

DELETED SCENE

The following deleted scene takes place between pages 118 and 119 of Who We Are in Real Life. The scene was cut during early drafts (before anyone else saw the manuscript, really) because it seemed repetitive, but I still love it! Enjoy!

City lights twinkle like stars on the distant horizon, as we share a bag of gas station candy from the tail bed of Art's truck. It's late, much later than we should be and we still have an hour to drive, but neither of us seem to be in a hurry. When he returned from filling his truck with a bag of candy and two hot chocolates and suggested that we go stargaze, I knew I was in real trouble.

He kicks his heels against the truck's bumper, his neck craning back as he looks at the stars. "The city lights are okay," he says, his voice casual, relaxed in a way that makes me want to cuddle into his shoulder. "But I bet you don't see anything like this downtown. Look, those three stars right there, that's Orion's belt."

I glance up, feeling him point more than I see where he's pointing. There's no real moonlight, and we took a gravel road until we found somewhere secluded. I squint. "Where?"

When he leans down, I go so still that I'm certain he'll hear my hammering pulse. His eyes are level with mine and his cheek is so close that I feel the heat radiating off him. He wraps his hand around mine and points my finger into the sky. "Right there."

Who are you, Arthur Bailey? The question swells like a cartoon speech bubble, my mouth shaping the words when he looks back at me and catches me staring, not at Orion's belt, but at him. I drop my gaze, but he doesn't let go.

In fact, his fingers tighten around mine and the little squeeze prompts me to look back up at him. He's smiling, his thumb rubbing little circles against the heel of my hand. "Is this okay?" he asks and I blink. He lifts our interlocking fingers, and I realize he's asking permission to hold my hand.

I can't stop my cackling laughter. "Art!" I gasp. "For real? Are you swooning because of my bare fingers? Should I put gloves on? You're serious!"

He drops my hand, then drags his palm down his face, and I realize I've embarrassed him.

"Art?" I ask, voice gentle. I reach out to touch him, but he groans, then flops back in the truck bed.

"I don't know what I'm doing," he says. He covers his eyes with his arm, then adds, "Or saying. You make me nervous, I don't know how to act around you."

I hesitate, then lean back. "I shouldn't have laughed, Art. I like the way you act with me. That was—you're really sweet. It's nice."

His arm falls back down, as he turns to look at me. I open my mouth. There's so much I want to say—you make me nervous too, I want to hold your hand, I wish we could stay like this. I haven't been honest with you.

I reach out with my pinkie finger and brush his wrist. "That okay?"

He snorts, his fingers slipping between mine again.

We lay on our backs, stargazing, and for the first time since moving, I think I might actually prefer living in the country.