

W O M E N R U L E

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FADE IN:

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT -- AFTERNOON

The little roadster brakes with SCREECHING TIRES. Flustered, KAREN, blond, thirties, jumps out, hurries to the building entrance in the back, unlocks the door, darts in a...

INT. HALLWAY

...and rushes to the upper floor. She walks on and stops at...

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE

...where the light streaming in from the window gives Aunt Anastasia's portrait on the wall a strange expression.

Karen glances at her, moves on in the...

INT. HALLWAY

...and checks one room, peeking in from the corridor. She rushes on, and stops at another door. She switches on the lights inside. They go off by themselves.

On her, shaking her head in disbelief,

CUT TO:

INT. KAREN'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

as she walks in, puts her keys down next to the phone, and dials 911. The LINE GOES DEAD.

On the calendar open on the month of August 1986.

PENETRATING, WEIRD SOUND EFFECTS set in.

She rushes out to the...

INT. HALLWAY

...and dashes in the dark. She BRUSHES AGAINST OBJECTS in her way. She almost falls down. Sound resembling HUMAN LAUGHTER sets in.

She runs to the sound stage. BLARING NOISE emanates from different directions. She stops.

Her tension increases. She speeds downstairs to the front entrance.

Trying to get out, she realizes that an object blocks the door from outside.

On her, perturbed,

CUT TO:

INT. KAREN'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

as she comes in. Her keys are gone. THE SOUND OF KEYS HITTING THE FLOOR FADES IN and REVERBERATES.

Uncertain, she searches for the keys all over. The SOUND OF THE KEYS HITTING THE FLOOR loops, louder and louder. She gets mad. The sound stops. LAUGHTER reverberates.

INT. SOUND STAGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Angered, Karen walks in. The CACOPHONY of sinister and discordant sounds increases in volume. She grabs a microphone stand, lifts it up in a threatening manner, and spins with it from the decks next to her to the boxes. The sound effects fade out. She slows down, confused.

More NOISE ERUPTS. Triggered, she swings the stand around, and SMASHES whatever is in front of her in sheer hysteria.

The sounds come to a stop. She calms down. Dripping sweat, she sighs.

Violin-like sound resembles a HUMAN CRY. She realizes the damage she perpetrated. The CRYING rises so high in pitch that it affects Karen in her mood.

On her, as the WAILING morphs into GIGGLES,

CUT TO:

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

with Aunt Anastasia's portrait as GIGGLES intensify. Reflected on the portrait's protective glass, Karen can be seen as she enters, stares at Anastasia, and chuckles.

As psychedelic lights bounce in,

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE -- MOMENTS LATER

where moving visual effects enhance the madness. Karen shows up as if she were a mental facility escapee. The climax reaches a tragicomic suspense when CRAZY SCREAMS add themselves.

Speechless, Karen sits down on the floor. A potpourri of DISTORTED SONG FRAGMENTS joins in with the weird hodgepodge of noise. A visual effect of huge flames fills the stage. The sound fades out. The flames go on in absolute silence.

Bewildered and fascinated, she remains seated as along the floor liquid runs toward her. It reaches her. She touches it, feels its stickiness, and gets up at once. The flames stop. Darkness and silence fill the room.

The cork of a champagne bottle DETONATES.

Relieved, she grabs a chair, and sits down. A WATERFALL effect sets in on stage. Again liquid nears her feet. Sinister LAUGHTER breaks out. The flame effect substitutes the waterfall on stage.

Flames of real fire spread out from behind the stage. Paralyzed, Karen watches as the flames consume those of the visual effect. The entire stage burns. The liquid on the floor is flammable. The sprinkler system does not work.

Terrified, Karen hastens through the premises in the gloom. Sound effects alternate from LAUGHTER to SCARY, DEEP TONES. The FIRE ALARM SIREN adds itself.

On her, groping through the chaos,

CUT TO:

INT. KAREN'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

as she storms in, exhausted. Too flustered to open a window, she scans the office, and stops at the computer monitor. She swings over.

Meanwhile in...

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE

...flames consume Aunt Anastasia's portrait.

BACK TO:

INT. KAREN'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Fire reaches the door. She pulls out all cables from the monitor, throws it with force against the window next to her, and smashes out its pane.

She jumps out, lands in the...

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT

...where her head strikes the asphalt, and she loses consciousness.

On bloody shards of window pane,

CUT TO:

INT. KAREN'S SLEEPING ROOM -- NIGHT

as she wakes up, bewildered. She switches on the bedside table lamp. She, her pillow, and her sheets are covered in sweat. The light on the answering machine blinks, and distracts her. She runs the message with the voice of:

KIM (V.O.)

Karen? You there?

(beat)

Went to bed early, huh? Still mad at Tim? Listen: I'm back. If you haven't planned anything for Saturday, how about the swim club?

Karen picks an envelope with prints from underneath her alarm clock which displays:

4:30 am

06/15/1986.

Going through photos of herself with a pretty thirtysomething in long dark hair, she comes to one with a blond man in his thirties. She puts it aside, annoyed. On another photo she, the woman, and the man appear. Upset, Karen puts the print aside.

On photo detail of woman who eyes man,

CUT TO:

INT. NICOLE'S SLEEPING ROOM, INDONESIA -- EARLY MORNING

NICOLE (9), blond yet dark skinned looks out the window. It is dark. Near her lies an old magazine. She interacts with imaginary VOICES.

BOY (V.O.)

I want to be a doctor.

GIRL (V.O.)

I can help you.

(beat)

I want to become a nurse. Like Nicole, right?

NICOLE (V.O.)

(in Indonesian)

No.

GIRL (V.O.)

No?

BOY (V.O.)

What d'you want to be Nicole?

Nicole opens the old magazine. She stops at a page with an image of Melody, an exotic woman with a mic in her hand.

NICOLE (V.O.)

Well...

(beat)

Well...

(in Indonesian)

Well, I... I want to...

Nicole smiles, mysterious. She lifts up her arms, joins them in the form of an arc over her head, walks out to...

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET

...and dances.

Puzzled, GIRL and BOY her age stare at her from their houses.

Nicole goes on.

They smile.

Chimp OKKI shows up and imitates her.

NICOLE

Okki!

(beat)

What do YOU want to become? -- A parrot?

Girl and Boy chuckle. Okki monkey shines.

EXT. SWIM CLUB -- DAY

Karen and the woman from the photos, KIM, relax on deck chairs at some distance from the pools.

KIM

You look great, just great.

KAREN

My eating habits haven't changed.

KIM

Look at him. Eyeing you since we showed up.

Karen turns to the LIFEGUARD. He waves at her. She looks the other way.

KAREN

He sniffs out divorced women.

KIM

You'd refuse such a stud?

LATER

They approach the swimming pool.

KAREN

You game?

Karen jumps in.

KIM

Good! Very good, Karen! Like in college days -- always the first. You go girl.

The Lifeguard glances more times at Karen. Kim observes him, amused.

MINUTES LATER

Karen and Kim return to their deck chairs.

KIM

Even he admired you...

KAREN

What are you trying to say?

KIM

Take it easy...

As Karen sits down, absent-minded:

KIM

What's wrong with you?

KAREN

The dream.

KIM

You're kidding.

KAREN

It's still on my mind.

KIM

Since when --

KAREN

Never had such a strange and vivid dream.

KIM

Since when do YOU attach importance to a dream? I mean --

KAREN

You're the one who's introduced me to that entire universe.

Kim opens a soda can.

KIM

Well, look, it's fun analyzing them.

KAREN

It was so real.

KIM

So you were running and running all over. That's very fortunate. You'll make a journey. Meet someone who will help you.

(gulps soda)

You'll make a lot of money.

KAREN

All these discordant notes and sounds...

KIM

Big deal, they signify a journey with a few mishaps.

KAREN

Yeah, I ended flying off the window, landing on the asphalt.

KIM

In the end you should succeed.

KAREN

I was getting insane.

KIM

An omen of great accomplishment.

KAREN

It was hell, Kim.

KIM

Again, that means a change for the better.

KAREN

The whole company was on fire.

KIM

Fire doesn't mean anything.

KAREN

It felt like a trap.

KIM

That means only that you're too suspicious. What else? What else?

KAREN

I don't know. Oh, my keys.

KIM

Denote prosperity.

KAREN

It was dark. No electricity. All this wine on the floor. And the laughter. And that picture of his aunt.

KIM

Wait wait. Wine: you'll make a new friend. Electricity: something good with abroad. Laughter...
(gulps soda, thinks hard)
If you did not fully join in, your prospects are bright. And what was the last?

KAREN

A picture.

KIM

Picture: things will clear up.

KAREN

Is that so?

KIM

That's what I've learnt in the dream support group. Broadly speaking.

As Kim finishes her soda:

KAREN

So things clear up, huh?

Kim nods, not fully certain.

LATER

Walking with Kim:

KAREN

I couldn't follow his theories, all these fantasies he's engrossed in.

KIM

Get over it!

KAREN

(beat)
For a long time I thought that he was taking me for a ride.

KIM

Which lasted for seven years.

KAREN

I mean, I mean is it conceivable to question ambition? Dreams?

KIM

He must have picked up some New Age theory and bent it to his advantage.

KAREN

Everybody has an aim to follow.

KIM

I know how to get along with such boys.

KAREN

Maybe you're right.

KIM

All he wanted is to keep the upper hand.

Karen remains pensive and unconvinced.

KIM

You'll never understand that guy.

KAREN

I know, I know...

KIM

If you don't believe me, ask one of our old mutual friends.

(beat)

Hmm, Neal.

KAREN

Neal?

KIM

Yeah ask him.

KAREN

Of all my friends?

KIM

I'd go to him for counsel.

KAREN

Haven't seen him in ages.

KIM

Neither have I. But he is profound.

KAREN

I don't even know where he lives.

KIM

We could find out --

KAREN

Nah. He's too highbrow. Even for me.

Kim bursts out in laughter and takes on a confidential tone.

KIM

The best therapy is, spend a "proper" weekend with someone like him...

She glances at the Lifeguard. Karen is perplexed.

KIM

Enjoy and forget.
(chuckles)
Until the next occasion arises.

KAREN

Kim?

KIM

You won't tell me Tim's still on your mind?

KAREN

No. I wonder how I could be so stupid to marry him.

KIM

We're not always rational.

KAREN

I know, I know. You were the one who warned me back then.

KIM

Didn't want to remind you of that. I was the less experienced.

Karen glances at Kim, suspicious.

KIM

Your decision stunned me. But I'm not at all surprised about the outcome.

KAREN

Not in the least, what?

KIM

Karen, you're the born career type.