

RESCUE DOG

By

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FADE IN

INT. NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The hallways bustle with activity at this rural school as teens clean out lockers and papers fly everywhere.

STUDENT #1

You goin' to Jake's party?

STUDENT #2

It's going to rock! Party all summer long!

Happiness bounds from every face. All except one.

KAREN WILKES, 17 going on 27, dressed in a torn T-shirt and tight jeans, holds her notebook close to her chest as she walks alone. Eyes distant and empty. Sullen.

EXT. NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Karen exits toward the parking lot and her eyes light up. She's a different person.

AXLE CROSS, 18 and trouble in a leather jacket, leans against the hood of his car, smoking cigarettes with his friends. He notices Karen, smiles, and nods her over.

She smiles as she crosses the parking lot toward them.

AXLE

Hey baby. Ready for some summer fun?

He extends the lit cigarette to her as she approaches. She kisses him but shakes off the cigarette.

KAREN

With you? Always. We still planning on driving to Boston next month?

AXLE

You know it. Need to raise more money though. Willing to help?

KAREN

Just say when. What's up for later?

AXLE

Hittin' the party tonight, then who knows...you up for it?

KAREN
Absolutely. I'll text you.

AXLE
Aren't you still on lock down?

KAREN
Don't worry, just pick me up.

Axle smiles and holds her tight.

AXLE
You know I will.

They kiss. She smiles, then pulls away.

KAREN
Text you later. Love you.

AXLE
Later.

Karen peeks over her shoulder at the gang as she leaves. Axle doesn't look up. Karen sighs and moves on.

CUT TO:

INT. NURSERY - NIGHT

ANXIOUS MOM peeks into the baby's room and sees LOLA, their wrinkly Bull Terrier/Shar Pei mix with a white-tipped tail, curled up in a ball at the foot of the crib.

Lola immediately picks up her head sensing Mom's presence.

Mom smiles and leaves. Lola lowers her head on her paws and closes her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mom lies on the bed next to DAD, who is reading. The baby monitor hums on the night stand.

DAD
You don't have to check on the baby every five minutes.

MOM
I can't help it.

Dad absently points to the monitor.

DAD

Let the electronics do some of the work. Take a break.

Mom sighs and relaxes.

MOM

You're right.

Mom gets under the covers and turns off the light.

CUT TO:

INT. NURSERY - NIGHT

The night light glows on the wall and casts shadows across the peaceful room.

Lola suddenly perks up. Her nose twitches, sniffs something in the air and she looks toward the crib. WHIMPERS.

She stands and moves to the crib slowly. Nose twitching. The baby lies silently against the railing.

Lola presses her nose up against the baby, sniffs, then moves toward the nursery door. She WHIMPERS. Paces. WHIMPERS again.

Lola BARKS. Then LOUDER. SNARLS. She jumps up and down against the crib.

The baby remains still.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mom and Dad hear the NOISE from the monitor and down the hall. They spring into action.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

Mom runs into the nursery first and sees Lola on hind legs against the crib, BARKING at the baby.

MOM

Get down, Lola. NO!

Mom runs over to the crib and pushes Lola aside. Lola BARKS as Dad stands in the doorway.

DAD

Lola! What's gotten into you?

Mom picks up the baby. He's not waking up.

MOM

Sweetie?

Lola takes Mom's nightgown in her mouth and pulls.

MOM (CONT'D)

(to baby)

Sweetie?

(to Dad)

Something's wrong! He won't wake up!
Call 9-1-1!

Lola tugs harder and rips it. Mom swats Lola on the nose.

MOM (CONT'D)

Get away from me, you stupid dog!

Lola retreats, tail between her legs, as Mom runs out of the nursery. Lola stays behind in the dark room, curls up in a tight ball, and WHIMPERS.

CUT TO:

INT. WILKES' HOUSE - NIGHT

A door slams. Karen stands defiant at the top of the stairs, staring down at her parents.

KAREN

It's just a party!

ROBERT and JANICE WILKES, middle-aged parents whose wrinkled foreheads make them appear older than they are, glance at one another and shake their heads. Again.

ROBERT

We already talked about this.

KAREN

You told me to make friends here!

JANICE

Like that Axe character? Who names a kid Axe, anyway?

KAREN

It's Axle, Mom. And just because you don't like him doesn't mean-

JANICE

Don't talk to me like that, young lady, or I'll-

Robert WHISTLES through his teeth to stop the escalation.

ROBERT

Enough! Karen, do NOT talk back to your mother. This isn't getting you any closer to what you want.

Karen crosses her arms and sits down on the top step.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Look, we're glad you've finally made friends here. We're just concerned.

KAREN

At least my friends trust me.

JANICE

It's not that we don't trust you, it's just...we don't want something bad to happen again.

KAREN

That was almost two years ago! And why do you even care? You didn't believe me then, why would you believe me now?

Janice is about to lose it when Robert intervenes.

ROBERT

This isn't about what happened in the past. It's about what's happening right now. And as long as you can keep making good choices, we'll trust you to do so.

KAREN

Does that mean I can go out tonight?

Robert glances at Janice, sighs, then back at Karen.

ROBERT

Only if you're home before midnight.

KAREN

I will! Thanks Dad!

Karen runs into her room. The door SLAMS.

Janice stares briefly at Robert, shakes her head and leaves.

ROBERT

What?

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Several cars parked in a deserted dimly-lit lot, as a handful of teenagers carouse amongst themselves, acid rock music BLARING from speakers.

KAREN

Why'd we leave the party? That was fun!

Karen leans against one of the cars, holding a beer bottle.

AXLE

Me and the gang have something we want to share with you.

KAREN

Oh yeah? Like what?

Axle leans in next to her. He takes the beer bottle from her hand, finishes it, and throws it against a nearby brick wall. The other teenagers laugh.

AXLE

Come here, I'll show ya.

Axle takes Karen's hand and crosses the street toward a closed drugstore. Karen follows him but with hesitation.

They approach the doorway and Axle crouches down. Karen joins him there.

KAREN

What?

AXLE

If I asked you to do something, would you do it? It's for the Boston trip.

Karen smiles at him.

KAREN

Well...sure. What is it?

Axle nuzzles against her neck and kisses it. Then puts her hand on his, and picks up a chunk of a broken cinder block.

AXLE

We need to get some things inside.

KAREN

But it's clo-...Wait...No!

AXLE

Come on, baby. You want to get up to Boston when you turn eighteen, and we need the cash for the trip. The supplies inside is our ticket there. And anyway, if you really loved me, you'll show me.

KAREN

You know I love you, Axe. It's just-

Axle eggs Karen on outside the darkened doorway.

AXLE

Then show me. And I'll show you.

Karen pauses. Axle rubs her arm.

KAREN

What happens if we get caught?

AXLE

Don't worry baby, just trust me. I'll take care of you, I promise.

Karen pauses, needing to believe those words. She takes the block from him. Feels the weight of it in her hands. She looks at the window. Then back at him.

AXLE (CONT'D)

I've got your back. We all do.

Karen looks at Axle then back at the gang.

KAREN

I trust you.

Karen stands up, braces herself, and hurls the block through the doorway window. It SHATTERS to pieces as an ALARM blares.

Axle runs inside, while Karen stands in the doorway, shaking. She holds herself while the rest of the gang runs in.

Axle and the others push past the counters and cherry-pick electronics items from the shelves, shoving them in backpacks, while others raid the liquor area.

Karen hyperventilates and shakes even more. Her vision becomes cloudy.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Axe, it's happening again. Something's not-

She falls to one knee, trying to steady herself. Her world becoming wavy.

From a distance, a police SIREN is heard. One of Axle's gang, RICKY FITCH, 18, catches on.

RICKY

Axe! C'mon, cops are coming!

Karen can't catch her breath. She's on all fours now. Squints up as Ricky and the others run out the door. Axle turns as he runs past.

AXLE

Karen, come on! Get up!

Karen can't. She moves as though she's in molasses and quicksand. Everything goes in and out in waves.

Axle stops in his tracks and doubles back. Reaches for her.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Let's GO!

Axle takes her arm and tugs, but Karen can't get her legs under her. They buckle and she falls to the ground.

A squad car rounds the corner in the distance, lights flashing.

Ricky hops into Axle's car as it roars to life.

RICKY

AXLE! NOW!

Axle lets go of Karen and gets in the car as it peels out.

Karen lies on the sidewalk outside the drugstore, her eyes rolled back, and falls into darkness as the cops arrive.

CUT TO:

The sound of a judge's gavel HAMMERS through the darkness.

INT. WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA COURTROOM - DAY

A female JUDGE, 49, peers over her glasses at the end of her nose, and HAMMERS the gavel on its pedestal again.

JUDGE

Will the defendant please rise.

Karen stands with a remorseless look on her face, while her attorney, FRANCO TOMASELLI, 55, turns to her parents. He waves them up, as well.

Karen's parents stand and wait anxiously in the front row, hanging on the judge's every word.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Mr. Tomaselli, do you or your client have anything to add before I pronounce the sentence?

MR. TOMASELLI

Thank you, your Honor. We only wish to add that my client deeply regrets her actions and is willing to provide compensation for any damages caused.

JUDGE

Miss Wilkes, do you have anything to add?

Karen shrugs her shoulders.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Fine, Miss Wilkes, I'll do the talking. According to your record, this is the second time that you've been before the court on serious charges.

Karen glances away as the judge continues.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

The first time in the Boston area on borderline DUI charges and moving violations. And now here you are. Fool them once, shame on them. Fool them twice...well, not in my courtroom.

The judge picks up Karen's file and reads from it.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Destruction of private property. Breaking and Entering. Aiding and abetting. These are all very serious charges. If you were eighteen, you would find yourself behind bars.

Karen stares at the judge through near-dead eyes.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

I sentence you to attend mandatory behavioral counseling sessions with a state-approved psychologist. And you must complete two-hundred hours of community service. Choose a service commitment at the clerk's office.

The parents sigh in relief as Tomaselli turns and smiles.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

And Miss Wilkes, let me assure you that if I find you in my courtroom one more time, or if you miss any counseling sessions or community service, I will find you in contempt of this court and you WILL serve time in Juvenile Detention. Is that understood?

Tomaselli nudges Karen and motions for her to respond.

KAREN

Yeah.

JUDGE

I know you're smart enough not to be in contempt of court right now, am I correct, young lady?

Tomaselli whispers in her ear. Karen rolls her eyes.

KAREN

Yes...Your Honor.

JUDGE

Very good. Sign up for community service at the clerk's office before you leave today.

The judge SLAMS her gavel down, and rises from her seat. The courtroom comes to life as she steps down from the bench.

Robert shakes Tomaselli's hand, while Janice reaches out to hug Karen.

Karen pulls away and exits down the aisle.

CUT TO:

INT. CLERK'S OFFICE - DAY

Robert sits at a table and scans down a list of community service jobs while Karen remains emotionless.

ROBERT
How about the Food Bank?

Robert turns to Karen. She shrugs her shoulders.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Homeless shelter?

Again, nothing.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Come on, Karen, if you don't pick
something out, I will.

KAREN
Go ahead. Doesn't matter anyway.

Robert hands her the list, frustrated.

ROBERT
It DOES matter. If you don't show up
for service, it's game over and you go
to jail. We can't help you anymore.

Karen rolls her eyes. Grabs the list. Barely glances at it.

KAREN
Yeah, you helped so much when you moved
me down here. No thanks.

The words break her father's heart.

ROBERT
Honey, we all made sacrifices when-

Janice joins them at the table crossing her arms.

JANICE
The Probation Officer is on his way
down. How's this going?

ROBERT
We can't decide on what to pick. I'm
thinking Food Bank.

JANICE
Well, I'm tired of this, Rob. If she
doesn't care what happens to her-

Karen snaps.

KAREN
If you don't care then just GO!

ROBERT
Karen, enough! Janice, please.

Janice turns away, fed up. Karen glances at the list again.

KAREN
Fine. What about the Animal Shelter?

Robert reacts with hope.

ROBERT
Animal shelter? Sure! You love animals.

KAREN
Whatever.

Janice circles the choice and finishes the form.

JANICE
Good, it's settled.

As Janice finishes, CHARLES OAKLEY, 38, tall, bald, and muscular, approaches the table looking like Mr. Clean in a fitted suit.

CHARLES
Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes? I'm Charles
Oakley. I've been assigned to Karen.

Robert and Janice both stand and shake his hand.

ROBERT
Hello, Mr. Oakley, nice to meet you.

CHARLES
And this must be Karen.

Karen just stares at him and his extended hand. He chuckles.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
That's fine. We'll get to know each
other along the way. Let's sit down and
get up to speed.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. WILKES' CAR - DAY

Karen stares outside the backseat window, ignoring her parents, the radio, and the outside world.

Nicely manicured southern lawns and landscapes pass by through the suburbs of this North Carolina town.

Dogwoods bloom on every lawn, as the car slows in front of a two-story freshly painted colonial.

The car pulls into the driveway and stops. Karen is the first out of the car and bolts to the front door, opening it and darting inside.

EXT. WILKES' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Robert and Janice follow up the walkway to the large front porch. Janice sighs and steps inside. Robert follows.

INT. WILKES' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A door upstairs slams closed.

Robert closes the front door, but it pops back open. He pushes it closed again, and the faulty latch slips. The door rests ajar.

ROBERT

Damn thing. Add it to the list.

He pushes it hard against the jamb, wedging his foot against the bottom. He releases. Waits. It stays.

Robert looks up the staircase and pauses. Sad and frustrated. He goes into the kitchen.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Janice stands at the sink trying to get her head around what is happening with her family. Robert steps behind her and puts his hands on her shoulders.

JANICE

Tell me this is going to get easier.

ROBERT

It's going to get easier.

Silence.

JANICE

I don't know how much more of this attitude I can take.

Robert gazes over her shoulder out the kitchen window to the backyard. He takes a deep breath and holds her tight.

CUT TO:

INT. KAREN'S ROOM - DAY

Karen sits on her bed, scowling. She reaches between the mattresses of her bed and pulls out an old flip phone.

She dials up a number and waits.

CUT TO:

INT. AXLE'S ROOM - DAY

It's a disaster area, clothes strewn everywhere. Axle lies across his bed as his phone CHIMES somewhere under the clothes and covers.

He finds it and answers.

AXLE

Yeah, hello?

INTERCUT BETWEEN KAREN AND AXLE - CONTINUOUS

KAREN

Hey baby. It's me.

AXLE

How'd it go?

KAREN

Just like you said. Counseling and Community Service.

AXLE

I told you. You're still a minor, it ain't no big thing. If they caught me, I'd be in jail, so I owe you for not ratting us out.

KAREN

I'd never do that, baby. I'm stuck at the animal shelter, though. Two hundred hours! What about Boston? I'm so over this place.

AXLE

You'll be done before you know it. And as for Boston, we'll do that after you're finished.

KAREN

When can I see you?

AXLE
You're not grounded?

KAREN
Yeah, but you're not. Meet me at the shelter tomorrow.

AXLE
Text me, and I'll see you then.

KAREN
Okay. Love you.

AXLE
Later.

CLICK.

Karen smiles at herself, clears the phone memory, then puts the phone back between her mattresses. She lies on the bed, curled up in a ball, and stares out the window.

CUT TO:

INT. WAKE COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DAY

Karen walks into the front lobby of a nicely decorated building, which seems more like a welcoming center than an animal shelter.

Karen doesn't want to be here. Or anywhere for that matter.

A young receptionist, LILY, 22, greets her warmly.

LILY
Can I help you with something?

KAREN
I have service hours I need to complete-

LILY
Sarah told me you would be here today.
I'm Lily.

Karen doesn't care. She rolls her eyes and glances off.

Lily just smiles and hands Karen a clipboard.

LILY (CONT'D)
Let me go get her. You fill these out over there.