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Anatomy of a Scene: Lady Bird
Timestamp of the scene: 0:47 - 3:25

Shay:

This brief three-minute scene at the start of the film is an introduction to the type of relationship this mother-daughter duo has. It starts with them listening to the end of an audiobook, both teary-eyed as they soak in the final words. The camera is steady at a medium two-person shot, showing both Lady Bird and her mom in the frame. The camera briefly changes to a shot-reverse-shot, closing in on both Lady Bird and her mom's faces, one at a time, then returning to the default medium two-person shot. As the audiobook ends, they both sigh. Lady Bird reaches over and takes the VHS tape out and says aloud that the college trip they'd been on took 21 hours and 5 minutes. They both laugh and Lady Bird reaches over again to turn the radio on.





Alondra:

A Robert Ebert article, written by Susan W, states, “Enjoy the lack of familial tension while you can. This is just about the last time parent and child will agree on anything...” As Susan W. points out, the first few seconds of this scene, just before either of them actually start talking, show a sweet moment. However, that moment only lasts a few seconds as the following events rapidly change the tone of the scene, foreshadowing the fast paced nature of this movie.



Shay:

Lady Bird's mom stops her from turning on the radio and says "Hey wait. Let's just sit with what we heard." to which Lady Bird replies, "Are you serious?" Right then the mood of the scene almost immediately shifts as Lady Bird's voice changes to annoyed and she sits back in her seat to move ever so slightly away from her mom. Her mom picks up on this but doesn't say anything alluding to their passive aggressive relationship.



Alondra:

The camera changes to the same shot-reverse-shot, showing Lady Bird's face first as she speaks, saying she wished she could live through something. The camera then switches to her mom's face as she responds. In a sarcastic tone she says, "Okay fine. Well, yours is the worst life of all, so you win." Her mother's face begins to look annoyed as her voice shifts too in tone, implying how ungrateful she thinks Lady Bird is being. Within seconds they start to bicker over what seems to be nothing on the surface, but as the scene unfolds, we see that there is more to the story.





Shay:

Their arguments erupt into talk about where Lady Bird should go to college versus where she wants to go to college. Since they are driving home from a college trip, viewers can make the safe assumption that college will be a bigger theme throughout the rest of the movie. In this scene, Lady Bird makes the argument that she wants to go to college in the East Coast, but her mom believes she couldn't even get in with her grades, much less be able to afford it. Her mom brings up what a hard time they are having financially and how ungrateful Lady Bird is. Notice how the scene is set up, showing her mom talking to her while she is either looking straight ahead or out the car window.



Alondra:

It is only when her mom says, "... you don't think anybody but yourself" that triggers Lady Bird to actually turn to face her mom. Of all the issues brought up throughout this fight, there are two that stand out the most. The first being college, which we mentioned before, and the second being how selfish LadyBird is, and whether or not she is or isn't acting selfish.

Shay:

This scene, though very early in the film, gets to the heart of the movie. At its core, this film focuses on this complicated relationship between Lady Bird and her mom. All the little disagreements between the two never take away from the love and care they have for each other. Similar to the start of this scene, there are sweet and calm moments between the two, but ultimately their stubborn natures always make them end up butting heads and never coming to any type of agreement.



Alondra:

As the fighting continues and the main dialogue comes from Lady Bird's mom, the scene begins to feel more and more tense. Lady Bird slowly begins to lose her patience and can't take the hurtful things her mother is yelling. In a very quick motion, Lady Bird unbuckles her seat belt and jumps out of the car, making her mom scream. As quickly as the scene changed from peaceful to argumentative, the camera cuts to a close up of the cast Lady Bird has on her arm. The quick ending of the scene models how fast paced the movie is, barely giving viewers time to think before Lady Bird leaps into the next thing.



Shay:

This opening scene sets up the rest of the film as every little argument or spat is brought up again later in the film. Although audience members will have a hard time tracking and remembering all of the little things they said, everything eventually comes back up at different moments of the film. Susan W, said it best, “Yes, “Lady Bird” is occasionally too episodic and obvious ... But then there are such displays of tenderness ... ‘Lady Bird’ might not be perfect, but it touched many of the right emotional buttons for me.” All the chaos thrown at the audience is weirdly relatable, and in the end, that’s what makes the movie so memorable.

Bibliography

Włoszczyna, Susan. “Lady Bird Movie Review & Film Summary (2017): Roger Ebert.” *Movie Review & Film Summary (2017) | Roger Ebert*, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/lady-bird-2017>.