

Always

written by

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Aug 2022

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INT. MINIVAN - DAY

Fall in suburbia. Wet roads. Strip malls. Trees of orange and yellow, or otherwise bare branches.

We fix on TWO WOMEN, presumably related, inside a minivan.

JOAN drives. 21, contemplative, steadfast, long hair tied back. She smokes a cigarette with the window cracked. Listens to Mozart's "Requiem Aeternam" over the sound system.

In the passenger seat sits REBEL (35). Though almost fifteen years older than Joan, Rebel behaves like an obstinate teenager -- her outfit performatively sloppy, her head buried in her phone. An attitude of pervasive discontent.

Her patience worn thin, Rebel flicks off the car stereo, bringing Mozart to an abrupt end.

JOAN

Excuse me, I was listening to that.

REBEL

It's so boring. It just keeps going and going.

JOAN

You don't wanna listen to music, you don't wanna talk...

REBEL

Fine, listen to your music.

Rebel clicks the music back on. Dons her own earbuds.

JOAN

(turning off the music)
No, no, you're not gonna abandon me here all by myself.

REBEL

It's only like two hours or something.

JOAN

We just got on the road.

Rebel sighs, removes her earbuds.

REBEL

(the cigarette)
Can you put that out?

JOAN
Sorry. I didn't know it bothered
you.

She tosses the cigarette out the window.

Silence.

JOAN (CONT'D)
You know, I think this trip is
really gonna be good for us?
(frowns)
Get our minds off Rascal.
(then)
We can start a fire, it's that time
of year. You can gather the leaves
to get it going. Aw, you used to
love collecting leaves.

Rebel rolls her eyes.

JOAN (CONT'D)
You remember that picture book you
put together?
(laughing)
You took all our family photos out
of that album and replaced them
with these dried leaves, all
different kinds.

REBEL
Didn't that mold and we had to
throw it away?

JOAN
I miss those days.

Rebel watches a road sign pass by.

REBEL
I thought we were supposed to take
the turnpike.

JOAN
(hesitant)
I told you, I wanted to make a
quick stop first.

REBEL
Where?

JOAN
(cagey)
I just thought we could... talk to
someone...

REBEL
Oh my god. Are you taking me to a
clinic?!

JOAN
We don't have to pick anything up.
(over protests)
I just want you to talk to them,
okay? It's a consultation.

REBEL
No!

JOAN
They're doctors. Maybe they can
help with your, your knee thing.

REBEL
At a Planned Adulthood clinic? They
don't do that there. All they do is
prescribe the pill.

JOAN
Is it that much to ask to just talk
to them?

REBEL
Yes! This is so fucked up.

JOAN
Language, Rebel.

REBEL
(mocking)
Language, Joan.

JOAN
When did you start calling me that?
I don't appreciate that.

REBEL
It's your name.

JOAN
Can you just call me mom, please?
Like a normal daughter?

REBEL
God, you're so old.

Odd. They're talking as if Joan (21) is Rebel (35)'s mother. They sit in silence a few beats as this sinks in for us.

JOAN

I don't know what you're waiting for, you're already starting to get wrinkles.

REBEL

I told you, everyone wants a little more age now. It's not a big deal.

JOAN

Yes, it is a big deal actually. Do you realize that you are doing irreversible damage to your body?

REBEL

(sarcastic)
Oh, yeah, sure.

JOAN

Oh, yeah, no, yes. Your knees, I mean -- what do you think's happening there? No, really, *what*. Every time you feel a new ache and pain, that's something you're going to feel for the rest of your life.

REBEL

That's a myth.

JOAN

Oh my god, you are so naive. I can send you an article -- I'm gonna send you an article about it.

REBEL

Lots of girls are waiting til they're older now to start on the pill.

JOAN

Okay... and what about the boys? Are they waiting?

REBEL

What are you even talking about?

JOAN

Do you think some boy -- and I'm telling you this because I love you -- do you think some boy is gonna be attracted to you when you get your first grey hair? When you get... age spots on your hands?

She stops herself. Takes a beat to calm down. Then levels.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It doesn't have to be permanent. You can stop taking it whenever you want. You don't have to to *keep* taking it.

REBEL

(calmer)

Nobody ever stops once they start.

JOAN

Well, that's not true, because I read an article in the New Yorker about a man who stopped taking his.

REBEL

Nobody ever stops taking the pill, or there wouldn't be an article about the one person who did.

(hesitant)

I don't even know if I ever wanna take it.

JOAN

Excuse me?!

REBEL

(watch the road)

Mom!

Joan veers back into her lane over oncoming CAR HORNS. Pulls over to the shoulder and parks the car.

Rebel looks at her mother. Rare to see her this upset.

JOAN

Don't ever say that to me again. You don't wanna die. Okay? This is just a phase.

REBEL

Even if I did die it wouldn't be for another, like, fifty years or something.

JOAN

No! Never. You're never going to die.

REBEL

Everybody dies.

JOAN

Fine, Rebel, then you'll die in some... some freak accident like everyone else. Not of old age -- Jesus -- not in a, a *decaying* body. Do you really think I'm gonna let you do that to yourself?

REBEL

Lots of people are doing it now.

JOAN

Lots of people, what "lots of people"?

REBEL

You tell me, you're obviously reading *all the articles*.

JOAN

Does Tiff know about this?

REBEL

(duh)

What do you think?

JOAN

Oh. Great. I'm calling her mother. Right now.

REBEL

(go ahead)

I don't care. You can't force me to take it.

JOAN

Uh, yes I can. You're thirty-five years old, you are a minor. If I tell you to take the pill, you will take the pill.

Rebel looks at her mother in disbelief -- hurt, and deeply betrayed. She unbuckles her seatbelt, storms out of the car.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Rebel...?

Joan watches anxiously through the window as her daughter crosses the busy street.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Rebel!

Joan takes off her seatbelt, exits.

EXT. BUSY STREET - DAY

She emerges from the minivan on the side of traffic.

ACROSS THE STREET: Rebel approaches a beige business park.

JOAN

Rebel!!

Rebel ignores her, keeps moving.

Joan waits for an opportunity to cross. Unlike her daughter, she is terrified of the oncoming traffic.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSINESS PARK - OTHER SIDE OF STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Joan searches the parking lot.

JOAN

Rebel?!

Nowhere in sight. Scared, Joan runs off camera to search.

EXT. BUSINESS PARK - SIDE OF BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Around the side of the building, amidst a sea of beige, sits one of those sad grass patches that passes as "a view" for the lucky corner offices.

Joan steps onto the grass, approaches someone out of frame.

JOAN

Rebel...

REVERSE ON REBEL, who sits in the grass under a lone tree, its branches bare. She is rubbing her knee.

Joan crosses to Rebel. Waits for her to speak. She doesn't.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You want to die? I mean, is that really what you want? Do you hate me that much?

REBEL

You're so self-centered. This isn't about you.

JOAN

Oh, it's not? Really.

REBEL

This is my body. It's my choice. And if you try to make me take it, I swear to god I will run away.

JOAN

I don't understand where this is coming from. Is it Rascal? Is it what happened to Rascal? What happened to him doesn't have to happen to you.

REBEL

It's not fair that it had to happen to him at all. If it happened to him, it should happen to all of us.

Joan's hackles lower. She is touched. She sits, joins her daughter under the tree.

JOAN

Oh, baby, you are so sweet. But it wouldn't have been fair for us to give Rascal the pill. There are already enough dogs who, who need homes...

REBEL

I know.

Rebel isn't crying. Still, she wipes an eye.

JOAN

You have your whole life ahead of you. I just, I don't want to lose my little girl.

Rebel recoils at "little girl" -- but she doesn't protest.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(opening up)

You know, sometimes I wish I could've seen myself at your age. I mean, your body's age.

Rebel can't help but grin at the ridiculous thought.

REBEL

Shut up.

JOAN

I'm serious. I think about it
sometimes, I do.

REBEL

You still could, you know.
(gently)
You *could* stop taking it.

Rebel picks a brown leaf off the ground.

JOAN

(shaking her head)
It's been too long. I can't stop
now, I'd be too... scared.
(lightly)
I wouldn't know what to do if my
knees started to go out on me.

She puts a loving hand on Rebel's aging knees. Rebel allows
it. Joan studies her daughter with deep admiration.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You're not scared of anything, are
you?

Rebel twirls the dead leaf from its stem in quiet
contemplation. It brushes against the youthful skin of her
mother's hand.

REBEL

Yeah, mom, I'm scared. Of course
I'm scared.
(divulging)
But I don't want to do it *just*
because I'm scared.

A weight off. She sighs, leans back against the tree.

Joan rubs her daughter's leg lovingly. They sit in silence.
Behind them, the tree's bare branches point up towards an
overcast sky. Beneath them, a floor of fallen leaves.

They watch the cars pass in the distance.

TITLE OVER:

ALWAYS

FADE OUT.