

Rescue Dog

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!

Happiness bounds from every face. All but 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. Sullen.

EXT. NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Karen exits toward the parking lot and her eyes light up. Transforms into a different person.

AXLE CROSS, 18 and trouble in a leather jacket, leans against the hood of his car, vaping with his friends. Notices Karen and waves her over.

She smiles as she crosses toward them.

AXLE

Hey baby. Ready for some summer fun?

He extends the vape pen as she approaches, but she shakes it off and kisses him.

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.

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.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mom lies on the bed next to DAD, who's reading next to her.
The baby monitor hums on the night stand next to them.

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

MOM
I can't help it.

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

MOM
You're right.

Mom gets under the covers and turns off the light.

INT. NURSERY - NIGHT

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

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

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

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

BARKS. LOUDER. SNARLS. Jumps up and down against the crib.

The baby remains still.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mom and Dad hear the RUCKUS from the monitor and down the hallway and spring into action.

MOM

Princess?

INT. NURSERY - LATER

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

MOM

Lola! Get down, NO!

Runs 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.

No movement. No sound.

MOM

Sweetie?

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

MOM (cont'd)
(to baby)
Sweetie?
(to Dad)
Something's wrong! She 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, you stupid dog!

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

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 on the top step.

ROBERT
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?

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Several cars parked in a deserted lot, as a handful of teenagers party, acid rock music BLARING from speakers.

KAREN

Why'd we leave? 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. 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 but with hesitation.

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

AXLE (cont'd)

If I asked you to do something, would you do it? For the Boston trip?

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 closed...Wait...No!

AXLE

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

Then show me. And I'll show you.

Karen pauses. Axle rubs her arm.

KAREN
What happens if we get caught?

AXLE
I'll take care of you, I promise.

Karen pauses, needs to believe those words. Takes the block from him. Feels the weight in her hands.

Looks at the window. Then back at him.

AXLE (cont'd)
I've got your back. We all do.

KAREN
I trust you.

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

Axle runs inside, while Karen stands in the doorway, holding herself, while the rest of the gang runs past her.

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

Karen hyperventilates and shakes. Her vision becomes cloudy.

KAREN (cont'd)
Axe, it's happening again.
Something's not-

She falls to one knee. World becomes wavy.

From a distance, a 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. On all fours now. Looks up as Ricky and others run out the door. Axle turns as he runs by.

AXLE
Karen, come on! Get up!

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

Axle 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, lights flash blue and red.

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, eyes rolled back, and falls into darkness as the cops arrive.

PRELAP: Judge's gavel HAMMERS through the darkness.

INT. WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA COURTROOM - DAY

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

JUDGE

Will the defendant please rise.

Karen stands, remorseless, while her attorney, FRANCO TOMASELLI, 55, turns to her parents. 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, anything to add?

Karen shrugs.

JUDGE (cont'd)

Fine, Miss Wilkes, I'll do the talking.

(MORE)

JUDGE (cont'd)
According to your record, this is the second time you've been before the court on serious charges.

Karen glances away.

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...not in my courtroom.

The judge picks up Karen's file and reads.

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 with a state-approved psychologist. And 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 let me assure you, 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, motions her to respond.

KAREN
Yeah.

JUDGE
I know you're smart enough not to be in contempt right now, am I correct?

Tomaselli whispers in her ear as Karen rolls her eyes.

KAREN
Yes...Your Honor.

JUDGE
Very good. Sign up for community
service 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 the lawyer's hand as Janice goes to hug Karen.

Karen pulls away and exits down the aisle.

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?

Karen shrugs.

ROBERT (cont'd)
Homeless shelter?

Nothing.

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

KAREN
Go ahead. Doesn't matter anyway.

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

Karen grabs the list. Barely glances at it.

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

ROBERT
Honey, we all made sacrifices when-

Janice joins them at the table, frustrated just being here.

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)

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

Animal shelter? You love animals.

KAREN

Whatever.

JANICE

Good, it's settled.

Just then, CHARLES OAKLEY, 38, tall, bald, and muscular, introduces himself looking like Mr. Clean in a fitted suit.

CHARLES

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

ROBERT

Hello, Mr. Oakley, nice to meet you.

CHARLES

And this must be Karen.

Karen stares at his extended hand as he chuckles.

CHARLES (cont'd)

We'll get to know each other along the way. Let's get up to speed.

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 in this suburban North Carolina town.

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

The car pulls into the driveway as Karen is the first one out, bolts to the front door and darts inside.

INT. WILKES' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A door upstairs SLAMS closed.

Robert shuts the front door, but it POPS open. He pushes it closed, but as 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. Releases. Waits. It stays.

Robert looks up the staircase. Pauses. Then heads to the-

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

- as Janice stands at the sink, near tears. 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.

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

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

INT. KAREN'S ROOM - DAY

Karen sits on her bed, scowling. Reaches under the mattress and pulls out an old flip phone.

Dials up a number and waits.

INT. AXLE'S ROOM - DAY

It's a disaster area, clothes strewn all around. Axle lies across his bed as his phone CHIMES somewhere under the mess.

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 big
time 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 under her mattress. Lies on the bed, curled up in a ball, and stares out the window. Forlorn.

INT. WAKE COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DAY

Karen walks into the well decorated lobby, which feels more like a State Welcome Center than an animal shelter.

Looks around, doesn't want to be here. Or anywhere for that matter, as a young receptionist, LILY, 22, greets her.

LILY
Can I help you with something?

KAREN
I have service hours to complete-

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

Karen rolls her eyes and glances off as Lily just smiles and hands her a clipboard.

LILY (cont'd)
Let me go get her. You can fill these out over there.

Lily crosses the lobby, pokes her head into a corner office.

A moment passes and SARAH SAMMS, 45, a fresh-faced, radiant woman comes out with Lily to the lobby.

SARAH
Hello, Karen? I'm Sarah.

Sarah extends her hand. Karen takes it absently.

KAREN
Hey.

SARAH

Follow me.

By the time Karen gets up, Sarah is already at the end of the hall toward a set of automatic sliding double doors.

As they open, the OVERWHELMING sound of BARKING greets them as Sarah hurries through the doors.

SARAH (cont'd)

I talked with Charles, and it sounds like you'll be here a while, which is great. We can use the help.

They turn the corner into -

KENNEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

- a room lined wall to wall with cages, each with a dog of a different breed, color, shape and size. BARKS roar and echo all around them.

Karen winces at the loud noise and covers her ears.

Sarah slows along the cages, reaching in as she pets one dog here, another there, sharing her love with them.

SARAH

Don't worry, you'll get used to it.

KAREN

WHAT?!

SARAH

You'll start here with the cages. Feeding, bathing, cleaning. Andy will walk you through it.

Sarah points at ANDY KERNS (21, clean-cut, cute) on all fours, head first in a cage, scrubbing furiously.

SARAH (cont'd)

Hey, Andy! New girl!

Andy peeks out through the neighboring cage.

ANDY

Hey there, I'm Andy!

He's still face first in the cage on all fours. Waving crazy. Smiling. Butt in the air.

Karen raises her eyebrows...*could you be a bigger loser?*