

THE ABATEMENT

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FADE IN:

EXT. STREET BRIDGE - NIGHT

GABE (30), a withdrawn and lethargic but physically fit man, walks along the street bridge. He looks up at the moon when a bright, multi-colored star just to the left blinks wildly. He quickly averts his gaze in frustration.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

In a dimly lit room with one HANGING LIGHT shining from above, a GROUP OF PEOPLE sit in a circle. This group literally ranges from 16 years old to 60.

Gabe walks in, pulling back his hood, and makes a beeline to the only empty seat. He sits, crossing his arms.

The group's MODERATOR (45), an intelligent and comforting guy, holds a notepad, scribbling every once in a while. He listens on as SUZE (16), a shy and mournful girl, albeit naive, speaks to the group.

SUZE

After about a year, visiting the memorial site became easier, but it's still not the same.

She wipes away tears with a tissue.

MODERATOR

Of course. And I think that's a common trait with all of us, right? It gets easier, but it's never the same as it was.

SUZE

Yeah. I feel like these groups help though. It's safe to talk about it and I can move on. Or at least take it day by day.

MODERATOR

Thank you for sharing, Suze.

She nods.

MODERATOR (cont'd)

Okay.

He looks around the group, spotting HELENA (60), a middle-class woman who is very average: not skinny, but not hefty; not wealthy, but not in rags.

MODERATOR (cont'd)  
Helena, why don't you go next.

HELENA  
Sure.

With her hands in her lap, she begins to speak very straightforward and calm, like she's told this story hundreds of times before.

HELENA (cont'd)  
Hello. My name is Helena and it was about five years ago that I received the red letter.

At Helena's mention of "red letter," Gabe startles and-

FLASH OF IMAGES:

Gabe peers through the blinds of a house window; TWO MEN stand outside the entryway knocking on the front door; One man holds in his hand a RED ENVELOPE. It's slightly larger than a regular-sized envelope.

BACK TO THE GROUP, Gabe looks at Helena.

HELENA (cont'd)  
It was my grandson that time. The men showed up at my door on a Sunday afternoon and handed over the letter. I think a rerun of Jeopardy was on? Not sure. But three days later, I took him downtown to the transfer center and that was it. He was seven years old.

A few empathetic gasps arise from the group.

SUZE  
You said 'that time'? Did you lose someone else?

HELENA  
Yes. About two years before my grandson, my daughter, his mom, was chosen.

She scoffs.

HELENA (cont'd)

I say chosen like it's some goddamn grand prize. They tell you it's a random drawing from a lottery system, but that's bullshit. These rich pricks never get called up, but I lose two generations in the span of two years? How's that fucking random? And the severance money they give you is bullshit too. Why not give us more than three days to say goodbye instead? Worthless dicks.

She collects herself.

HELENA (cont'd)

Anyway, I've come to accept that I can't change the past and I've learned to move on with what I got.

Suze scoffs.

MODERATOR

Suze? You have something you want to add?

SUZE

I mean it sucks losing someone, but the government is doing good things. It's helping restore America.

Helena throws a look of disgust at Suze and goes to respond, but-

MODERATOR

Thanks, Helena. We all understand pop control is difficult to experience and we all appreciate the pain we go through.

He skims his notepad for the next name.

MODERATOR (cont'd)

Gabriel? Did you want to go next?

Gabe looks up at the Moderator. Arms still folded, he drops them to his side and sits up straight in his chair.

GABE

Yeah, sure. Um. Hello, my name is Gabe. Gabriel. We got the red letter almost a year ago for my husband, Cameron.

INT. GABE'S HOUSE - DAY

**SUPER: ONE YEAR EARLIER**

UPBEAT POP MUSIC plays while Gabe slides some scrambled eggs off a pan and onto two plates, which already have bacon and toast. A dancing, happier Gabe sets the pan and spatula in the sink and removes his apron.

GABE  
Cameron, breakfast is ready.

CAMERON (30), stylish and slender like Gabe but nerdy, comes into the kitchen in slacks and a tucked-in superhero tank top, very form-fitting.

GABE (cont'd)  
(smirking)  
Go finished getting dressed! You do look cute though.

Cameron winks at Gabe, grabs a piece of bacon, and walks away.

KNOCK at the front door. Gabe walks over and peers through the blinds. It's the Men with the RED ENVELOPE. He looks back, checking for Cameron, then opens the door.

EXT. GABE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The two Men are dressed in OFFICIAL UNIFORMS, almost military-style. The one with the envelope hands it to Gabe. They immediately turn around and walk away. Gabe stands there for a moment, then hurries back inside.

INT. GABE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He stands in the entryway and rips open the envelope. Pulling out the letter, he scans it quickly, his eyes falling on these words:

**CITIZEN FOR ABATEMENT - CAMERON RICKET.**

CAMERON (O.S.)  
Hey. Who was that?

Surprised, Gabe tries to hide the letter behind his back. Cameron's buttoning the last cuff of his shirt and smirks.

CAMERON  
What are you hiding?

GABE

Nothing.

Cameron walks over to Gabe.

CAMERON

Nothing? Gabe, I saw you put that paper behind your back. What is it?

It takes a few tries, but Cameron snatches the paper away from Gabe and scans it. His expression melts from playful to horrified.

GABE

I'm gonna call my dad, he'll know how to get out of it.

CAMERON

Oh my god. I can't believe- Why? What are we gonna do? Babe-

Cameron's eyes well up with tears.

GABE

Hey, hey. Listen to me. You need to go downtown and start filling out the paperwork or they'll arrest you, okay? It'll be fine. My dad will work everything out. You'll be fine, you hear me?

Cameron nods. They hug tightly and kiss deeply.

CAMERON

Gabe, please-

GABE

Don't worry, baby. Sink or swim, remember? I got this. Go.

He watches Cameron leave.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Tears fill up Gabe's eyes, but his expression is more frustrated than sad.

MODERATOR

It sounds like you handled it pretty well.

GABE

I tried.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. GABE'S HOUSE - DAY

Gabe is taking a bat to the dishes on the table, SMASHING everything and SCREAMING in anger. Eggs, bacon, and pieces of plate fly everywhere like confetti.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

MODERATOR

And at least you got to spend the three days allotted with him right?

Gabe scoffs.

INT. GABE'S HOUSE - DAY

Gabe sits on the couch in his living room watching his dad on the phone. STEVE (60) is gray-haired and athletic with a charismatic demeanor and a hint of a Texan accent.

STEVE

(on the phone)

Okay, thanks. No, not at all. I appreciate you looking into it. Thanks, Mel.

He hangs up and slides his cell phone into his pants pocket. Gabe looks hopeful, waiting for some good news.

STEVE (cont'd)

It's a slight chance, but we can try filing an appeal.

GABE

Oh my god, dad. You're a civil rights lawyer. There's nothing else?

STEVE

No, that's the only option right now-

GABE

That's bullshit.

STEVE

Hey! You're not the first person this has happened to.

(MORE)

STEVE (cont'd)  
I've been litigating this mess for five years, others have been fighting it since it started, so don't act like I don't want Cameron out of this as much as you.

Gabe stands and paces with his hands on his head.

GABE  
I know, I'm sorry. I'm scared and I don't know what to do. I just feel like I'm letting Cameron die without doing something.

STEVE  
He got the letter today?

Gabe nods.

STEVE (cont'd)  
Okay, so at least we have a few days.

Gabe's PHONE RINGS. He picks it up from the coffee table.

GABE  
It's Cameron.

STEVE  
Put it on speaker.

Gabe answers.

GABE  
Hey, babe. My dad's here. We're trying to figure out-

CAMERON  
(on speaker)  
Gabe! They're taking me back now!

GABE  
What?

CAMERON  
They said that-

Steve takes the phone from him.

STEVE  
Cameron, this is Steve. What exactly did they say to you?



CAMERON

They said the letter should have been delivered three days ago and that I'm supposed to be phased today.

GABE

What?

Gabe starts pacing again.

STEVE

Cameron, listen. We're on our way down there. Tell them that your attorney is coming down to file an appeal.

CAMERON

(terrified)

Okay, I will.

He hangs up the phone.

GABE

What's phased?

STEVE

That's what they call the euthanasia process.

GABE

Oh my god! I sent him down there. I'm so stupid. Dad, I can't- I can't lose him. Please help me. Please-

STEVE

Gabe! You need to stay focused. Let's go, we can take my truck.

He hands Gabe's phone back to him and they hurry out of the house.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

HELENA

I've heard of them doing that to families, saying they don't get the full 72 hours, even though the letter was late.

SUZE

How did this even start?

HELENA

How can you support something you know nothing about?

SUZE

I know some things, I just don't know-

HELENA

When over a million Americans died in the pandemic, there was more food and less pollution, so Congress voted to have an annual abatement.

SUZE

Abatement?

GABE

Oh my god. Population control! Thinning out the herd! Either of those work for you?

SUZE

You don't need to yell. Maybe if you weren't married to a guy they wouldn't have taken him.

GABE

What the fuck did you just say?

The Moderator puts his hands out like a referee in a boxing match.

MODERATOR

Okay, we all need to calm down and remember: this is a safe space to learn and communicate. No negative arguments and no verbal attacks. Helena? Did you want to continue?

HELENA

I lost my daughter the same way as your husband. My grandson got the three days, but my daughter called me while I was at work and by the time I got to the house, she was gone. My grandson was sitting alone on the couch.

GABE

Did you get to see her before she phased?

HELENA

Nope. Did you get to see your husband?

Gabe scoffs and chuckles, crossing his arms.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY - TRACKING

Gabe and Steve pull up in a pickup truck and park on the street. Gabe gets out, phone to his ear.

GABE

(to Steve)

He's not answering.

He hangs up.

STEVE

Come on.

They walk across the street to the city courthouse. A GROUP OF PROTESTORS are out front waving signs that say anti-abatement phrases: "NO ABATEMENT!", "DOWN WITH POP CONTROL!", "STOP MURDERING US!", etc.

They push through the crowd, walk up a series of steps, and enter the building.

INT. COURTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The walls and floor of the Courthouse are pale, all shades of gray. Not a hint of foliage in sight.

It's not busy at all; in fact, no one's here except for a SECURITY GUARD (50), waiting for them to approach the only means of entrance: his METAL DETECTOR.

SECURITY GUARD

Please empty your pockets. Everything goes in the trays to the right.

They both comply and walk up to the front desk, a RECEPTIONIST sitting behind it.

STEVE

Hi. Can we please speak to the case manager in charge of Cameron Ricket?

The Receptionist, clicking and typing, stares at the computer screen.

RECEPTIONIST  
Looks like he was phased earlier this morning, I'm sorry.

GABE  
We just talked to him 30 minutes ago!  
Where is he?

Steve tosses a disapproving glance at Gabe.

STEVE  
(to the Receptionist)  
I'm his attorney. He called me earlier and I advised him that we want to file an appeal.

RECEPTIONIST  
What they have here is all I'm able to see, sir.

Gabe sees Cameron being escorted by SECURITY PERSONNEL.

GABE  
Cameron!

Cameron turns his head and sees Gabe, but they keep pushing him down the corridor.

CAMERON (O.S.)  
Gabe! Gabe, help me!

Gabe jumps over the turnstile and runs after him.

STEVE  
Gabe!

RECEPTIONIST  
Sir, you can't be back here!

Steve tries to follow Gabe, but the Security Guard stops him.

SECURITY GUARD  
(on his walkie talkie)  
I need assistance in the front please.

Gabe turns the corner to find Cameron and his escorts going through a glass security door. Gabe gets there just after the door shuts and the LOCKS CLICK. He tries to open the door, but it doesn't even budge.

Separated by a half-inch thick glass wall, Gabe and Cameron are hand to hand, staring longingly at each other. Cameron is terrified and speechless.

GABE

I'm here, baby. I'm right here.

The Security Personnel pull Cameron away and they continue down the hall until out of sight.

GABE (cont'd)

I'm right here!

Steve and the Security Guard turn the corner, the Security Guard with his hand on his holster.

STEVE

Gabriel!

SECURITY GUARD

Sir, you need to back away from the door and move to the lobby now, or I'll put you in a holding cell.

They get to Gabe.

STEVE

Son, we can't do anything for Cameron from here. We need to do this the right way.

GABE

There is no right way, dad! The appeal process has never worked and it's not going to work now!

SECURITY GUARD

Let's go. You need to move.

GABE

(defeated)

I was right there. I didn't even get to say goodbye.

STEVE

It's not over.

Back in the lobby, the Security Guard guides Gabe and Steve over to a seating area.

SECURITY GUARD  
(empathetically)  
I'll see if I can get him escorted  
out here so you can say your  
goodbyes.

STEVE  
Thank you, sir. That would be  
amazing.

INT. COURTHOUSE - LATER

Cameron comes out, escorted by the Security Guard.

SECURITY GUARD  
I was able to get you 10 minutes. I'm  
sorry it couldn't be longer.

STEVE  
Thanks.

The Security Guard walks back to his post. Gabe and Cameron  
embrace, squeezing each other tightly.

GABE  
(to Cameron)  
Are you okay? Did they hurt you?

CAMERON  
No, not really.

STEVE  
Did they say anything about the  
appeal process?

CAMERON  
Yeah, they said since this is  
technically the third day, there's no  
way to start the appeal process.

GABE  
Maybe we could sneak you out somehow.

Gabe looks around, locking eyes with the Security Guard  
who's shaking his head.

GABE (cont'd)  
Shit. Cameron, I'm so sorry. I'm so  
sorry.

They embrace again, Gabe crying. Cameron is surprisingly  
calm.

GABE (cont'd)

How are you not going crazy right now? We're never going to see each other again. Can you be more upset about it?

CAMERON

I am upset, but what can we do.

He looks at Steve, who agrees.

STEVE

I'm sorry, son. I'll give you guys some time. I'm so sorry, Cameron. I really wish things were different. You were my favorite son-in-law.

CAMERON

(smirking)

I was your only son-in-law.

Steve smiles, touches Cameron's shoulder, then Gabe's, and walks out of the courthouse.

Gabe and Cameron sit, holding hands.

CAMERON (cont'd)

Do you think we've had a good life together? Good memories?

GABE

Yeah.

CAMERON

Remember that time at the lake? Your dad was at the rinse station and slipped on some algae?

Gabe laughs.

GABE

Yeah.

CAMERON

What did he say?

GABE

(mimicking Steve)

Damn slippery some-bitch.

They both laugh.

CAMERON

You've got to hold onto those moments  
and remember them.

GABE

I don't want you to go.

CAMERON

I know, babe, I know. We were dealt a  
shitty hand. But I love you so much.  
And we had a relationship that most  
people can only dream of.

Gabe nods.

CAMERON (cont'd)

You are the most brave, loving,  
intelligent man I have ever known,  
and I am so happy that I got to spend  
my life with you.

GABE

I love you so much. I'll never let  
you go.

CAMERON

You better not, or I'll come back and  
haunt your ass.

They chuckle.

CAMERON (cont'd)

Hey, I got one request. You know that  
star we always see, the one next to  
the moon that's always blinking crazy  
colors?

GABE

(confused)

Yeah.

CAMERON

Every time you see it, think of me.  
I'll be next to it watching over you.

GABE

Okay. I will.

They kiss deeply and embrace again. Cameron walks away,  
looking back before passing through the turnstile.

GABE (cont'd)

I love you. So much. With all my  
heart.



CAMERON  
I know. Sink or swim?

Gabe is barely keeping it together.

GABE  
(almost inaudible)  
Sink or swim.

Cameron continues through and the Receptionist guides him around the corner and out of sight. Gabe sits down and cries into his hands.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Everyone's crying except for Helena and Gabe. The Moderator wipes his tears away with a tissue.

GABE  
That was the last time I saw him.

Helena places her hand on Gabe's knee.

INT. MEETING ROOM - LATER

The Moderator is standing at the room door, saying goodbye to everyone leaving.

Gabe is the last one out. The Moderator stops him.

MODERATOR  
Gabe. Thank you for sharing today. I appreciate you being brave and honest about it.

GABE  
Of course.

MODERATOR  
At the end of the day, we all have a choice to make: whether we sink or swim.

Gabe's eyes quickly lock onto the Moderator's, taken aback by those words.

MODERATOR (cont'd)  
Each of us deals with loss differently and this is still really fresh for you. I want you to keep coming to the meetings okay?

Gabe nods with a slight smile and leaves.

EXT. STREET BRIDGE - NIGHT

Gabe looks down as he walks along the side of the bridge, the busy highway below.

CAMERON (V.O.)  
Gabe! Gabe, help me!

GABE (V.O.)  
I'm here, baby. I'm right here.

Gabe looks down at the traffic below and walks over to the railing.

GABE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
I'm right here!

He places his hands on the railing, the ROAR OF THE TRAFFIC getting louder.

MODERATOR (V.O.)  
We all have a choice to make: whether  
we sink or swim.

He looks up and there's the moon again, shining bright. And right next to it, the star BLINKING with hints of color. The sound of the TRAFFIC FADES. Gabe smiles and-

**CUT TO BLACK:**