's big beautiful "love affair," the proof positive of their mission. That it *worked*, that their love could be the

crucible that burned a better world into being. So he got carried away, fine. So he pushed her a little too hard, fine.

This ends now, she'd said after Ram and Kurt's funeral, and probably JD shouldn't have laughed. Probably JD shouldn't have stepped in to her, close and intimate enough for a kiss, one she wouldn't be able to sidestep this time.

Or what? He'd said. A little too cocky, he admits. Maybe with too much of an edge of violence, something of a threat, buried there in his tone. He hadn't been thinking really, about what he was saying. Had just wanted her to hurry up and walk through this logic for herself, to see. See that there was nothing in their way. Nothing that could stop them. No other option for them, either. No end to this. Now or ever.

Or I'm breaking up with you .

A heavy, suffocating shock crashed down on him then, looking into her clear eyes. Followed by a long, disbelieving disgust right on its heels. Because the idea that either of them would just *call it off*, walk away from the most glorious miracle they had ever or *could* ever know, hadn't ever crossed his mind. But it had crossed hers. Clearly.

He trusts Veronica. He believes her, and he believes *in* her. But that shock stays with him. He's doing his best, he's trying so goddamn hard. He's shrugging himself into the shape of Regular Ol Teen every single morning, even though it's a fork dragged down the cracked and stained porcelain of his soul. But he can't shake the knowledge that she really said she would do it, she'd leave him. And she'd meant it.

Well. She *thinks* she means it. But when push comes to shove? When the metal hits the meat? Would she actually do it? Of course not. He's sure of that.

Pretty sure of that.

The weight of the pistol in the waistband of his jeans isn't for her, it's *never* for her. But he's not like her, he's not in the business of lying to himself: he knows it brings him comfort. Serenity. And security, which he can't quite get from her in the same way anymore.

—

Yet again, JD has found himself flat on his back with this unstoppable, irresistible girl on top of him.

"You know," JD murmurs, kinda proud of how casual it sounds coming out of his mouth, "we really gotta stop meeting like this."

"Hush, you," Veronica says, and he can hear the smile in her voice. "I'm trying to concentrate, and you agreed you'd keep still."

“I don’t know about *agreed*,” JD says. “Kind of makes it sound like I had any choice in the matter. Your Honor, let the record show my client’s last words were ‘my eyelashes aren’t anything special,’ before he was shamelessly ambushed.”

“Objection, immaterial evidence,” Veronica says, no hint of a smile in her tone now. Maybe it was his too-facetious reference to the penal system, or maybe she’s just focused on whatever that soft-scratchy makeup brush is up to over his left eyelid. “Strike it from the record.”

He could ask what’s bothering her, but maybe it’d be better to let it go. There’s a thread of tension in Veronica lately, he’s noticed. Sometimes she seems to tune out a little or— not *out* so much as *into* some other frequency. Listening to a channel JD can’t hear.

But she only *thinks* he can’t hear it. He knows exactly what’s going on, because feels the cracks in the foundation himself, the groaning of pressure building up over these weeks of pretending. Of course she feels it too, *of course*. But, but— JD’s learned his lesson about pushing too fast, too soon. He can wait for her for a little while longer. Knowing that she’s feeling it too, that he’s not the only one struggling with this *normal*, makes it easier for him to cope with his own mounting frustration.

He can push it to the side for a little longer. He can wait.

Veronica’s sitting on his chest, knees pressing down just a little on his shoulders. He can smell the lingering hint of whatever it is she combs through her hair after a shower, something sweet and innocently floral, tempered by a pleasantly sharp edge of citrus. The tops of her thighs are warm under his palms, resting innocently just under the hem of her plaid pleated skirt.

Oh, he can wait. He can wait, right here, while Veronica amuses herself with covering half his face in Maybelline’s finest. He can do this for as long as she likes.

“The AV Club boys keep asking about you,” he says, suddenly remembering an excruciatingly awkward exchange from earlier that day.

“About me?” Veronica snorts a laugh. “I’m not about to hop in on spotlight duty for the assembly tomorrow, if they’re short a guy. Since I’m *in* the assembly. You know, the thing you’re helping me figure out TV makeup for?”

“Yes, and I am being so very, *very* helpful with that,” JD says. “But nah, I’ve cornered the spotlight market myself. It’s more that they just can’t seem to grasp the concept that someone who’s with you would even deign to dirty their shoes by associating with the likes of them.”

“Like I wouldn’t let you hang out with the lowly tech geeks, or something?” There’s a pause in the action over his eyelid, but the suspense only lasts for a second before something seems to need her urgent attention right under his eyebrow. “Wow, bow to stereotype much?”

“Yeah, it’s very after-school special of them,” JD agrees.

Veronica’s quiet for a second. JD would like to open his eyes to look up at her, but he’s already gotten yelled at for doing that about three times tonight already. See: he can be

taught.

“So, you’re ‘with’ me, huh?” She’s so sweet, when she goes bashful like this. He can never decide which Veronica he loves more helplessly: the one who ruthlessly shoves him to the floor to have her wicked way with him, or the one who blushes and stammers when he pulls her close and kisses her gently.

JD gives her thighs a little squeeze. “That’s what I told them.”

Veronica’s weight shifts above him, her knees pressing into his shoulders as she leans forward to press a kiss right in the center of his forehead. JD’s breath catches. He’s the one blushing now, probably.

“Good,” Veronica whispers, lips brushing against his skin. And sits back. Eyes still closed, JD starts to lean up after her, chasing that closeness, but is stopped by a hand on his chest and a laugh. “Ah, ah! I’m not done with you yet, Dean.”

“This might qualify as cruel and unusual punishment,” he grumbles, but allows himself to be pushed back down. “Which is particularly unfair, since I’ve been so *very* good.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Veronica says. “Take it up with Geneva.”

A few more strokes against his brow bone, and the brush ceases its motion. That thread of tension again, that feeling as though Veronica is having an internal conversation he can’t join. Waiting, waiting for her to let him in, yet again. Muscling his own quick flash of resentment down is a good enough distraction, while he waits.

“You have been good,” she says quietly. And he knows, immediately, that she doesn’t mean it in the more prurient way that he had been implying. “You’re *being* good.”

JD waits for more, but that appears to be it. “Thank you?” he offers, not sure what she’s looking for in response. “Or… you’re welcome?”

“No, I just meant. Do you. Like it?”

“Like it?” JD can’t help it anymore, he opens his eyes.

There she is. His *raison d’etre*, in all her glowing glory. Short curls pushed off her face with her favorite blue headband, the top two buttons of her white blouse undone and a delicate pulse thrumming at the base of her creamy neck. God, she drives him crazy sometimes. That full bottom lip is in the process of being tenderized between her teeth, and although she’s been looking right at him she still startles a little at how he’s suddenly returning the attention. Turnabout, Sawyer. Always fair play.

“Yeah,” she says. And touches him, tentatively, one fingertip sliding along the side of his jaw. “What we’re doing. How things are. Do you still want—”

He catches her hand with his, pressing the back of her fingers against his cheek. “Yes,” he says immediately, and when her eyebrows press together in concern, he has to rush to clarify. “Yes, I like it. The whole— it’s good. We’re good.”

He pauses. He doesn't want to lie to her. He's never *wanted* to lie to her. But even if she doesn't want to believe it, sometimes she needs the lies. Wants them, secretly. They protect her. They keep her happy. They let him take care of her, freeing her from the guilt she's still holding on to. But he knows it's made her unhappy, when she's found out about them after the fact. So this moment calls for a carefully balanced blend of the two: lies to protect her and truths to pacify her. He's just not sure what to say that wouldn't be, uh. Overselling the thing.

"You changed my mind, Veronica," he offers. "You changed *me*. I'm with you, for all of it. Whatever you decide that is."

God, her smile. When it breaks over her face like that, irrepressible and toothy and unconcerned with looking polished or cool and is just *stunning*, absolute sunlight and all for him.

It makes all of his lies absolutely worth it.

"Thank you," she says, and drops down again to kiss him, finding his mouth this time.

JD lets his hands slide inch by inch up her thighs, and then even more slowly back down to her knees. Reveling in the silky soft warmth under his hands, the heat of her lips, sparks kicking to life across his chest when her mouth opens and her tongue drags against his.

JD hasn't lived a particularly good life. Whatever he might say or try to be for her, he doesn't think he's a "good" person by any definition. So he doesn't really know how he managed to earn the gift of *time* with Veronica. He gets to learn that sometimes it can be heated and desperate and rushed between them, like they only get one shot at this. Like it's up to them to trick time itself and make the night last for eons.

And then there are times like this, when JD could lose himself entirely in nothing more than her lips and his hands on her thighs. Going farther isn't something he's *against* (he is, as Veronica has astutely noted, a seventeen-year-old guy after all), but the moment he's in now is too sublime not to savor. They're not tricking time, they're outside of it. They have all the moments, hours, years, epochs of man, that they could ever want. So why hurry?

Sometimes, things develop from there. This time, because Veronica has business at hand and maybe a little too much restlessness in her blood, she eventually pulls back first. JD doesn't mind much, especially since she doesn't go far. Just sits back on her heels to regard him, taking in her good work. Admiring whatever she's done to transform him with her little caboodle full of eyeliners and shimmery blushes, and perhaps even more with her hands and lips.

A shadow crosses her face though, for a moment. "Hey," JD clears his throat, takes one hand out from under her skirt to press comfortingly against the dip of her waist. "What is it?"

"It's just..." she sighs. "I said something... something really cruel to Martha today."

As far as mood-killing talk goes, that's a pretty winning sentence. "What happened?"

She shakes her head, eyes skittering away from his face to fix on the comforter, the bedside table, the wall. Ah. Something related to him, then, probably. “We were kind of...arguing. And I just said something mean. It happened so fast, I wasn't really thinking about it. I just knew exactly where I could hurt her, and how. So I did it. I mean, I think my reasons were good. But still.”

“Well, if your reasons were good...” JD trails off warily. This is starting to feel like *deja vu*, approaching the territory of a familiar argument. Something about the ends justifying the means, and he's not sure if Veronica is ready for it. (Waiting. Still waiting.) And he doesn't know what to make of Martha Dunstock as a topic of conversation. Someone who was close to Veronica, and is now... a sore spot. A source of guilt. A human avatar for broken social contracts, and their weight.

He has no issue with Martha in particular, but he has some issue with anything that tugs Veronica's sense of moral obligation towards the complacent. Plus, now Veronica mentions it, he has caught Martha looking intently at him over the last couple of days. X-raying him from across the cafeteria, and then quickly looking away when he catches her at it. It's not really worrying. Martha has no fangs. She's one of nature's gentle creatures, a sweet and biddable prey animal. It's what makes her easy to leave behind. But if it's some kind of jealousy thing, and they argued over it, he doesn't think Veronica will find it as amusing as he probably would.

“I just mean,” Veronica says, eyes now firmly fixed on where her hands are resting on his chest, fingers lax around a forgotten makeup brush. “I'm not so sure *I'm* being good.”

“Hey,” JD takes her face in both hands now, drawing it gently down closer to his. He doesn't have to lie, this time. “You *are* good. It's just the fact of you. Whatever you do, whyeveryou do it. That doesn't change anything about your basic, incredible *goodness* .”

And he kisses her, needing to feel her against him once more and also *desperately* needing to stop himself from saying anything else. Maybe Veronica feels that way too, because she immediately rocks up into his touch with a breathy moan that just kills him. She slides her legs down his body until they're fully flush against each other, and he can feel her heartbeat against his own. He's pretty sure one of them catches the makeup caboodle with a foot or an elbow because there's a muffled clatter as it topples off the bed, probably spilling beauty products everywhere, and absolutely neither one of them cares at all.

Maybe that answered whatever question Veronica needed to settle for herself. Because this time things... develop from there. And all is right in the universe once more.

He wakes up abruptly in Veronica's bed sometime just before 4AM. He regards the harsh red light of the clock on the bedside table for a while, watching the severe right angles of the digital display numbers click their way through a few formations. Veronica's breath wafts soft across his chest and her arm is slung across his waist, fingers curled loosely against his hip. A sweet thrill to offset the pain in his shoulder where it's spent hours pressed against the wall. Someday, they won't have to spend the night pressed tightly together in a twin bed like this. But maybe then he'll miss this tiny bed she's been sleeping in since childhood (or his

own mattress, thrown against the floor in true who-gives-a-shit fashion). Maybe he'll long for the days when they had to lace themselves so closely together even in sleep, barely room for a breath between their bodies. He might miss it. But his shoulder probably won't.

It's a good time to go, he knows. Veronica's mom is an early riser and likes to enjoy her morning coffee with the sunrise. And JD isn't nearly as elegant as Veronica when it comes to making a hasty exit out the window. Slip out of the house now, downstairs and out the door like a shadow, and it'll be like he was never here at all.

That idea doesn't sit well, even a little. But it's motivation enough for him to ease his way out from under Veronica, who makes a sleepy grunt in protest but burrows her way into the warmth he's left behind without apparently waking up.

Just in time, dressed and almost out the door, he remembers to take a minute he probably doesn't have to step into her en suite bathroom. If there's any trace of Veronica's handiwork left on his face, it's worth risking a little extra time now to wash it off before he goes home: while not necessarily likely, it's also not impossible that his dad could be home and awake when JD gets in. He might or might not give a shit to see his son in Veronica's full Covergirl splendor, and decide to do something about it. Kind of a fifty-fifty call there. Figuring out what his dad might or might not give a shit about, and what might be done to mitigate the chances of finding out, has become second nature to JD over the years, almost effortless. Almost.

But he's startled by what he sees in the bathroom mirror, illuminated softly in the dim pre-dawn light coming through the window. It's not the Official Heathers Makeover he was expecting, but something... else.

He doesn't turn on the light for a better view, just stares entranced at the dark lines swirling around his eyes, a deep burgundy red coating the lids and sweeping down towards his nose. She's traced out the hollow of his cheekbones and the dip of his temples in a dark shimmering shade. Some of it has clearly been smeared, rubbed or sweated off, and he wonders if Veronica will ever get the traces of it off her sheets (or her skin). But it looks even more impressive for the smudges and streaks, more... feral. His deep-set gray eyes seem to glow silver, picked out by all these shadows, and JD angles his face back and forth, a little entranced.

Okay. She was right. His eyelashes are pretty goddamn phenomenal.

But, more importantly... Veronica sees him like this? This is no seventeen-year-old boy standing in front of him. This is an avenging angel, an unholy warrior. A creature of righteousness, of darkness, of great purpose and even greater love.

JD is so shocked, so relieved, he staggers forward a little and has to catch himself against the counter. *She sees. She understands. She knows*. He takes one more long look, and then turns on the tap with a shaking hand. It's still got to go, but he'll remember.

Fact is, there have been times with her these last few weeks when he *has* enjoyed this attempt to just be a normal guy. He's gotten glimpses of it, of the life he could have. The highschool to-do list, which turns out to be richer and more vital than he had imagined back when he had

no one to share it with. Veronica had asked him, *do you think we can do this?* And there had been moments, real moments, when his answer was a sincere *yes* .

But only when they were together. Never, never when he was alone. And he's alone too much. Those are the times when he feels the hurt, the rage, the anger. The grief and frustration and resentment that he could love her *so much* , could see right to the heart of her, and in return she just keeps trying to remain blind. To him, to them, to the truth of their power. He always regrets it later, always tries to forget the glasses he shattered or the bullets fired in the depths of the woods. But when he's alone he's only angry.

Now, striding the witching hour streets of Sherwood Ohio, his jacket flapping companionably against his calves and his freshly-washed face stinging a little in the late-autumn chill, there's no anger. No resentment. He understands. He trusted her, he trusted her all along, but now he *gets it* .

She sees him. She knows him. She knows he can wait. She just needed this time, this punctuation mark between one life and the next. To say goodbye to those dreams she might have had once, before her fateful visit to the right 7-11 on the right night, at the right time.

She had to give those dead dreams their due. And she wanted to share that with him. Knowing him, understanding him, she of course realized that it wouldn't be forever. She hadn't wanted him to *change* , she just wanted him to wait while *she* did the changing. He shouldn't have been angry— he should have been *grateful* . The way he's grateful now.

The bullshit TV assembly is tonight (and he doesn't know what Veronica will do for her makeup, because he ultimately was decidedly unhelpful there), and he'll be perfectly placed on the sidelines with his spotlight to watch her swirl and sparkle but smile just for him. And soon they'll start their lives together. Their *real* lives together. Making a better world.

JD stretches his arms above his head, extending his palms to the fading starlight. Catches a glimpse on the cuff of his jacket where, despite his best efforts at the time, a dried crust of brownie batter has left a stubborn stain: he doesn't mind, now. He brings the cuff to his nose even, breathing deep the lingering sweetness of the batter, blended with the floral and citrus scent of Veronica still on his skin.

He gets what she wants. He gets who they are. If he can just wait, it'll all be fine.

JD puts his hands in his pockets. And contentedly whistles as he swaggers his way into the sunrise. Ready for the dawn that's breaking, and bringing with it a better world.

Better, and all for them. Him and Veronica. Together.

End Notes

I didn't even really know this musical was a thing until a certain TikTok audio hit me like a truck this February, I already know my 2022 Spotify Wrapped is going to come at me with a knife, and I am just down catastrophically bad for Jamie Muscato. Please keep me in your thoughts and prayers during this trying time.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!