

Deleted Scenes: *Driving around in cars*

Bethany was sitting in the backseat of Emily's car. Emily and Chester were in the front. The arched roof of Emily's purple Volkswagen Bug created a vast empty space between her and the two up front.

“Is Alex going to be there?” Emily asked.

“Yes!” Chester said. Apparently Emily had asked this question many times even before they had picked Bethany up.

They were on their way to a bowling alley in Oakridge called The Fast Lane. Mara Wozniak, Jon Whitaker, Jase Sullivan, Chris Smith, and someone named Alex were going to meet them there. Bethany hadn't wanted to go,

but Emily kept calling to persuade her, saying she needed a life outside of James. Now Bethany was realizing that Emily really wanted another girl to talk to between flirting with Alex. Mara was kind of a tomboy.

Tori Amos was playing on the car stereo. The November night was fairly warm and Bethany had chosen to wear only a black velvet jacket over a black shirt with mesh sleeves, but now Chester had his window rolled down, and the air circulated to the back. She crossed her arms over her chest and hugged herself tightly. She kept thinking about James. She had thought their conversation last night was meaningful, but apparently James didn't feel the same way. He hadn't called her.

“And you’re sure he doesn’t have a girlfriend?”

“Jase said he didn’t, and I asked him last night,” Chester said.

“Okay,” Emily said. During a silence between songs on the Tori Amos CD, she asked, “How come Genn and James aren’t coming?”

“Who knows,” Chester said. “James has been a dickhead ever since he hooked up with Genn.”

The next song came on, but Bethany thought she saw Emily give her a cautious look in the rearview mirror. Chester sighed and looked out the side window. Bethany wondered why James was still a taboo subject around her—they broke up three months ago. And

Bethany knew exactly how big of a dickhead James had been in that time. She closed her eyes to keep the glare from oncoming headlights from giving her a headache.

“I need to get laid,” Emily said.

Chester growled and crossed his arms tighter. Emily laughed.

“Well I do. The last time was... I don’t know, maybe that guy Shane. Yeah. And that was like five months ago. I really need to get laid.”

Chester still didn’t say anything. Bethany and Emily both knew he didn’t believe in casual sex.

“I don’t know, Bethany,” Emily said. “Do you ever feel the need to get laid?”

“Not really,” Bethany said. She couldn’t ever remember wanting sex, not even when she was having sex with James. The thought depressed her. She couldn’t get herself excited over anything, sex or otherwise.

“Oh, you guys are too young to understand.” A few moments of silence. Bethany hoped Chester was also thinking that two years didn’t make much of a difference.

Bethany cracked her eyes open a little. Through her lashes she could see Emily’s petite form, her hands clutching the steering wheel. Chester’s lanky body was folded up in his seat. The green light from the radio pierced her eyes. She wanted to fall asleep, and the night hadn’t even started yet.

The car was silent except for Tori Amos.

Suddenly Chester said, “Jesus, do you always have to drive five below the speed limit?”

“Who put the hair across your ass this morning?” Emily retorted. “You can crack on my driving when you have your license.”

“In April.”

“Whatever.”

On the right, lawn spotlights illuminated Saint Joseph’s Academy, a private Catholic boarding school. A girl Bethany used to hang out with, Collette Jarvis, had gone there instead of to the public high school. Bethany wondered if she would have remained friends with Collette had she gone to Middlesex High. Probably not. Collette was a thin girl with limp brown hair,

geeky. She wouldn't fit in with Bethany's friends now. Would Bethany have remained friends with Jana if she hadn't moved to Delaware? She wasn't sure. Part of the reason Bethany had changed was Jana being gone. If Jana was still here, maybe Bethany would still be trying hard to be popular and fit in, maybe she would still try in school.

The main street in Oakridge was quaint, full of small shops and cafes with hand-painted shingles. The houses had been built in the 1800s, big Colonial mansions. The bowling alley was on the edge of town, where newer buildings had crept in.

"Hey, guys, there's that coffee shop I told you about, the one with the cute waiter," Emily

said, pointing to a shingle that said, “Alexander’s Jazz Café.”

“You’re horny all the time,” Chester complained, but jokingly.

“You’d better lose that attitude right now, mister, or I’m gonna pull this car over and beat the shit outta you,” Emily said, also joking. Bethany couldn’t force herself to smile. Their banter felt choreographed. She wondered how they had the energy to pretend so well.

Dark forest enclosed the road for a few miles, then a strip mall appeared, just before the bowling alley. Emily put on her blinker too early and Bethany thought the steady ticking would slowly drive her insane.

“Oh, look, a pull-through space,” Emily

said, inching the Bug through. She turned off the car and said, "We're here!" as if bowling was the most exciting thing they could be doing on a Friday night.

They were on their way back from the bowling alley. Everyone was sitting in the same seats, even the Tori Amos CD had restarted in the CD player. Bethany felt like she'd never gotten out of the car, even though the evening of bowling had felt like forever.

After they had paid for one lane and rented shoes, Chester, Jon, and Alex wanted to order pizza. So they called in an order, and they all played for about fifteen minutes before the three boys left to go pick up the pizza. Bethany

hadn't been very hungry but she ate a piece anyway. She noticed Emily sitting next to Alex and wondered if she would be invisible for the rest of the night.

When it was her turn to bowl she forced a smile and did her act of "Bowling is so fun!" all the while feeling ridiculous. At one point Mara started a conversation with her about how she was trying to go vegan, but then Chester got involved and Bethany sat to the side, wishing herself away. The invisible feeling continued here in the car.

"Do you think Alex liked me?" Emily was asking.

Chester shrugged.

Alex had turned out to be a heavyset guy

with a lip ring and two eyebrow rings. His head was shaved and he wore mostly black. Bethany thought he looked too hardcore for Emily but she didn't say anything.

“He said his band was playing at a club in Boston in a couple weeks,” Emily said. Bethany hoped Emily wouldn't want her to go. Alex had said his band did a lot of covers of Metallica and Korn, two bands Bethany was not particularly fond of.

The Volkswagen cruised through the sleeping town of Oakridge, passing each landmark. Bethany felt like she was watching a film of the drive up in reverse. She didn't know why everything suddenly felt so repetitive and pointless. Then again, everything always felt

repetitive and pointless if she thought about it enough.

Up front, Emily turned on the heat.

“Close your window, I’m freezing,” she said to Chester.

“Your car smells like smoke. I need it open,” he said.

Emily put the heat dial on high. “It’s like forty degrees out. My car can’t smell that bad.” She flicked a tree-shaped air freshener dangling from the rearview mirror. “My car smells like pine.”

“You can’t smell it because you smoke. I don’t want to have to breathe it in.”

“Keepin’ your breath fresh for the ladies, eh?” Emily joked, but this time Chester wasn’t

taking the bait. He sat with his arms crossed, staring out the window.

Emily turned the music up louder.

Bethany's ears hurt, and she was still cold from the open window. She tried to think of when she was happy, but she couldn't come up with anything. All the things she used to like to do were pointless and she couldn't enjoy them anymore.

Emily drove up North Road, turned onto Cobalt Street, then got onto Riverside Drive. She pulled up in the parking lot for Riverside Condominiums, where Chester lived.

"See you later," Chester said, getting out and slamming the door behind him.

"What's his problem?" Emily asked. The

headlights shone on Chester's back as he walked away. Bethany climbed over the center console into the front seat.

"I don't know," Bethany said. She tried to make her voice sound amused at Chester's bad mood or even like she cared at all about Chester's feelings, but it came out in monotone.

"And what's your problem?" Emily continued. "Lately you've been, like, a zombie. Is everyone starting their seasonal depression early or something?"

Bethany slouched down in her seat and buckled in. Emily started to drive away. "I mean, you, Chester, James... you're all so depressing I don't know how you stand yourselves."

“Is that a cop car?” Genn said.

James immediately slammed on the brakes, and the car’s five passengers flew forward. Bethany could see a gray car parked haphazardly on the side of the road, half in the overgrown weeds. “I guess not,” Genn said. Bethany sighed.

Genn had been paranoid all night. Bethany had no idea why Genn was so jumpy. Maybe it was the fact that the car’s interior beat the thick fog outside the car. Bethany tried to crack a window earlier in the evening and everyone had protested that she was letting out precious smoke. It was giving her a headache.

The mid-November frosts were creeping in

now, and Bethany had barely seen James all month. He and Genn were never in school. It seemed random, James inviting Bethany along on this smoking expedition, especially with Jon Whitaker, who Bethany didn't know very well, and Steve, Jon's friend, who she didn't know at all. She suspected that James was trying to find her a boyfriend, but she wasn't sure he even put that much thought into this trip.

“You know what I feel like doin', man?”
said Steve slowly from his corner of the car. His hair was brown with bleached blond tips and he was wearing a blue Hawaiian print shirt. “I feel like bungee jumping. I feel like jumping off a fuckin' cliff, man.”

“That would be awesome,” Jon said.

“Let’s go to Hawaii right now, dude,” said Steve.

Bethany took the joint from Jon and inhaled.

“If we got pulled over right now we’d all go to jail,” Genn said, looking at everyone in the backseat with wide eyes. “We’d have to go to lock-up for a couple of years at least. We’d be convicts.”

“Stop tweakin’, lady,” said Steve. “We’d just get probation or some shit.”

Genn whirled around and poked James in the ribs. He jumped. “You should slow down. We’re right near the police station.”

James took a drag on his joint. “Genn, the police station is like four miles from here.”

His voice was sharp, untempered by the pot.

Bethany handed her joint back to Jon. She'd forgotten she was holding it. With the car this smoky everything felt like a million miles away. She couldn't keep track of any of the conversations going on in the car. Everything happened behind the fog. She slouched down and rested her head on the back of the seat.

A Jimi Hendrix CD was playing "Purple Haze." Bethany remembered how Emily always listened to Pink Floyd when she got high. The realization came to her friends liked cliché smoking music. No one ever wanted to listen to death metal when they were stoned and feeling happy and slow.

Bethany thought a lot of her friends were

depressed. They all hid it, though. In art class everyone did really depressing work, but outside of art class they acted happy. It didn't make any sense. Bethany couldn't act that well.

Sometimes she thought they were hiding their depression, but other times she thought they put on a depressed act in art class because everyone expected freaks to be depressing and morbid.

Listening to "Purple Haze," Bethany thought they were afraid to feel suicidal while they were high, because maybe then they would act on it. It all made perfect sense. Even if everyone pretended like they were depressed, no one really wanted to feel depressed.

Bethany wished she could tell everyone

about her epiphany, but she thought they might be insulted somehow by saying they were only pretending to be depressed. She thought of a random song lyric: “You’re into depression / Cause it matches your eyes.”

As usual when she thought about depression, Bethany’s mind wandered into that dangerous territory of why she was depressed. She had begun to know the answer to that. Because life was pointless. Nothing she could do mattered. When she died, nothing she had done would matter. People forget. Her essence would be lost.

Bethany began to feel her essence dying right now, her body sinking deeper into the car’s backseat. Why did she even bother hanging out

with some of these people? She'd probably never see Steve again; it was pointless to try to get to know him. She wished she would never see Genn again. The only person in the car who remotely mattered to Bethany was James, and he was untouchable at the moment, so that was pointless. Why was she even bothering to smoke? To escape the pointlessness? The only real escape was death.

Bethany thought about that gun in her father's drawer. She hadn't touched it since bringing it to school that one pointless time. She imagined going into her parents' bedroom some morning after they'd gone off to work and taking it out. Putting the barrel in her mouth. Pulling the trigger. She could see the back of

her head splatter on her parents' quilt. She could see herself lying there, dead, blood staining the quilt until the print patterns were obliterated. She tried to imagine the reactions of her parents, her sister, her friends, but she couldn't. There was only that moment of being dead that lasted forever. There was no heaven or hell. She was forever lying dead on her parents' quilt.

Maybe she didn't know people well enough to imagine their reactions to her suicide. Maybe she didn't care about them enough to know them. It was pointless. She wouldn't see the reactions even if she could imagine them.

A sharp elbow dug into her side. "Hey, man, wake up," said Jon's voice. Bethany slowly

turned her head toward the sound. The car had stopped moving. Everyone had turned to face her: James concerned, Genn hysterical, while Jon and Steve smoked, calmly watching her. She struggled to sit more upright.

“Dude, you were, like, gone,” Steve said.

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It was 9:49 pm. Emily had been outside the car, talking to the guy in the black Mustang for exactly twelve minutes. Bethany wasn't sure, but she didn't think most drug deals took this long. It was pot, nothing heavy.

As the conversation outside Emily's Volkswagen continued, Bethany stopped the Pink Floyd CD and turned on the radio.

Generally she hated the radio—most of those bands were sell-outs and their music sounded the same—but she didn't want to listen to "Hey, You" eight million times while she was high. Or "Comfortably Numb," like at Emily's party. "Last Resort" by Papa Roach came on, and Bethany sat back, pleased with herself.

At 9:55 Emily got back into her car, a sandwich-sized Ziplock bag in one hand. "Christ, finally," she muttered as the black Mustang drove off. Before Emily could get herself together to drive, an old model Thunderbird pulled up beside Emily's car. The passenger side window rolled down and Chester motioned for Emily to roll down her window.

"Hey, guys, what's up?" he said. Bethany

could see Jase Sullivan in the driver's seat.

Mara's face was barely visible through the tinted rear window.

“Not much,” Emily said.

“You guys wanna go to the movies?”

Emily looked at Bethany, not to see if she wanted to go but to roll her eyes. Bethany knew Emily had been itching for some pot all night. But Emily surprised her by saying, “Sure. What movie?”

Within five minutes, Bethany and Emily were crammed in the tiny backseat of Jase’s car, on their way to the movie theater. Bethany was in the middle. She kept her shoulders hunched close to her body. She didn’t feel like touching anyone.

Chester and Jase talked about their gig on Saturday night. They were going to get paid \$100, which Bethany didn’t think was a lot, split between four guys. “James wrote this really awesome new song and we’re going to play it,” Chester said. “You guys should come.” Bethany

doubted she would make an appearance.

“So what have you been up to?” Mara asked her. “We haven’t seen you around in a while.”

Bethany saw Mara almost every day in school. “I’ve been working on painting.” It was a complete lie.

“Well, you are a good artist. I can’t even draw a stick figure. I bet you’re going to be famous someday.”

“Thanks.” The backseat was silent for a few moments; Emily was uncharacteristically staring out the window and looking bored. Bethany tried to think of something to say to Mara. Her mind came up blank. “So what you have been up to?” she asked, trying not to make it sound like the same question.

“Not much. Chester and I went to a

concert last weekend... I've been doing some stuff for Amnesty... Oh, and Mr. Beck asked me to enter some of my photographs in this art contest. I've been spending a lot of time in the darkroom because of that."

"Cool," was all Bethany could think of to say. She had forgotten that Mara did photography because Mara was not really the artistic type. She thought of photography as an art for people who couldn't draw. Bethany always wondered why other people had to put so much effort into art. Art was supposed to be fun, not back-breaking labor like Mara made it seem. Like it had been for Bethany the past few weeks.

"So how is James doing?" Mara asked.

Jase and Chester's conversation stopped.

"Um... James and I aren't going out

anymore,” Bethany said.

“Oh,” said Mara. She laughed, a nervous giggle. “Shows how much I’ve been around, huh?”

“Yeah,” Bethany said, trying to laugh and not succeeding. “We’ve been broken up for a while.”

“Oh, well... are you guys still friends or what?”

“I guess,” Bethany said. Now that she thought about it, she realized she hadn’t seen James at all since last weekend. He hadn’t been in school or anything. Neither had Genn for that matter. She wondered what they had been up to.

Jase parked at the movie theater. They all got out of the car, and Bethany realized Emily hadn’t said anything in a while. “What’s

wrong?” Bethany asked her as they walked in.

“All I wanted to do tonight was smoke up and now I have to sit through some crappy movie,” Emily said.

“You didn’t have to say we would go. We could have said we didn’t want to see this movie.”

“I thought you wanted to!”

Bethany shrugged.

“Great!” Emily muttered. They were walking through the glass doors into the theater and Bethany almost got hit in the face when Emily didn’t hold the door open for her.

On the day after Thanksgiving, Emily called Bethany. “I need to get away from my family. Wanna go for a drive?”

“Sure,” Bethany said.

Emily picked her up a little after six. Bethany gave her parents some vague explanation before leaving. The sky was already dark.

“I’m sorry, I don’t even have anything for us to smoke. Things have been hectic. Dan’s failing out of college so his parents cut off his tuition, and they kicked him out of his house too so now he’s staying with us. This morning I got woken up at the crack of dawn because Dan came in all drunk and got into a fight with my parents. A loud fight. Then he took off in his car, tires squealing and everything.”

“Wow,” was all Bethany could think of to say.

Emily turned on a CD, some new age music. Bethany leaned her head back and relaxed. She didn’t really feel like talking. Every

time she got into a car lately she felt like falling asleep. Six hours of her day had been wasted yesterday driving to and from Darlene's college to pick her up and drop her off.

"How was your Thanksgiving?" Emily asked. Bethany wished Emily didn't always need to be talking.

"Not as bad as yours," she said. "Darlene came home, and my parents jumped all over her about changing her major from English to law. Then they started in on how I need to apply myself more in school and how they weren't going to let me major in art in college just because I slack off in 'academic subjects.'"

It had been a lot worse than that sounded. The arguments had begun on the way home from Darlene's college and continued through the Thanksgiving meal at Aunt Gloria's. There,

all the relatives had gotten involved. Grandpa and Grandma Hunter kept mentioning Aunt Laura's boys, one of whom was in medical school and the other who was in school for computer technology. "That's where the money's at these days," Grandpa Hunter said.

"Computers. You'll get a great job straight out of college with that degree. An English degree will only get you a teaching position and a lifetime of poverty." Luckily no one had mentioned Bethany's art, but it was implied. As always, it pissed Bethany off to see everyone looking for money instead of happiness, conformity instead of creativity. The sad thing was, next weekend it would all be repeated when Mr. and Mrs. Caleb dropped Bethany off to visit Darlene at school.

"You know who I haven't seen in a while?" Emily said. Bethany came out of her thoughts

in time to hear Emily answer herself. “Genn. I haven’t seen her in like two weeks. Like, she hasn’t been in school and I’ve tried to call her but no one’s ever home.”

“Weird,” Bethany said for something to say.

“Genn and James both. Probably they’re together but I miss how me and Genn used to hang out and talk. ‘Course, you probably could care less about her, but I bet you miss James, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“Have you seen him at all?”

“No.”

“It’s like a black hole swallowed both of them.”

“Yeah.”