

That First Step

By

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FADE IN:

SUPER: "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." Lao-Tzu

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Like a numbed patient, ROSE (35) scrubs bits of food off a pile of dirty dishes. Tired from a long day, the miles of her marriage have built up well past the extended warranty, yet she drives on.

JEFF (O.S.)

Rose!

Rose freezes. Mentally fortifies herself.

JEFF (O.S.)

I thought you said you paid the bills last week!

ROSE

I did. Remember I told you...

JEFF (O.S.)

...Cause if you did then why did I just get a phone call that my credit card is past due?

ROSE

Did you not read my text?

The category five hurricane that is her husband Jeff (37) storms into the kitchen and firmly plants himself across from Rose.

JEFF

God dammit, Rose! How can I rebuild my credit when every other month my cards are going unpaid?

ROSE

Our credit, Jeff.

JEFF

It's my name on the god damn card! Here, do you want me to show you?

KID'S ROOM

Though most of the room is taken up by their bunk bed, JESSICA (4) and CORY (7) practice for the somersault Olympics on the floor.

ROSE (O.S.)

I know it's your name on the card  
but guess who's money is going into  
it?

JEFF (O.S.)

Ha! What money? The fifty dollars  
you make in tips a night serving  
mochas to loser hipsters? Good luck  
with that! You know what would  
really help? You finally getting a  
real job!

Per his routine Cory goes to close the door to his room and  
grabs a book from his small bookshelf then sits next to  
Jessica.

ROSE (O.S.)

Fine! You gonna stay home and watch  
the kids? Great! Then how do we pay  
for Jessica's daycare?

Cory opens the cover to his book.

CORY

Hey, Jessy, do you want me to read  
a story to you?

The sound of SHATTERED DISH fills the house. Cory reads.

CORY

Oh the places you'll go.

Another dish SHATTERS. Cory turns the page.

ROSE (O.S.)

Jeff! Stop it!

CORY

Congratulations. Today is your day.  
You're off to great places. You're  
off and away.

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The house is quiet as Rose sweeps up the broken plates.

She opens up the overly full trash can lid and dumps the  
pieces in. To close the lid she has to use two nearby beer  
bottles just to push in all the trash.

KID'S ROOM

Cory and Jessica lay sound asleep in the bottom bunk. Though there is no room, Rose squeezes in to lay next to them.

INT. CAR - DAY

The EMPTY GAS LIGHT dings on in the car dashboard.

Rain pours down onto the car as Jeff drives. Rose plays on her phone as the kids watch the rain in their boosters.

JEFF

Guess that's a no on filling up the tank like I asked yesterday night?

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Essential oils and rich lather foam up as Rose washes her hair in peace. Until Jeff storms in.

JEFF

Are you fucking talking to that Robert guy again? Why did his fucking "I wanna get punched" face just pop up as a potential friend on my Facebook?

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Rose slaves in front of the stove to dice chicken for dinner. As she does the kids can be heard through the house in the middle of another loud and crazy game.

ROSE

We're out of tomatoes. Can you go grab some from the store quick?

FAMILY ROOM

Beer in hand, bottles on the table, Jeff tries to watch baseball on the couch through the kids' best monster impressions.

JEFF

Nope! Game's on!

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Still asleep, Jeff rolls over in the bed to hold Rose and close the gap between them. Wide awake, Rose pushes his hand away slides to the edge of the bed, stares at the wall.

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Like an old pro, Rose simultaneously folds laundry as she talks with the phone nestled against her shoulder.

ROSE

Oh that sounds so cute! They'd love  
to come over and see it.

The front door unlocks and opens. Jeff storms in covered in oil and greasy mechanics overalls from work.

JEFF

Who the hell are you talking to?

ROSE

(on phone)  
Yeah. Gotta go.

INT. CAR - DAY

Hands at ten and two, Jeff drives. Rose stares out her window. A mile wide chasm between the two. Finally Jeff breaks the silence.

JEFF

Serious question. Therapists. Do  
they give refunds?

EXT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The front door flies open as Jeff storms out, keys in hand, with Rose quick behind.

ROSE

And where the hell do you think  
you're going?

JEFF

Away.

ROSE

Great. Just great. Here we go  
again. So who's gonna help me get  
the kids ready for bed then?

He opens the car door, half steps in.

JEFF

Who do you think does it every night you end up working? Christ!

ROSE

I swear, one of these days you're gonna leave and come home to an empty house.

JEFF

Oh yeah? What's stopping you?

Cory and Jessica stare out the window at Mom and Dad. Exasperated, Rose waves her hand at them.

ROSE

What do you think?

JEFF

Tell you what. Get a job that can support yourself first. Then I'll worry about finding a roommate!

A SLAM of the door as Jeff gets in, starts the car.

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

A photo album's worth of framed photos line the wall which Rose dusts. She stops at a crooked picture of her and Jeff's wedding.

INSERT: Rose and Jeff's wedding photo. Happier and younger. Rose's hands attempt to level the frame but it refuses to stay straight.

EXT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

In front of the obnoxious noise of his lawn mower and a half mowed lawn, Jeff listens intently to his phone.

JEFF

Rose? Why has my credit card still not been paid?

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Head in her hands, Rose sobs uncontrollably at the table as Jeff towers over her slightly unhinged.

ROSE

No, Jeff! I'm not on my period!

JEFF

Then let me ask again. What. The fuck. Is wrong? With you? Stop it or you're going to scare the kids!

MASTER BATHROOM

Copious amounts of steam makes the bathroom more like a sauna. A thousand yard stare from Rose as she showers.

Jeff's hand leaves a beer bottle on the sink counter.

He enters the shower behind her.

JEFF

Babe, I'm sorry about earlier. I didn't mean to say those things. I still love you.

He pushes up on Rose who reacts as if his body were made of sandpaper.

ROSE

Jeff. Stop it.

Suddenly aggressive, he clutches her wrists, pushes her against the wall. Trapped, Rose closes her eyes in shame.

JEFF

I said I still love you didn't I?

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dressed for work in a green apron Rose checks herself quickly in a mirror. Toys and laundry litter the couch, but the kids still find room to watch TV on it even with Jeff in the way.

ROSE

I'm already late! What do you want me to do about it?

His overalls covered in oil and grease, Jeff wipes his grimy hands with a rag.

JEFF

Then what did you do all day? It sure as hell wasn't spent cleaning.

Rose walks to stand in front of Jeff.

ROSE

There's lasagna in the freezer. If you can change breaks all day I'm sure you can figure out how to set an oven.

Jessica runs over to Rose, hugs her knees. Rose kneels to her level, plants a ginormous kiss on her baby.

ROSE

Mommy loves you. I'll be back to tuck you into bed later OK?

JEFF

Looks like its leftovers again guys. Mom was too busy to cook for us. So who's hungry?

Exasperated, he leaves for the kitchen.

CORY

Love you mom.

ROSE

Love you too. Be good for dad.

In a blur, Rose turns and flies out the front door.

ROSE

And don't forget to feed our kids!

The oily rag flies across the room and smacks the door.

INT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Exhausted from her late shift, Rose enters the kitchen to find an empty six pack and a half eaten tray of lasagna on the counter. She tosses her keys and a small pile of bills and loose change by it.

DINING ROOM

Illuminated by the light of her phone, Rose eats the cold lasagna out of the tray with a fork as she reads her cell.

JEFF (O.S.)  
Who are you texting?

ROSE  
The New York Times.

Eyes glazed and half asleep, Jeff leans against the wall from the hallway.

JEFF  
Alright. Then why did you come home so late?

ROSE  
Somebody called in sick. It took forever to clean up. And we were abnormally busy on top of it all, so fuck my life right?

JEFF  
That's funny. You didn't text me to say you were coming home late.

ROSE  
No, I didn't.

Triggered, Jeff rushes at Rose and slaps the phone out of her hand. The screen BREAKS as it hits the floor by Jeff.

KID'S ROOM

Eyes wide awake and next to his sleeping sister, Cory stares at the top bunk.

DINING ROOM

Face to face, Jeff and Rose confront one another.

ROSE  
What the fuck is wrong with you?

JEFF  
I know what you're doing. Don't lie to me!

Jeff slaps her face. Hard. Stunned, Rose stands her ground.

JEFF  
You gonna tell me now? How about now?

Another slap. Then a shove into the wall from Jeff.

ROSE  
 Stop it! What are you doing? I  
 swear to God if you touch me again  
 I'm gonna call the police!

With all his weight, Jeff steps on her phone as he leans in to grab Rose's neck and push her into the wall.

JEFF  
 Do it. Tramp.

Try as she may, Rose isn't strong enough to force Jeff off her. His fingers dig deeper into her neck.

Scared at the sight before him, Cory stands assertively in the hallway with his arms around Jessica for protection.

CORY  
 Stop it! You're hurting mom!

JEFF  
 Cory! Take your sister and go back to bed! We're just talking.

With his attention diverted, Rose reaches for the fork in the lasagna tray. With it she stabs Jeff deep in the neck. Fork firmly embedded, he recoils back in pain.

Rose breaks from the fight and rushes to her children.

ROSE  
 (to Cory)  
 Quick honey! Go get your sister's shoes. We're leaving.

In severe pain, Jeff stumbles around in the dark, trips on the dinner table and chairs.

JEFF  
 Oh the police are gonna love this!

JESSICA  
 What are we doing, Mommy?

ROSE  
 Something we should have done a long time ago. Hurry!

KITCHEN

Frantically, Rose grabs the pile of money and her keys.

EXT. SMITH FAMILY HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Rose rushes to get Jessica into her car seat while Cory buckles himself in.

A huge rev of the engine as she starts the car and backs out of the driveway.

In a sprint Jeff follows out the house already on his phone.

JEFF

Don't you dare go! I'm calling the police! Do you see me? I'm calling!

Lights off, Rose speeds away down the street.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Pin drop quiet as Rose slow rolls up to a red light.

ROSE

Is everybody OK?

CORY

Mom? Mom, where are we going?

Out of nowhere, a wave of peace and calm washes over Rose. Any trace of fear or panic is replaced by a sudden found strength of inner peace. She buckles her seat belt.

ROSE

I don't know, Cory. I've never been here before.

EXT. INTERSECTION - NIGHT

The traffic light goes green.

Rose drives straight ahead.

FADE OUT: