

The Last Tape

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INT. GENE'S HOUSE - NOON

In the middle of the room, Gene Smith, a thirty-year-old Caucasian male, sits talking into a camcorder and recording a tape. The room is disorganized, but with a strange feeling that there is a very distinct method to the madness.

GENE SMITH

Hello future generations.

(beat)

This is my last tape. I...

Gene is lost for words. A pause, then suddenly everything in him breaks.

GENE SMITH

I have a confession! I do this so I don't forget... I... if I forget everything - no...

(beat)

If I forget ANYTHING, it will disappear. It's hard to believe. It's true though! Look, here's a tape of the first time that it happened...

Gene reaches over and hits a button above the camera.

HARD INTO:

INT. PARTY ROOM - 17 YEARS PREVIOUS, DAY

The camera is shaky and low-quality. It is a camcorder.

The party room is festive and full of balloons and confetti.

13-year-old kids swarm the area, amongst them a 13-year-old Gene Smith (unburdened compared to his older self) and 13-year-old Derrick Gat, a friend of Gene's.

Gene's parents enter with a cake and place it on a table.

 GEORGE SMITH
 (singing)
Happy birthday to you,
happy birthday to you...

 LISA SMITH
 (singing)
Happy birthday to you,
happy birthday to you...

Everyone joins in.

 ALL
 Happy birthday dear Gene, happy
 birthday to you!

Gene is laughing, distracted by something.

 LISA SMITH
 Gene? Blow out the candles on the
 cake.

 GENE SMITH
 What cake...? I see the candles,
 but you didn't bring a cake...

 LISA SMITH
 What!?

Suddenly we notice that the cake is gone! The candles fall down and set the table alight.

Everyone screams. Color bars.

HARD INTO:

INT. GENE'S HOUSE - PRESENT

We are returned to Gene's room, where he is still sitting down.

GENE SMITH

Luckily, nothing like that happened for another nine years. But when it happened again, it was disastrous.

Gene begins to "set the stage."

GENE SMITH

It was in a bar...

FLASHCUT INTO:

INT. BAR - 9 YEARS PREVIOUS, NIGHT

The bar is rambunctious, as is common with bars. People sit at barstools ordering drinks.

GENE SMITH
(V.O., from the present)
I had just turned twenty-one, just old enough to drink.

Gene Smith, twenty-one years old, enters and sits at a barstool. He is happy.

GENE SMITH
(V.O., from the present)
I think that Derrick was with me too. You saw him in the birthday video.

Derrick Gat (twenty-one years old as well) swiftly follows Gene, and sits at the bar.

GENE SMITH
(V.O., from the present)
I was about to take my first sip of alcohol.

The scene is now thoroughly in motion.

DERRICK GAT
Here we go.

GENE SMITH
Ok... on the count of 3.
1...2...3...

Simultaneously, Gene and Derrick take a swig of their Jack Daniels.

FLASHCUT INTO:

EXT. GENE'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

The entire scene is blurry. All that we see are the steps of Gene's apartment building. Gene approaches, drunken, helped along by DERRICK.

His parents open the door, and see him. George and Lisa Smith have aged since we have last seen them; George Smith carries a cane. They stand atop the small staircase that leads into the apartment building.

LISA SMITH
What happened?

GENE SMITH
I...

GEORGE SMITH
What happened?

Gene forgets about something. The expression on his face is now confused. He stares at his Dad, mystified and unaware.

GENE SMITH
Dad?

Gene's father's cane vanishes. He is suspended for a moment, leaning on nothing.

GEORGE SMITH
What?

Gravity kicks in. George Smith topples down the stairs, screaming.

FLASHCUT INTO:

INT. GENE'S HOUSE - PRESENT, NOON

GENE SMITH
(On the verge of tears)
He never made it out of the
Hospital.

Gene recovers somewhat.

GENE SMITH
But... that's besides the point.

Gene banishes the memory with skill.

GENE SMITH
After my father passed away, the
curse kept coming back. It began to
be more and more frequent. I
started forgetting small stuff. But
even forgetting small stuff was
bad. In the grand scheme of things
nothing is "small stuff." Just
think, you forget to go to work and
the project that you've been
working on for two weeks is gone in
a puff. So I went out and got...
well I guess you could call it an
organizational tutor... Sort of.

FLASHCUT INTO:

INT. CHEN'S SPACE - 9 YEARS PREVIOUS, NIGHT

The entire room is dark.

GENE SMITH
 (V.O., from present)
 His name was Ping Chen. He was a
 guru.

Slowly, Ping Chen, a guru, comes into focus. Only he is illuminated; the room is otherwise dark and shrouded in mystery. He sits in Lotus Position, awaiting something that he does not expect.

GENE SMITH
 (V.O., from present)
 But, he wasn't like those movie
 Gurus, that movie was terrible by
 the way. He was a real guru.

A counter-bell rings. Ping Chen does not move, but he is surprised. However, he remains calm and collected.

PING CHEN
 (projecting his voice into the
 darkness)
 Come in.

The door opens. A twenty-one year old Gene Smith enters. He has just witnessed the strange happening at his first drink party. He seems confused at Ping Chen's obvious surprise at his arrival.

GENE SMITH
 You... weren't expecting me?

PING CHEN
 No, you made an appointment.

GENE SMITH
 But...

PING CHEN
 Half the people that make
 appointments with a mysterious Guru
 never really come.

GENE SMITH
 Ah, I see. Uh...

Gene Smith is still standing awkwardly in the doorway. Ping Chen, who has his eyes closed and is relaxed, seems to be giving off an unwelcoming vibe by making his countenance so contrary to Gene's nervous look.

(CONTINUED)

PING CHEN
What is it, then?

GENE SMITH
I have a memory problem.

PING CHEN
(perked up, but still bored)
Elaborate.

GENE SMITH
It's happening a lot now. Every
time I forget something, it goes
away.

Ping Chen sits bolt upright, as though he has just heard something both terrible and wonderful at once.

PING CHEN
What?

Gene Smith looks around, searching for something that could be the object of Ping Chen's attention.

GENE SMITH
What is it? Is something on fire?

The light flickers. Ping Chen is mortified.

PING CHEN
Stop that, boy! No! Oogly boogly!
Waka waka CAW!

Ping Chen jumps up and dances in the wan light, like some strange exotic bird.

PING CHEN
GAGOS! Evil, BEGONE!

GENE SMITH
What is it!?

PING CHEN
Tell me, boy, how old are you?

GENE SMITH
Twenty-one, just old enough to
drink.

PING CHEN
The same man with that problem died
exactly twenty-one years and six
days to date! He nearly destroyed
the world!

(CONTINUED)

GENE SMITH

(scared)

Oh no... I'm going to destroy the world!?

PING CHEN

(calming down)

Wait. Wait! Stop it!

Gene calms down for a second.

GENE SMITH

What?

PING CHEN

I know more about this than you think.

GENE SMITH

Just tell me what I must do...

(petrified)

Get me out of this!

The light flickers again.

PING CHEN

Stop! Concentrate or you will ruin the universe! Relaxation leads to memory, anxiety leads to forgetfulness!

This only suffices to get Gene more anxious.

PING CHEN

STOP!

GENE SMITH

Ahh!

The light bursts and goes out.

Gene and Ping Chen breathe heavily in the darkness, as though they have been running.

PING CHEN

You forgot the light, not the bulb. It'll return in a minute when the electricity kicks back in.

(beat)

Wait for it...

The light goes back on.

(CONTINUED)

GENE SMITH
(determined)
What do I have to do?

PING CHEN
You must see me once a week. We
will begin... now!

Ping Chen claps loudly. Gene Smith's anxiety explodes.

GENE SMITH
AAAHHH!

Gene Smith tumbles backwards. The light goes out again.

PING CHEN
(in the darkness)
We've got some work to do.

FLASHCUT TO:

INT. GENE'S ROOM

GENE SMITH

Ping helped me a lot. He helped me
find a loophole in the curse. I
started filming everything I did.

FLASHBACK:

Gene approaches a dog on the street and begins filming every
inch of the dog. The owner slaps Gene in the face.

GENE SMITH

(V.O.)

I felt like an outcast and a loser
of course...

FLASHBACK:

Gene walks by a friend that he tries to greet, but is
totally ignored.

GENE SMITH

(V.O.)

...because I was always filming,
but that's life for me.

FLASHBACK:

Gene goes to a party and tries to look at a girl while
filming. It doesn't work.

FLASHCUT TO:

Gene leaving the party, forlorn.

GENE SMITH

(V.O.)

I never really was the "cool" kid.
I... I couldn't even date! So back
to the topic...

RETURN TO PRESENT:

Gene chuckles.

GENE SMITH

...when I made the tapes, all I had
to remember were the tapes. I mean,
I still went to Ping Chen for help.

FLASHBACK: CHEN'S PLACE

Gene Smith is meditating with Ping Chen, who is talking MOS.

GENE SMITH

(V.O.)

He taught me to be aware of myself,
my power... and my weaknesses.

We can now hear Ping Chen.

PING CHEN

There are passions which will
distract you from this most
essential task-- you must learn to
control them. Stress, jealousies,
avarice, anxiety, frustration,
lust-- all these must be avoided.

Ping Chen goes MOS again.

GENE SMITH

(V.O.)

He gave me some emergency resources
to use...

PING CHEN

...it is a loophole, but it'll only
work once in forever. If you do
manage to destroy the world, just
watch the tapes and it'll all
return...

Ping Chen goes MOS again.

GENE SMITH

(V.O.)

And I worked with him so that I
didn't need to use the tapes
anymore.

PING CHEN

(heard again)

...in a few years, your memory will
be expanded enough that you won't
need the tapes. Then, you can have
a life again -

An alarm bell rings three times, distinctly.

RETURN TO PRESENT: GENE'S HOUSE

GENE SMITH

I achieved that goal. That is why
this is my last tape. Whoops,
there's the bell, gotta go get my
groceries. I almost forgot them.

Beat. Gene chuckles.

GENE SMITH

No pun intended of course...

Gene reaches over and hits a button on the camera.

HARD TO BLACK AND THEN FADE UP ON:

EXT. CITY STREET - MINUTES LATER

The city street is a standard New York avenue. People are everywhere, and cars drive by.

Gene Smith enters the scene carrying a bag of groceries. He walks down the street, murmuring to himself.

Suddenly, Anna Steinberg is revealed. She is beautiful, and her beauty is enhanced in Gene's eyes. His face is transfixed upon her face immediately. She is young and beyond pretty. Their attraction is instantaneous and mutual.

All at once, they bump into each other in their distraction. Gene's grocery bags topple down.

GENE SMITH

Uh -

ANNA STEINBERG

I... Uh - Sorry about that...

GENE SMITH

Oh, it was - nothing - I...

ANNA STEINBERG

You can, uh... Need help?

Gene begins frantically picking up the bags.

GENE SMITH

No thanks... I can... That was nice of you for offering, though -

ANNA STEINBERG

No problem, I try to be nice like that.

GENE SMITH

Bye then...

Gene finishes collecting his bags. They start away from each other, then turn around. They make eye contact for a second.

GENE SMITH

Bye then.

ANNA STEINBERG

Bye.

They walk away from each other.

It is almost apparent that they will never see each other again, when:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

15.

ANNA STEINBERG

Wait!

Gene turns around, surprised.

GENE SMITH

Yes?

BLUR AND FADE TO:

INT. GENE'S APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER

Gene is talking into the camera.

GENE SMITH

So, I've just met this amazing
girl! We talked for a few minutes.
I figured out that her name's Anna
Steinberg and-

(speeding up his speech)
we're going on a date tonight and
(faster, almost inaudible)
she looks fantastic and I'm so
excited that I - !

He runs out of words and suffices his need for expression
with hyperventilation. This all conveys one idea: obsessed.

GENE SMITH

Hmm... Don't want to -
(huff huff)
waste space on my
(huff huff)
last tape...

Gene reaches over and hits a button above the camera.

HARD TO BLACK AND THEN FADE UP ON:

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Inside the restaurant both Gene and Anna sit at a booth table. There is talking and ordering all around. A waiter approaches them.

ANNA STEINBERG

Um... I would like a Caesar salad without blue cheese and extra croutons.

Gene is staring at Anna, obsessed and oblivious.

WAITER

Would you like anything else with that?

ANNA STEINBERG

I would like...

Gene begins to drool.

The waiter vanishes.

ANNA STEINBERG

Oh my god! Oh my GOD!

GENE SMITH

I can explain -

ANNA STEINBERG

She was there... and then she wasn't there! I -

GENE SMITH

Please, please!

ANNA STEINBERG

Aahhh!

GENE SMITH

Please - uh... oh no!

Gene Smith gets up and runs towards the door.

ANNA STEINBERG

Gene! Where are you -

Gene is gone in the darkness.

ANNA STEINBERG

Gene! Gene, don't leave me here with all these weird disappearers!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

18.

(beat)
Gene!

DISSOLVE INTO:

INT. CHEN'S SPACE - MINUTES LATER

Ping Chen's space, like Ping Chen himself, is unchanged in nine years - the same wan light, the same mysteriously cloaked surroundings, the perfunctory misunderstanding between the audience's common sense and Ping Chen's distorted, wiser version of daily values.

Chen sits in the center of the room, deep in meditation.

Gene Smith bursts in.

GENE SMITH

Help me!

Chen knows that this is serious.

PING CHEN

What?

GENE SMITH

You must help me forget something.

PING CHEN

(gravely)

Oh. This is serious. Look me in the eye.

Gene Smith sits down in front of Chen and looks him square in the face. This is apparently something that he has done before. It is a lesson routine.

PING CHEN

(studying the face)

Wait... This is tough...

Gene Smith's focus suddenly shifts past Chen's face. He is imagining Anna where Chen should be.

Chen sees this, and a light of understanding is cast upon him.

PING CHEN

Your obsession over something, probably a woman, is devouring your ability to remember anything.

Smith wordlessly becomes sullen.

PING CHEN

Oh.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

Smith's gaze leaves the world in which he is situated.

PING CHEN
(sympathetically)
You... want me to... teach you how
to forget her.

Smith returns to Chen's world, and looks him in the eye.

PING CHEN
Am I right? You want to forget her?
If you purposefully forget one
thing, the results could be...
(beat)
...disastrous...
(beat)
You could start a... chain
reaction...

Chen realizes that if Gene Smith does not forget Anna Steinberg, he will forget everything due to his obsession over her.

PING CHEN
Are you sure that you cannot let
her and your remembrance coexist?

Smith shakes his head.

Smith drifts away again, then returns.

PING CHEN
(knowing)
Are you sure?

Smith slowly nods. Tears form in his eyes, but are pulled back. He won't let himself cry yet.

FADE TO BLACK, THEN FADE UP ON:

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - MINUTES LATER

Anna Steinberg is recovering from shock at her booth. She is sad and scared. "What could possibly be going on?" she wonders wordlessly. "Conspiracy?"

Gene enters slowly. He is like a child that has promised himself to go easy when getting a flu shot. But now, seeing the needle, all of his defenses fall and he is reduced to his core.

GENE SMITH

Anna...

ANNA STEINBERG

What?

GENE SMITH

I have... I have no idea how...
I...

ANNA STEINBERG

Gene, what are you talking about?

GENE SMITH

It's for the good of the world... I
just can't...

ANNA STEINBERG

What is it?

Gene starts to meditate. He leans back in his chair and closes his eyes.

ANNA STEINBERG

What are you doing?

Gene begins to drain his emotions. He is now stone faced.

GENE

No, Anna. I'm sorry. Goodbye.

ANNA STEINBERG

I -

Anna is gone. Smith is emotionless. His eyes are closed.

Slowly, a tear rolls out from under one of his eyes.

Gene wakes up.

(CONTINUED)

GENE SMITH
(confused)
Why am I here? What am I doing?

Gene feels his cheek.

GENE SMITH
Have... have I been crying?

Gene feels something in his pocket.

GENE SMITH
What's this?

Gene pulls out a slip. Inside it a picture of Anna.

GENE SMITH
Who is - !!!

Gene is horror-struck. The realization comes down on him like a pile of bricks. A million dots are connected in his mind. His face goes pale.

GENE SMITH
I... I... I don't know how... I've
done... I am...
(quietly, a hiss whisper)
I am... a *murderer*.

Gene turns around. The world loses saturation. It is becoming black and white.

GENE SMITH
Oh no... The tapes!

Gene sprints off.

DISSOLVE INTO:

INT. GENE'S APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER

Gene rushes in, distraught. The world is entirely black and white, and is drifting out of focus.

GENE SMITH
(desperate)
Help... help... please help...

Gene begins rifling through his stuff. He grabs the camera, and the tapes and puts them in either arm.

GENE SMITH
(crying out)
HELP!?

Derrick Gat enters, running. Gene's back is turned to him.

DERRICK GAT
Did you hear, Gene? It's all over
CNN! Televisions have stopped
working!
(beat)
And so has logic!

Derrick looks around and notices that the world is black and white. It is deteriorating.

DERRICK GAT
Gene! Gene, are you O.K.?

Gene turns around, slowly.

GENE SMITH
Stop...

DERRICK GAT
What is it?

Derrick makes for the T.V. remote. He grabs it.

DERRICK GAT
(slow-motion sounding)
Geeennneeee...

Derrick drops the remote. Gene turns around.

Derrick is gone.

Gene is sick of himself. He drops to the floor.

His room is gone. All that's left is a box of tapes and a camera.

(CONTINUED)

GENE SMITH
(weeping)
Why... Why...

Smith gets up and buries his face in his hands.

GENE SMITH
I just wanted to fix one thing to
save everyone and now... now, I've
destroyed the universe!

He looks at his hands, as though they are the weapons used
in a heinous crime - to him, they are covered in blood.

GENE SMITH
The world and everything is gone...

He stares at his hands.

GENE SMITH
(his mind drifting off)
Gone... Gone?

Something on Gene's hands registers in his mind.

GENE SMITH
(the idea "clicking")
No... The universe isn't gone!

Gene points to himself, then looks at his hands again in
disbelief.

GENE SMITH
The universe is still here...
Because I'm still here!

Gene looks towards the camera and tapes.

GENE SMITH
And the camera and tapes are still
here! But, the world itself is
gone. The world is - gone?

FLASHBACK:

Gene and Ping Chen are in a lesson.

PING CHEN
...it is a loophole, but it'll only
work once in forever...

RETURN TO PRESENT:

(CONTINUED)

GENE SMITH

Yes!

Suddenly, we are in the Camera's point of view.

GENE SMITH

(to the camera)

Hello. I am Gene Smith. I have just accidentally destroyed the entire world. However, I am still here. I am going to restore the whole world. This is a testament for future generations that will wish to see the true story of how the world was saved!

The tempo increases.

GENE SMITH

My plan is to watch my tapes, which have recorded everything that has been forgotten. If I watch the tapes, the world will be restored. It is a wonderful plan! I will be hailed as...

(beat)

"Saviour of the Universe!"

Gene is lost in thoughts of future glory.

GENE SMITH

YES! All I have to do is... watch the tapes...

Gene looks beyond the camera.

GENE SMITH

The tapes...

(beat)

Now, where'd I put the tapes...

Suddenly, Gene realizes that he's forgotten something.

GENE SMITH

(horrified)

Oh--

The camera switches to static.