

8 ITEMS OR LESS

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FADE IN:

INT. LENA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

LENA, 29, with a tangle of curly hair, sleeps. The alarm screams, waking her - she slaps it off. She reaches for her journal on the bedside table and writes.

LENA'S VISION

Lena looks out a window and sees herself float by.

LENA (V.O.)
I dreamt I was floating. Couldn't
tell if I was underwater or in the
air.

Floating Lena blows bubbles through a bubble wand and sings.

LENA (V.O.)
Funny how dreams break all the
rules, but you have no trouble
following their logic.

END VISION

Lena looks at the clock: 7:00 AM. She snaps the journal closed.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The cabinet door slams shut.

Lena wears a pink robe, fills a pot with water, puts it on the stove.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Out of the medicine cabinet, she pulls a Sally Hansen Mustache Bleach kit, mixes the concoction, smears it above her upper lip.

LENA (V.O.)
There are a lot of rules in our
culture and generally I follow
them, but I'm not immune to how
arbitrary most of them are.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She runs in, checks the water, which is just about to boil.

INSERT - RULE # 814: FOR PERFECT COFFEE, AVOID BOILING WATER.

LENA

Perfect.

She pours the water into the French Press coffee maker and stirs it. She scurries into:

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Holding a copy of In Style magazine, she flips the pages, stops on a page that reads: SHORT STORY CONTEST. She rips it out, sticks it in her pocket.

Then she turns to a dog eared page with an article called: *7 Hip Ways to Shape Your Brows*. She plucks her brows according to the picture.

Lena wipes the bleach from her upper lip and admires her handiwork in the mirror.

INSERT - RULE # 67: WOMEN SHOULD NOT HAVE MUSTACHES

LENA (V.O.)

I'd like to know for instance, what genius decided that mustaches on girls are a bad thing?

LENA'S VISION

INT. SCIENCE LABORATORY - CIRCA 1950 - DAY

A nerdy scientist examines a boiling vial of liquid in one hand, scribbling notes with the other. His wife comes in with a lunch tray, tries to kiss him but her thick mustache gets in the way.

LENA (V.O.)

And I wonder if Miss Manners really existed or if, like Santa Claus and Yom Kippur, she was created just to keep us in line.

INSERT - RULE # 91: WOMEN SHOULD NEVER SIT WITH THEIR LEGS APART

INT. CLASSROOM - CIRCA 1950 - DAY

A prim teacher glares at a little girl whose legs aren't crossed. The teacher shakes her head sternly - the girl quickly crosses her legs. In unison, all the other girls cross their legs, too.

LENA (V.O.)

I'm 28 years old and I'm sure of only one truth...being a person is a funny thing. So many rules exist telling you how you're supposed to look -

INSERT - RULE #11: WOMEN MUST STRIVE TO LOOK LIKE MOVIE STARS

INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

A line of women at the salon clutch the latest copy of In Style magazine. Each woman sits in the stylist's chair, points to a picture of Jennifer Anniston.

One by one the salon chairs spin around to reveal each woman who now looks like Jennifer Aniston.

LENA (V.O.)

...rules about how you're supposed to live -

INT. PARTY - EVENING

A MAN and WOMAN are pushed together by two friends.

INT. CHURCH -DAY

In wedding attire, the same couple is pushed to the altar by their parents.

EXT. A HOUSE -DAY

The man and woman are dragged by a REAL ESTATE AGENT, up to a house with a picket fence and a for sale sign in front.

LENA (V.O.)

...and rules about how you're supposed to react to your own experiences.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The woman lies exhausted in a hospital bed. The DOCTOR hands her a screaming baby.

DOCTOR
Here's your little bundle of joy!

She holds the baby in her arms, perplexed.

LENA (V.O.)
These rules reign supreme. But
rules can be tricky. Case in point.

EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY

A small airplane readies for take off. A middle aged SKY DIVER in a flight suit climbs onto an plane.

LENA (V.O.)
I once heard that when you jump out
of an airplane for the first time
you can experience vertigo.

EXT. PLANE IN FLIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The sky diver jumps out of the plane. Hovering over the land below, everything around him is spinning. All becomes black except a pinpoint of light.

LENA (V.O.)
You can even black out, because
your brain has no frame of
reference to understand the
situation it's in. I saw this story
on the news.

INT. LENA'S APT. - DAY

Lena sits on the couch in front of the TV. Channel surfing, she stops on the news.

NEWS ANCHOR
A man jumping from a small plane...

LENA (V.O.)
The story was about a man who took
sky diving lessons.

INT. SKY DIVING CLASSROOM - DAY

The sky diver sits in class while the teacher points to a chalkboard, filled with diagrams of how to jump out of a plane.

LENA (V.O.)
The day came for his first jump.

EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY

He happily waves to his wife as he climbs onto the plane.

EXT. PLANE IN FLIGHT - CONTINUOUS

He jumps.

EXT. AIRFIELD - LATER

His wife stands over a four foot deep, body shaped hole in the cement. An ambulance drives up.

LENA (V.O.)
So what happened? He took lessons.
He learned the rules.

INT. SKY DIVING CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher writes on the chalkboard - Rule #1: *Jump*.

Students wearing flight suits jump in place, in unison.

The teacher writes - Rule #2: *Pull*. The teacher demonstrates how to pull the rip cord. Students wearing flight suits pull their rip cords in unison.

LENA (V.O.)
He was drilled and drilled until he
was ready.

INT. SKY DIVING CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher blows a whistle; the class crouches. Whistle blows again, the class pretends to jump. Whistle blows again, everyone pulls their rip cords.

LENA (V.O.)
So what happened?

EXT. PLANE IN FLIGHT - DAY

The sky diver jumps out of the plane.

LENA (V.O.)
He jumped just like he was supposed
to. He reached for the rip cord
like he was supposed to.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

As he falls, he reaches for the ripcord.

LENA (V.O.)
But it wasn't there. No one taught
him what to do if the rip cord
wasn't there.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

He rips at his flight suit.

LENA (V.O.)
He panicked.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

He cries, he prays, he screams, he rips at his flight suit.

LENA (V.O.)
The report said the guy scratched a
huge hole in the fabric of his
flight suit where that rip cord was
supposed to be.

EXT. AIRFIELD - CONTINUOUS

The crowd makes way for the paramedics, who rush towards the
gaping hole in the cement, where the sky diver lays lifeless.

LENA (V.O.)
The thing is, his brain went into
overdrive and because of this
vertigo - he couldn't think
straight.

(MORE)

LENA(cont'd)

He was grabbing and scratching for the rip cord on the wrong side of the suit. *The wrong side.*

There is a hole on the left side of his flight suit at chest level. On the right side is the rip cord. The inert body suddenly sits up - it's Lena in the flight suit.

LENA

Some days are like that, you know?

END VISION

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Lena pours coffee into three mugs. Her roommate BEN is 28. He enters carrying a super 8 camera, a potato and a tomato made up to look like action figures. Ben is a man whose goodness makes him sexy. His hair is shaggy - he looks like a filmmaker. He grabs a cup of coffee.

LENA

Today however, is not like that at all. Today is, in fact, going to be a great day.

BEN

How can you tell?

LENA

Nick is taking me out to dinner tonight, and the rule is -

INSERT - RULE #112: IF YOUR BOYFRIEND PAYS FOR DINNER IT'S GOING TO BE A GREAT DAY

BEN

Wait a minute, did you say he's actually buying you dinner?

LENA

Don't sound so shocked.

BEN

When's the last time he took you out?

LENA

Um...

BEN

Exactly. I don't get what you see in him.

(MORE)

BEN(cont'd)

You know, if you deconstruct his name it's Nn-ick. Ick. Subliminal warning.

FREEZE FRAME of Ben mid-sip.

LENA (V.O.)

Ben drives me nuts sometimes, but he's like a brother, always looking out for me. We're perfect roommates cuz he's not my type and I'm not his. We met in the college dorms.

FLASHBACK

EXT. GROUP HOUSE - DAY -1999

Ben and Lena walk up, suitcases in hand.

The house is run-down. TWO STONERS sit on the front porch smoking with a PUNK GIRL while JACK, 19, a scruffy, dorky, musician, plays guitar.

INT. GROUP HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Music blares - Pink Floyd. The two stoners, ensconced in a cloud of smoke, laugh hysterically. In her pajamas, Lena peeks out from behind her bedroom door just as Ben in his pajamas, peeks out from behind his bedroom door.

LENA (V.O.)

Sure, we made out once.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - LATER

Antique movie posters hang on the wall and the room is decorated with all kinds of film memorabilia.

Lena and Ben roll around on the floor, making out.

LENA (V.O.)

Luckily, we're not each others type. He likes redheads and I like bad boys which makes us perfect roommates.

EXT. GROUP HOUSE - ANOTHER DAY

Ben, Lena and Jack walk away with their suitcases in hand.

RESUME SCENE

Ben and Lena take their coffee into the livingroom.

INT. LIVINGROOM - CONTINUOUS

The coffee table is set up with a miniature scene. The potato and a tomato are face to face in martial arts poses. Ben hovers over them with his camera.

LENA

You're so lucky you know what you want to do with your life.

BEN

You'll find your thing.

Lena investigates the miniature scene. Jack enters, guitar strapped over his shoulder and coffee in hand. He plops onto a chair.

JACK

Who's the new guy in town?

BEN

Mr. Tomato Head. He's a psychic with an identity crisis. He can't figure out if he's a fruit or a vegetable.

LENA

So what happens?

BEN

Good question. I gotta figure it out quick - my producer says it'll be easier to get investors for my feature if we have a short to show.

LENA

How about if it turns out Mr. Potato Head and Mr. Tomato Head are brothers? Same mother, different fathers.

JACK

That's deep! What happens next?

LENA

Well, Mr. Tomato head needs a shrink.

JACK
You'll need an intelligent
vegetable to play that role. Maybe
asparagus.

LENA
In therapy he realizes he's got to
do battle with his nemesis.

JACK
(sings)Everybody was kung fu
fightin'!

LENA
Yeah, and just as Potato is about
to finish Tomato off, their mother
shows up and throws herself on
Tomato -

BEN
Who's oozing Tomato juice and at
the brink of death.

LENA
The mother stops the bleeding with
a large piece of basil, because
moms always have the solution.

BEN
That sounds like *your* mom. If it
were my mom, she would've thrown
Tabasco on the open wound. I think
I like your version of the story
better.

LENA
Oh, come on. It's stupid. Forget I
said anything.

BEN
No, I'm serious. Can I use it?

LENA
I guess. If you think it's any
good.

BEN
It's great.

LENA
What did I tell ya? Today's gonna
be a great day.