

EXT. THE SUBURBS - STREET - DAY

A SMALL GRAY CAR moves so slow the cars behind it pass. A couple BEEP at it. *

INT./EXT. SMALL GRAY CAR - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Two young women sit in the front seat. ***Moving in Stereo by The Cars*** plays over the radio.

In the passenger seat sits a young woman with bright curly red hair, MAUDE DELANEY, 17, an anxious art kid with anger issues.

Behind the wheel is her best friend, BETH, 16, an eccentric theater kid and the epitome of great self-esteem.

Maude clutches her backpack to her chest.

MAUDE

Beth. If you don't press the gas a little more, we're going to be late.

Beth's KNUCKLES are white against the steering wheel. Beth hits the gas hard and they jerk forward. Maude reaches up and grabs the handle. She squeezes her eyes shut shaking her head.

MAUDE (cont'd)

Never-mind, never-mind, go slow.

BETH HITS THE BREAK, THE CAR STOPS.

BETH

Sorry, sorry.

MAUDE

(slow)

Gently press the gas and get into to left turning lane.

OUTSIDE THE CAR: They are approaching a large intersection. The row of cars behind them are bumper to bumper in the morning rush.

Four buildings sit on the intersection: the POST OFFICE, a SEVEN ELEVEN, the town's COMMUNITY CENTER, and the local cafe, AUNT VICK'S.

The gray car takes a sharp jerk into the turning lane.

INSIDE THE CAR: Out of the windshield, we watch as they approach the car in front of them in the turning lane.

THE CAR HALTS TO A STOP.

Both girls whip forward in their seats.

Maude EXHALES. Beth smiles wide.

BETH

I'd say that was a success.

Maude nods slow.

MAUDE

Now wait until the light turns to the green arrow and then SLOWLY and carefully turn.

Beth laughs.

BETH

Got it.

A WEATHER REPORT ALERT CHIMES ONTO MAUDE'S PHONE:

"SEVERE WEATHER REPORT: Lake Effect Storm Warning in effect until tomorrow morning at 7:00 am."

Maude shakes her head and looks up at the sky, a clear blue.

BETH (cont'd)

What are you looking for?

MAUDE

Weather report says a lake effect storm-

BETH

Eh..probably will just be a few inches.

Maude shrugs. She opens a message from a text chain that reads: "Check this shit out!" Maude clicks the link and...

SEX SOUNDS AND MOANS BLAST OVER HER SPEAKERS.

BETH (cont'd)

Maude! Porn this early?

Maude closes it quick. Her eyes wide.

MAUDE

Oh um no...I think someone sent a masturbation tape to the whole school.

Beth snorts.

Maude turns the volume back up on the song and rests her head against the window.

Maude's POV: At the Seven-Eleven, a young man in a leather jacket and dark hair. *

HE LEANS AGAINST THE BUILDING SMOKING A CIGARETTE.

This is ADRIEL CARTER, 18, known to most as ACE. Your stereotypical asshole with a heart of gold. Loyal and protective to the bone.

Ace(from the car window) pulls his jacket closer to his body, drops the cigarette and walks back into the building.

INT. SEVEN-ELEVEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Ace strides down the aisle. He snatches a MONSTER ENERGY DRINK and a roll of DONUTS off the shelves.

He throws the contents onto the counter with the exact amount of change.

Behind the counter stands an older gentlemen, ROGER, 60s, the store manager.

ACE
It's fucking freezing out there.

Ace shivers. Roger chuckles.

ROGER
Maybe you should get a car.

ACE
(mocking, high pitch)
Maybe you should get a car.
(normal)
No shit, Rog. Why else would I be working here? Just for shits and dicks.

Ace grins, Roger lets out another chuckle shaking his head and finishes cashing Ace out. Ace grabs the contents from the counter and moves toward the door.

ROGER
A smarter person would at least buy a better coat for fucksakes, I don't wanna hear it when you get goddamn frost bite.

Ace reaches the glass door.

HE FLIPS OFF ROGER.

ACE
See ya tonight, Rog.

Ace pushes the door, the BELL RINGS signaling his exit.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

A young black woman with short braids sits in the passenger seat, NAOMI JOHNSON, 17. She possesses an air of authority and a clear no nonsense attitude, everything about her is pristine.

NAOMI FLIPS THROUGH A PLANNER/CALENDAR, IT'S FULL.

"12pm - Student Council Meeting"

"3pm - Community Service w/ Mrs. Warner"

"6pm - Movie Night w/ my love *heart drawing*"

Next to her behind the wheel is her girlfriend, LIZ, 17. A cool and collected trans woman who doesn't care what anyone thinks.

THEY ARE APPROACHING THE INTERSECTION.

Naomi scribbles something else into the planner. Liz peers at her.

LIZ
More community service?

Naomi CLICKS her pen and SIGHS. Liz's eyebrows are raised, playful.

NAOMI
It's only till four.

Naomi shuts the planner and grabs Liz's free hand. She plants a quick kiss on the back of it before holding it. Liz smirks.

LIZ
Hmmm, did you have to schedule our movie night in there?

NAOMI

Well I couldn't possibly write: "Have sex with my girlfriend" in there, could I?

Liz lets out a burst of laughter. Naomi smiles.

Their quiet intimate moment is ruined by a RED CORVETTE pulling behind them BLASTING **Dear Goth by Cassyette**.

Naomi GROANS and rolls her eyes.

INT. RED CORVETTE - CONTINUOUS

The music becomes louder. A young woman sits behind the steering wheel. This is ZOE RICHE, 17, her face is painted with variations of black makeup.

Next to her is KAI PAT, 17, a young East Asian non-binary person in goth attire. Their long hair over their face. Kai, quiet and reserved, longs for a future they will never have.

Kai is slumped in the seat next to her. One headphone in their ear Kai's forehead against the window as Zoe screams the lyrics.

From Kai's POV: They stare at the red light, the music begins to warp/fade into **Bach: Cello Suite No.1 performed by Yo-Yo Ma**. Kai closes their eyes and everything goes black.

A SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON THE NECK OF A CELLO.

MATCH CUT TO:

Kai's hands play the notes along their backpack strap.

Zoe plucks out Kai's headphone.

THE CLASSICAL MUSIC CUTS OUT.

ZOE

Earth to Kai! Hello, did you hear me?
Can you come over tonight?

Kai opens their eyes they land on...

AN ASIAN WOMAN JOGGING IN PLACE IN FRONT OF A CROSSWALK.

Her ponytail whips back and forth as she checks her watch.

Kai see's her talking almost yelling. She looks furious. Waving her hands with a passion, her headphones swinging.

They watch her as she jogs in front of the car.

Kai shakes their head.

KAI

I have a...um...thing I have to do.

Zoe rolls her eyes.

ZOE

What type of *thing*?

She puts air quotes around "thing". Kai COUGHS and squirms in their chair. They nod their head at Jane running.

KAI

You think she's freezing?

EXT. INTERSECTION - SIDEWALK - DAY - CONTINUOUS

JANE XINGYUN, 15, a preppy and petite Chinese teenager with not a single mean bone in her body, jogs along the sidewalk.

She is breathing hard and her cheeks are flush from both the cold and her jog.

JANE (INTO PHONE)

I know I'm failing but...it's only one class...yea...well the college scouts come next week...it's not fair...

CUT TO:

INT. LIVERPOOL HIGH SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Ace is slumped in a plush chair. His arms folded across his chest, his head thrown back, and his eyes closed.

White powder forms a light ring around his lips. His mouth parted.

PRINCIPAL (O.S.)

Adriel Carter?!

Ace snaps awake. He wipes the powder off his mouth.

PRINCIPAL, 45, a brilliant woman with an ambitious streak. She rounds the desk and sits in the leather chair.

She arranges her papers as Ace straightens.

ACE

Yes ma'am. I actually go by Ace.

She nods slowly.

PRINCIPAL

Right, Ace. It says here that you have missed over twenty-five percent of school days this year and thirty percent throughout all four years.

She clears her throat.

PRINCIPAL (cont'd)

That is unacceptable with our graduation policy.

Ace's face is stone, unreadable.

PRINCIPAL (cont'd)

Yet, I want my students to prosper and graduate in a timely fashion. Some of your teachers and myself have discussed an alternative plan to help you graduate with your class.

Ace SCOFFS.

PRINCIPAL (cont'd)

Is something funny Mr. Carter?

ACE

Ace. And yea, I find it funny that you care about my attendance when it's almost too late.

Ace SHRUGS.

ACE (cont'd)

I think you just want the graduation rates to look good before you run for Superintendent.

Ace GRINS and leans back in the chair.

PRINCIPAL

Right well whatever you think or do not think, don't you want to graduate?

Ace SHRUGS.

PRINCIPAL (cont'd)
 These alternatives will replace your
 absences if they are all completed.
 Your first alternative is today after
 school at the Community Center down
 the road.-

ACE
 (mutter)
 Another one of your
 brilliant initiatives.

PRINCIPAL
 - Mrs. Warner has had
 students cleaning up there
 since last semester and she
 needs assistance with the
 final touches. I hope you
 have painting clothes.

The Principal smiles.

ACE
 (sarcastic)
 Yes ma'am.

Ace rises and gives her a curt nod. He walks out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVERPOOL HIGH SCHOOL - ORCHESTRA PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Kai sits in a chair, A CELLO between their legs, a MUSIC
 stand in front of them. The room is small with a piano. *

Kai gathers their hair and ties it. They take a deep breath
 and sets the BOW onto the strings.

They begin playing **Bach: Cello Suite No.1.**

Their eyes scan the music. The music flows perfectly. Kai's
 in their element. Their body moves with the bow.

SOMEONE CLEARS THEIR THROAT.

The spell is broken. Kai's movements cease.

Behind Kai stands MRS. WARNER, 50s, the kindest teacher in
 the school but since she used to be a lawyer her reasoning
 skills cannot be beat.

MRS. WARNER
 That was beautiful, Kai.

Mrs. Warner smiles. She pulls a chair and sits across from
 them. Kai sets their bow on the stand and lays the cello on
 the floor. *

MRS. WARNER (cont'd)
Getting ready for your Julliard
audition I suppose. Let me see...

She furrows her brow concentrating.

MRS. WARNER (cont'd)
Cello Suite No.1 by Bach? Right?

Kai smiles and nods.

MRS. WARNER (cont'd)
Listen, Kai. We need to discuss some
of your assignments.

Kai's eyes go wide and then to their hands.

MRS. WARNER (cont'd)
I know you have been plagiarizing and
cheating. I have swept a few under
the rug because I know you have been
busy with your practicing. But...your
midterm has the exact same answers as
the girl next to you.

Kai stares at their hands.

MRS. WARNER (cont'd)
I can't ignore that.

KAI
Are you going to report me?

Mrs. Warner takes a deep breath.

MRS. WARNER
Cheating is a big deal, Kai, and it
can affect your college acceptances.

Mrs. Warner SIGHS.

★

MRS. WARNER (cont'd)
I will let you retake the exam. No
cheating and...you will help out this
afternoon to complete the community
center.

Kai looks up at her. She stands.

MRS. WARNER (cont'd)
You have a bright future, Kai. I will
see you at two.

They look up at her.

KAI

Thank you.

Mrs. Warner smiles and walks out the door.

Kai exhales their head falling back into their hands.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

Faux velvet red seats line the auditorium. The curtain on the stage is closed.

Naomi stands at the front of the room. She's in charge.

NAOMI

Mrs. Warner is allowing any students to come to the community center this afternoon. She asked me to extend the offer to other students throughout the school.

Maude sits at the back of the auditorium. She rolls her eyes.

Maude pulls out her phone and texts BETH:

MAUDE (TEXT)

Where are you? Naomi is already making me want to fucking die

BETH (TEXT)

Omw!

NAOMI (O.S.)

I am willing to drive anyone who may need a ride.

MAUDE

(mumble)

Who has the fucking time for that bullshit?

BETH (O.S)

No one with a life.

Maude turns to see Beth walking toward her.

BETH

I wonder if she has any free time.
Her life must be miserable.