

Hello there, YA Scavenger Hunters! How's it going? Hopefully your hunting has been joyous and bountiful thus far.

You're about to read a deleted scene taken from the *very first draft* of my debut novel, *Denton Little's Deathdate*. If you haven't read my novel yet, you can still read this scene and it won't spoil that much.

This excerpt is the first chunk of what was, like, a fifteen-page dream sequence. I'm ashamed to say I'm not even exaggerating. In the final version of the book (which is maybe the eighth or ninth draft?), a dream sequence still exists, but it's only a couple pages long. Which is good. Because here's something I learned while writing this book: *Most dream sequences are pretty boring. Nobody cares about the dreams of real people, let alone fictional ones.*

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, and I thought---through many drafts of my book---that what I had written was one of them. I was wrong. But since I felt strongly that there needed to be at least a tiny dream sequence in the book at that particular moment for story purposes, I didn't cut it entirely.

My book is about 17-year-old Denton Little, who lives in a world where everyone knows the day they're going to die. Denton's deathdate is tomorrow, the same day as his senior prom. At his funeral---because in this world, you get to attend your own funeral---the man leading the ceremony mentions that Denton may be reincarnated as a squirrel or a chipmunk. I loved that idea so much that I thought, "Oh man, during his deathdate, I'm going to have Denton pass out and then wake up as a squirrel and readers are going to think he's dead and *actually* got reincarnated as a squirrel but then he'll realize it's a dream." I thought this was an awesome idea. In fact, during the writing of the first draft, I had a short list of about five or six things that I knew I *definitely* wanted to happen in the book, and this squirrel dream sequence was one of those things. Kind of hilarious in retrospect.

But I have no regrets! This scene isn't the best, but I still have a deep affection for it. Because, at the time, it made me happy and kept me excited about my book. So, may this excerpt inspire you all to follow your creative impulses and let your process take you where you need to go, even if later you'll be mercilessly crushing the fruits of some of those impulses.

Here it is, folks:

### *The Deleted Squirrel Reincarnation Dream Sequence*

I open my eyes, and it is still a beautiful day. The sun is shining, and a strong breeze is blowing in my ears. Not sure when it got so windy, but it feels nice.

I take a step forward and quickly realize the ground below me is not stable. It jostles up and down, and I freeze in an attempt at maintaining my balance. But I soon realize the ground below my feet is not the ground at all.

I am on a tree branch.

Very, very high up.

I look around me, and I seem to be in the tree in our front yard. There's our house right below me, but some things are slightly off. For example, there's an above-ground pool on the front lawn. We don't have a pool.

Also I have paws.

And a big bushy tail.

I've never been a big heights person, so I head to the trunk of the tree, where I size up my options for getting back down to ground level. It seems I can either jump from branch to branch to branch till I hit ground, or I can race straight down the trunk.

I look down. I am very high up in this tree.

I dig one of my paws into the tree, and I get a surprisingly good grip, a lot of traction. The racing-down-the-trunk thing might be feasible.

This would be easier if I wasn't so hungry. I search in the near vicinity for acorns. Is this acorn season? Does this tree have acorns? Any kind of nut would be helpful right now. Ew, that's not how I meant it. Some nuts would not be acceptable.

A huge gust of wind blows out of nowhere, and my fur bristles as I hold onto the branch for dear life, nearly losing my grip.

I make a game-time decision to head down the trunk, and after a tentative few steps at a near-perfect 90-degree angle to the ground, I get a rhythm going. Soon I'm speeding, flying toward the grass below, and it feels easy.

Naturally, as I reach the peak of my confidence, I step onto a loose piece of trunk, which breaks off and sends me careening face-first towards solid ground. I'm only about fifteen feet up, but that's high enough. I try to spread out all my limbs, so I can do that flying parachute thing.

It doesn't work. I land face-first in the grassy dirt, in a weird rodent sprawl.

The impact isn't too painful, but, much like the sitcom-football-to-the-head that magically restores the memories of the character with amnesia, it brings me back to myself.

I lift my head up and look around.

What exactly is happening right now?

I guess I'm a chipmunk. Or a squirrel.

This must be my next life.

The funny thing is I feel no shock or surprise at this revelation. I was expecting this, and I'm mainly just thankful that I've retained my human perspective on the world.

Pretty sweet, actually. Being a squirrel could be cool.

Do squirrels have sex?

Yeah, right? They must. Do I have a squirrel penis?

I slide a paw down to my squirrel groin and start feeling around.

"TWEEEEET!" I snap up on all fours and look into the sky. Plummeting straight towards me, tweeting with gusto and fury, is the dead bluebird.

It is undead.

And huge and angry-looking.

Do birds eat squirrels? That doesn't sound right. They eat worms. And cats. No, cats eat birds. Ah, no time for thinking!

I try to yell *BACK OFF!*, but all that comes out of me is a high-pitched screechy sound. Dead Bluebird is screech-tweeting back at me, and I think it's time to run.

"Run, Denton!" I screech aloud to myself, and I'm off. I'm impressed with my speed, as I use all four limbs to propel myself forward, almost gliding along the earth. I hear Dead Bluebird gaining on me, with that tweet like chunks of metal crushing into each other, and a chill runs down my animal spine. I skitter wildly back and forth, finally taking a sharp right around the above-ground pool.

I keep charging forward, but behind me, I hear a satisfying smash as Dead Bluebird careens head-first into the pool water. Yes! The bird issues sad, gurgly tweets that fade into nothing as I get further and further away.