

Rules To Live By

by
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WGA Registered

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INT. CAR - EARLY MORNING

The silhouette of a MAN, viewed from behind, driving stolidly, his head immobile. The car eats the road— a desolate stretch snaking into the remote hills.

CLOSE-UP of a hand turning the dial on the radio.

SOUND of a RADIO zipping through the morning shows - talk, traffic, news. STATIC cuts between each one.

A frazzle of static and then the station comes to life.

RADIO (V.O.)

I remember a time when I could not speak.

An adolescent boy rides in the back, his face outlined against the window. His name is JAKOB. He is 16, troubled, with a face that can't quite hide his vulnerability.

Slowly drifting views reveal the landscape. Hard, rocky, desolate.

SOUND BRIDGE

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Yellow light bleeds through 70's flowered curtains.

HELEN - a plump 15 year-old girl dressed in underwear - looks at herself in the mirror.

She examines herself intently - her neck, her arms, her belly. She looks up quickly, as if she's heard something, and looks over her shoulder around the room.

She is alone.

RADIO (CONT'D)

I would open my mouth to say the words but nothing would come out. There would be a lump in my throat, my chest would go tight, I would sweat and my face would turn red. I would feel shame.

EXT. GLASGOW, CITY - CONTINUOUS

TIMELAPSE as the sun rises over the city. Traffic ebbs and flows in all directions.

On the street level people herd on to busses, stalk the pavement and stuff themselves into the train station.

A poster with a black and white picture of locomotive wheels reads: GIVE US A FUTURE: JOBS EXPRESS.

Everyone has somewhere to go.

RADIO (CONT'D)

People seemed angry that I could not get the words out. They'd look at me, confused, frustrated. As hard as I tried, all that I could do was croak. After a while, they just stopped trying.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She looks out the window of her bedroom. A MAN walks towards his CAR.

RADIO (CONT'D)

(Interviewer)

What about your social life.

(Helen)

I don't really have that many friends here, no. The people around here aren't really that interesting.

EXT. TRAIN STATION OVERPASS - CONTINUOUS

Jakob hangs on to the railing overlooking the tracks. He has a SIX-PACK in a PLASTIC BAG at his feet.

Commuters brush past him, unconcerned.

Out of one of the train cars, the Jobs Express youth rally disgorges. They have banners and a small marching band. They gamely try to muster enthusiasm.

Jakob spits slowly onto the railway tracks below.

He drinks a beer. Between the trains the overpass is empty. He drinks another. Crowds fill up the overpass. Then it empties.

RADIO (CONT'D)

(Helen)

Sorry? Oh, no. No boyfriend. Not here at least. I do have one, but he's older. I find the boys my age are really just young, you know? In the head.

EXT. CAR PARK - CONTINUOUS

DAVID, Jakob's father, mid-40's, gets out of his car. He looks scruffy and sheepish. He walks into a BETTING SHOP.

RADIO (CONT'D)

(Helen)

I like dating someone older because, you know, he's just more sorted, know what I mean?

(Interviewer)

I see.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Helen lies in bed staring at the ceiling. Her hand absent-mindedly scratches, bored, distracted.

CLOSE UP on her face. She stares off-camera.

HELEN (V.O.)

Boys just don't really know what to do, how to treat you. They're really lacking in any complexity. I feel like I need more. You know, and with my boyfriend we really talk. Often we'll just talk, instead of doing anything else. And he'll ask about me. My interests, what I want to do with my life. That sort of thing.

She is lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling. A tear trickles silently out of her eye towards her ear.

A long pause as she stares into camera, then averts her gaze.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I don't want to go to school...

An air of resignation.

EXT. TRAIN STATION OVERPASS - CONTINUOUS

OVER THE SOUND OF A RADIO DIAL TURNING AND SETTling ON THE REPLAY HIGHLIGHTS OF A FOOTBALL MATCH.

Jakob drinks another beer. He urinates into the can.

He places the can on the walkway in front of him and takes several measured, deliberate steps back. The radio announcer reaches a fever pitch as a player breaks away running with the ball.

One-two-three steps forward and Jakob takes a kick.

ANNOUNCER

This is it! Is it?!!!

The can flies, spraying its contents as it spins through the air.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

GOOOAAAAALLL!!!!!!!!!! And Arsenal have done it!!!!

Jakob raises his arms in victory.

A MAN in jeans and denim jacket - obviously tougher than Jakob - gets some of the spray from the can. He is not amused. He chases after him. Jakob tries to dodge and duck his way out of it. We don't know if he succeeds.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Wide shot as Helen stands by herself at her deserted bus shelter in the middle of the countryside.

The bus pulls up. She gets on.

INT. BUS - MOMENTS LATER

School kids make the usual noise. Laughter, shouts, teasing. Helen sits by herself.

She looks over towards the group of POPULAR GIRLS. One in particular is very attractive. She sucks on a lollipop, aware that others are probably looking at her, even as she appears to be engrossed in conversation.

EXT. SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

TEACHERS stand outside with PLACARDS, picketing. The placards are emblazoned with the initials EIS - Educational Institute of Scotland. One placard reads: Low Pay Hurts The Children.

The bus pulls up. Students stream out past the teachers. We follow Helen.

INT. SCHOOL RECEPTION - MORNING

Students and staff mill about.

As we track with Helen, we momentarily swerve to witness the following vignette.

An OLD LADY is talking to the receptionist.

OLD LADY

I didn't receive my cheque you see.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry madam this isn't the right place. This is a school. A comprehensive.

OLD LADY

Yes. I thought I should come here in person. My grandson says there are benefits...

RECEPTIONIST

Comprehensive. Do you understand?

OLD LADY

...benefits that I might qualify for that I don't know about.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes madam, but this is a school. You need Social Services. Do you understand?

OLD LADY

Yes.

(blinks, but not going
anywhere)

Yes I do.

We continue to track with Helen.

INT. OUTSIDE GYM - CONTINUOUS

Helen leads us to:

A YOUNG MALE STUDENT stands in his shorts and t-shirt talking to a SUBSTITUTE TEACHER. He is skinny and short. She is holding a clip board.

BOY

(legs fidgeting)

I'm sorry miss.

TEACHER
What's the problem?

BOY
I have a hernia.

TEACHER
A hernia?

BOY
Yes miss.

TEACHER
What kind of hernia?

BOY
(hesitates, then half-points)
Testicle miss. I have a herniated
testicle.

TEACHER
Do you?

BOY
Yes. It hurts.

TEACHER
And Mr. Causebrook will back this up?

BOY
Yes miss.

TEACHER
Alright then. You're excused.

BOY
Thank you miss.

EXT. TRAIN STATION OVERPASS - CONTINUOUS

The Jobs Express youth arrive, accompanied by the oompah sound of the tuba. They reach Jakob's beer can urine puddle. They jerk to a stop then walk around it. The tuba falters with the squeak of an elephant fart.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Helen passes the half-open door of the music room, we see the hand of the bandmaster lightly dancing a rhythm with the baton.

The brass section overpowers everyone with their warm-up scale. Some students aren't even playing; they stare blankly into space.

EXT. STORE - DAY

Jakob lingers outside the store, his back to the wall. He looks around. He has a grazed cheek and a split lip.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Helen stands outside her locker and opens it. PACKS of CONDOMS fall to the floor, followed by the bobbing slow tumble of inflated condoms filled with cream or mayonnaise.

Laughter is heard off-screen.

EXT. STORE - CONTINUOUS

Jakob bursts out of the store. He is running for his life. TWO SECURITY GUARDS chase him.

THE SOUND CUTS. We follow Jakob, running in silence.

HELEN

(V.O.)

People are like animals. They sense the weak and kill them or leave them to die. Weak or different-it's all the same to them. No one beats the pack.

We follow him down the street, frantic, exhilarated, breathless, the guards close behind.

An ALARM BELL rings. It morphs slowly to the sound of a SCHOOL BELL.

SOUND BRIDGE

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The bell echoes and stops.

An unfocussed blur of colour, up close. Some movement.

TEACHER (O.S.)

(softly)

Go ahead Helen. Begin.

The blur comes into focus. It's the back of Helen's neck. A drop of sweat trickles down.

HELEN

I am the son
and the heir...

TEACHER

(interrupting)
This is a poem?

Helen turns to him and nods. The class and the teacher are all a blur, with moments of hyper focus.

HELEN

Yes. I mean...well, yes.

TEACHER

Who's the author?

HELEN

The Smiths.

TEACHER

Smith?

HELEN

Morrissey, from The Smiths.

TEACHER

Morrissey from the Smiths?

HELEN

Yes.

TEACHER

And Morrissey Smith is a poet?

The class snickers.

HELEN

No. But songs can be...

TEACHER

(interrupting)
I don't care. You were supposed to bring
in a poem. You brought in a song.

More snickering. Silence between Helen and the teacher.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Well?

HELEN
Yes. It's a song.

TEACHER
Ok. So sing it.

HELEN
What?

TEACHER
I said sing it. You brought in a song. A song should be sung. Sing it.

HELEN
But I can't.

TEACHER
Sing it.

HELEN
I don't sing.

TEACHER
Sing it.

HELEN
I don't...

TEACHER
You're not sitting down until you sing it.

Helen looks towards the classroom door and through its small square window, possibly contemplating escape.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jakob is being led down the hallway by a TEACHER. The teacher's hand is clamped on the back of Jakob's neck, pushing him along.

Jakob pushes back, slowing down his pace. The teacher pushes him forward. Jakob tries to lock his legs. The teacher keeps pushing and digs his knee in. Jakob twists around and tries to wriggle free. He slips out of the teacher's grip.

The teacher grabs on to his arm and they start to tussle. It is slow and pathetic. They fall to the ground.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Helen relents. She faces the class. They are quiet. She starts singing, faltering.

HELEN

I am the son
and the heir
of a shyness that is
criminally vulgar
I am the son and heir
of nothing in particular

She stops and looks around, but gets no support.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You shut your mouth
how can you say
I go about things the wrong way
I am human and I need to be loved
just like everybody else does

The class breaks into laughter.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The teacher gets the better of Jakob and pins him down.

TEACHER

I'm going to let you up slowly now. One
false move...

They get up slowly. The teacher dusts himself off, somewhat embarrassed. Jakob eyes him. He makes a break for it. The teacher lunges. Jakob stops. They look at each other. Jakob tries to make another break, in the opposite direction. The teacher blocks him off, bumping his chest up against him.

The teacher jerks his head, indicating the direction in which Jakob should walk. Jakob obeys. The teacher clips him upside the head.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Idiot.

JAKOB

Fuck off.

The teacher clips him. Jakob bolts. The teacher catches him. They end up on the floor again.