

TITLE: "SYNDROME"

INT. SUBWAY STATION - MORNING

A generic coffee shop with COUNTER PERSON and some other people, in the year 2035. A large cafe latte now costs \$11.99.

KAREN LIANON(25), an attractive young woman, is waiting for her coffee order. Karen's outfit looks like the business clothing they sell in the Victoria's Secret Clothing catalog- it's might be a gray tweed suit, but somehow it's not quite actually formal looking.

Karen has a small wireless earpiece, and she is holding a phone conversation as she gets her coffee. The annoyed voice belongs to KAREN, and the annoying one belongs to Karen's mother, JANET LIANNON.

JANET

Karen, I don't see why you have to move so far away, especially now that-

KAREN

Mom, I can't drive anymore. They took my license away, and no drivers license means I need to live some where with a better public transportations system than upstate New York.

JANET

Honey, I would have been happy to drive you, or get you a carpool, it's not that hard. We could even get your sister to-

KAREN

Mom, I'm 26 years old, I don't need this right now.

JANET

But Boston? You could've just gone to Chicago, it's not that far.

KAREN

Mom -

JANET

You know what? I think you're avoiding me.

KAREN

Mom.

JANET

Well, I've been reading all those books Dr. Scott sent me and I think you're just running away.

The COUNTER PERSON holds up an ENORMOUS single cup of coffee. She looks at the order and frowns as she tries to read it.

COUNTER PERSON

Will whoever ordered the "veni vidi vici" Mongolian Monkey coffee with chocolate syrup, carmel syrup, strawberry syrup, mint syrup, vanilla and four shots of espresso?

KAREN

Sorry Mom, my coffee's ready.

JANET

Karen-

KAREN

Buh bye!

Karen hangs up, takes her coffee from the counter person, and walks out onto the street.

FADE TO:

INT. OFFICE LOBBY -- DAY

Mediocre, boring, 2035 office lobby with an ELECTRONIC RECEPTION SCREEN.

Two cubicles before you get to a hallway. They are occupied respectively by RICK O'CONNER(25), messily dressed in khaki pants, a hideous orange collared shirt and loosened tie and LEO CHANG(25), young and uncomfortably well dressed, with a perfectly pressed suit that somehow just doesn't look right on him- the tie is way too short, tied incorrectly, and the socks don't match the outfit.

Leo and Rick have advanced looking computers with wireless headsets and glove based keyboards. Leo is working. Rick is peeling an orange.

Leo is in the middle of a conversation on his headset, and Rick begins flicking pieces of an orange at him.

KAREN walks in and over to the RECEPTION DESK. It's a large screen with a woman's face on it. It's VERY VERY loud with a very cheerful, annoying female voice.

RECEPTION DESK
HELLOOOOOOOOOO!!!!

Leo covers his ears and and Rick winces.

RECEPTION DESK (CONT'D)
Welcome to Slick Screen Publishing
House! How may I help you today?
Press the screen for more options.

Karen presses a screen labeled "Appointments"

RECEPTION DESK (CONT'D)
Eyeehand what's your name, hon?

KAREN
Karen Liannon. I have a 2pm
interview.

Rick stops flicking the orange at Leo and is suddenly very interested in the general direction of the reception desk.

RECEPTION DESK
Of course you do. And I must say
you look GREAT today. Let's see
here. Mm hmm... uh huh... mmhmm...

2 pictures of Karen's face pop up on the screen and are matched to each other. The screen flashes green when the faces match up.

RECEPTION DESK (CONT'D)
There you are! Room 119 is down the
hall with Alex Foster.

KAREN
Thank you.

RECEPTION DESK
Have a nice day!

The screen turns off. Rick stands up as if to stretch. Karen turns and walks past the cubicles towards Alex Foster's office. Rick blocks her way for a split second.

KAREN

Excuse me.

RICK

Oh, sorry. . Hey, next time you come in, can you just grab either Leo or me? Screen gets a little annoying after awhile. Not the same as a person.

KAREN

I'm not sure if I'll be back.

RICK

Oh, I'll just hope so then.

Awkward laughter. Rick smiles, Karen smiles, flirt time is over, and Karen goes down the hallway more relaxed than she was before. Leo looks up, takes off his headset.

LEO

Rick, stop intercepting every female that walks through the door. It's not professional.

RICK

It's called keeping your options open, stalker boy. Or even having an option. You should try it. Maybe kidnap people like the Zappers.

Leo takes offense by Rick's last comment and takes a second to regain his composure.

LEO

That was uncalled for.

Rick's smile widens.

RICK

No, no, really. I think it'd be good for you, Leo. Steal some people so you can practice your conversation skills. Wait!

(MORE)

RICK (CONT'D)
I think I've got a light in here
you can use.

Rick begins rummaging through his desk.

LEO
RICK!

Rick pulls out a flashlight and shines it on himself.

RICK
Here we go. (In a high pitched
voice-) "Oh no, help me, I'm being
zapped by Leo!"

LEO
That is enough!

Leo tries to grab the flashlight from Rick and they fight over the flashlight like 4 year olds. The flashlight hits the ground and breaks.

OFFSCREEN: ALEX FOSTER'S office door slams shut.

INT. ALEX FOSTER'S OFFICE -- DAY

Alex Foster's office. KAREN has just shut the door. The office contains some nice big screens, and is completely devoid of books, paper, pencils, and office stuff. Across the desk sits ALEX FOSTER(42): a serious woman with no-nonsense, pulled back hair, formal businesswear, and a piercing gaze. She is looking down at the screen in front of her, using her finger to browse through it.

ALEX FOSTER
Please have a seat.

Karen sits, and Alex looks up and smiles a very small smile.

ALEX FOSTER (CONT'D)
You are Karen Liannon?

KAREN
Yes ma'am.

ALEX FOSTER
Ma'am? Do I seem that old to you?
Oh don't be embarrassed it was a
joke. Alex Foster, pleased to meet
you.

They shake hands.

ALEX FOSTER (CONT'D)

Now, as you've already met our current Screen, you can see we desperately need a real receptionist. As I've told my managers, even in labor shortage, Screen just doesn't cut it in a publishing house like this.

KAREN

She did seem a little...
overwhelming.

ALEX FOSTER

An interesting choice of words. I might say the same about your resume.

KAREN

What's wrong with my resume?

ALEX FOSTER

The fact that you have one and are applying for a job as a receptionist strikes me as odd.

Karen shifts in her chair and crosses her arms defensively.

KAREN

The ad said to send in a resume.

ALEX FOSTER

So it did. But yours says you have a degree in chemistry, previously worked at Sephelline Cosmetics?

Karen looks warily at Alex Foster.

KAREN

Yes.. Is there a problem?

ALEX FOSTER

The opposite, in point of fact. You are just a smidgen overqualified. Why come here?

KAREN

Well I wanted a change.

Alex's face is incredulous. She squints her eyes a bit.

ALEX FOSTER

A change?

Karen has begun to sweat slightly under her makeup and her breathing has sped back up. She swallows.

KAREN

I think in addition to working here, I'm going to go back to school, you know, for writing. I decided I liked that better than chemistry. I, ah, I really like people.

ALEX FOSTER

Oh, an aspiring writer. Well, good luck to you on that. Great. You're hired.

KAREN

What?

ALEX FOSTER

We need a receptionist now. Go talk to the HR department is down the hall. I've already spoken to them, they have all the filework. I just wanted to meet you before hiring you.

Karen lets out a huge breath.

KAREN

Well, thanks very much.

They shake hands and Karen leaves the office.

INT. OFFICE LOBBY -- DAY

Karen walks down the hallway and stops in front of Rick's cube.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Excuse me, where's the HR department?

RICK
Great, you're staying! My name's
Rick, by the way.

KAREN
I'm Karen. Hi. It's nice to meet
you. I'll be replacing the Screen.

RICK
Thank god. That will be one
expensive piece of trash that I
will be HAPPY to see disappear.

Karen blanches, then laughs nervously.

KAREN
Yes, I suppose the Screen will
disappear, won't it?

RICK
Like I said, thank god. Anyways-

Rick's headset rings.

RICK (CONT'D)
Sorry I'll just be a second. I have
to chase down all these editors and
the writers and make them send me
their manuscripts. Crucial, really.

Rick walks back into his cubicle with his headset on and sits
down. Leo comes out of his cubicle.

LEO
The Human Resource Office is down
there on the left.

Leo points down the hallway. Karen blinks.

KAREN
Oh. Thanks. My name's Karen, by
the way.

LEO
So I heard.

KAREN
Yes, I was just talking to your
friend Rick.

LEO
He's not really a friend.

KAREN

Umm...

LEO

But anyway, HR is very helpful.
Linda Peters, the woman in charge,
is very helpful.

KAREN

Okay, well I'll just-

FLASH!!!!!! THE ROOM IS FILLED WITH BLUE LIGHT COMING FROM
KAREN. Leo has had the wind knocked out of him with and falls
a to the ground with a CRASH.

WHEN THE LIGHT FADES, KAREN IS GONE. Rick, Alex, and other
people come running.

ALEX FOSTER

Leo, what was that? What happened?

Leo gulps for breath.

LEO

That girl, Karen, she just-

RICK

Leo, when I said try to meet new
people, chasing off the new
receptionist is not what I meant,
idiot.

Leo breathes hard.

LEO

She just got zapped! She's got what
the- the-the-

Alex Foster sighs.

ALEX FOSTER

FTS. Karen has FTS. I'd better go
call her contact number.

Alex Foster glares around her.

ALEX FOSTER (CONT'D)

Back to work everybody!

Alex claps her hands and shoos people off.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK, ANOTHER PHONE CONVERSATION -- YESTERDAY

JANET

Okay Karen, do you have someone to go with you to your interview on Thursday?

KAREN

No, Mom, actually, I don't.

JANET

Oh... well do you want me to fly out there? Dr. Scott said we should be supportive, and even though I know you're in that "shutting out phase" that I read about, I just want you to know that I think you're very brave and that-

KAREN

Mother. I. Will. Be. Fine. It' s the subway. Taken it before.

JANET

It's not the same anymore, Karen! Last month some man in China went up from the train and reappeared on the TRACKS. He got HIT BY A TRAIN! You know it's not safe and-

CLICK! Karen hangs up on her mother.

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE LOBBY -- 5 DAYS LATER

The same spot in the publishing office.

There is another, smaller FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT, and Karen reappears in the same spot and same clothes. Alex and Leo are in obviously different clothes.

Alex is amazingly unnerved but remains barely in control. Stress pushes her into speaking and acting quickly. Karen looks around her, trying to get her bearings. Her gaze locks onto Alex.

KAREN

Ms. Foster-

ALEX FOSTER

Karen, don't worry, you are of course still welcome here. I'll have HR add the proper Americans with Disabilities Act forms to the filework right away, and I'll go call an ambulance just in case. Leo, wait with her.

KAREN

I won't need a, don't need a- wait-

Alex almost runs out of the room. Karen finds a chair and collapses, head in hands. Leo has no idea what to do and stands there helplessly.

KAREN (CONT'D)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5....

Karen continues counting out loud, slowing down and getting quieter as she goes. Finally she stops counting.

KAREN (CONT'D)

What day is it?

LEO

Tuesday.

KAREN

Which Tuesday?

LEO

You got zapped- taken- teleported- last Thursday. Last week.

After an awkward silence, Rick walks in. He stops abruptly in surprise as he sees Karen.

RICK

Wow. Hi Karen. Are you okay?

Karen and Leo just look at Rick.

RICK (CONT'D)

Yeah, well, so after you got zapped last week I did all this research and stuff, and it says you people end up just fine when you come back even though nobody knows what happened, but I just wanted to let you know I think you're really brave you know, just walking around like that when at any second you could get-

LEO

Rick, shut up. She's not dead. Alex is calling the hospital now just in case.

RICK

The hospital? Does she need to -

KAREN

SHE IS RIGHT FUCKING HERE!

LEO

Sorry.

KAREN

Yeah, join the club.

RICK

Karen, I only wanted to make you feel better. Just because the aliens-

LEO

They don't know if it's aliens.

RICK

Anyway, just because the aliens picked you for some reason doesn't mean we think you're a freak.

LEO

RICK!

Karen squishes her head in her hands and sighs.

KAREN
I'm going home. I'll tell the
ambulance to leave on my way out.

Karen walks out of the lobby.

EXT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE -- DAY.

Karen exits out the front door of the office building. She releases long held back tears.

Leo runs after her. Karen pulls out her cell phone.

LEO
Karen, wait.

Karen dials the phone.

KAREN
Excuse me, I need to call my
therapist. Or maybe my mother.

LEO
Alex did say she was calling the
hospital. Shouldn't you wait for
the-

KAREN
Let me make this clear. When this
happens I don't remember anything
but light and shadows. No, I don't
get special powers. No, it's not
the Russians, the Chinese, or Elvis
Presley. I am not "Just Fine" when
I can randomly lose parts of my
life here and I might not even end
up in the exact spot where I left.
I am NOT OKAY! And the last thing I
want to do right now is get poked
at by some EMT's who have probably
never even SEEN an FTS case.

LEO
But-

KAREN
Now, I need to call and admit to my
mother that I'm having a nervous
breakdown, that I'm going back to
New York, that she was right about
me, and that I'll need a "ride" for
the rest of my life.

Karen inhales huge breaths as she recovers from her outburst. Bursts of steam come from her breath.

LEO

Will you come back to work tomorrow?

KAREN

What.

LEO

Rick's an asshole. I can't put up with him and the Reception Screen together. You could help. And- this happened before, right? You moved here for a new job, and you got one without a nervous breakdown. So, will you come back to work tomorrow?

The sounds of sirens in the distance grow steadily louder. Karen and Leo listen to them for a moment, and Karen closes her phone. She takes one final deep breath.

KAREN

Okay.

FADE TO BLACK.