

SMALL CHANGE

Written by

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FADE IN:

1 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENT CENTRE. EVENING

1

Flashing coloured lights illuminate KAREN's confident smiling face. Karen, mid 20's, is pretty but in an unassuming way; her face is open and kind. Karen is playful, feisty and a dreamer. In her eyes there is a glint of satisfaction as she confidently chews gum. Under Karen's coat is a supermarket uniform. Slot machine wheels spin in various fruit combinations. We see a montage of Karen's expression change from confident, to anxious, to confident as she yanks one-arm bandits. The fruit machine displays: LEMON/LEMON/LEMON. We hear a WINNING JINGLE triumphantly play as shower of coins CLINK against the metal grill (£40 pounds worth). Pleased with herself Karen leans back, looking towards MARY (late 50's), playing four machines up. Mary is a 'tough cookie', worn down but a fighter. Karen exaggerates a COUGH to get Mary's attention. Mary see's Karen in her peripheral vision, but doesn't break her gaze from the game.

MARY

Got a chewing gum stuck in your throat?

Karen smiles to herself, collecting the coins into a pot.

KAREN

Ah go away and shite, ya only jealous.

Karen moves towards the change desk with a cheeky smile on her face. Exchanging her coins, Karen looks across the room to see LAURA(7), alone, dressed in a school uniform climbing the dodgems railings. Laura is Karen's daughter. Karen looks around realising there is no other children about, she glances at her watch.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Fancy chips?

Karen gives Laura a playful smile and holds up the coin pot. Laura looks up relieved and nods.

2 INT. CHIP SHOP. EVENING

2

Karen and Laura are eating chips quietly. Karen looks over at Laura who looks very serious. Karen throws a chip at her. Laura looks over, Karen sticks out her tongue and throws another. Laura starts to smile, an irritated BURLY MAN approaches from behind the counter as Karen and Laura are in fits of laughter.

3 EXT. STREET. EVENING

3

Karen and Laura are eating chips as they look at a travel shop window. The window is decorated in Christmas decorations and cheap sun holiday package promotions.

KAREN

What do ya reckon?

Laura looks at Karen in disbelief.

LAURA

Spain?

Karen's eyes widen and she begins to smile.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Really?

Karen puts her arm around Laura and they begin to leave.

KAREN

Yeah, I've always wanted to go to Spain.

4 EXT. KAREN'S HOUSING ESTATE. NIGHT.

4

A large electric pylon dominates a grass embankment. A row of council houses line the street, Newry lights twinkle in the background.

5 EXT. KAREN'S HOUSING ESTATE. MORNING.

5

The morning sun hides behind a dark looming rain cloud. Newry falls into shadow.

6 EXT. JOANNE'S FRONTDOOR. MORNING

6

Next door to Karen's house is JOANNE'S (Mid 30's). Joanne is mother to SHAUNA (8). Joanne is plain and sincere, her clothes are very practical and mumsy. Underneath she is neurotic. Shauna is shy and over-protected and easily led. Karen drops Laura off at Joanne's front door, dressed in her supermarket uniform. Joanne gossips fiercely while Karen glances at her watch.

KAREN

Here I gotta go.. i'll be late for work.

- 7 EXT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. MORNING 7
- Outside Oasis amusements is quiet, the sky is overcast. The sun struggles to break through. An OLD CLEANING LADY rubs the glass windows vigorously as the shutters open.
- 8 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. MORNING 8
- Karen is playing on the slots. Mary arrives in and without looking at Karen takes a side ways glance at Karen's 'count display'. Karen feels Mary watching her.
- KAREN
- Well.
- MARY
- Alright.
- 9 EXT. HOUSING ESTATE. AFTERNOON 9
- Laura and Shauna are sitting on the pavement drawing on the ground with coloured chalk.
- LAURA
- Guess!
- Shauna looks over confused. Drawn on the ground are beach scenes. Laura SIGHS, carefully drawing a bunch of red cherries. We see the combination lemon, lemon, cherries.
- LAURA (CONT'D)
- Cherries- You lose!
- 10 INT. SUPERMARKET. AFTERNOON 10
- Karen hurriedly enters the shop while taking off her jacket, throwing it behind the counter. Quickly she starts rearranging magazines, unaware that the OWNER is watching her. Karen half glances around and locks eyes with the sour looking owner who looks at his watch and then back at Karen.
- KAREN
- (apologetic)
- Laura wasn't well.
- 11 INT. SUPERMARKET. EVENING 11
- STEVEN (50'S) brass and cocky, enters the shop looking around. CUT TO Karen stacking cans on a low shelf on the other side. Karen glances up towards the CCTV in the corner and is about to get up and serve the man, but suddenly pauses. In the CCTV footage Steven talks to a SHOP ASSISTANT. Karen keeps ducked low, she watches as her eyes fill with anxiety. Steven looks around as though looking for someone.

He speaks to the Shop Assistant, who then also glances around the shop, she shrugs her shoulders. Karen is frozen. Steven looks miffed.

12 EXT. SUPERMARKET. EVENING 12

Karen exits the door to put rubbish in the bin. The SHOP ASSISTANT from earlier is having a sneaky smoke. She gestures one to Karen.

KAREN
No I quit.

Karen heads towards door.

SHOP ASSISTANT
(coy)
Some fella was in here earlier
looking for ya, said you'd know
what it was about.

KAREN
And?!

SHOP ASSISTANT
Just saying like?!

Karen stares at the shop assistant until she looks away.

13 EXT. KAREN'S HOUSING ESTATE. EVENING 13

Steven exits a house. He puts something in his pocket. In a near by house we see a flicker of a curtain. Steven looks towards Karen's house. No lights are on. Joanne opens her front door to leave out empty milk bottles. Steven smiles and heads towards Joanne.

STEVEN
Here you couldn't help me, Im
looking for Karen- know when shes
back?

14 EXT. HOUSING ESTATE ALLEYWAY. EVENING. 14

Painted on the alleyway wall are a number of insults and love declarations. We hear a door slam from a nearby house and a woman SHOUTING as she gives out. A stray dog BARKS.

15 INT. JOANNES KITCHEN/HALLWAY. EVENING. 15

Upstairs we hear Laura and Shauna LAUGHING and playing. On the wall is a photo of younger Shauna and her daddy playing. Karen is still in her uniform.

Karen and Joanne are nearly finished drinking tea at the kitchen table, Joanne is unusually quiet.

KAREN

I better get Laura to bed.

JOANNE

Steven Clark's been around looking for ya.

KAREN

What did he want?

JOANNE

He wanted to know when you would be back. Are you in trouble Karen?

KAREN

No.

JOANNE

Have what sorted? You in trouble?

KAREN

Joanne I'm fine don't worry about it.

JOANNE

Ya know if you need any help, anything at all, just ask.

KAREN

I know. Joanne

Karen leaves, closing the kitchen door behind her.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Laura, C'mon.

Karen holds back the tear, hearing Laura coming down the stairs Karen puts on a brave face.

18 EXT. KAREN'S FRONT DOOR. MORNING

18

Joanne is standing outside Karen's front door with Shauna in her school uniform. Karen is in her pyjamas.

JOANNE

You don't mind? Mummies not well, need to a round and see her.

KAREN

..yeah sure i'll take them, dont rush back, im not in til four.

JOANNE

Right il be back for three. Give us
a kiss.

Joanne kisses Shauna.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

Thanks a million. See ya later. Bye

19 EXT. SCHOOL. MORNING

19

Laura and Shauna run ahead. At the school gates a number of parents and children are waiting outside. The gates are closed over. Fire engine and fire men are moving through the crowd. Laura runs back. Karen Moves towards the group of parents. Through the crowd a SCHOOL SPOKESPERSON has the attention of the parents.

SCHOOL SPOKESPERSON

The pipes wont be fixed until
later. We're doing everything we
can.

LAURA

No school!

Karen looks away disheartened. Laura and Shauna are ecstatic.

20 EXT. HOUSING ESTATE. MORNING

20

Karen is carrying the girls school bags. Her expression is anxious. The girls walk ahead excitingly making plans for their free day ahead. Karen looks at her watch.

21 INT. CORNER SHOP. MORNING

21

The girls and Karen enter the shop. The girls run to the sweet counter.

ANNIE

Well girls. Well Karen what's the
craic?

KAREN

Nothing much.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Can I get a single?

ANNIE puts a single cigarette on the counter.

ANNIE

thought you were of them?

KAREN
Keep meaning to.

ANNIE
Your not trying hard enough.

22 EXT. SHOP. MORNING 22

The girls are eating strawberry laces. Karen inhales deeply the last of her cigarette and looks anxiously down towards the town. She glances at her watch. She throws the butt away and looks at the girls sitting on the shop window. Taking the girls by the hand they head towards the town.

23 EXT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. MORNING 23

Outside the amusements window we see Laura and Shauna dancing on the dance machine in serious competition with each other.

24 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. MORNING 24

Karen is silhouetted against the fruit machines. Mary is hunched over her machine, squinting. Laura and Shauna run over out of breath.

LAURA
Ma can we get money for a drink?

Karen's focus is fixed on the machine. She removes change from her pot and hands over a few coins.

25 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. MORNING 25

The girls are on a carousel . Bright lights and music overload the senses. Laura is gulping down a bottle of coke. Shauna eagerly looks on and decides to takes it of her. Shauna gulps down the coke quickly, Laura reaches out her hand for her go, Shauna takes an extra large gulp and hands it back. Both the girls have coke moustaches.

26 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 26

Losing MUSIC Jingle is heard. Karen continues to play mechanically. A stale cup of tea sits beside her untouched. The clock reads 1.00.

27 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 27

A steal claw reaches down for a teddy. The hands close over missing the teddy. We see Laura and Shauna disappointed in the mirror reflection.

28 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 28

Two pence coins cling to the edge of a coin waterfall machine. A two pence enters the machine. The coin is pushed along to the edge. It looks like coins may drop but they stay fixed. We see Laura and Shauna eagerly look on. They add another coin and this time cross their fingers.

29 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 29

Laura and Shauna are each holding guns. Laura is eagerly shooting at the screen making machine gun noises. Shauna does her best to copy. On the screen we see the start screen, it reads PLEASE INSERT COINS.

30 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 30

Laura and Shauna are outside a dingy looking toilet door. Shauna has her legs crossed and is uncomfortably jiggling on the spot. Laura holds the door open. There is no light on inside.

LAURA

Just go on in. Its okay. I went.

SHAUNA

There's no light and it stinks! I wanna go home.

LAURA

Ya can't! Just go!

SHAUNA

No!

31 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 31

Karen takes a nervous breath, looking at the clock it reads 3.40. The machine reads: MELON- MELON. The third wheel looks like its going to stop at MELON, but drops to LEMON.

KAREN

(mouths)

Fuck!

The losing JINGLE plays.

32 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 32

Laura and Shauna sit on two dodgems. Shauna is still uncomfortable rocking to and fro. Laura is more relaxed observing the room, eating her packed lunch.

She offers a jam sandwich to Shauna who shakes her head. The girls watch an OLD DRUNK MAN stumble across the room, he finds change in his pocket and puts it a coin machine. A MIDDLE AGED WOMAN is swearing abuse on her phone. Laura BURPS accidentally. The woman looks over disgusted. Squirming Laura and Shauna start giggling harder and harder uncontrollably. Shauna suddenly stops laughing her face turning red and very guilty.

33 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 33

In Karen's eyes we sense an increasing pressure. Her money pot is nearly empty. Laura is standing at Karen's side, she is about to speak, Karen looks at her and cuts her off.

KAREN

Not now.

Mary looks over. Karen looks at Mary. Mary gets back to her game. Laura is gone.

34 INT. OASIS AMUSEMENT CENTRE. LATE AFTERNOON 34

Karen looks at her reflection in the screen. CUT to Mary hunched over a fruit machine, the bright screen reflecting in her glasses. Mary is smiling to herself as Karen approaches.

KAREN

Mary can I borrow a bit of small change?

Stiff, Mary slowly moves her head towards Karen. Mary's POV Karen's eyes are welling. A JINGLE goes off. Mary glances back at the screen to look at the combination, she looks back at Karen.

MARY

Karen.

KAREN

I need a win.

Mary continues to play.

MARY

You that desperate?

LOSING JINGLE plays on Mary's machine. Mary looks at her pot of change. She fingers the coins and puts another coin in the machine.

MARY (CONT'D)

(guilty)

If I win this go- ya can have half.

Mary hits the start button. The wheels spin: LEMON, LEMON, GRAPES. Karen is speechless, starring at the screen. Mary turns to look at Karen and catches sight of the girls behind.

MARY (CONT'D)
For gods sake Karen.

Karen turns to see Laura and Shauna. Laura looks guilty, Shauna looks upset.

KAREN
(furious)
I told ya to stay out of the way!

LAURA
But Shauna wants to go home. She
wet herself.

Shauna starts to sob. Mary turns back to her machine. Karen grabs the girls bags and leaves.

KAREN
C'mon

35 EXT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON 35

We see Karen from across the street pulling the girls behind, The girls struggle to keep up. Shauna is sniffing.

36 INT. SUPERMARKET. AFTERNOON 36

Karen runs into work flustered. The owner is on his phone, he spys her and stops his phone call.

OWNER
You going for the record?

37 INT. SUPERMARKET. AFTERNOON 37

Karen is mopping up a spill next to the fridge. Karen's eyes are distant, her motion is mechanical. A CUSTOMER is asking her for a price. Karen doesn't respond at first. They ask again.

KAREN
Sorry. What?

38 EXT. HOUSING ESTATE. EARLY MORNING 38

Karen's housing estate is void of life. The street lights flicker off.

39

INT. KAREN'S FRONT DOOR. EARLY MORNING.

39

Karen's front door bell rings abruptly in short bursts. Karen is in her pyjamas and opens the door. Joanne is fuming. Laura is next to her with all her over night belongings. Joanne nudges Laura into the house.

JOANNE

I need a wee word with your mummy
pet, give us a wee minute.

Laura enters the house but stays close to Karen.

KAREN

Go on.

Karen knowingly nudges Laura in the direction of the stairs. Laura is barely up the stairs before Joanne speaks.

JOANNE

Karen what happened yesterday?

Karen looks confused.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

You don't know? I'll tell ya what
happened yesterday. My child 8
years of age wet herself cause you
were too busy, wouldn't take her to
the toilet.

KAREN

She didn't ask me.

JOANNE

Karen don't go there- she did ask
you. She came and asked you but you
were too busy on the slots. (a
beat) What were you thinking? The
poor thing, sitting all day in wet
clothes coming home crying her eyes
out to me, didn't even eat her
dinner. Why would ya do that?

KAREN

I think your over-reacting.

JOANNE

Yeah Karen, great, over-reacting.
Different if it was your child. See
how you would feel. Some friend you
are Karen. It's Laura I feel sorry
for.

A Beat of silence. Karen looks as though she is about to speak but stops. Joanne leaves. Karen slowly closes over the door. Laura watches from upstairs guilty.

40 INT. LIVING ROOM. AFTERNOON. 40

The living room is plain with minimal furnishings. A handful of Christmas cards including one from the post office stand on the fireplace. The TV is on. Karen is starrng into space, her eyes are sad as if hiding a burden she can hardly bear. Behind Karen on the wall is a large framed poster of an exotic beach.

41 EXT. HOUSING ESTATE. AFTERNOON 41

In the community football field a busted sofa serves as a goal post. A few children kick around a ball.

42 EXT. KAREN'S FRONT GARDEN. AFTERNOON. 42

LAURA
I wanna spark scooter for
Christmas.

Reveal STEVEN

STEVEN
(interrupting)
What's a spark scooter?

LAURA
Whenever you pull the breaks sparks
come out.

STEVEN
You're joking

LAURA
No

STEVEN
What are they for, just for show?

LAURA
Yeah

STEVEN
What colour do ya want?

LAURA
I want a red one

43 INT. KAREN'S LIVING ROOM. AFTERNOON. 43

Karen sees Steven talking to Laura through the blinds.

44 EXT. KAREN'S HOUSE. AFTERNOON. 44

Steven is laughing at Laura.

KAREN (O.S.)
Laura get in here.

Steven gets up off his hunkers.

STEVEN
Well Karen.

Karen pushes Laura protectively behind her.

KAREN
(to Laura)
Go on in.

Steven looks at Laura then back at Karen.

STEVEN
Looks like your one wants a scooter
for Christmas.

Karen half glances to see if any neighbors are watching.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
I could extend the deal, but the
rates going up.

Karen looks over at Laura. Laura watches from the front door.

45 INT. LIVING ROOM. EVENING. 45

A bare Christmas tree stands in the corner. Laura is in her pyjamas helping Karen unravelling a ball of fairy lights.

LAURA
I told Joanne.

KAREN
What did ya say?

LAURA
I told her you were on the slot
machines when Shauna needed to go
to the toilet.

LAURA (CONT'D)
I didn't mean to, it just came out.

Karen remains quiet.

LAURA (CONT'D)
I think it me that's making your
made your luck go away.

Karen is in shock. Stunned, she stares into Laura eyes. Laura looks lost. Karen begins to well up and gets down on her hunkers.

KAREN
You know you're the luckiest person
I know and that makes me very lucky
to have you.

Karen hugs Laura.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Alright?

Laura doesn't seem convinced. Karen grabs the fairy lights, choking back tears.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Give us a hand.

The fairy lights come on.

KAREN (CONT'D)
See

Karen smiles encouragingly as though Laura helped magically fix the lights. Laura smiles. Karen and Laura start arranging the lights on the tree, Karen smiles at Laura, Laura smiles back.

46 EXT. OASIS AMUSEMENTS. AFTERNOON

46

We see hands using a fruit machine. TRACK BACK to reveal Mary consumed by her game. In the near distance we hear another machine start up. Mary looks over, a MAN (30's) starts a game. The man is faintly smiling to himself as though his luck might just be in. He leans back in his seat getting comfortable, revealing another player further down. We see Karen focused and tense. Mary looks away indifferent and gets back to her game.

FADE TO BLACK.