

UPROOTED

Written by

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Angry teenager and his mother clash head-on after stepdad
relocates family

FADE IN:

INT. NEW RENTAL - PORCH - MORNING

Angry, volatile, 16-year-old teenager, JOSH, flies up the stairs. At the top of the stairs, his eyes turn to his stepdad, PAUL PETERS, 42, steady, solid, bent low to water a couple of small bushes in plastic bags.

Josh's mouth twitches. His eyes glare at the plants and then at a crate of white rounded stones. A few have a child's artwork on them.

His mother, SUSAN PETERS, 38, wise yet worn down, steps out of the front door. She and Josh almost collide. Josh stops abruptly. Looks over at Paul and then down at the plants. He spits out...

JOSH
I hope they all die!

Paul looks up. Susan gasps. Hand flies to her mouth.

SUSAN
Josh!

In a swooping motion, Josh grabs a plant's top branches. Flings it onto the lawn. Plant strikes ground. Bag splits. Roots spring loose. Soil flies.

JOSH
How long will that one last, hey?

He turns to glare at the other plants.

JOSH (CONT'D)
They don't like moving anymore than I do, man.

Susan moves left towards Paul. Paul stands straight and stretches his back.

JOSH (CONT'D)
I never asked to move here! Away from my friends.

He looks down at the plants.

JOSH (CONT'D)
At least these plants belong together.

Susan breathes deeply. Sighs. Leans forward a little.

SUSAN

Yours were not good friends...

Shoulders back. With energy.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Dad has a new business. We are growing...

JOSH

HE is growing. HIS business is growing. I am not! He is not even my dad.

Susan and Paul exchange glances. Susan's shoulders slump. Paul moves in to put his arm over her shoulders. He pulls her closer to his chest. Kisses her on the head.

Josh strides through the open front door and hits its glass window pane with his open hand. Susan shivers involuntarily at the noise.

INT. NEW RENTAL - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Paul sits at the dining room table. Behind him is a bookshelf with a picture of him: medal around neck. Certificate in hand: Paul Peters, Horticulturist of the Year.

Next to that photo are two framed photos. A picture of Susan and Paul on their wedding day. A separate photo of a younger Josh on his bicycle.

There are a couple of packing boxes along the side of the staircase leading to the bedrooms upstairs.

Susan puts three plates of food on the table and looks towards the inside stairway.

SUSAN

(loudly)

Josh, supper is up.

Josh slides down the banister, his top teeth chewing his lower lip. He stares at the boxes.

JOSH

So we're back to living out of boxes. Going from place to place. Never knowing where we will sleep...

SUSAN

It's not at all like that. That was so long ago... after Dad died...

JOSH

(accusingly)
Then why are we here?

PAUL

(quietly with authority)
We are in transition. A temporary spot. For a month or two.

JOSH

What does that mean?

Josh walks over to the table, grabs a chicken leg off his plate. Rips meat off bone. Stands.

PAUL

Let's eat. Then I'll fetch the plans from Mom's car.

JOSH

Plans? Um. For who, I wonder!

He throws his bone on his otherwise untouched plate. Rubs fingers on jeans. Turns.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Don't bother.

Strides to small table near front door. Grabs keys. Heads to front door. Grabs handle. Opens. Slams door.

Susan jumps to her feet.

SUSAN

Josh!

Paul puts his hand on Susan's arm.

PAUL

Let him be.

Susan's eye brows dive deeply over her eyes. Her head moves indecisively from the front door to Paul and back again. A car is heard revving outside.

SUSAN

We should have told him...

INT. MOM'S CAR - EVENING

Josh drives in the middle lane towards an intersection. The red light brings him to a stop. His fingers hit the steering wheel impatiently. His teeth dig into his lower lip. He sees a sign to a church. Abruptly turns his eyes back to main road. Watches for traffic lights to change.

He glances at Paul's rolled up architectural plan next to him with a wrapped parcel with his name on it. Eyebrows knit. Shakes head.

The lights turn green. Car revs. Jerks forward. Stalls. Bashes steering wheel. Car honks spur him on to start the car again. Takes off.

Sees overhead road signs. Chews bottom lip. Slows down. Shakes head.

Drives aimlessly.

A slight mist descends. He leans forward to see better. He puts on the windshield wipers. Doesn't help.

A red light flickers on the dashboard. He glances down. Gas low.

He takes a few more turns. Sees another sign for a church. Makes a right turn into their parking lot. It is dark. Few lights on. He pulls into the darkest area. Parks car.

Josh pushes front seat back. Tries to sleep. Tosses. Turns. Shivers. Pulls his shirt closer to his body. Turns again. Recoils as he sees his disheveled reflection in the window pane.

Sees nothing outside. The mist blocks his view completely.

He shakes involuntarily. Curles into the fetal position, knees press against door. A deep, loud groan of painful proportion vibrates through the car.

INT. NEW RENTAL - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Susan paces up and down the length of the dining room table. She picks up the photo of five year old Josh on his bike, presses it against her heart.

SUSAN

Anything could have happened to him.

Paul sits quietly at the end of the table, his Bible open in front of him.

PAUL
Sometimes a man needs time out.

SUSAN
He's a boy!

PAUL
He is sixteen.

SUSAN
Perhaps we should have stayed...

PAUL
That season's over. We've uprooted the old. Time to move on.

Paul looks up at her.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Time to plant. To settle.

Reaches out and takes her hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)
It'll be okay.
SUSAN
I just don't know how you can be so sure.

She slumps down next to him. Paul takes her hand and holds it over the Bible.

PAUL
Because there's a purpose for everything we've been through.

INT. CHURCH'S PARKING LOT - MOM'S CAR - MORNING

Knock. Knock. Josh rubs his eyes. Turns towards window. Two cups of coffee stare at him on right. Knuckles knocking on left. A face appears. Friendly, young. Name tag on T-shirt: JAMES, Youth Pastor.

JAMES
Hey, man, thought I could join you.
May I get in?

Josh shuffles uncomfortably, winds down window, takes the two coffees in their cardboard holder.

JOSH

Yeah. Sure.

Josh leans over to collect parcel and roll with his other hand. Places them on his lap while James gets into the car.

JAMES

One of those nights! Glad to see daylight!

Josh wiggles to get comfortable. Passes coffee. James takes one cup from the holder. James glances at the name Josh on the parcel on Josh's lap.

Josh stretches his back. Mouth pulls downwards in pain. They sip coffee. In silence.

James reaches out to take empty coffee mug. Bends. Sits up. Mugs out of sight.

EXT. MOM'S CAR - VIEW THROUGH FRONT WINDSHIELD - CONTINUOUS

Mouths move. Josh shifts. Wiggles. Writhes. James takes parcel and roll off Josh's lap. He settles them on his lap.

James waits. Josh talks. James listens. Josh hits the steering wheel. He talks. He bangs his head on the wheel, shakes his head. Chews lip. Leans back.

Josh's shoulders collapse. Head tilts forward. Then slowly he lifts his chin. His chest expands outwards. Lets out a huge grunt. Heaves. Relaxes. Calms down.

INT. NEW RENTAL - DINING ROOM - LATE MORNING

Josh and James sit on one side of the dining room table. Susan sits opposite with Paul at the head. Empty coffee mugs are in front of the four of them. On the side of Susan lay the roll and the parcel, still unopened.

JAMES

It's been a long night, I imagine, for all of you.

SUSAN

I'm glad you are safe, Josh.

Glances at her.

JOSH

(low)
I was fine.

JAMES

Josh and I have had some time
together. I heard his story.

James looks at Susan and then at Paul.

Susan moves her cup out of the way. Lays her hands on the
table.

SUSAN

Then you know, my first husband
died... killed in a car crash... We
had no insurance. I was working
part-time, living in a small
apartment. Josh was five.

She glances at the photo with Josh on his bike.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

He was so little. It was hard. For
five years we moved from place to
place...

Glances at the boxes then turns towards Paul. Their hands
reach out and touch one another.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I found love again. More than love.
Security. For Josh, for me. A place
to lay down roots.

She reaches out for Josh's hand. His hand lays still, limp on
table.

She lets her hands move from Paul and Josh to the parcel. She
passes it to Josh. His top teeth chew at his lower lip.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Please open this.

Josh glances at James. James nods.

Josh takes the wrapping off with listless hands. He sees the
photo book entitled

Josh Peters, Our Son.

He turns the first few pages. He wets his lips. Swallows
hard. All eyes are on him. Heads slowly nod.

Josh glances at James, Susan, briefly at Paul.

Photos of Him, Susan and Paul together. Planting bushes. The same type that had come with them to this new place.

Josh glances sideways towards the porch. Eyes back to Susan. She nods. He looks sideways, up to Paul.

JOSH
Those bushes...?

Paul nods.

SUSAN
You loved them so much as a kid.
They'll grow here...

Josh stares at pictures of himself, painting his rocks. His mouth softens. He swallows hard as he looks at the three of them with paint on their faces, laughing.

JOSH
(softly)
I'd forgotten that...

Photos of his small room colorfully decorated. Of Paul, hand on Josh's head, next to a bed with stairs, designed and made by Paul.

Susan reaches over and points to the bed.

SUSAN
Remember that bed? Dad built it for
you... with a mini cabin with it's
own door underneath...

Josh's head tilts slightly.

JOSH
(mutters)
Felt safe in there...

Photos of him on his big bicycle with Paul holding the saddle to steady him.

Photos of his first driving lesson with Paul.

SUSAN
You only wanted Dad to teach you.

Josh nods. Smiles a little.

JOSH
He's... solid.

His graduation from school with both Susan and Paul. A tear drops onto the page. Josh wipes it away with his T-shirt.

He turns the last page and stares. He sees an architectural drawing. It focuses on a new house but the angle is on the apartment attached to the house.

Josh's brows meet. Looks up at Paul. Susan's eyes brim. Paul's eyes glisten.

PAUL

I am a man of few words.

SUSAN

And many deeds. A doer.
 (looks at Josh)
 You know that... He makes
 everything beautiful for us...
 see...

Susan reaches out to collect the roll and unfolds it. James moves the coffee mugs out of the way. The architectural drawing is laid large on the table. Josh's eyes catch the top corner: Family Peters House and Apartment. A key is taped onto the side of the plan.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

The house is nearly ready.

Josh runs his finger along the outline of the house. Paul's hand reaches out. He points at the apartment attached to the house.

PAUL

This is the purpose of our move.

SUSAN

(whispers)
 And dad's long hours.

PAUL

To give you your own apartment,
 Josh. A forever place.

SUSAN

(whispers)
 Built especially for you.

The tears flow freely down Susan's cheeks. She stretches over the table to loosen the key. Passes it to Josh.

Paul's and Josh's eyes lock. Paul's arm stretches out to touch Josh's shoulder.

ON SCREEN:

Two months later.

EXT. JOSH'S APARTMENT - DOORWAY - MORNING

Josh looks out his new front door. Just in front of his porch, a row of small bushes intersperse between flat, round rocks. Some with childlike paintings on them.

He looks across the lawn as Susan and Paul walk hand-in-hand towards him.

JOSH
Coffee's on the boil.

Susan slips her arm around Josh's waist and gives him a quick squeeze. Her eyes fill with tears as she glances in at a large photo of the three of them on the wall. She steps aside.

Paul pauses and looks at Josh.

Josh extends his hand. The two men shake hands until Josh pulls Paul close. Their other arms fly around each other.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Thank you, Dad.

FADE OUT: