

Zach Bucholtz
"The Designated Driver"
Treatment

Zach is beginning his sophomore year of college, but he has yet to make any friends. He doesn't drink, go to parties, and is moving in blindly to a house with three guys he's never met: Lance, Paul, and Sam. Sam's girlfriend Zoey decides to throw Sam a surprise birthday party at the boys' house a couple weeks into the school year, meaning Zach will not only be going to his first party, he'll be hosting it.

The party goes well, and lots of people show up. Zach knows none of them, however, and is so nervous that when the party commences he is upstairs on the couch nearly throwing up. Zoey comes up and tries to talk him down but with only limited success. Moments later, he is confronted by Laura. Laura is everything Zach is not: attractive, outgoing, strong-willed. She tells Zach to come play beer pong with her without even introducing herself first. She is so forceful that Zach agrees to join her. Downstairs, he meets Gina, Alex, and Kim – Laura's friends – and he and Laura play against Paul and Lance. Zach is terrible, and Kim spends most of the game making fun of him; Laura at one point reveals she picked Zach because she saw his baseball memorabilia (he played in high school). When Paul and Lance win, they force Zach to drink, but he refuses. He admits he has never had a drink, and suddenly his new friends see an opportunity: he can drive them places when they are drunk. They ask to be taken to Taco Bell later in the night.

Zach's social anxiety only mildly tempered, he goes outside for a breath of fresh air. When he comes back in, Laura and her friends are ready for Taco Bell, and Zach goes to get his car: a relatively new Ford Mustang that he just bought. He drives the girls to Taco Bell, and afterwards they thank him repeatedly and tell him nice things, boosting his confidence. It is then that Zach realizes this may be his route to finding friends: being their designated

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driver. After Taco Bell, he returns home and takes care of his drunk house guests, giving them blankets, sweatshirt, and bins to throw up into (they served chili at the party, a big mistake). He tells his mom his plan, and she is happy for him but advises him to be careful about what he is doing. But to Zach, it is perfect: he doesn't have to go to parties, he doesn't have to drink, but he gets to still be part of the social scene.

At home one night alone, Zach gets a text from Zoey, asking for his help with her drunk roommates, Michele and Britney. He drives to a party at Zoey's brother Kyle's house and finds the three girls there, very drunk. Zoey wants to stay but asks Zach to drive Michele and Britney home, which he agrees to do. In trying to find them at the party, he sees them being offered more alcohol but intercepts the alcohol and hides it from them. He takes the girls home, but they throw up in his car on the way. They apologize profusely and thank Zach for his help. He responds by saying that he will help them whenever they need a ride, fully committing himself to being the designated driver.

The second act starts with Zach in full swing as the designated driver. He drives a group of his new friends to a party, waits outside, then picks them up. They pull off a "Chinese fire drill" at a red light. Paul gets super drunk one night and is obsessed with "parkour," i.e. climbing things wherever he goes. He hops out of the car and climbs trees around campus, failing most of the time.

Later, he picks Laura and her friends up and takes them to the library, where they embarrass Sam in front of his study group by quietly dropping books about sex onto his table and walking away. After he takes everyone else home, Laura asks for Zach to take her to Taco Bell, and then to help her move some furniture around at her house. Zach and

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Laura have a long talk while working, and Zach tells her parts of his backstory. He was never very social in high school and preferred to spend time with his family, but did excel at baseball. She asks why he drives her and her friends around, and he insists he does it so that everyone has someone they can count on. When Zach goes to leave, Laura insists on him staying because it is so late, and offers to let him sleep on her bed with her. Having never shared a bed with a girl before, he has trouble falling asleep, but does eventually, and they do not have sex. But for Zach, this is big step forward in his journey.

Zach is assigned a big paper for a class and spends time at the library doing research. While there, he runs into Zoey and her roommates, and has a few awkward moments with Michele, who he has started to develop a crush on. Later on, when dropping Laura off at a party, she invites him to come in. This is his first time going to a party (besides the one thrown at his house). It's an awkward time for Zach, who gets hit on by a gay guy, and then runs into Lance, who offers to be Zach's wingman for the night. Lance helps Zach talk to a girl at the party, but Zach doesn't know what to say. He's bailed out by Laura, asking for a ride home. Laura asks Zach to stop by a park, and outside on a swingset under the stars she tells Zach her backstory: her dad dies when she was 13 and she thought she had to be strong for her family, and has been so ever since.

While studying on a Wednesday night, a drunk Gina asks Zach for help home. He initially says he's too busy, but when she persists, he reluctantly blows off his studies to help her. She is too drunk to tell him where she is at, so he spends two hours tracking her down, eventually finding her in the bathroom of a long-closed for the night ice cream parlor, and walks her to her dorm room. The next weekend, Alex has an extra ticket to a

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big concert (by some famous band) and offers it to Zach for free. Zach thinks of this as a sign he has made it socially, and has a great time.

The second half begins with Zach deciding to make a move on Michele, and asking Zoey for help. She talks him through how to get Michele's attention (by tagging along when they go out and do things). He goes bowling with Sam, Zoey, Michele, and a few others, and flirts with Michele, and offers her a ride somewhere.

Meanwhile, one night, Zach is called by Kim and Alex for a ride. He was sleeping, but gets up and gets dressed. When he is dressed, they call again and tell him not to come. Just before he gets back in bed, they call again asking for a ride.

It's Halloween, and the whole gang goes out together. Zach dresses as Slash from Guns N' Roses, and gets Michele's number before the group splits up. Michele asks Zach for a ride home from a party, and after taking care of Britney for awhile (who at this point still has not spoken in the movie), the two of them get some alone time and take a walk on Halloween night, going through campus, people watching, and stopping for day-old Jimmy Johns bread. Zach thinks he's made progress with Michele.

Laura, Gina, Kim, and Alex have Zach drive them to the apartment of Ken Bass, a friend of theirs who they say never comes out of his room. After hunting his apartment down, they interrupt him masturbating. Zach briefs Laura on his pursuit of Michele, and Laura comments on how she thinks he'd be a great boyfriend to anyone.

Zach's mom calls him, and asks why he hasn't called her in nearly three weeks, to which he doesn't have much of an answer. Sam asks him to study one night, but instead he opts to drive around town and wait for "the call." He never gets one, and returns home to

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find out that Lance had hooked up with Michele, ending his pursuit of her. Zoey apologizes for allowing it to happen, and admits to knowing Michele was more interested in Lance.

Zach is called by Laura, Kim, Alex, and Gina to pick them up from a party. When they get in the Mustang, they admit to having stolen a lot of marijuana from the house they were at, thus making Zach their "getaway driver." They decide to "dispose of the evidence" by smoking all the weed, which Zach uncomfortably watches, as he insists on taking Laura home from Kim's apartment when they are done. Zach is visibly uncomfortable by the whole experience, and starts to question his actions.

Winter break comes, and Zach heads home to see his family, including two younger siblings he didn't talk to for much of the semester. He gets an email that he has been put on academic probation for his poor grades, and has to tell his parents, who tell him they will not pay his car insurance anymore if he doesn't get his grades up, and that his driving people around all the time is the cause of his bad grades.

Zach returns to school and "retires" as the designated driver. He focuses on his studies, improves his relationship with his family, and turns his phone off before bed to make sure nobody calls him. When he finishes doing his homework, he sits alone in his bedroom watching movies, as he did before moving in with Lance, Paul, and Sam.

He gets a call one night from a distraught Laura, begging Zach for a ride. He at first says no, and hangs up, but feels bad and "unretires" for one last drive. He finds her at a house party, except she is the only guest left and is being hit on repeatedly by a guy, and shoots him down every time he speaks. She hugs Zach and thanks him for "saving her," and offers to buy him some food, so they stop to go to a diner, but Zach confronts Laura about

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taking advantage of him, pointing out the weed incident especially and blames her for his academic probation. Laura is taken back by this, and yells back at Zach calling him a pushover and then calling him out for not recognizing all the nice things she's done for him. Zach, very angry, crashes a frat party and starts getting drunk.

The next morning, Zach wakes up hungover and unsure where he is. He realizes he is at Laura's house. She comes upstairs with coffee and explains to Zach that he blacked out and she took care of him. They reconcile, and Zach apologizes. He realizes that she has been a great friend, but also that he got taken advantage of.

The movie ends with a series of shots of Zach adjusting to balance in his life: he hangs out with Laura during the day, studies for school at night, and the final shot is of him starting the engine to his Mustang.