

Deleted Scene: *Art Class (non-literal self-portrait)*

During art Bethany waited for James to show up. She started working on her worked-over painting, her brush circling randomly. The bell rang and James still wasn't there. She sighed. One of the nerdy girls had turned the radio to a country station, and adjusted the tin foil antenna so the music came through with only slight static. Bethany sighed and looked down at the random marks on her canvas.

Mr. Beck came up behind her, watching her stare for a few minutes. Bethany quickly tried to think of something to paint but her mind was as blank as a new notebook page. Finally Mr. Beck sat down. "Bethany, I've noticed you're having trouble with this assignment."

"Yeah," Bethany said.

"A lot of my students have trouble with the non-literal self-portrait," he said. "They're not sure which part of themselves they want to show to the whole world. They don't realize that they can show their whole personality without

showing anything, by painting abstractly, like a code only you know the key to.”

“I guess,” Bethany said.

“Just paint how you feel. Let the brush go where it wants.” Mr. Beck got up and walked away.

Bethany still stared at her canvas. Slowly she dipped her brush in black paint. I feel black, she thought. As the brush eased along, it painted a black crow. Bethany wondered if it would be a dead crow, like that sketch she’d done (that Raina told me was trying too hard, Bethany added) but quickly it became something else. Fiery red and orange flames radiating. It almost looks positive, Bethany thought—but then she added the darker, burgundy and mustard-colored flames trailing behind the crow’s outstretched wings. She worked without consciously knowing where her brush would go next, what color it would pause over and dip into, without feeling the cramps in her neck and back.

Then the painting was done. She felt like it had happened so fast. But when she looked

up, finally feeling the stiffness in her neck, something looked different. Mr. Beck was still at his desk, writing something, but the other students were different. Newspaper covered the long wooden tables, and people were busy molding clay into various shapes. She couldn't remember hearing the bell ring. The clock, however, said it was past the lunch hour.

“Very nice work, Bethany,” Mr. Beck said. He had walked up behind her again. “You seemed to be so deep in the creation process that I just let you continue working. I hope that's alright.”

Bethany rubbed her eyes. “Sure,” she said softly.

“You've heard me talk about how I feel regarding class periods. It's very difficult to go from thinking mathematical terms or thinking artistically, in the span of forty-five minutes. And that isn't subtracting any time for setting up or cleaning up. Art students at this school are really only given little more than a half-hour to work. Most students can't get into the proper frame of mind to really express themselves

artistically in thirty-five minutes, so when I see a student REALLY creating, I like to let that person continue... who cares what the school board says.”

Bethany barely heard Mr. Beck’s rant. She just nodded, and cleaned up her supplies, drained. Mr. Beck gave her a pass to her history class. “Feel free to come after school and use the art supplies to create. It’s a little easier than during school hours,” he said. She thanked him and left.