

Deleted Scene: *Halloween Party & aftermath*

The streetlights had come on when James's gray Oldsmobile swung into the driveway. Bethany ran downstairs and out the front door without a comment to her parents. They were getting ready to go out anyway and barely noticed her departure.

James had already gotten out of the car and was walking up the Caleb's expensively landscaped front walk. Bethany ran into him and gave him a hug. He was wearing the striped sweater again and smelled like cigarettes. "Hi," Bethany said, smiling. James gave her a shy smile. When they walked out to the car, Bethany could see Genn already occupying the front seat and her smile disappeared.

"Relegated to the back, of course," Bethany muttered as James pulled his seat forward so she could climb in. She didn't even bother trying to modestly pull her short black leather skirt down as she crawled in. The smell of pine overpowered her, descending from the forest of air fresheners dangling from the car's

ceiling. It gave the car a Christmasy feel. Some crap was playing on the radio, Dave Matthews Band or some feel-good shit like that. Probably a tape of Genn's. Bethany stared out the window during the short ride to Emily Seoul's house.

Emily was the only one of Bethany's friends who threw parties regularly. Mostly it was because Emily's parents had given her the in-law apartment over the garage when she turned sixteen. The apartment was a good fifty feet from the house, so Emily's parents couldn't hear them if they were a little loud, and as long as no one messed up the lawn, they didn't really care who came over. Bethany wished her parents had an in-law apartment she could move into, although her sixteenth birthday was still almost a year away. Emily was also a senior and knew a lot of older kids in college who could buy alcohol.

The party had some kind of Halloween theme, although none of the people standing outside on the stairs smoking were in costume.

There were jack o'lanterns lining the stairs and fake cobwebs on the door.

The three of them walked in, Bethany trailing behind. She spotted a half-keg on the counter and helped herself to a brimming cupful of beer. The apartment was decorated in varying shades of purple. Bethany was almost certain that the Soeuls had paid for an interior decorator. There was no other way to explain the lavender refrigerator and stove. In the living room, some horror movie was playing, "Friday the 13th" or something. People on the screen were running through the woods with the sound of a chainsaw blasting through the speakers and filling the living room. Bethany quickly caught up to James and Genn, who were talking to Emily.

"Hey, happy birthday," James said to the small girl with short brown hair curled pixie-like over her ears. Bethany always felt big and clumsy around Emily. "I got you a present." James handed her a small wrapped box. Bethany hadn't even thought to get a present for Emily. Since she broke up with James, Bethany

had been distant from most of her friends. She was actually a little surprised when Emily singled her out to invite her.

She wandered over to the couch to drink her beer and watch the movie. The guy sitting next to her holding a bottled Heineken had a ring pierced through his nose, dangling over his upper lip, and a shaved head. “Hey, haven’t I seen you here before?” he said to Bethany. His words came out slow like he was already drunk.

“Probably. You’re Emily’s brother, right?”

“Cousin.”

“Oh.”

Bethany turned back to the movie.

“So what’s your name?”

“Bethany Caleb. What’s yours?”

“Lucifer.” He flashed her a wicked grin. His front tooth was chipped.

Bethany smiled even though the guy seemed a little creepy. “Cool name.”

“Thanks.”

Bethany watched James and Genn across the room. They were still talking to Emily, who then gestured for them to go into Emily’s

bedroom. Probably to smoke pot. She'd been in Emily's bedroom before, for that reason. She wished she had stuck by James. Instead she gulped at her beer.

The movie continued, boring aside from the gory murder scenes. In the dim light of the room one couple was kissing and groping each other, while a girl sprawled on one of the couches, her eyes closed and strands of thick brown hair obscuring her face. Two girls, Amy Vaughan and Veronica Resmini, were dressed in black gothic ball gowns, with pointy caps on their canine teeth. They sat at the kitchen counter facing the TV. Veronica was a junior and in Bethany's art class. Bethany always wondered if the girls really thought they were vampires or just liked the look. She knew they weren't wearing Halloween costumes, although they rarely wore the ball gowns to school.

"You all done with that?" Lucifer asked her. Bethany looked down at her cup, saw that she was, and handed it to Lucifer. He smiled his chipped smile, and she blushed at how cute he suddenly was.

By herself in the dark, Bethany wondered where Chester was. He was a really good friend of Emily's. Then Bethany remembered that Chester was straightedge and adamantly refused to go anywhere alcohol or people drinking. Both he and Mara Wozniak were straightedge. Sometimes Bethany wished she had a strong moral conviction about something like Chester and Mara did, but without alcohol in her system this party would be unbearable.

The couple making out on the armchair suddenly shifted position, and Bethany recognized them as being in the marching band. Who had invited them?

Lucifer returned with two full cups of beer. “So are you a senior?” Bethany asked.

“Nah,” he replied. “I go to Middleton State. I graduated last year.”

Her parents would absolutely hate it if she dated some guy in college. “I think I remember you.”

Lucifer just smiled at her, his eyes a little too intense. She drank more of her beer and

glanced at the unconscious girl on the couch.
“What’s up with her?”

“Can’t hold her liquor,” he said, still smiling.

Bethany couldn’t think of anything else to say, so she tried to concentrate on the movie instead of Lucifer’s eyes staring at her. James and Genn came out of the bedroom, and James pulled Genn by the hand over to where Beth sat. He sat down beside her, with Genn on his lap. “What movie is that?” Genn asked, her eyes squinting.

“I don’t know,” Bethany said.

“Let’s watch something more happy,” Genn said, almost falling off James’ lap and crawling over to the TV. James just looked at Bethany with a dopey smile on his face. The horror film shut off, and bright blue light and silence filled the room. Then Genn pressed another button and a loud sitcom came on. She flipped through the channels still on her hands and knees, her fat ass sticking up in the air. Bethany looked down at the patterns of froth in her beer.

“Hey Dan,” James said, “How’s college life?”

“Just peachy,” Lucifer said.

“Majoring in art?”

“Yeah.”

Bethany tilted her head back and drank the entire cup of beer, her head interrupting the conversation between James and not-his-real-name Lucifer. She set the cup on the coffee table, bending over so James could see her ass in her black leather mini skirt instead of Genn’s. “I’m going to the bathroom,” she told the boys.

“I have to go too!” Genn shrieked, leaving the TV on QVC and staggering to her feet. She linked her arm around Bethany’s and dragged her off to the bathroom.

Once the door was closed Genn pulled down her jeans and plopped down on the toilet seat to urinate. Bethany blanched at the suddenly exposed pale flesh and concentrated on checking her make-up in the mirror. She was feeling hot but her makeup prevented her from looking drunk or embarrassed, unlike

Genn, who had bright red splotches all over her smiling face.

Genn finished and Bethany self-consciously pulled her skirt down and sat on the toilet. “How come you didn’t come in and smoke with us?” Genn asked, drinking some water and watching Bethany. Bethany stared at the bottles of shampoo in the shower.

“I don’t know,” Bethany said.

“We’re gonna smoke s’more later. You come too.” Genn’s sentences came out stilted as she smoothed her hair in the mirror. “How do you get your hair so nice. It always looks so nice.”

Bethany stood up and pulled her shirt into place. “It’s just like that,” she said.

“Mine’s always so frizzy,” Genn said. “But whatever.” She opened the bathroom door and they reentered the party.

The room seemed to buzz for no apparent reason. On the TV some woman was describing a set of diamond jewelry. As Bethany passed by, Amy said to her in monotone, “Hey, I like your

barrettes.” Her words sounded garbled by the vampire teeth in her mouth.

Bethany felt in her hair. She remembered the brightly colored plastic barrettes she’d found at Wal-Mart. The package of barrettes were all numbers and letters, and Bethany had stolen out only two to wear: the green barrette with three nines and the purple one with three sixes. The nines she turned upside down. Barrettes with 666 made her look both devilish and like a raver, even though she had never been to a rave and had only done E once. “Thanks,” Bethany replied.

She got another cup of beer and went back into the living room. Genn had taken Bethany’s seat next to James. Bethany sighed and wandered into Emily’s bedroom.

Emily was there, on her bed sleeping. The digital clock on the bedside table blinked 12:01 over and over. Bethany looked at her own watch, a bulky neon purple thing. It also said 12:01.

Bethany sat down on the double bed, not disturbing Emily, who lay in a fetal position in

the corner of the mattress. A few candles lit on the mirrored top of a bureau gave the room flickering light. The room was smoky and the dominant hues of purple cast a dreamlike quality to it. A pentagram was drawn on the hardwood floor in blue chalk, half covered by a fluffy purple rug, reminding Bethany that Emily was a Wiccan. A stack of tarot cards lay on a velvet cloth on the rug, and Bethany picked them up and started looking through them. She didn't think wiccans did tarot, but she had only read one book about Wicca before deciding to be an atheist so she couldn't be sure. The cards depicted mysterious medieval-looking scenes. They were poorly drawn, which irritated her for some reason, so she dropped them back on the floor.

She drank more beer. Stared at the bare lavender wall in front of her. The party seemed louder without her. It always happened this way; she would find herself seeking solitude when she should be out socializing. Her boots seemed to be too heavy to lift. What would she see when she went back out there, anyway?

James making out with Genn? That other couple making out? Lucifer leering at her? Some random unconscious girl? QVC?

Bethany didn't really want to drink any more beer. Her mouth tasted disgusting. She downed the rest of the cup in two or three big swallows anyway. And stared at the lavender wall.

"Hey, Bethany," said Emily sleepily, from behind her. "What's wrong?"

Bethany hadn't realized she was crying. "I don't know," she said, wiping at her face. Black streaks of mascara and eyeliner came off on her hand. It looked oddly like blood in the dim light.

"Oh, honey." Emily sat up and put her arms around Bethany. Bethany was a little taken aback, since her family was not demonstrative at all, but she remembered this was why she liked Emily. She was like some kind of surrogate mother. "Don't you worry, hon. James still loves you. You're both at different places in your lives. When the time is right, you'll be together."

Bethany liked the tickle of Emily's breath in her ear. James wasn't the real problem on Bethany's mind, but it made her feel better to be in contact with another person.

Eventually Emily pulled away. "You wanna smoke up?" she asked, tucking Bethany's black curls behind her ears. Bethany wished Emily were her real mother.

"Sure," she said.

Emily's pipe was glass, with swirls of blue and purple. Bethany admired it as Emily searched her underwear drawer for her bag of pot. "I made that," Emily said, sitting down with the Ziplock baggie. "Dan took a glass-blowing class at his college and he let me in and showed me how."

"It's really cool," Beth said. Emily put the weed in and lit it. They each took a few hits. "He told me his name was Lucifer."

"Yeah, he got a tattoo of 666, like in that Omen movie," Emily said, laughing. "I can't tell if he's Satanic or if he thinks he's the Antichrist."

Bethany took a long hit off the pipe and counted to sixty, holding the smoke in. When she exhaled, she said quietly, "Maybe it's all an act."

She held the pipe out to Emily, but Emily jumped up and turned on her stereo. "Let's listen to some Pink Floyd. I feel like listening to Pink Floyd."

"Comfortably Numb" eased out of the speakers at a low volume. The sound of clinking drew Bethany's attention to the doorway of the bedroom, which was blocked by long strings of colorful beads. James had poked his head through. Involuntarily Bethany smiled. "Hey, you two," James said. "You mind if I join you?"

"Feel free, Jimmy-James," Emily said, fussing with the volume on her stereo. Bethany was suddenly jealous of how easy Emily was with everyone. Even with James, who knew Bethany better than anyone.

James put his arm around Bethany's shoulders. She realized she was still holding onto the pipe. "Want some?" she asked James.

He took the pipe and leaned her head on his shoulder. "You smell so good."

James exhaled a cloud, then kissed the corner of her mouth softly. "You taste even better," he whispered.

She smiled, blushing underneath the powder, and he kissed her again, more on her lips than before.

"Just let me know if you want me to leave," Emily said over her shoulder. James pulled away and took his arm off Bethany's shoulder. Bethany shot an angry look at Emily's back.

"Genn's in the bathroom puking," James said.

"Good," Bethany muttered. She felt James's eyes on her, hard, but he didn't say anything. He just handed the pipe back.

"I guess I'd better go hold her hair back or something." He got up and slumped out of the room.

Bethany stared at the swirls of color in the glass pipe in her hand. She suddenly felt like James was mad at her, and she couldn't figure

out why. He was just kissing her. He couldn't be so mad from the two minutes since he kissed her. Sometimes he was so perfect in her mind that some little incident could shatter his image.

It was around one AM when she focused beyond the pipe again. Emily had left the room. "Comfortably Numb" was still playing, Emily had a habit of putting her CD player on repeat then forgetting about it. Bethany placed the pipe carefully on the bedside table and left the room. People formed scenes in the living room: Genn and James asleep, leaning against each other on the couch; Emily talking to Lucifer and the girl who had been unconscious earlier, sharing a bag of Fritos. The vampire girls were gone and the couple had taken their place, still making out. With the stereo blasting and MTV now on the TV, no one heard her leave. Bethany walked out, grabbing her black wool coat with the leopard-print fur collar on the way out. She doubted anyone even heard the door slam shut behind her, and definitely not the sound of her footsteps descending the wooden stairs to ground level. By the time she had walked out to

the tree-lined sidewalk, she was as good as invisible. Middleton's streets were dead even on a Saturday night, and her black attire would prevent even headlights from illuminating her.

Her footsteps echoed in the quiet street. She kept remembering that night at James's house, in his basement bedroom, the pills they had taken earlier beginning to affect them. Bethany had assumed it was E but it could have been anything, Valium or opium or something.

Facing each other on the wheeled bed, Bethany and James told each other things they had never told anyone. Bethany remembered tracing the lines on James's corduroys over and over as he talked about his stepfather beating him and his mom's alcoholism. She had never known people like that. Alcoholism and child abuse were just statistics in a book, not something that actually happened to people. The stuff she had told him, confessions of shoplifting and how she felt like no one understood her, seemed trivial. James was so positive about everything and all kinds of bad things had happened in his life. Bethany's

parents had been married for 25 years and they had a lot of money. Her parents had never hit her, had rarely punished her. She had no reason to be depressed at all. But she was, and she couldn't tell James about it.

When Bethany reached the end of Pine Street, she crossed Willow Street and continued through the forest along the old railroad tracks. The tracks had been abandoned for years and weeds had overgrown them. Bethany absently walked on the rotted wooden planks between the rusted rails.

That night had been the last time Bethany and James had sex. Their relationship hadn't been the same since. That was just before school started again. Every time Bethany went over to James's house she couldn't look at his stepfather because of what she knew. She got more depressed but couldn't tell James what it was all about. She never felt like going out anymore but went out when James asked her anyway and always ended up not having fun, turning away when James went to kiss her good-night. Then James told her wanted to

break up. "I just think we need a break to figure out how we feel about each other," he'd told her, trying not to make it sound as bad as it was. They had remained friends, but Bethany knew James still didn't understand why she was acting the way she was. But how could she explain why she was depressed? Half the time she didn't have a clue herself.

The forest around her was black now, with only the slightest blue highlights from the crescent moon in the sky. Up ahead, through the tunnel of pine trees there was more light from the street. Bethany's mind buzzed from the three beers she drank, like there was a cloud of mosquitoes around. It was too cold for mosquitoes, though Bethany didn't feel cold at all. Her clenched hands were even sweating.

She knew James was the only person in the world who understood her, and to realize that even he didn't understand made Bethany feel hopeless. Realizing that James was practically in love with Genn made her want to kill herself. James wasn't attracted to Bethany because she was depressed, and his rejection

depressed her more. Bethany realized she was crying again and rubbed at her eyes as she stepped out of the forest onto Townsend Road. She took a right toward her own house. The forest gradually gave way to small houses close to the road with cluttered lawns. One house had a pile of furniture and lawnmowers by the mailbox, a piece of cardboard proclaiming, "FREE STUFF." Bethany walked by without much interest.

The road curved left, and the houses became larger, with large landscaped lawns, complete with decorative boulders and carefully placed trees. Bethany had walked about two miles from Emily's house and her feet didn't hurt. Her feet felt kind of numb, actually.

Her parents hadn't left the outside light on. Bethany fumbled her house keys out of her pocket and went inside and up to her room. The house was silent and pitch black, but she didn't turn on any lights. She entered her own dark room, took her shoes off, and lay on her bed in her clothes. Every time she closed her eyes, the room felt like it was spinning, so she kept them

focused on the ceiling. She kept her mind as black as the white ceiling with the hairline crack near the light fixture. Eventually she fell asleep.

Bethany slept most of the day on Sunday, and by Monday morning she still hadn't heard from James. Either he doesn't care about me, she thought, or he's mad at me for that remark about his stupid girlfriend. She put her makeup on blacker than ever, leaving her hair down to hang in her face. As a final touch she painted her fingernails black. While waiting for them to dry she missed her bus.

"Great," she muttered, watching from her bedroom window as the yellow vehicle lumbered by without stopping. Both of her parents had gone to work. She would have to call someone for a ride. That someone being James.

She dialed his number, careful of her nail polish.

"Hello?" His voice sounded rushed.

"Hi James, it's Bethany."

"I know your voice."

“I know.” She chewed the inside of her cheek for a second, thinking about how curt he’d just been. “Listen, I missed the bus. Can you give me a ride?”

James was silent.

He could have said, “No,” about a hundred times before she said, “Well, can you?”

Another few moments of silence, then James said, “I... Bethany, I...”

Then Bethany knew he was pissed. She felt her knees start to shake. “If you don’t want to you can say no!” Bethany said.

“Bethany, I didn’t—”

“And it’s fine if you’re mad at me too! It’s fine with me!” Bethany’s voice had risen to a strangled-sounding shriek.

“Wait a—”

Bethany slammed the phone down.

She could skip school. No big deal. Her parents probably wouldn’t even care. Maybe she’d get detention or something. She could convince her parents she felt sick and they’d write a note excusing her. No problem.

Now that the pressure of another day of school was gone, Bethany crawled back into bed. She was still breathing hard and shaking. James was mad at her, he always got silent when he was mad. But she hadn't been angry at him before, and now he must think she was. Her stomach started to hurt.

She had finally fallen asleep when the doorbell rang. The clock said 8:05. She tried to ignore it, but whoever was at the door was insistent. She dragged herself out of bed and went downstairs, the doorbell ringing in her ears. "Jesus Christ, just stop ringing," Bethany muttered. She reached the door and jerked it open. James stood on the doorstep, his finger on the bell.

They stood looking at each other.

Finally James said, "I'll give you a ride."

Bethany looked down at her bare feet and scratched her head. She was shaking again. "Okay." She wandered upstairs to get her shoes and book bag. James followed close behind her.

“I’ll just be a second,” she said, pulling on her coat. When she looked up, James kissed her.

In that moment it was like they’d never broken up. She leaned into him, then suddenly pulled away. He looked at her, confused. “Why did you do that?” she asked.

James removed his hands from her waist and put them in his pockets. “I don’t know. I wanted you to feel better.”

“What about Genn?”

When James didn’t answer, Bethany sighed and got her things, followed James downstairs and out to his car. They rode to school in silence.