

# **Rescue Dog**

## **Family Film Treatment**

**By**

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### **Logline:**

A two-strike teen doing community service rescues a shelter dog giving each of them one last chance at redemption until a poor decision with her delinquent boyfriend puts both of their lives at risk.

### **Summary:**

Rescue Dog is a story of last chances, redemption, and hope. KAREN WILKES (17 going on 27), walks across campus toward the parking lot on the last day of her Junior Year at High School, her eyes distant and empty. Sullen. Until she sees her delinquent boyfriend, AXLE CROSS (18 and trouble in a leather jacket), hanging out with his friends next to his prized car, who calls her over. Her whole persona changes as she engages with him, and plans a secret road trip to Boston with him that summer. The gang talks about heading to a big end of school party later that night, and Karen tells him to come pick her up that night, even though she's grounded. She walks off and returns to her state of malaise.

Meanwhile, LOLA, a five-year old wrinkled Bull Terrier/Shar Pei mix with a WHITE-TIPPED TAIL, curls up in a ball at the foot of a crib. An anxious mom peeks into the room, and Lola perks her head up, protective and on-call. The mother smiles and leaves the door ajar, as Lola continues to monitor the room throughout the night. In the middle of the night, Lola suddenly perks up, SNIFFS toward the sleeping baby, and whimpers. She moves to the crib, her nose pressing against the bars, and sniffs again. Nudges gently, but nothing happens. Then BARKS. Nothing. Lola turns toward the door and barks loudly. The parents run in, worried, yelling at Lola, rushing to the crib where the silence is deafening. A young mother picks up her son, and knows something is wrong. As the mother holds him, Lola pulls at the mother's nightgown, ripping it, and she is scolded by the panicked mother. The parents rush out of the room, leaving Lola alone in the dark. She curls up and whimpers.

Karen pleads with her mother, JANICE WILKES (47, single, and exhausted), to go to the party that night with her friends. The move to North Carolina for a new job and a new start has come with new problems, not the least of which is Karen's new attitude adjustment. Janice agrees to let her go out with her friends, but that decision changes everyone's life.

Axle and his friends leave the party early and goad Karen into helping them break into a store under the guise for money and supplies for the trip to Boston. Hoping for acceptance, Karen reluctantly agrees to help, but once the alarms go off, her vision and breathing become erratic, her legs go out from under her, and can't move. Karen blacks out just before the police arrive, and Axle leaves her behind. Later, in court, Karen is disrespectful before the judge and is sentenced to a summer filled with mandatory community service and counseling. More despondent than ever, she chooses the animal shelter and is introduced to her probation officer, CHARLES OAKLEY. This is going to be a long, tough road ahead.

ROGER SAMMS (45) runs the Wake County Animal Shelter, and gives Karen the tour of the state-of-the-art facility and her upcoming job responsibilities on her first day, then introduces her to ANDY KERNS (21, clean-cut and energetic), a long-term volunteer at the shelter. Roger puts Karen under Andy's care and instruction, as Charles checks up on Karen's placement to make sure that she is on the right path. Karen doesn't want to be there, but has no choice and her flippant attitude toward it all seethes through. Even during her first counseling session, all she does is sit quietly, avoiding every question, never saying a word.

The next day while Andy teaches Karen how to clean the kennels, he chooses Lola's and Karen tries to pull Lola out with brute force, but Lola won't have it, standing her ground. Distracted by Andy's teaching, Lola slips her neck out of the looped leash, so when Karen yanks on it again, the sudden slack makes Karen fall on her butt, and she becomes enraged...and dizzy. Lola SNIFFS suddenly, perks up, and approaches Karen, something Lola had never done with anyone before. Lola sits next to Karen, whimpering. When Karen responds with anger, Lola retreats to her kennel out of fear, and Andy shares that Lola's time is almost up and is about to be put down. Horrified by this, Karen agrees to foster Lola if it saves her life.

Janice meets Roger for the first time when getting instructions on care for Lola, especially since she is not being micro-chipped for identification as a foster dog, but instead giving her a simple collar with tags. And at home, Janice helps Karen understand the importance of taking care of Lola, and that if she is successful with this responsibility, she will earn more of her privileges back. Sensing an opportunity to take advantage of this opening, Karen agrees to be fully responsible for Lola. However, when Karen neglects Lola's need to 'take care of business', and she soils the bedroom rug in front of her, Karen reacts harshly and sees Lola's entire behavior change, as she cowers and shakes in fear before her. Compassion comes over Karen, and she pets her...cares for her. She brings Lola out of her state of fear, and they connect for the first time.

During her next counseling sessions, Karen opens up about the anger she feels about her mom's move to North Carolina from Boston, and leaving all of her friends behind. About the hurt she feels for her mom not

believing her or trusting her, especially about the car accident that happened when she was sixteen and she blacked out behind the wheel. And at work, Karen opens up about Lola and asks why she is still so afraid even though she's fostered and no longer at the shelter, and Andy tries to help her understand how living in a new place doesn't just take away the scars of the past. Karen starts to make a connection, then Axle shows up at the shelter and promises to make it up to her for having to perform community service and for not ratting them out.

At home, Karen and Lola start to bond as they play fetch and share time together. And even though Karen still gets upset when Lola chews up a random shoe of hers, she learns to replace harsh reactions with effective training, substitute anger with understanding and compassion, and gives love instead of anger. A side of Karen that Janice hasn't seen in years comes out, giving her hope for a more peaceful road ahead.

As Karen ends her community service, Roger offers her a job at the shelter if she wants it, giving her praise for the job well done, seeing that she has a gift toward animals. At her counseling session, Karen opens up about the car accident, a result of arguing with her mother about the move to North Carolina while driving, when she suddenly blacked out and wrecked the car. The police smelled beer on her clothes and breath and issued a DUI, even though Karen knew she never drank enough to cause the accident. She is still angry that her mom believed the police instead of her, and shortly after the event, was moved to North Carolina. And at home, Karen has shown enough responsibility to earn her phone privileges back, where she immediately contacts Axle and agrees to meet up with him as he has a surprise for her.

Waiting until her mother has gone to sleep, Karen sneaks out of bed and Lola follows, her dog tags JINGLING with every step she takes. Karen removes the collar from her neck and tells her to stay, as Karen sneaks out the front door, but fails to close it completely behind her. As Karen gets in Axle's car, Lola nudges the door open, watches Karen get in the car, and then follows the car down the dark rural street. Soon, after following taillight after taillight, Lola finds herself on a back country road in the middle of nowhere, lost and afraid. She is found by an older couple who take care of her overnight.

Meanwhile, Axle's surprise is nothing good: he and his friends are going to repay the cops for busting Karen by vandalizing the police parking lot with paint balloons. Karen wants nothing to do with it and demands to be taken home, but Axle refuses and takes her along for the ride. A police chase ensues and after being cornered by the police, Karen attempts to get out of the car but blacks out. She wakes up in the hospital, handcuffed to the bed and read her rights by the attending police officer. It's as bad as it gets.

The following morning, Lola is dropped off at the very old and small Chatham County shelter. With no identification and the over-crowded conditions, Lola is given a three-day window until 'termination'. Meanwhile, back at the house, Janice confers with her lawyer that even as an unwitting or unwilling accomplice, Karen's involvement in the vandalism will likely land her in jail. Hopeless and despondent, Karen goes to her room where she spots Lola's collar, right where she left it the night before. Panicked, she calls out for Lola, and then retraces her steps out the front door, only to watch the faulty front door latch open again. She knows that Lola got out the night before and fears the worst.

They head to the Wake County shelter and Lola is nowhere to be found. Andy reminds her about the Chatham shelter, and they drive over there, as well. Meanwhile, Lola is cared for by a local attendant, JOHNNY, who removes a sad and scared Lola from her crate into a separate room to be washed down. While Lola is being washed separately, Karen arrives and checks the kennels only to find she's not there. While filling out a lost-and-found card, a ruckus breaks out in the waiting room between two large dogs, distracting Karen and Janice long enough to miss Lola being taken out of the washroom. All Karen sees is a glimpse of a WHITE-TIPPED TAIL disappear around the corner.

Discovering that her bad decisions have resulted in Lola's disappearance, Karen finally embraces her responsibility, and apologizes to her mother about everything. Janice sees the change in Karen and knows she has learned a huge lesson but fears it may be too late. When Karen's emotions get the better of her, she feels light-headed and tells her mom she might black out again, which triggers a memory for Janice that Karen had told her the truth about the car accident years ago and hadn't believed her. Mother and daughter connect like they haven't in years, and Janice promises to help her.

The following morning, Karen puts others before herself, and teams up with Andy, Roger, and her Mom to find Lola. With fliers in hand, Janice and Roger canvas the town while Karen and Andy survey the surrounding counties asking everyone they meet if they have any information on Lola. After searching for two days to no avail, and with time running out for Lola, Karen spies a woman walking a dog with a WHITE-TIPPED TAIL and remembers the dog at the shelter she only got a glimpse of, but wasn't allowed to look for. She tells Andy, believing that Lola is in the Chatham County shelter, and they race across town to get there in time.

Meanwhile, Johnny and an ELDERLY VETERINARIAN are preparing for the worst part of their day, when dogs have to be put down due to overcapacity. Johnny gathers Lola and begins to prepare for the night's procedures. When Karen and Andy arrive at the shelter, they find it's closed but Andy sees a familiar car in

the parking lot; the vet he used to call Dr. Death, the one who puts the animals down. Karen pounds on the front door, desperate to get their attention. But the noise only makes the dogs inside bark louder and louder, drowning out any chance of hearing her. Karen has an idea and turns from the door, intent on finding exactly what she needs.

As Johnny slips a leash around Lola's neck to guide her out of her cage and down the hallway, Karen runs to the shelter sign and pries loose a landscaping brick with her foot, then picks it up. Andy sees what she's about to do and pleads with her to stop, that he can't be involved. With only a moment of hesitation, knowing that what she's about to do will certainly put her in jail, she throws the brick through the front door, as ALARMS go off all around them. She runs in and tells Andy to hurry, but Andy confesses he has two-strikes against him and can't go to jail. With the sudden burst of noise inside, Johnny drops the leash and Lola runs off toward the familiar voice. Lola finds Karen and the two hug only to be stopped by the Elderly Vet as he calls the police.

In the same courtroom as the opening along with the same Judge, Karen is a different person. She takes responsibility for her actions, pleads to clear Andy's name, and shares that she would rather go to jail than be responsible for hurting Lola. Or her mother. Or her true friends. The Judge learns the truth about Karen's medical issues, how Lola has helped with them, and the progress she made through her community service and counseling. With Karen's promise to share what she knows about the earlier incident with Axle, the Judge shows leniency and commutes her sentence.

Karen ends up back at the Wake Shelter with her true friends, including Lola wearing a "Rescue Dog" vest. They have rescued one another, through love, trust and friendship.

**Author:**

'RESCUE DOG' was a Top Ten finalist in the 2018 Screencraft Family Film Screenplay Competition, a 2016 PAGE Awards Finalist, and a 2018 PAGE Awards Semi-Finalist. I have written seven additional feature screenplays and have developed three TV pilots. I reside in Los Gatos, California.