

Deleted Scene: *Christmas Eve*

The family went out to eat on Christmas Eve, to a Chinese restaurant. The placemat showed the Chinese zodiac, and Bethany searched for what year she was born. 1985, year of the Rat.

“So, Darlene, have you thought any more about what you want to major in?” Mr. Caleb asked, after all the food had been ordered and he had downed a glass of wine.

“I’m majoring in English,” Darlene said. Bethany stirred her Coke with her straw.

“I think what your father means, dear,” Mrs. Caleb said, “is what do you intend to do with your major? What do English majors *do*?” Bethany thought Mr. Caleb really hadn’t known his daughter’s major in college, but she didn’t say anything.

“I don’t know, I guess I could be a teacher?”

“A teacher? Do you know how much teachers make? Next to nothing! You need to think about your future, Darlene,” Mr. Caleb said. “You’re going to want to make more than

\$30,000 a year, especially when you start paying off your student loans.”

“I just want to teach until I start getting published and I can write full-time,” Darlene said.

“A writer?” Mr. Caleb practically choked on his last swallow of wine.

Mrs. Caleb looked at her husband with concern. “What your father means, dear, is that writers or teachers aren’t very good goals. Now that’s not to say we don’t need teachers, and you’re a wonderful writer, darling, but those aren’t very *realistic* goals...”

“Damn right!” Mr. Caleb coughed into his napkin.

Bethany took out a blue crayon from the small box provided for children, and began coloring in the animals of the Chinese zodiac. If her parents were flipping out over Darlene wanting to be a teacher, what would they have said about Bethany wanting to go to art school? Luckily she had decided that art wasn’t for her; the problem was thinking of something else she wanted to do for the rest of her life.

The conversation continued until the food came, with Mr. and Mrs. Caleb pressuring Darlene into a career in law, and Darlene coming back to how she wanted to be a writer.

“Pipe dreams,” Mr. Caleb muttered.

“Besides, law is boring. And I hate public speaking,” Darlene said.

Bethany grabbed some chicken fingers and a teriyaki steak. “You know, Bethany, it’s not too soon to think about your future,” Mrs. Caleb said.

Bethany stopped mid-gnaw and watched her mother cut up her teriyaki steak. Mrs. Caleb looked at her expectantly. Bethany said, “You sound like my guidance counselor.”

“I’m just saying it’s never too soon—”

“What your mother means,” Mr. Caleb broke in pointedly, “is that if you think you’re going to some freak-show art school to learn to finger-paint, you’re dreaming.”

“I’m not going to college, so you don’t have to worry,” Bethany said, glaring down at her plate of chicken and pork-fried rice.

Mr. Caleb choked on his rice, and Mrs. Caleb pounded his back and called for the waiter to bring a glass of water. The subject was dropped.