

THE CHAIN

Written by

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EXT. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE HIGHWAY -- AFTERNOON

One car is driving along down the open road.

CUT TO:

INT. ZOE'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

ZOE, a hot-headed and stubborn 20-something-year-old woman, sits in the driver's seat. She's alone, cruising down the highway at a high speed, with the windows rolled down and the radio turned up. In the backseat, there is a mess of clothes and papers, and trash everywhere.

Suddenly, the music cuts out. Zoe hits the radio button a few times, trying to get the music to turn back on.

ZOE
What the hell.

She starts to aggressively hit the radio button rapidly, trying to get it to do something. Nothing happens. Suddenly, the car starts to lose speed. The value on the speedometer drops until it reaches zero, and Zoe is forced to pull over onto the side of the road.

ZOE (CONT'D)
No no no no no...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- CONTINUOUS

As soon as the car halts, Zoe leaps out and pops the hood. She glances at the inner workings of the car but ultimately doesn't know anything about it. She shakes her head and pulls out her phone. The screen shows that there is no service in the area.

ZOE
Are you fucking kidding me!?

Zoe moves around to try to find service, but fails. Exasperated, she looks up and down the highway to try to spot a car, but there are none in sight. Zoe kicks the tire in frustration, and then she leans against her car and waits.

A car finally appears in the distance, and Zoe steps out into the road to try to flag it down.

CUT TO:

INT. DUSTIN'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

DUSTIN, a collected and calculating 20-something-year-old man, notices Zoe frantically jumping and waving in the middle of the road. His car is very clean and tidy, with just a backpack on the passenger seat. The image of her in the windshield grows larger as the car approaches.

DUSTIN
What the hell?

Dustin slows down and pulls his car over behind Zoe's car.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Zoe moves towards the stopped car with enthusiasm.

ZOE
Oh, thank you! Thank-

Dustin exits the car. It takes Zoe a moment, but she recognizes him. Her entire demeanor drastically changes on a dime.

ZOE (CONT'D)
No.

Dustin recognizes her in an instant. Zoe turns and starts to quickly walk back towards her car. Dustin hesitates, but then begins to follow her.

DUSTIN
Zoe?

ZOE
No. Nope. Stay away from me.

DUSTIN
Do you need help with your car?

Zoe turns abruptly to face Dustin.

ZOE
Nope.

Dustin can clearly see the dead car behind her. He gives her a doubtful look.

ZOE (CONT'D)
I'm sure someone else will come along.

The road is still empty for what looks like miles. Dustin and Zoe face off. Zoe is very tense and Dustin appears unfazed by the silence.

ZOE (CONT'D)
...Any day now.

DUSTIN
Will they?

Zoe lets out a noise in frustration, before collecting herself again.

ZOE
You need to leave, alright?

DUSTIN
Just so we're clear, you don't want help with your car?

ZOE
No.

Dustin stands there staring at Zoe again, only this time he's focused on her necklace. It's gold necklace with a thin chain, and the charm is shaped like two horns facing downward.

ZOE (CONT'D)
Get out of here!

DUSTIN
Hm. Nice necklace.

Zoe instinctively reaches up and grabs her necklace, covering it.

ZOE
Go!

Dustin smirks as he slowly turns away from Zoe and walks back to his car and gets in.

CUT TO:

INT. DUSTIN'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Dustin sits in the driver's seat. He sees Zoe staring at him, but once she sees that he's in his car, she turns and walks around the front of hers. He's about to put the keys in the car but he hesitates.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE -- FLASHBACK

The memory is hazy and dream-like. Dustin reaches out and hands Zoe a box wrapped with ribbon and paper. She opens it and pulls out a necklace, the same one that she is wearing in the present. She mouths words of gratitude, but there is no audio, just a soothing and dreamy melody playing softly.

INT. DUSTIN'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Dustin looks at his keys again and decides not to put them into the ignition. He exits the car again.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Zoe leans over the front of her car, hiding behind the popped hood. She's still trying to calm herself down. She reaches up and starts to play with the necklace again. Dustin reappears beside her, and she lurches upright to face him.

ZOE
What did I tell--

DUSTIN
My car won't start either.

ZOE
What?

DUSTIN
Looks like I'm stuck here too.

Dustin leans on Zoe's car, making himself comfortable.

ZOE
No. *I'm stuck here. You can be stuck over there.*

Zoe points to Dustin's car.

DUSTIN
You--

ZOE
No.

DUSTIN
You don't think--

ZOE
No.

DUSTIN
Hear me out.

Zoe begrudgingly gestures for him to go on.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
Maybe this is...

ZOE
What?

DUSTIN
You know, fate.

ZOE
(Skeptically:)
Since when do you believe in
"fate"?

Dustin shrugs almost mockingly and Zoe examines him for a second. Finally, he breaks and smirks a little.

ZOE (CONT'D)
Asshole.

Dustin laughs.

DUSTIN
What! Oh come on.

Zoe turns away from her and gets back into her car. She closes the door and tries to start it again, but it doesn't work. Zoe puts her head down on the steering wheel. Dustin opens the door.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
What's wrong with it?

ZOE
It won't start.

DUSTIN
Yeah I kind of got that... Why?

Zoe looks up at him.

ZOE
I don't know why.

DUSTIN
Empty tank?

ZOE
I'm not an idiot.

DUSTIN
Just asking. Dead battery?

ZOE
I mean probably. It died while I was driving.

DUSTIN
Sounds like a problem with your alternator. A jumpstart might get it going again, but you're gonna wanna get that looked at.

ZOE
Great. I'll get right on that.

Zoe pushes past Dustin and looks up and down the highway again, but it's still deserted. Dustin closes the door to her car and follows her. Amused, he watches her desperately search for approaching vehicles. Zoe becomes aware that she's being watched.

ZOE (CONT'D)
You know, if you're so good with cars, maybe you should go fix your own.

DUSTIN
It's just overheated. Needs some time to cool down.

ZOE
Well, maybe it's ready now.

DUSTIN
I don't think so.

ZOE
Maybe you should try it anyway.

DUSTIN
Nope, I'm good.

Dustin smiles at Zoe, who rolls her eyes in response. She turns away from Dustin and looks back down the road. It is still empty.

ZOE
Where the fuck is everyone?!

Dustin watches her, somewhat amused by her turmoil.

DUSTIN
Looks like my car's not the only
thing that's overheating.

ZOE
Ugh! How, HOW are you the only
other person out here?

DUSTIN
I know, what are the odds.

Dustin grins again, and Zoe glares at him.

ZOE
Yeah, what are the odds...
Give me your keys.

DUSTIN
What?

Zoe lurches forward and snatches the keys from Dustin's hand.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
Hey!

Zoe ignores him and starts to walk at a determined pace
towards Dustin's car.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

ZOE
Starting your car.

DUSTIN
I just told you--

Zoe opens the door to his car, and looks back at him.

ZOE
Yeah, bullshit.

INT. DUSTIN'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Zoe slams the car door shut and puts the key in the ignition.
She turns it harshly. Nothing. She stares at the key in
disbelief, and tries to turn it once more. Again, nothing.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Zoe begrudgingly opens the door and gets out of Dustin's car.

ZOE

I guess you weren't lying.

She tosses his keys back at him.

ZOE (CONT'D)

That's new.

She starts to walk back to her own car. Dustin stares at the keys in his hand.

DUSTIN

(Under his breath:)

What?

Dustin desperately jumps into his car and tries to turn the ignition. It doesn't work. He slouches back in the seat.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

You've got to be kidding.

Dustin sighs and gets out of his car again. He goes to the front of his car. Zoe hears Dustin pop the hood of his own car, and she peaks around her own hood to see him. She watches him, but he turns around and looks at her. She quickly ducks back behind her own car. Zoe takes another peak out from behind her car, only to see that Dustin has vanished. She takes a step out from behind her car to get a better vantage point, only to be startled by Dustin who has walked up behind her.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

And here I thought you didn't want to see me.

ZOE

I--I don't.

DUSTIN

Then what are you looking for?

ZOE

I was just... wait.

Zoe's attention is captured by a car in the distance behind Dustin.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Is that a car? That's a car!

Dustin turns to see the car. Zoe steps out into the middle of the road, but Dustin grabs her and pulls her back.

She roughly shrugs his hand off of her arm, glaring at him briefly. Both of them start waving, trying to grab the attention of the anonymous driver.

DUSTIN Hey! Stop! Over here!

ZOE (CONT'D) Pull over!! Stop!!

They continue waving frantically, but the car passes both of them and drives out of sight.

ZOE (CONT'D)
(Yelling after the car:)
SERIOUSLY!?

Dustin goes to put a comforting hand on Zoe, but she wrenches her body away from him.

DUSTIN
Zo--

ZOE
This is a fucking nightmare.

DUSTIN
Zoe, just try to calm down.

ZOE
Calm down!?

DUSTIN
Yes. It'll be alright. We'll figure this out.

ZOE
Okay, first of all, "we" will not be doing anything. There is no "we" anymore, you've made that painfully clear. I'm stuck here, in the middle of nowhere, with my emotionally abusive ex-boyfriend. Absolutely nothing about this is "alright" so no I will not "calm down."

DUSTIN
Emotionally abusive? (Pause.) Is that really what you think of me?

ZOE
Yes.

DUSTIN
Okay.

Dustin turns his back to Zoe and walks back towards his car. Zoe takes a moment to herself, but then starts watching as Dustin walks away from her. He gets in and sits in the driver's seat.

INT. DUSTIN'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Dustin is sitting in his car, desperately trying to start it to no avail. He hears a timid knock on the passenger window and turns to see Zoe looking at him. He looks at her for a moment before deciding to unlock the doors. Silently, she moves his backpack into the backseat, slides into the passenger seat, and closes the door behind her. They sit there quietly for several seconds.

DUSTIN
Came to yell at me some more?

Zoe shakes her head. More silence.

ZOE
I'm sorry.

More silence.

DUSTIN
Can I ask you something?

Zoe nods.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
Why do you hate me so much?

ZOE
You're kidding right?

DUSTIN
Like I know that most exes don't stay friends, but I didn't think we ended that badly.

ZOE
I think we did.

DUSTIN
Really?

Zoe nods.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
I tried to make it as painless as possible.

ZOE
Over the phone?

DUSTIN
Okay, I admit that wasn't my best
move.

ZOE
No, it wasn't.

DUSTIN
But I really was trying not to hurt
you.

ZOE
By sleeping with Claire the next
day?

Dustin freezes.

DUSTIN
Who told you that?

ZOE
Does it matter?

DUSTIN
I guess it doesn't.

ZOE
Then it's true?

DUSTIN
I'm sorry that you found out, but--

ZOE
Oh my god, it's true.

DUSTIN
BUT I didn't hook up with her while
we were together. If that's any
consolation.

ZOE
No, you just flirted with her while
we were together until you knew it
was a sure thing, then you dumped
me.

DUSTIN
I--

ZOE
Look, it doesn't matter. I'm over
it.

More silence still. Zoe absentmindedly begins to fiddle with
the necklace again.

DUSTIN
I really am sorry.

ZOE
Yeah.

Another long pause. Zoe continues to play with the necklace.

DUSTIN
So why did you keep that?

ZOE
Hm?

Dustin gestures to the necklace, and Zoe snaps her hand away
from it.

ZOE (CONT'D)
Oh. I don't know.

DUSTIN
I just figured you would have
gotten rid of anything that
reminded me of you. I mean, you of
me. Right? Yeah.

Zoe laughs a little and Dustin looks slightly frazzled by his
mistake.

ZOE
I mean I'm not gonna pretend like
you don't exist, you were a big
part of my life. Besides I like
this necklace.

DUSTIN
Really?

ZOE
Yeah, it reminds me of my sign.

DUSTIN
Wait, what?

ZOE
You know, it's like the Taurus
horns.

DUSTIN

Oh my god.

ZOE

What?

DUSTIN

That's why you wanted that necklace so badly!?

ZOE

Yeah... why?

Dustin sighs and shakes his head.

ZOE (CONT'D)

What? Okay I know how you feel about astrology, but hear me out. My horoscope for today said that I would come to terms with a past relationship.

Dustin stares blankly at Zoe.

DUSTIN

...And?

ZOE

Well! This! You!

DUSTIN

I thought you were smarter than that.

ZOE

Whatever.

DUSTIN

They're all so vague. That could be about a burrito you ate yesterday.

ZOE

You know, this is why we shouldn't have dated. Fucking Capricorns.

Zoe crosses her arms and looks away.

DUSTIN

Look, I just don't believe in that stuff. Fate. Any of it. Our future is determined by the choices we make in whatever situation we're in.

ZOE

What about the stuff you said earlier? Us being stuck here together, that's gotta be something. The universe wants--

DUSTIN

I lied about my car not starting.

ZOE

What? I tried and it didn't work.

Dustin avoids eye contact and doesn't respond.

ZOE (CONT'D)

What do you mean you lied?

DUSTIN

Well... initially I was lying but then it actually wouldn't start so...

ZOE

Karma.

DUSTIN

Coincidence.

ZOE

Right.

DUSTIN

Listen. I lied because as soon as I saw you, I realized how much I missed you.

Zoe looks at Dustin again, surprised.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

I know, I know. I was the one who ended things, but this is the first time that we've seen each other since, well... I just didn't expect to feel...

ZOE

I miss you too.

DUSTIN

You do?

ZOE

Yeah.

Zoe leans in to kiss Dustin but Dustin looks uncomfortable.

ZOE (CONT'D)

What?

DUSTIN

I just don't know if it's the best idea... (Pause.) As much as I'd like to.

Dustin and Zoe look at each other for a moment and then both break away, unsure of what's next. They look out the windows. An awkward pause.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

It looks like it's getting dark.

ZOE

Yeah. Is your car still...?

Dustin tries turning the car on again, it doesn't work.

DUSTIN

Nothing. Maybe we can call someone?

Zoe checks her phone.

ZOE

Still no service.

Dustin checks his phone.

DUSTIN

Same.

ZOE

Now what?

Dustin taps the steering wheel, thinking. After a few seconds, he is struck by an idea.

DUSTIN

You know what I think we need?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

Dustin and Zoe are sitting on a blanket off away from the side of the road, behind their cars. Zoe is laughing, and they are passing a wine bottle back and forth, taking turns sipping from it.

DUSTIN
Okay, I'll admit it's a little
warm.

ZOE
It's literally fermented.

Zoe takes another long swig from the bottle. She stops drinking to suppress a gag. Dustin tries to take the bottle from her, but she holds up her finger and keeps drinking.

DUSTIN
Come on.

ZOE
If I'm gonna be stuck here with you
all night, I need this.

DUSTIN
Really?

ZOE
I'm only kidding!

Zoe playfully punches him in the arm, and Dustin takes the opportunity to reach for the bottle. Zoe again tries to pull it away from him, but he catches it and takes it from her.

ZOE (CONT'D)
Hey!

DUSTIN
I think that's enough for right
now.

Zoe pouts, but Dustin ignores it. He sets the bottle on the other side of him and lies back, gesturing for Zoe to lie down next to him. They look up at the stars together.

ZOE
So I have a question.

DUSTIN
Yeah?

ZOE
Where were you going?

DUSTIN
What do you mean?

ZOE
Like before you pulled over to help
me, where were you going?

DUSTIN
Oh. Burke Mountain.

ZOE
Shut up.

DUSTIN
What?

ZOE
Wait are you serious?

DUSTIN
Yeah... I was in the mood for a
hike. Why?

ZOE
Alone?

DUSTIN
Yeah.

ZOE
With wine?

Dustin shrugs.

ZOE (CONT'D)
That's where I was going too.

DUSTIN
Really?

ZOE
Yeah.

DUSTIN
By yourself?

ZOE
Yeah?

DUSTIN
Hm.

ZOE
What?

DUSTIN
You just don't really look like
you're going hiking.

ZOE
Well... never mind.

DUSTIN
No, what?

ZOE
It's stupid.

DUSTIN
Tell me.

ZOE
No.

DUSTIN
Tell me.

Dustin tickles Zoe, who is not expecting it.

ZOE
Ah! Okay fine fine fine! I wanted
to take pictures.

DUSTIN
Like of the scenery? I don't--

ZOE
Like a really hot selfie at the
peak.

DUSTIN
I mean--

ZOE
For Tinder.

DUSTIN
Oh.

INT. A PORCH -- FLASHBACK

Dustin is sitting on the porch, dressed nicely, waiting. Zoe emerges from inside the house, also dressed nicely, and Dustin stands and smiles. He appears to compliment her. She smiles and spins around, giving Dustin a full look at her outfit. He reaches out and she goes to him. They kiss, and look lovingly at each other. They hold hands and step off the porch, Dustin leading the way.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- CONTINUOUS

ZOE
Does that bother you?

DUSTIN

Nope.

Zoe looks disappointed.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Why there?

ZOE

I don't know, give the illusion that I'm active? Or something... Besides I needed to get out and clear my head.

DUSTIN

You know, if we hadn't gotten stuck here, we probably would have seen each other on the trail.

ZOE

Yeah. I guess we were destined to be stuck together.

Dustin rolls his eyes and sits up.

DUSTIN

I have a question for you then.

ZOE

Yeah?

DUSTIN

If your car started working and mine didn't, would you leave?

ZOE

Of course not.

DUSTIN

Why not?

ZOE

I wouldn't want to leave you here alone... that would be shitty.

DUSTIN

But wouldn't that be the universe's way of telling you to leave?

Zoe thinks about this for a second.

ZOE

Oh shut up. It's not a perfect science.

DUSTIN

Yeah, it's not science at all.

Zoe smacks him in the arm, Dustin winces and reaches up to where she smacked him. He rubs his arm.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Definitely didn't miss that...

Zoe ignores his comment and presses onward.

ZOE

Would you want me to leave?

DUSTIN

I don't think so.

ZOE

Really?

DUSTIN

Yeah, I think this turned out to be a pretty good night.

ZOE

Maybe we could have more nights like this in the future...

DUSTIN

Yeah, maybe...

Zoe reaches for Dustin's hand, and he takes hers.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Except I think our friends would be pissed if they knew we were hanging out.

ZOE

Mine wouldn't be.

DUSTIN

Oh please. They hate me.

ZOE

Yeah, but I don't. And they just want me to be happy.

Dustin pulls his hand away from Zoe.

DUSTIN

I don't think that mine would be as understanding.

ZOE
What do you mean?

DUSTIN
I mean that they still haven't
fully gotten over that time you
smashed my phone.

ZOE
That was an accident.

Dustin gives Zoe a doubtful look.

ZOE (CONT'D)
Well, I didn't mean to break it.

DUSTIN
Yeah, well, I don't know if they
see it that way.

ZOE
Can't you explain to them that I
didn't mean to?

DUSTIN
It's... not just that.

ZOE
What else do they think about me?

DUSTIN
I don't think this is--

ZOE
Just fucking tell me.

DUSTIN
Fine. They don't like how
controlling you are.

ZOE
Controlling!? How can I be
controlling when you never listen
to a god damn thing I say.

DUSTIN
Okay this--

ZOE
What else?

DUSTIN
Zoe...

ZOE

No, tell me what else they say about me. They probably think I'm a crazy bitch, don't they?

DUSTIN

... Well...

ZOE

What did you say about me??

DUSTIN

What?

ZOE

They didn't just get this idea from nowhere, what the fuck did you say to them to make them hate me?

DUSTIN

Zoe.

ZOE

This is fucking unbelievable.

Zoe gets up and runs to her car in the dark. Zoe opens the door to the backseat and gets in, locking the doors behind her. Once she's in the car, the necklace is no longer around her neck.

DUSTIN

Zoe...

Dustin takes out his phone flashlight and follows Zoe over to her car, where she is sitting sideways in the backseat, on top of her piles of trash and clothes, crying. He tries to open the door but it is locked.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Zoe, open the door.

Dustin repetitively pulls at the door handle, but Zoe ignores him. She shakes her head. Dustin notices something on the ground, and turns his flashlight to look at it. He sees the necklace just outside Zoe's car door. He leans over and picks it up.

CUT TO:

INT. ZOE'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

ZOE
(To herself:) I'm such a fucking
idiot.

Dustin continues to pound on the door.

DUSTIN
Zoe! Zoe!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- MORNING

Dustin has fallen asleep leaned up against Zoe's back tire.

INT. A BEDROOM -- FLASHBACK

Dustin is lying in bed with Zoe curled up asleep next to him, resting her head on his shoulder. His eyes are open and he stares up at the ceiling pensively.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Dustin is woken up by the sound of the car starting. He leaps to his feet and runs around to the driver's side of the car. Zoe opens the door and stands to face Dustin, leaving the door open and the car running.

ZOE
What.

DUSTIN
About last night-

ZOE
It's fine.

DUSTIN
You're mad at me.

ZOE
No.

DUSTIN
Oh.

ZOE
I was just upset. And the alcohol
and everything...

DUSTIN

Yeah. (Pause.) So I guess your car is fine now?

ZOE

Apparently. Maybe you should try yours?

DUSTIN

I will, in a minute. I just wanted to... (Pause.) I, um, found this on the ground.

Dustin pulls the necklace out of his pocket, and Zoe's hand immediately flashes up to where the necklace usually rests.

ZOE

Oh!

DUSTIN

Do you still want it?

Zoe doesn't answer right away.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

You should keep it.

ZOE

Why?

DUSTIN

You said earlier you liked it.

ZOE

I know, but...

Dustin gently takes Zoe's hand and puts the necklace in it. He then kisses her on the cheek and takes a step back. He smiles at her and starts to walk back to his car. He turns back and looks at her.

DUSTIN

Call me when you get home so I know you made it there safely.

ZOE

I... don't have your number anymore.

DUSTIN

Alright, I'll call you then.

INT. DUSTIN'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Dustin gets into his car and turns the key. It starts. He puts on his sunglasses. Dustin begins a three point turn, waving to Zoe as he passes her. He then starts driving off in the opposite direction. He smiles a little as he drives away.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Zoe watches as Dustin drives off into the distance. She looks down, opens her hand, and stares at the necklace.

CUT TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.