

14 EXT. ARIZONA SKY - DAY 14

A week later.

The trees are barer now, a last stand against the powerful winds of monsoon season.

The sky pulls over itself in rows of dark gray.

A loud THUNDERCLAP. A storm is rolling in.

15 INT. GRACE'S WORK 15

Grace drudges through the office, exhausted. The clock on the wall reads 9:30. She passes Mike's desk.

MIKE

Late again?

GRACE

Fuck off, Mike.

Grace plants herself at her desk. The circles under her eyes are darker.

She gets to work...and slowly but surely, she begins to drift...until her head slumps into her arms. She's asleep.

16 INT. GRACE'S WORK - LATER 16

Her phone RINGING jolts her awake. She comes to, shakes her head for dozing off.

She answers the call.

GRACE

Mm, yes, hello?

The response makes Grace sit up, now alert.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Wait, what do you mean fighting?

17 INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 17

PRINCIPAL HOWARD (40s, empathetic but stern) sits at her desk, on the phone with Grace. Her room is decorated with drawings and gifts from children throughout her tenure.

Across from her, a seat apart from each other, sit Ben and JAX (15, looks one step shy of fighting the world).

Both kids are beat up, their knuckles wrecked, their faces bruised and bloody.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD
Yes ma'am...At lunch...

Ben fidgets with the skin around his nails, anxious. Jax leans back in his chair, relaxed as he eyes Ben.

Ben catches him. Principal Howard continues her phone conversation in the background.

BEN
(quietly)
Got something else to say?

Jax shrugs.

JAX
Not unless you want me to whoop your ass again.

BEN
(louder)
Just leave me alone, asshole.

Principal Howard snaps her fingers at the kids.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD
Hey! Settle down!

Ben crosses his arms. Jax rolls his eyes. Principal Howard glances at Ben.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD (CONT'D)
I see...I understand. Well, just get here as soon as you can. The doors lock at 6:00pm...Mkay, buh-bye.

Principal Howard replaces the phone receiver. She rests her elbows on the desk, fingers laced.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD (CONT'D)
Benjamin, I'm afraid your mother cannot retrieve you until she gets off work.

Ben clenches, seething. Betrayal written across his beat-up face.

BEN
Fine. Whatever.

JAX
 ...Has my mom gotten back to you
 yet, Mrs. Howard?

PRINCIPAL HOWARD
 Um...no dear, I'm afraid not.

Jax smiles weakly.

JAX
 Yeah. Figures.

18 INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - HOURS LATER

18

Grace rushes in. Rain seen through the glass doors and windows.

Principal Howard exits her office. She spots Grace as she approaches her.

GRACE
 Where's Ben? Is he okay?

Principal Howard sighs.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD
 He's fine. He's resting in the
 nurse's office right now...Let's
 talk inside.

19 INT. SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

19

GRACE
 So who was the other kid involved?

PRINCIPAL HOWARD
 I don't know the family well. Just
 moved here this summer. The other
 boy, Jax, has something of a
 temper. We've already had some
 trouble with him...A few witnesses
 saw the altercation. They think he
 said something to Ben and the whole
 thing escalated before anyone could
 get in between them. They wrestled
 around a bit before the teachers
 split them up.

Grace shakes her head, hand to her forehead.

GRACE

I'm so sorry. I-I don't know what to do here. I feel like I'm barely holding things together.

(tearfully)

I can't control him. He's only getting worse.

Grace tries to compose herself. Principal Howard offers her a tissue.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD

Well...the good news is, when I finally did get ahold of Jax's folks, they seemed content to handle things "in-house."

Grace is a little relieved.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD (CONT'D)

But...according to school regulations, I have to expel your son.

Grace's face falls.

PRINCIPAL HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Grace. It'd be different if it was his first incident. But with so many altercations on his record...

Principal Howard's voice muffles as Grace reels.

20 EXT. SCHOOL - EVENING 20

The rain has picked up.

Grace and Ben walk through the downpour towards the parking lot.

21 INT. GRACE'S CAR 21

The car is deathly silent as Grace drives. Ben slumps in the passenger seat.

Loud THUNDERCLAPS echo outside. Ben stares at the rain hitting hard against the car. Grace white-knuckles the wheel.

Finally, she speaks.

GRACE

What's going on with you?

He doesn't answer. Grace sighs, exasperated.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I--I know you're hurting,
sweetheart. But skipping school,
neglecting your meds and therapy--
all these stunts with the law, and
now getting expelled--

BEN

That other kid started it, not me.

GRACE

Principal Howard said you threw the
first punch.

Ben huffs, frustrated.

BEN

Whatever. Doesn't matter, anyways.

GRACE

Of course it matters, Ben. I love
you, I only want the best for you--

BEN

And what about Lori?

Icy, tense beat of silence. Grace clenches.

GRACE

What *about* Lori?

BEN

Did you want the best for her, too?
Cause look where that got her.

GRACE

Benjamin, *that's* enough.

BEN

You just left me there, mom.

GRACE

I had no choice! I was gonna lose
my job if I left again in the
middle of--

Ben chuckles, thinly veiling his anger.

BEN
Glad to see where your priorities
lie.

Grace looks at Ben.

GRACE
(anger growing)
What was I supposed to do, Ben?
Would you rather me be a single mom
AND jobless trying to take care of
us?

Distracted, Grace runs a stop sign.

Ben turns to respond, but he sees a car going through the 4-
way stop on the left side of the car. His eyes widen.

BEN
(panicked)
Mom!

Grace faces forward and her face changes immediately. She
gasps.

The car's horn BLARES, swerving past with SQUEALING tires. It
just narrowly misses Grace's car.

Grace instinctively pulls the car forward along the street,
throwing it in park. She and Ben breath hard, reeling.

A beat as they recover.

BEN (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ, mom.

He gets out of the car and into the rain, walking off.

22

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - CONTINUOUS

22

Grace follows him. GRACE
Where are you going?

BEN
You almost killed us!

GRACE
It was an accident, I didn't mean--

Ben laughs mockingly at her. He's lost all composure and is
seething in anger.

BEN

It's always a fucking accident, or
an apology, but it's meaningless!
We could've died! Do you even care?

They stare at each other, breathing hard in the rain.

BEN (CONT'D)

Do you even care that she's gone?

A part of Grace crumbles at these words.

GRACE

Watch it, Ben.

BEN

No, I'm tired of you pretending
everything's okay, that it's not
your fault Lori's dead!

Grace, hurt and past composure, hardens. Her gaze is cutting
and accusing.

GRACE

You of all people have no right to
place blame.

In a fit of anger, Ben pushes Grace. She slips and falls,
hitting the wet ground a little too hard.

The air is deathly still between them. They look at each
other, both stunned and horrified.

He slowly approaches to help her.

BEN

I--I'm sorry, mom, I didn't mean--

Grace backs away from him, *afraid of him for the first time
in their lives*. And Ben can see it in her face.

Ben stumbles back, before running down the street towards
their house.

Grace watches him leave, breath catching in her throat.

After a moment, she picks herself up and gets in the car.

Grace sobs into her steering wheel. She struggles to catch
her breath.

As her breathing slows, her eyes find the Brightpath pamphlet in the side door pocket again. She stares at it for a long moment.

On her phone, Grace types "Brightpath wilderness therapy" into her search bar.

She easily finds the website and scrolls through it. She clicks on a link to a web seminar.

In the video, SAMUEL CREED (50s), the charismatic founder, speaks directly to the camera.

SAMUEL CREED

(on video)

Every day, I meet distraught parents who have tried every trick in the book to get their child back on track...but to no avail. But here at Brightpath, we understand that some children need that extra bit of love and care. Whatever your child's issue is...we can assess, address, and adjust them as they embark on a journey, that will challenge them, yes...but most importantly, elevate them.

Grace watches intently, calming.

SAMUEL CREED (CONT'D)

Here, we help them develop a sense of self and inner control. If you're a parent and any of this sounds familiar, don't fret. Don't panic, or beat yourself up. Just call our 24-hour help line, connect with one of our fine representatives, and allow us to help your child find their purpose.

Creed smiles charmingly. The number blinks on the screen.

Grace dials it, holds the phone to her ear.

RING, RING...

SHERYL

Hello, this is Sheryl with Brightpath Wilderness Therapy. How can I help you?

GRACE

Yes, um--hi. My name is Grace Brooks, um...I--I think I need help. With my son...I mean, he's not a bad kid, it's just...

Grace fidgets with the dry skin around her nails.

SHERYL

(reassuring)

Grace, thank you for taking this first step in calling. Let me be the first to say, there are no bad kids. But some kids suffer more than others, and it's our job to elevate them from their suffering. You're doing the right thing as a parent. You only want to help your son, right?

Grace sighs deep, relieved at being heard, being understood.

GRACE

Yes. Yes, exactly.

Grace looks at their house just down the street. Ben's bedroom light is on. His shadow paces back and forth.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I just want to help my son.