

## Deleted Scene: *Walking at Night*

As usual, after dinner Mr. Caleb went into the living room and started watching the news. Mrs. Caleb told Bethany to put all the dishes in the dishwasher, then went into the den to watch the soap operas she taped while she was at work. Bethany loaded the dishwasher.

It was still light outside. Bethany opened the door outside, and heard her mother call from the den, “Bethany, dear, you’re not going out walking at night again, are you?”

Bethany’s response was to close the door behind her.

It was still warm. The setting sun’s warm clung to her black clothes, made the chill inside go away. She turned left at the end of her driveway, kept her eyes on the sidewalk as she made her way up Townsend Street.

The Duvalls from across the street were out walking their greyhound. Mrs. Duvall must have been in her mid-forties, but she was thin and her skin was flawless, and she still had the same honey-blond hair as her daughter Sara, who had been head cheerleader while Darlene was at Middlesex High. Mr. Duvall was a doctor and looked older with his dark hair peppered with gray, but he had retained his youthful musculature, unlike Mr. Caleb, whose gut was starting to hang out over his belt. Bethany’s mother had been forcing her father to diet for ages. Bethany walked past the Duvalls without speaking to them. They barely seemed to notice her. The dog sniffed at the hem of Bethany’s skirt as he passed.

The sidewalk ended and the trees thickened at the end of Townsend Road, where Bethany took another left. She walked at the edge of the pavement. Long shadows crossed her path. Slowly the trees thinned again, and two small houses appeared. A farm on the right had broken slats on the fences and a tractor with no wheels parked in the driveway. More trees and another house, this one blue, with an overgrown lawn and broken shutters.

The mailbox of the blue house rested in a sand-filled bucket, the victim of yearly snow plows. The name on the mailbox was Javovich. Bethany knew

their son, Nathan. He was in Bethany's grade and weighed in at a rumored 355 pounds. He was another who Bethany had tried to defend. In fourth grade, Ben Simms, Jake Hines, and Pete Franklin had been teasing Nathan. Nathan was barking at them. And Bethany told them to stop, and they had started teasing her, calling her Nathan's girlfriend. So she ran away.

Another time Bethany was a coward. She fucking hated herself. She wanted to be this brave person who stood up for people and instead she always ran away, turned her back when the fire came in her direction. She never knew what to say, never knew the right thing, anyway. No one ever let her forget those times she was coward. Every day she had to ride the bus to school with Nathan, Ben, Jake, and Pete. Every day she had to deal with Shannon.

By the time she reached the point where Andrew Street started off of \_\_\_\_ St., the sun had hidden behind the horizon. Bethany crossed her arms, but began shivering anyway. She turned down Andrew Street, now passing trailer homes set back in the woods and small, unkempt houses with cluttered lawns.

She knew where she was walking, had known this whole time. James's house. It was the fourth one on the right. A shitty little white house with cement front stairs that sagged away from the door and a dirt driveway.

The mailbox said Hills. Jerry Hills was James's stepfather. James's mother had taken Jerry's last name, but James refused. He was still James Cooper. He had the last name of a father he had never known.

That was the sort of thing Bethany wished she could do. Stand up for what she believed in. If her mother was marrying some bastard she hated, she wanted to be able to refuse to take his last name. She couldn't imagine her parents ever getting divorced, or feeling that strongly about her own father, but she wanted to be able to have conviction. She knew how it would go if it ever happened. Mrs. Caleb would only have to yell a little bit, or constantly guilt-trip her, and Bethany would give in. She would say she didn't care. Which she didn't. But even if she did care, she would say she didn't care. And she would be the same coward who couldn't stand up for Nathan Javovich, or her own

best friend. The same coward who couldn't stand up for herself.

She passed the house where she once spent every afternoon after school, where she lost her virginity. James's car was absent from its parking spot on the lawn. He was with Genn, she supposed. They had been right there waiting for her when she got to school, talking to her like nothing was wrong. Maybe they didn't notice that her only reply was a grunt.

Other than that one instance, the school day hadn't gone that badly. She had managed to avoid Shannon, people ignored her in the halls (except for one person shouldering her, but that could have been an accident), and none of her teachers had singled her out about her incomplete homework or failing grades. Except for seeing Genn and James at the lockers. And during art class when James practically ran out of the room to talk to Genn before class started. But, overall, it was a pretty good day. She just felt really shitty.

All too soon, Andrew Street merged with Townsend Road, and Bethany took another left, toward home.