



Athletic Withdrawal

Written by

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A boy, BLAKE WALKER (17), sits in a chair facing an oak desk. He's ambitious, resourceful, and extremely competitive - he doesn't handle losing well. His right knee has a bulky, black brace wrapped around it, and a pair of crutches lean against the chair.

A woman, FRANCINE ABADDON (30's), sits in a leather chair behind the desk. She's perceptive, patient, intelligent, and empathetic.

The furniture looks expensive, but not gaudy - a picture of success, not ostentatiousness.

Several degrees hang on the wall behind her, and to her left, there is a bookshelf filled with medical journals.

Dr. Abaddon scribbles in a notepad on her desk.

Blake sits slumped in the chair staring at her - he TAPS his fingers against the armrest impatiently.

She sets her pen down and looks up at him.

DR. ABADDON

So Blake, why do you think your parents set up this meeting?

BLAKE

They want me to see a shrink because my mom overreacts to everything.

DR. ABADDON

I prefer the term psychiatrist, but you can call me Dr. Abaddon.

He leans back and crosses his arms.

BLAKE

Whatever.

She SIGHS and adjusts her glasses.

DR. ABADDON

I'm sensing a little resistance. Look, I'm not trying to ruin your life, but I do need to understand how you're feeling.

BLAKE

How many times do I have to say it... I'm. Fine.

DR. ABADDON

Your teachers are concerned about you. They say you've been absent a lot lately.

BLAKE

So I skipped a few classes. I'm in grade twelve. By that logic, my entire graduating class should be in here.

DR. ABADDON

Your parents are concerned as well, they think you're depressed. Would you agree?

2 **INT. BATHROOM ROOM - NIGHT (FANTASY SEQUENCE)** 2

Blake stands in the bathroom, facing the mirror.

1 **INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY** 1

DR. ABADDON

Blake? Did you hear me?

BLAKE

...What?

DR. ABADDON

I asked if you think you're depressed.

BLAKE

Why? Because I can't play a dumb game anymore?

DR. ABADDON

I imagine tennis was more than a game to you.

BLAKE

It's a stupid game my dad forced me into when I was a kid.

DR. ABADDON

That's really how you feel?

BLAKE

Yes.

Dr. Abaddon scribbles in her notepad.

DR. ABADDON

Let's try something else. What's your earliest childhood memory?

Blake shrugs.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)

Maybe this will ring a bell.

She grabs a sheet of paper from a desk drawer and holds it in front of him, but he doesn't react.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)

(reading)

My earliest childhood memory was when I was six years old, it was Christmas morning and I really wanted a new tennis racquet. When I opened my present, I was so excited. It was exactly the one I wanted; the Matrix Ace Jr. with the blue and yellow rim.

She looks up at him expectantly.

BLAKE

So? That doesn't prove anything. It was a stupid creative writing assignment. Did you see what I got on it? An A. I made up some sappy story I knew the teacher would like.

DR. ABADDON

I see... Well, what if I read to you from these?

She grabs a stack of papers from the same drawer.

When he sees the journal-app logo on one the pages, his eyes widen, and he digs his fingers into the chair's armrest.

BLAKE

How... how did you get those?

DR. ABADDON

Your parents gave them to me. This is from two weeks before the accident. (reading) Today I beat Josh Volkov. He's the number-one-ranked player under 18 and I beat him in straight sets. After the game, dad told me he was the most proud of me he's ever been.

She looks up from the paper at him, and he fidgets in his seat.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)
Sounds like tennis was more than just a 'stupid game' to you.

BLAKE
Fine... I loved tennis. But that doesn't mean I'm depressed.

2 **INT. BATHROOM ROOM - NIGHT (FANTASY SEQUENCE)** 2

Blake opens the medicine cabinet and reaches for something.

1 **INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY** 1

Dr. Abaddon flips through the pages until she finds a specific one.

She looks at Blake pointedly before reading from the page.

DR. ABADDON
(Reading)
I saw my doctor for the second time since the surgery today. She said I probably won't be able to play tennis anymore. I don't know how I'm going to live without it.

She looks up at him.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)
From what I've read in these
(brandishes papers)
It sounds like you're depressed, possibly suicidal, and I want to help you, but the only way I can is if you're honest with me.

Blake crosses his arms and stares at her defiantly.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)
I could just have you hospitalized, * but I don't want to do that unless I have to... the problem is, if you aren't honest with me, I will have to.

His expression softens, he uncrosses his arms and lets out a deep SIGH, running his hand through his hair.

BLAKE

...Alright, fine. I guess I might be depressed. My life is so empty without tennis. Everyone treats me differently, I have no structure anymore... I don't really know what to do.

DR. ABADDON

Different how?

BLAKE

Everyone just keeps asking what I'm going to do now, and where I'm going to go to college since I lost my scholarship. I mean, I just don't know how to answer those * questions.

DR. ABADDON

Have you been having suicidal thoughts?

Blake looks down and refuses to make eye contact.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)

Blake?

He nods.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)

When you get these thoughts, are they really specific, or more abstract.

BLAKE

What do you mean?

DR. ABADDON

Do you have a plan for how you would do it?

2 **INT. BATHROOM ROOM - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)**

2

Blake grabs a bottle of pills from the cabinet - he opens the bottle and pours them into his hand.

1 **INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY**

1

BLAKE

No...

DR. ABADDON

You know, every athlete experiences this at some point in their life.

BLAKE

Experiences what?

DR. ABADDON

Having to give up playing their sport. You've just had to do it sooner than most.

BLAKE

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

DR. ABADDON

No, of course not. My point is, you aren't alone - what you're feeling is something every athlete goes through at some point in their career.

BLAKE

How is that supposed to help me?

DR. ABADDON

Well, you could join a support group for people in similar situations?

BLAKE

I would, but my high school doesn't exactly have a club for people like that... you know... since I'd be the only member.

DR. ABADDON

If you'd consider it, I can find you a group.

Blake momentarily lets his guard down.

BLAKE

I... I guess that might actually be helpful. This whole time I've been feeling so alone... like no one understands what I'm going through.

DR. ABADDON

Talking to people who can relate to what you're feeling might help you cope with these changes.

BLAKE

Okay... I guess I could give it a try.

DR. ABADDON

Have you noticed you haven't been able to enjoy the things you love to do?

BLAKE

Well, I mean, I loved to play tennis and I can't anymore, so I'm not really sure what you mean... Obviously I haven't been enjoying the things I love to do because I can't fucking do them.

DR. ABADDON

I mean the things you enjoyed doing besides tennis. You know: going to movies, parties... things kids your age do?

He pauses, a thoughtful expression appears on his face

BLAKE

I've never really done any of that stuff... I've always been too busy. After school, my dad would pick me up and bring me to the club and I'd practice until it closed.

DR. ABADDON

And this was your schedule every day? Even on weekends?

BLAKE

Pretty much. On Fridays, we would finish early so I could hang out with friends for a couple hours, but I could never go to parties or anything because my dad would always get me up early Saturday and Sunday mornings to train.

DR. ABADDON

Did you ever resent how much time you spent training?

BLAKE

Well, I mean sometimes I wished I could spend more time with friends instead...

(MORE)

BLAKE (CONT'D)

But, when I saw the results on the court, it made it all worth it.

DR. ABADDON

Did you feel it was worth it even when you lost?

BLAKE

Yes. Losing just helped me get better. My dad always said I either won or I learned.

DR. ABADDON

It sounds like your dad is really supportive.

BLAKE

Yeah... he was...

Blake lowers his head and stares at the floor.

DR. ABADDON

Do you feel like your relationship has changed since the accident?

He fights back tears.

DR. ABADDON (CONT'D)

Blake?

BLAKE

Yeah... Sometimes I feel like, now that I can't play anymore, he doesn't even want me around.

DR. ABADDON

That must be hard. Have you told him how you feel?

BLAKE

No...

DR. ABADDON

I'm sure he's struggling with your situation nearly as much as you are.

He sits up in his chair; his expression darkens.

BLAKE

What do you mean?

DR. ABADDON

Well, you aren't the only one who had their schedule disrupted - he did too. I'm sure it isn't easy for him to see you lose something you love, something over which the two of you bonded.

His face contorts into a snarl.

BLAKE

So that makes it okay for him to act like I don't exist? He doesn't pick me up from school anymore, he doesn't cook or seem to care what I eat, he barely even talks to me... it's like he doesn't even care that I survived the crash.

DR. ABADDON

These are all things you need to tell him. Maybe we could set up an appointment for the three of us.

BLAKE

He doesn't believe in therapy. My mom set this up. He doesn't care about me now that I can't play tennis.

He looks down at the floor.

DR. ABADDON

Blake, I don't think that's true. It sounds like he was also very invested in your tennis career. I certainly don't think he would make the sacrifices he did if he didn't care about you.

BLAKE

What sacrifices?

DR. ABADDON

Didn't you say he would get up early in the mornings to train with you on weekends? And spend his evenings with you at the club?

BLAKE

...Yeah, I guess that's true.

DR. ABADDON

He's probably struggling with this almost as much as you are. He likely doesn't want you to know because he doesn't want you to feel worse.

BLAKE

You think?

DR. ABADDON

It's possible. I definitely think you need to talk to each other.

BLAKE

Okay... I guess that's worth a shot.

Dr. Abaddon scribbles in her notepad, then puts the pen down and closes it.

DR. ABADDON

Based on what we've talked about today, I don't think you need to be hospitalized, but I do think you need to talk to a counselor, and your dad. I will try and schedule a follow-up appointment for the three of us.

BLAKE

Okay.

She stands, walks over to his chair, helps him up, and hands him his crutches.

As he hobbles towards the door, she stops him.

DR. ABADDON

Blake, if you ever feel like the suicidal thoughts are too much, and you start thinking about acting on them, please call me.

She hands him her card.

He nods, and slips it into his pocket.

3

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

3

Blake hobbles into his living room on his crutches and throws his school bag down on the floor next to the couch.

In the corner of the room is a shelf filled with trophies. Leaning against the shelf is a tennis racket with a blue and yellow rim.

On the counter that separates the kitchen from the living room, is a piece of paper.

He picks it up. It reads: "I won't be home for dinner, there might be something in the freezer you can heat up. Dad."

His eyes well with tears. He crumples the paper and throws it across the room.

4

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

4

Blake stumbles into the bathroom and opens the cupboard above the sink - he grabs a bottle from the shelf - the same as the bottle in his fantasy.

He closes the cupboard door and gets a glimpse at himself in the mirror - he slams it in disgust.

He takes a seat on the edge of the bathtub and opens the bottle - he pours some of the pills into his hand, as he goes to raise his hand to his mouth, several pills fall out and land in his lap - he reaches for the pills and feels the outline of something in his pocket.

He sets the bottle down and pulls out Dr. Abaddon's card. He glances at the bottle of pills, then back to the card.

He grabs his phone and dials the number. It RINGS once - it RINGS twice - it RINGS a third time.

DR. ABADDON (V.O.)

Hello?

BLAKE

Hi Dr. Abaddon, it's Blake. Can we talk?

FADE OUT.