

Deleted Scenes: *Bethany & James back together, a random party*

When Bethany walked into school the next day and saw James at his locker, wearing his green and black striped sweater like he hadn't been absent for a month, she felt like running over and kissing him. But there were too many people in the way. "Hi," Bethany said, going to her own locker. He just smiled at her, his eyes tired. Bethany's smile faded.

He took her hand and walked with her to her first class. She noticed right away that people were staring at him. Did they all know? How many people had seen Genn arrested at school? Bethany felt like she had been absent for a month, too.

They kissed quickly before he left for his class, and Bethany thought, I guess this means we're going out again. Behind her, Shannon and her clique entered the classroom, one of them whispering, "Get a room, freak."

Bethany was distracted for a moment, then turned back and waved goodbye to James. She sat in her usual seat and pulled out *The Catcher in the Rye*. "Hey, Bethany," came Shannon's voice. "When did your boyfriend get out of rehab?"

"Tell him his friends at the methadone clinic miss him," Alison Richards said.

Bethany tried to ignore them.

"Is he clean or is he trying to get you hooked too?"

"I guess his other girlfriend had too many track marks or something."

"I wonder how marked up Bethany's arm is now."

"Maybe he's not even her boyfriend, maybe he's her dealer and she pays up with sex."

"Why else would she dye her hair 'fuck-me' blond?"

Her hands holding the book were shaking. Then she just stood up and walked out of class, nearly knocking over Mrs. Greenbaum, who was walking in. "You'll get detention for this, Miss Caleb!" she called as Bethany ran down the hall to the bathroom.

She locked herself in a stall and sat on the toilet seat without pulling down her pants. Her hands were shaking.

Graffiti covered the walls of the stall. Strings of messages started big and ended small: Nick Lorden fucks cheerleaders.

How would you know?

Trust me he's good

Fuck off slutt

Shannon sux N.L.'s dick

Then, in the corner, was a string of graffiti Bethany had started last year. Bethany + James 4-eva, she had written. Above 4-eva someone had written Damned. Someone else had drawn a pentagram near it. Bethany Caleb fucks Satan. 666. Bethany drinks blood. Bethany C dates drug addicts.

The graffiti surrounding Bethany's original sentence formed a black cloud in the corner of the stall. Bethany stared at it. That last statement could have been written this morning, or last year. How long had people thought she was a drug addict?

Now she knew how James felt, except he had actually done heroin—he'd shown her the track marks. There were other marks on his arm, too, faint white lines, running down the length of his arm. She was pretty sure they hadn't been there when they were going out before, but she didn't ask James about them.

Bethany had sometimes thought about cutting herself. People respected someone who could hurt themselves. Maybe not respect, maybe they feared that person. A guy who had been in her Government class last year had slashed his wrists. He'd been out of school for two months while rumors circulated that he was in a mental institution, then he'd reappeared in school. He never wore short sleeves and didn't talk much to anyone. But no one talked to him, to tease him or otherwise. Even now he was alone whenever Bethany saw him, and people kept away from him. Probably it was fear, like depression was a disease you could catch.

When the bell rang Bethany exited the bathroom and went to her next class. She didn't care if she got written up—at least no one was allowed to talk in detention.

The weeks slid by. Bethany and James slipped back into their old routines—afternoons in James's room, night driving aimlessly around Middleton. In school they spent as much time together as possible, eating lunch in the cafeteria with all their old crowd, who talked all around Bethany and James's respective absences, and walking together in the hallways, weathering the insults that flew at them. After that first day, though, Bethany noticed that the insults flew at Bethany, not at James.

It was a Friday afternoon when James got beat up. Bethany was waiting by her locker for him, taking as long as she could to put on her jacket and get her books. The halls quickly cleared out, and Bethany still waited. Through the doors at the end of the hallway she could see the buses leaving. The remaining students in the school walked casually to their meetings and practices. None noticed Bethany hanging around her locker.

She checked her watch. Maybe one of James's teachers needed to talk to him, or gave him detention? For lack of any better idea, Bethany sat down in the hall with her back against her locker, and pulled out her homework.

About fifteen minutes later James showed up. Bethany saw him coming down the hall, his head down and limping. As he came closer she noticed he kept looking behind him. She threw her books in her bag and met him. Then she could see his face. A swollen red area sat upon his cheekbone, and blood dripped down his chin and around his eye. The sleeve of his sweater was ripped at the shoulder, showing white.

"What happened?" Bethany asked. James kept walking as though she wasn't beside him. "James?"

She followed him outside, out to his car. Bethany then noticed that James didn't have his backpack or his coat. He took his keys out of his pocket, attached to the chain he wore around his belt loop, with shaking hands.

They got into the car. James was shaking as he turned on the heat, but Bethany didn't think it was from the cold.

"I was walking with Chester and Julie to that Rainbow Alliance club thing they go to. I was just dropping him off, I hadn't talked to Julie in a while, you know?" James's voice had started to shake. He cleared his throat. "Once they meeting was going to get started, I left. I didn't even notice Justin Greer and Tony Pelegrini and Devon Granger standing down the hallway. But as soon as the door closed behind me, they grabbed me and dragged me down the hall..."

James proceeded to tell Bethany how they had punched him and kicked him, saying, "We just knew you were a faggot too. A queer and a drug dealer." They had torn apart his book bag looking for evidence of drugs. Not finding any, they just got angrier, and beat him up some more.

"I was crying, and they just called me more names. I heard people walking and no one stopped or yelled at those guys or anything." James was crying, as he ground his teeth and tried to choke back his sobs.

Bethany didn't know what to say. She wanted to hug him but his hands were gripping the steering wheel, and his bruised face looked angry even with his tears. So she got out of the car and grabbed a hunk of snow from the snow bank and brought it into the car. James stared for a second, then took the snowball and put it against his cheek.

"You should tell someone—" Bethany started, but James cut her off.

"I'm not telling anyone. You think Jerry will want to hear that kids think I'm gay? He probably wouldn't believe me anyway. Think I got beat up by drug dealers when I couldn't pay."

"Oh," was all she could think of to say. Suddenly she wished she were the one hurt. To have people look at her and think, Someone beat her up. That's how far the name-calling has gone. Her parents would probably get those kids convicted of assault and battery and they'd be in jail. James would just end up losing more face if he took those kids to court.

"Besides, they would have to take pictures of the injuries, and then they would see... other stuff." Bethany knew he meant the bruises on his back.

"Maybe they should see the other stuff," Bethany said.

"And do you know what that would do to my mom?" James looked at Bethany. "You don't, do you? You live in your little idealistic world where everything is perfect and people don't do drugs, or go to jail, or get divorced, or get abused. You don't know what it's like." He practically spit out the last statement then turned the radio on. Hard music hurt her ears. She looked away from him, out the window, as he backed out of the parking space and drove out of the school parking lot.

It wasn't fair of him to say that. She was sure it was awful to abused and beat up. But she was sure if he told someone besides her, something could be done about it and he wouldn't have to get hurt anymore. She missed the way he was last year, always gentle with her instead of angry all the time. She wished they had never broken up. Then Genn wouldn't have gotten him into drugs, and he wouldn't have gotten beaten up, because no one would think he was a drug dealer or addict. They might still think he was a fag, though, but life was never perfect.

James drove to Bethany's house and waited for her to get out of the car. "I thought we were going to your house," Bethany said.

"Look, Bethany, I just need to be alone right now, okay? I don't feel like hanging out. I think I have a broken rib or something. I just want to lay down, okay?"

Bethany opened her door and stepped out. "What about Chester's party tonight?"

"Are you fucking stupid?" James exploded. Bethany flinched at his voice, louder even than his music. "I'm not going to a party! I feel like crap! Jesus!"

"Sorry," Bethany said, and closed the door. Slammed it. James took off almost right away, and Bethany had to jump back across the slushy driveway. She had really meant it when she apologized, but now she wished she had been sarcastic when she said it. She hadn't beaten him up, but he was mad about it

and he took it out on her. She listened to the car roar down the road as long as she could, feeling a sense of deja-vu. Then she sighed, watching her breath cloud up, and walked inside.

The past couple of weeks she had been spending so much time with James that she barely remembered that Darlene was still home on winter break. She slammed the front door behind her and went upstairs, only to jump when Darlene came around the corner in her pajamas.

“Geez, Darlene, you scared me!”

“Sorry,” Darlene said. “How come you’re home? You haven’t come straight home from school since I’ve been back.”

“James got beat up at school and he needs ‘time alone,’” Bethany said. She went into her room and threw her bag on the floor, Darlene trailing behind her.

“Why’d he get beat up? He seemed nice all the times I met him.”

“They thought he was gay,” Bethany said. She hadn’t told Darlene about James doing heroin.

“Uh, hello? Didn’t anyone notice you two joined at the hip?”

“I guess not,” Bethany said, sitting on her bed. She was at a loss for what to do with herself.

“Oh, well... Want to go to the mall?” Darlene asked.

“Haven’t you bought enough clothes?”

“I’m looking for shoes. We can go someplace good for dinner. Come on.”

“No thanks. I’m kind of tired.”

“You’re just upset about James.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, don’t be. He’s a big boy, he just got a little humiliated. It’ll all work out.”

“Sure.”

“Well, I’ll see you later then.”

Darlene closed the door behind her, but Bethany could hear her in the bathroom doing her hair and makeup for another hour. She guessed Darlene’s

plan was to be gone before their parents got home. Bethany wondered if Darlene had been avoiding their parents for the entire winter break, just because she didn't feel like discussing her future.

Bethany lay in bed without sleeping. She hoped James wasn't really mad at her. She wondered if she should go to the party without him or if that would make him madder. She thought about it until Mrs. Caleb called her down for dinner four hours later, imagining what would happen if she did or didn't go. She finally decided to go. She needed to maintain her friendships now that she had them all back. Just because they started out as James's friends didn't mean she couldn't be around them without him.

After dinner she called Emily to ask for a ride, and at nine she ran outside to Emily's car, a purple Volkswagen Bug. "Hi," Bethany said, hopping into the front seat.

"Hey..." Emily's voice trailed off a bit as she looked over Bethany's outfit, but she drove off anyway. Bethany knew she probably should have dressed all in black like she used to, like everyone else was used to, but that style felt so fake to her now, a costume to show James that she was one of his crowd. She was wearing a black hooded sweater and some jeans frayed at the cuffs, which she didn't think was too preppy. But Emily wore her usual Bohemian dress of a long Indian-print skirt and an embroidered white blouse under her red velvet jacket.

Chester's house was one in a long row of condominiums. Emily parked with all the other cars that obviously belonged to high school students, and looked at the row of identical doors. "I can never remember which number his is," Emily said.

"Maybe it's that one?" Bethany pointed to the door marked 110.

"No, I think it's 112," Emily said. They walked up to that door and listened for a minute. "Sounds too quiet," Emily said, then rang the doorbell. A middle-aged man answered, peering down at them through large glasses.

“Sorry!” Emily blurted, grabbing Bethany’s hand and dragging her left, toward 110. She hugged Bethany, giggling, and Bethany laughed with her. They rang the doorbell at 110 and Chester answered.

“Hey, girls,” Chester said. “Where’s James?”

Bethany’s mind went blank. Emily hadn’t even asked about James. Finally she said, “He’s... uh, not feeling good.” It had been Chester who walked with James to that meeting. He hadn’t heard James getting thrown up against lockers right outside the door, down the hall?

“Oh,” he said, then left them to throw their coats around the layered coat rack. They stepped into the crowded living room. James’s band, with Jase, Chester, and Smitty, sat talking by the radio, which blasted heavy metal music into the small room. There was that couple in the marching band again, making out in the chair in the corner. A few of the drama club kids, including Raina. Bethany hadn’t spoken to Raina in a long time. She had moved her seat back a couple desks and she hardly talked to anyone in any of her classes. But she made eye contact with Raina, and knew something would be said.

Emily led Bethany through to the kitchen. She rummaged through the fridge for two cans of Budweiser, then searched the cabinets for a bag of Ripple potato chips. They found some floor space and sat down.

“I don’t really know anyone here,” Emily said, looking around the room. “I was pretty glad you called, or I would have been here all alone.”

Bethany tried to smile as she sipped her beer, but felt exactly the same way. She was sure, however, that Emily would have gotten along just fine without Bethany.

“You all forget that I’m a senior. Everyone here is a sophomore practically, except Jase and he and I don’t get along at all.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. He’s just so opinionated. I can’t stand him. I know Chester, too, but when he’s around the band he’s pretty much oblivious to anyone else.”

“Is Chester bi or something?” Bethany said without thinking.

“No. Why?” Emily looked completely confused.

“I just know he goes to those Rainbow Alliance meetings, so I just wondered...”

“Oh, no. He goes because Julie’s bi. You know, his cousin Julie? He’s afraid she’ll get beat up or something, even though he’s probably a more likely candidate for that,” Emily said.

“James got beat up after school today,” Bethany said.

Emily dropped the handful of chips she was holding and stared at Bethany open-mouthed. “Are you serious?”

“Yeah,” Bethany said. She stared at the opening of her beer can.

“Well? What happened? You can’t just say that and not give me details.”

Suddenly Bethany wished she hadn’t opened her big mouth. “Some guys saw him come out of the room where the Rainbow Alliance meets and beat him up. That’s all.”

“That’s all? Is he okay? Is he going to get a lawyer?”

Bethany took a deep breath, and as she exhaled she said, “He’s pretty bruised up but he doesn’t want a lawyer and he already yelled at me for making it a big deal so please don’t, okay?”

“Sure,” Emily said, then stuffed some chips in her mouth. “Wow. That really sucks. I bet he’s got big bruises on his face so everyone will know, too, huh?”

“Yeah,” Bethany said.

They sat eating and drinking and watching the party happen around them. Someone turned on a movie, “Evil Dead 2,” and Emily and Bethany watched that as they drank beer after beer, matching each other.

After about four beers Emily said she had to go to the bathroom. “Me, too,” Bethany said. They rose to go upstairs, Bethany weaving as the floor seemed to tilt beneath her feet. She hadn’t felt so drunk sitting on the floor.

The bathroom was at the top of the stairs, between the two bedrooms. Bethany sat on the small, brown-carpeted landing to wait until Emily was done. Her legs were bouncing up and down with her feet hanging down the stairs, her elbows resting on boxes of framed photos of Chester as a kid. After

a minute or so Bethany was about to call for Emily to hurry up, but then she heard retching noises and instead sighed, her legs bouncing higher. She leaned her head back on the wall to wait. Her legs seemed to be moving of their own free will.

“Excuse me, Bethany,” came Raina’s voice. Bethany cracked her eyes open and swung her legs over to let her by. Raina knocked on the bathroom door, and Bethany said, “I’m next.”

“Damn,” Raina said. “I really have to go.”

“Join the club.”

Raina sat down in the pile of dirty clothes tucked into the corner of the wall and the banister. The two of them waited silently, the sounds of Emily retching continued even over the music downstairs. Bethany closed her eyes, but she felt dizzy so she opened them again and looked at the soft touch family photos on the wall.

“How come you stopped dressing all in black?” Raina asked. Bethany suddenly realized that Raina had been staring at her this whole time and her face reddened.

“I don’t know. I guess I just felt like I was pretending to be morbid and depressed. I figured I shouldn’t have to dress a certain way just because my friends do.”

“Were you dressing like that because you felt like you needed to fit in, or because they pressured you to?”

Bethany remembered those shopping / stealing trips with Genn, how she stole jewelry that she never would have worn as the old Bethany. The black hair dye Genn persuaded her to steal, although Bethany bought the dye to do touch-ups. Even the more subtle pressure, the compliments Genn and even James gave her whenever she wore something dark and weird. The concerts they asked her to go to for bands she’d never even heard of. The deep conversations they had about not fitting in, and the realization that people actually excluded her on purpose. But just because she noticed that people

didn't want her around, did that mean she didn't want them to want her around?

It hadn't seemed like she was changing to exclude herself, to make herself different. It just seemed like she was changing to fit in with a crowd who had a different norm than everyone else. A crowd that valued nonconformity, even though they conformed to each other.

"I don't know," Bethany said. "Both I guess."

"I just noticed that you don't try too hard anymore," Raina said. "For a while I think people thought you were trying to be normal or something. But they're coming around. Soon they'll like you for who you are."

Bethany smiled like she knew Raina meant for her words to do. She wasn't sure anyone would like who she really was.

Finally Emily came out and looked at the two of them with glassy eyes. Bethany quickly went to the bathroom and helped Emily down the stairs. The movie was still playing in the dark room, casting flickering shadows over unidentifiable faces. Bethany and Emily sat down on their section of floor. Bethany closed her eyes and let drunkenness take her to sleep.

She woke up curled on the floor with her head nestled into the crook of Emily's knee. Her neck hurt when she tried to move it. There was a spot of drool on Emily's skirt. Bethany wiped the side of her face.

Glaring sunlight made the living room mess look even worse. There was popcorn spilled on the beer-can covered coffee table, and when Bethany moved she saw that she had been lying in crumbs from the Ripple potato chips Emily had been eating last night. The couple from marching band was asleep on the far couch, the girl's shirt pulled up to exposed half of her bra, and the boy's hand resting on top. The TV was still on, but so quiet she could barely hear the conversation of the cartoon characters on the screen. The house felt empty and quiet, despite the three people in the room with her.

Bethany shook Emily awake and they found their coats in the pile on the floor and left. The air outside was bitter cold. Sun glinted off the snow too

brightly. Bethany staggered toward Emily's car with its frosted windows, barely able to see.

When Emily turned on her car the radio showed the time to be 7:30AM. Bethany hoped her parents wouldn't wake up when she got home.