

# THE KEY OF G

a film by Robert Arnold

**Amy (offscreen):** The wind sounds kind of like the creek, huh? It gets louder and louder as it gets closer. It's kind of like we watch the wind on the water.

**Amy:** You can hear it and you can feel it coming. Yeah. It's windy.

**Amy (VO):** When you have a child you don't quite know what path it's going to take. You know, you assume it's going to be the normal experiences; birthdays, holidays, graduations. In Gannet's case, it's, it was simply different.

**Amy:** Alright, G-Man, you need to set the table. You're going to have cereal this morning for breakfast on the table, you see that? So you need a bowl and a spoon and a cup. Let's go to the cupboard. Pick it up and don't drop it. There you go, on the table.

[Gannet making noises]

**Amy:** Stop, stop. Get your spoon, and carry it to the table. On the table.

[Gannet making noises]

**Amy:** On the table, come on, let it go. There you go.

**Amy (VO):** Until he was about 10 or 12, Gannet lived in his own little world. You went to his world. He didn't come into your world. Now that he's 22, he's really started to come out and he's joined our world.

**Amy:** So I'm going to get a cup of coffee while you're doing that G-Man. Come on, let's keep going. All the way down. Okay, you just have to tip a little bit, just a little bit. Listen, listen, you can hear the milk, listen. Just a little more.

**Amy (VO):** It's been many, many years of juggling full time Gannet, full time job. I'm not the master juggler of life that I used to be. I'm really looking forward to having a life of my own. And I think Gannet is ready to have a life of his own. You know, he needs peers. He needs energy. He's got this great group of caregivers. They're artists and musicians and it's kind of their influence that leads me to believe that yes, it is time for him to move out.

**Colter:** Hey Gannet, you here to welcome me?

**Colter:** Yeah, I completely overslept. I don't know what came over me.

**Amy:** Mom's gotta go. I need a kiss. Huh? Yeah. Okay, bye-bye. You guys have to make it happen. It's like say, Amy, he has to move.

**Colter:** Yeah.

**Amy:** Because it's not, you know. It's like I keep on, I notice like I keep on like oh Gannet. It's hard. Chris is not looking forward to it.

**Colter:** Yeah.

**Amy:** Me, my transition.

**Colter:** I bet.

**Colter:** You need help? You gonna help? Okay, be gentle. Oh, oh, gentle.

**Donal:** Come on. I think your hand could be up here. Not on the cloth, right there. Come on, walk with me now, come on. This way's good. Gannet, the ground's flat, right? It's totally safe. So let's walk like this. You've done it before. What are you looking at? What are you looking at?

**Amanda:** Hello! Hello! Nice to see you Gannet. Be gentle though. I'm your friend, right?

[Amanda makes snoring noises and Gannet responds with Achoo!]

**Amy:** So this is in Youngstown, Ohio. We were arriving for Christmas. Gannet is four months old. Looking back at it and having been a mother and been around other babies, I look and I go oh yeah, something's wrong with him. I can see where he's floppy and he's mouthing more than other babies did. But at that point, you know, he was just recovering from his surgeries and he would most likely develop at a later date. If I would say his name, if I would come in after work at the daycare and he would get all excited that mom's here. But I could come in after work and put my face in front of him and he'd scan over my face and just be looking around and there wouldn't be any recognition that I was any different than any other person. Through the testing we knew that his brain was picking up the brain waves for sight. And the doctor said well he's getting the patterns, we can tell his brain's getting the patterns, but it's not processing the information so the world doesn't make any sense to him visually. For example he's looking at the bell and listening to the bell and it looks like he watching it and he's all excited about it but then Dad changes it down here and until it touches his hand he's still looking up here. How do you teach somebody to see? I mean you see, you function, you see, you know what to do with it. There was one teacher, he said talk to your son all the time. Explain things to him, talk to him, just constantly, constantly, whatever you do that's the most important thing you can do, is just talk to him all the time. So that, you know this is the shirt that's going to go over your head and this is the spoon you're going to eat with and this is the car you're going to play with. And that's kind of how he learned to see. Because he loves looking at stuff now. He gets his face down into photographs and looks at all the cars and everything. And that's this whole world that he kind of grew into.

**Amanda:** [singing and whistling] Oh Michigan, Michigan State. How I want to live in you. I've never been to Michigan State... That is a really nice car, isn't it?

**Colter:** Wanna go for a joy ride? Yeah? [Colter makes car noises] Gannet? Is that a Volkswagen bug?

**Donal:** Pssssheww. We're going to turn the corner and then we'll look at a car.

**Donal:** Okay, we're going to talk about this. If you were in this van, where would you go? Hm? Go out of town? Yeah? What would you do there? If you were out of town, what would you do? Something special. You'd go to a park? Yeah. If you drove this van to the park, what would you do? Have a picnic? That sounds like a fun day. Thank you Gannet, thank you for the conversation. That's a lovely trip. We should do it some time.

**Amanda:** You show me where to go. You show me where to go. Who's up there? That big fish is older than you. He's 27 years old. 27 years old. Big fish.

**Donal (VO):** In general I say I work with an autistic kid. But I don't know that Gannet is literally autistic. You can say that he has non-degenerative brain damage, but that's a little vague, too. You can say that his right brain and his left brain don't talk. He can understand more than you'd expect, but he can't

return it. Depending on who I'm talking to and their reaction to him.

**Donal:** One of the best parts of the job is watching people like start understanding that he's a person, like a full person, just a person who goes about it all differently. The kind of relationship we have is not encouraged institutionally. Don't give out your home phone number.

**Amanda:** Yeah.

**Donal:** You can if you want but really you want to leave your job at the door. Don't have an intense physical affectionate relationship with the client.

**Donal:** So this is Mike, he's going to work with you too.

**Amy:** Another new face.

**Mike:** Hello, hi Gannet.

**Amy:** The key with Gannet is to try to get him to do as much as he can independently and then just assist at the key moments where he needs the help. You know and I keep on telling him that life with caregivers is going to be a lot different than life with mom. It's trying to get him to be responsible for his actions for getting thing done as much as he can so that he isn't just totally dependent on everybody for everything and is a helpless little...

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Amy:** Which he'd love to be. Which is why he protests so much, I think.

**Amy:** And then he can turn it off. There you go. Thank you.

[Gannet making noises]

**Grandma:** I'll let you go honey and have a good evening.

**Amy:** Say hi to Gannet, he just walked in the room.

**Grandma:** Oh, okay. Gannet, this is Ama. Oh Gannet, it's Ama. Yeah.

**Amy:** He's laughing.

**Grandma:** My goodness. That's my boy. How's my boy. Hm?

**Amy:** He's got a big smile on his face.

**Grandma:** Oh Gannet, I know what I'm going to tell you. I love you. Achoo!

[Gannet laughs and smiles.]

**Amy:** Good night mom.

**Grandma:** Bye bye.

**Amy:** Have a good one.

**Grandma:** Okay, good night.

**Amy:** Good night. Bonk.

**Amy:** Let me cover you up Mr. G. Let me cover you up.

**Donal:** Hey Gannet, you want to sit on the front porch? Mr. G? Do you want to go out to the front porch and play with your car? Come on Gannet? Achoo. Look, here's your car. Check it out. No? Come on kiddo? Hey. Put down your hand. Your head still hurt? Here's a tissue. You want to go back inside? Hmm? Now I'll put on a record for you. Something quiet. Come on.

**Donal:** Alright Mr. G. Now what's all this about, huh? What's going on? Sick. Hm. How? What's wrong? You've got a headache. You've got headache, what else? What else is going on? Hm, you've got a pain. Do you have a pain somewhere else? Where? In your head. Just a headache, yeah? Well we took some medicine, so hopefully that's going to help. [Donal makes noises for Gannet]

**Donal:** Come on G. Come on up.

**Someone:** Hey G-Man.

**Donal:** Here's the door to your new house. This is where you're going to live, you're going to sleep, have dinner, everything. You know which room is going to be your room? This is it. That's your dresser. And we'll probably have your bed right here. And that window, this is your window. You can hear the street. Yeah, you can hear cars going by. Oh yeah, good! Fun wall. This is going to be my room. This is the kitchen. We have all these drawers for you to play with. Right there, between those two doors, that's where your piano is going to be. So you can come in here and play piano. Yeah. Would you like to do that? Do you think this would be a good room to play piano in? Hm? Yeah. I don't know if that means a yes or a no.

**Gannet:** Achoo!

**Amy:** We still have two boxes of clothes and stuff that will go in. No, that can go in my car.

**Amanda:** Do you guys feel nervous? Do you feel fine?

**Mike:** A little anxiety, yeah.

**Donal:** Oh totally. I'm a little freaked out.

**Amanda:** Really?

**Donal:** Not even a little. I'm scared. Well I deal with him every, I'm like well I'm like this life is pretty fragile. There's a lot that can go wrong with this being. And I deal with it everyday in public, in all the dangers of the public.

**Amy:** Yeah.

**Donal:** Why is it scarier in the home, where the risk is much less? And yet it seems so much more like...

**Amy:** Because you are the one.

[Everyone laughs]

**Amy:** Everyone points their fingers at you. He's the one.

**Amy:** He hasn't seen his room yet.

**Colter:** He hasn't?

**Amy:** Colter, no.

[ Colter show's Gannet around his old room, now empty]

**Colter:** You know it's in a new place, right? Pretty crazy, huh? You're okay with that? You haven't seen it empty, huh?

[People talking in the other room]

**Colter:** Don't sit down, that's where the bed was. Yeah. We're going to go back to your place, right? To sleep. Yeah.

**Amy:** You have a whole new apartment, new roommates. Yeah, are you ready for it? You ready to go home? Huh? Are you ready? You're thinking about it. This is it Mr. G-man.

**Chris:** Time to go home.

**Amy:** Are you ready to go home?

**Donal:** I feel like we're stealing him.

**Colter:** I know.

**Donal:** What's up kiddo? It's fun to be out late; huh G. It's a different world now man. No more of this in bed at 7. We are going out every night. And you're going to sleep till 11. What do you think?

**Donal:** Mr. G, come on into the living room.

**Colter:** Why don't you just move around? Move around, there you go, take some steps. Feel free, you can do it, you don't need me. What does Amy usually do? I don't know.

**Donal:** Alright, here you go, you take him into bed and give him a rub and scratch his back a little bit and then you read some Dylan Thomas to him. Seriously, that's what she does.

**Colter:** Really? Dylan Thomas?

**Colter:** [Makes noises and then reads to Gannet] Okay. The engine's turning into an ocean now. Turn off the ignition. We're slowing down. [reading aloud] "No this is the first time here, I said. Sometimes I stand in the Brynmill arch. Ever try the old pier? It's no good in the rain is it? Underneath the pier I mean, in the girders. No, I haven't been there. The wheels screamed through our heads, we were deafened and spark-blinded." Sleep to the sirens.

**Donal:** Hi G. Good morning. What's up? [Makes noises.] You are.

**Mike:** It wasn't a dream, huh G-Man?

**Donal:** Ah ha, let's hope the milk lasts. We'll have to get Mike to go get groceries. Okay, here's your spoon.

[Gannet eats cereal]

[Phone rings, Donal answers]

**Donal:** Hello. Well, he woke up at 2 and he was banging around. And I thought he had to go pee, so I got him up and he didn't have to go pee. He was just awa,e and exploring the bed. And then he got back up at 3. Yes. And then he didn't want to get up this morning, but he's up now. So...

**Colter:** Maybe it's not this Laundromat?

**Colter:** You take me to see the video game. Where is it? I'm following you now. Is it at that new Laundromat that just opened up by the temple? [Gannet does the hand sign for yes] Oh, why didn't you tell me?

[At the video game]

**Colter:** Check it out.

[Playing the race car video game]

**Donal:** Piano? Okay. So what we'll do, we'll take you to go pee and then you can play piano if you want. How does that sound?

[Gannet plays piano]

**Donal:** Alright, come here I need you to talk to me for a minute, okay? How were you? Were you homesick? Did you feel something? Do you want something? What? Huh? Alright, alright. We'll talk about it later.

[music]

**Donal:** Colter and I were talking about what a good house this is yesterday. This strange, state-funded, little thing we have here. Living like this, where like the work I do for him is directly translated into the place where you live. I'm not working for a corporation. I'm not working with people I hate, you know. As much as you might gripe about the way things don't get done or the way other people do stuff, we're all here because we all care about him or we want to do work that's about taking care of someone. I mean Gannet's love is really like, you know it's violent and it goes up and down. Just when you're ready to kill him because you can't make any headway, you know then all of a sudden you just get this hug. You know this long, drooly, grizzly little hug that he gives. You know there's this, there's this vivid, like really intense force that's life. Like it's always pushing itself outward from whatever it's source is, the plant, Gannet, you know. You watch it, just like all that energy that ripples through him, it looks like it's going to break his bones sometimes, you know. And it's like at the same time it's so fragile. Like his sight is going, you know there's always the question of how long can he, you know how long can he maintain? Like what is his actual life span? You know, but his life force doesn't know anything about that, it just wants, it's just like. I mean he's the most vibrant person I've ever met in a certain way.

**Donal:** Hi Mr. G. Please don't kick that into my stereo. If you want to be in here, you're welcome to come in, but the ball should probably go out.

[Greetings]

**Friend:** Do you feel like the house is yours? Like do you feel like you have it back?

**Amy:** I do. The thing is, you know, changing, kind of filling the rooms in different ways. We've moved the bedroom upstairs, Chris has his library downstairs and Gannet has a guestroom. When Gannet walked out the door, I thought, I always envisioned myself going to pieces. And Chris was like, oh my god, for like the last year.

**Chris:** Yeah.

**Amy:** You're going to be hell to live with. I don't want to see that moment when Gannet goes out of this house because you're going to be a basket case. I had no tears; no emotion other than isn't it great that he's walking off. This group of five people came up, happy as a lark and Gannet's like "Okay, I'm ready." And it's like I saw nothing but the back of his head walking down the stairs and up the street. No look back. I have it so lucky right now that it's just, it couldn't be any better.

**Donal:** You know what, maybe it's time to get your jammies on.

[Gannet making noises]

**Colter:** Hey G, hey, hey, hey. Let's try to redirect it. The legs. Can you hit your legs? No, no, no no. Deep breaths. C'mon, deep breaths. You were so good today. You gotta let it all out. Do you have a headache? Hmmm? Do you have a headache?

**Colter:** Gannet, geez loueez man. Listen, we can't be hitting our eyes like that, remember that, the sick eye? Right? We can't be hitting it like that. That's like the eighth time tonight. That's bad. Yesterday it was five. That was better but we can't do any. None, none, none. None, none, none. None.

**Donal:** Mr. G I know you're trying. I know you can be smart and not hit your eye. I know you can, right? You just hit the bed instead.

**Donal:** Do you know what you're going to do today Mr. G? What are you and Colter going to do? Huh? Come on, talk to me. It's not hard, you do it all the time. Where you going today, huh? A dance, no. You're going to the doctor today.

**Amy:** Can you look up? Look at the doctor.

**Doctor:** It's okay. He's doing fine actually.

**Amy:** Let's put your hand down. Let's move it down.

**Colter:** I'm going to hold on tight to you for 10 seconds okay.

**Doctor:** I got his nerve. His nerve is good. My biggest concern is that he not get what we call a hypermature cataract where the cataract starts to disintegrate within the eye. If he ever has a trauma where he can actually rupture his capsule, then it's an emergency to take out that lens.

**Amy:** Yeah.

**Colter:** This one particular dream, I don't remember what Gannet said exactly, but I remember what he did. I had a video camera, we were in his room and we were both sitting on the bed and then I left the room and when I came back he had moved and I pushed rewind on the camera. It was almost like he was possessed or something, he floated up like horizontal, horizontal right? Yeah. So he was like sideways and then he just like looked at the camera and he said something like 'It's okay, I understand.' Something like that, or 'It's cool, everything's cool.'

[others laugh]

**Donal:** When I haven't been around it for a while, I miss this. [pats Colter's shoulder]

**Amanda:** Yeah, I miss that.

**Donal:** This constant like, in a way it's totally grounding because you're always...

**Colter:** Or the little pat. That's the best.

**Donal:** Yeah, you're boundaries are always being defined. I mean I don't know what that touch is doing for him but for me it's always like I'm here, Gannet's there.

**Colter:** Do you miss this? [Colter hits Donal] Sorry.

**Donal:** Calm down. Achoo. [Donal hits Colter back]

**Donal:** I'm really hard pressed to know why I just decided that I really wanted Gannet to recognize me and wanted to have a friendship with him. I wanted to figure out how much of a person he was and I wanted that person to respond to me, I really wanted him to just, you know. I don't know why. Because you know when you first see Gannet it just seems like he's in that world all by himself. It seems so self-contained. I wanted to know what was going on in that head. Which is a question we'll never know. I don't know. I ended up just really falling in love with him. I know they'll come a day when I'm not going to be doing this anymore. I really can't see being 50 years old and still taking care of Gannet. But it's going to be hard. If I think about it I get really bummed out.

**Colter:** Come on, you can't rub your eyes. Stop rubbing your eyes. What do you want to do? Huh? No, you gotta look. Why don't you want to communicate? Huh?

**Colter:** No step, it's all still flat. That's a shadow.

**Colter:** Today we were walking and again we came to like the shadow area. We had come out of the sun and Gannet got really mistrustful. And wouldn't take any steps and I looked at his eye and it was just so clear, I don't know, that his eye was equally as fogged up as the other one. So it's like these two clouds now.

**Donal:** And I have big and unhappy news for you.

**Voice off-screen:** What's up?

**Donal:** Gannet's vision is going fast. The cataract's grown intensely in his other eye. He can't see very, he can probably see half of what he could last week. I mean we're all guessing but. We've made appointments. We can't get anything until March 21st last time I checked. So it's a serious thing. If he has the operation it means

a long period of him being in, you know restrained and in pain and trying to make sure he doesn't do any damage to himself. Like it's going to be really intense. And the hardest part is going to be making him understand why.

**Donal:** Okay cross the threshold, yeah see it's alright. There's even more light out here, you can see better. And if you can't see it, then well just walk forward. I'm going to help you. Okay? Come on. Come straight. Okay? Floor is solid underneath you. Come on. Just walk. Just walk. Look, it's getting brighter. It's getting easier to see. You don't have to worry about it.

**Amy:** I think okay; don't wallow in this because the tendency is just to go I'm so pissed. I can just, I just want to punch my fist through the wall. I mean you work so hard, he works so hard. He's got so many deficits. He finally, you know, can walk. He finally can see. He finally relents and starts uses picture communication.

**Chris:** You know if you continually think oh, you know that's the end of it and then it happens again then you just get driven deeper down into that well.

**Amy:** It's just those little, those little moments that, that were so enjoyable though. Like taking him to the car shows and he, he'll never drive. He just loves cars. And he just loves looking at them and for me it was such a sheer pleasure to see him stick his head in. And he loves dashboards. And to look at the dashboard and look at it. And I don't know what he gets out of it. I don't know what the fascination is with cars and dashboards. It's like you get to a point and you achieve success here and then something else goes wrong. And then you do something here and then something else goes wrong. It's kind of like having the luxury to live your life where you don't expect the shoe to fall at any given moment would just be, to me, I wouldn't know what it feels like.

**Colter:** Where are the goggles? They're in his backpack.

**Donal:** Yeah where is his back brace? Because I...

**Amy:** His front brace.

**Donal:** Where is that?

**Amy:** This is it. This is for the back.

**Colter:** Why does that thing stick out?

**Amy:** Oh I bet because this thing is supposed to go like this.

**Colter:** Oh, I see.

**Amy:** So everything fits if the brace, neck brace fits inside of the helmet like that.

**Donal:** Yeah, and you know that actually...

**Amy:** That probably helps to stabilize it a little bit.

**Donal:** Yeah, it's much harder to move your head back.

**Amy:** So what it sounds like from what I've heard from the pre-op and stuff is that

two weeks is a really critical time. Gannet can't put his head down or bend over or do anything that puts pressure on the eyeballs. And because he can't touch his eye or do anything else, it sounds like all of these pieces of equipment will come into play 24 hours a day almost for the two weeks.

**Donal:** Yeah, so get him all cleaned up and ready to go.

[under his breath]He's supposed to be there at one o'clock and he's still laying there...

**Donal:** [packing Gannet's bag] Pajamas. Slippers. Where is his black car? There's a car, it's the black one. The one, vroom, vroom.

[Doorbell rings, Amy arrives]

**Amy:** We've got three t-shirts, two jeans.

**Donal:** You got the small powder?

**Amy:** Are you ready Donal?

**Donal:** No, I'm not.

**Amy:** [to Gannet] You getting ready? So we're going to put your truck down soon. Oh not out the window. No, we got to take it with us. Oh Gannet, your teeth are chattering.

**Donal:** Come on Mr. G, you ready? Okay. There you go. You got it. Step down one, two. Look how good you're doing.

**Amy:** Admitting is right across from these...

**Chris:** So I should just park here and drop you off?

**Colter:** Bzzt. Bzzt.

**Amy:** Hello.

**Donal:** Mr. G, what's up? How are you doing Gannet?

**Colter:** There you go, he hears you.

**Donal:** You're not in any achoo mood, are you? What's happening in that little head of yours. [Gannet groans] Um, I see.

**Amy:** [removing the eye patch] There you go, one, two, three. Hey, hello. It's all off. Yeah. Hello. I wonder what he's thinking. It must be pretty incredible.

**Amy:** [speaking to Gannet] Yeah they said it came out really, really well. They're really happy with it. And they gave you a lens so you can see again. They said yeah, we're going to try. We're going to take a chance. See now you can stare back at us, we've all been staring at you for days Gannet. We've just been staring at you burning a hole into your forehead. Yeah. Mom's happy. Mom is so happy. Oh. Big weight, huh? Big weight lifted off of you. A big sigh of relief. Oh yeah.

**Donal:** Psst. Hi, hi. [removing the eye patch] Let's get this off. Good morning Gannet. Do you really need to do that with your head?

**Donal:** Can you see the camera now? [Using the communication book] Okay, let's talk about your eye, okay? How is your eye? It's better, right. If you touch your eye, what happens? Yes, it gets sick again.

[Getting Gannet ready to go outside]

Come here G. Hold this for me. Thank you. Here, hold on to that one too. Guard it with your life. Thank you. Now hopefully soon we can take this off when we're going walking, I hope. He's preparing to go into the deep sea world. I know you don't like them. But if we want to go look at cars we have to do this.

**Donal:** It's a few cars away. Yeah, let's go. We're off. Walking fast.

**Donal:** You know see, in the film this is where you are looking at cars, shaking with joy and like the string music comes in, you know, the big music. I don't know. Maybe like a big Kenny G melody just comes blossoming up and the credits starts rolling and everybody thinks Gannet lives happily ever after. What do you think of that?

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