

Meet the family

A short screenplay
By
Alex Broun

Email: abroun@bigpond.net.au

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INT. AA MEETING - DAY

PLEASE NOTE: Ideally this script should be shot in one long take.

CLOSE UP - Toby, a tall, thin young man in his late 20s.

He has tanned skin and curly black hair and is dressed in a moderately priced suit, shirt and tie - which is loosened around his neck at the end of a long day. But for now we see only his face lit by bright fluorescent lights.

TOBY

My name is Toby and I'm an alcoholic. And I'm three years sober today.

From off screen we hear a warm round of APPLAUSE and calls of "Well done Toby", "On ya Tobes".

TOBY

Thanks.

(beat)

I wish I could stand here and tell you how great the last three years has been, how I passed my bar exams and how grateful I am to be sober, and I am, but I've got a few other matters that I need to talk about. I've had an ... interesting week. Got a little surprise.

The camera begins to track back very slowly, away from Toby.

TOBY

I'm adopted, I've shared about that before so most of you know that. It's not a big drama. I've known since I was eight. My parents were going to tell me when I was ten but they thought that I was a smart kid and I might work it out before so they told me on my eighth birthday. Last week I turned twenty eight so they decided to give me another informative little gift. Again they were going to wait till I was thirty five, till I'd fully matured, but they thought I needed to know now. So last Sunday I go there for dinner and after the apple crumble birthday cake they hand me an envelope. I think - a cheque. How nice? In it is a card and on the card a name and a number. "Thought you might want to know who your real parents were".

(MORE)

TOBY (cont'd)

I look up and Dad's smiling sweetly. Mum squeezes his hand. I look back at the card.

Toby looks down. Beat. He looks up, angry now.

TOBY

Just who do they think they are to make that decision! It's a pretty big thing. Meeting your birth parents. Pretty traumatic. Who says that I'm ready for something like that or even that I want to meet them? Just what gives my mum and dad the right to choose.

He tries to calm himself.

TOBY

I try to put it on the programme. Hand over. Let go let God. Okay maybe the time is right. Maybe my higher power is guiding me towards my birth parents for some reason. So, next morning, I ring the number. It's the agency. "My name's Toby Walsh. I'd like to be put in contact with my birth parents." They ask me to come in and see them. I go in that afternoon, listen to some spiel about being prepared, great shock, blah blah blah. Nod my head, look very serious and about half an hour later - a name and an address. Duffy. Maroubra. My name is Toby Duffy and I come from Maroubra. From the Walshs of Gordon to the Duffys of Maroubra. Okay so I guess I could write them a letter or look up their phone number - but that's not my style. Not dramatic enough.

The camera has pulled back a little distance now and we can make out the side of a "Twelve Steps" banner hanging on the wall behind Toby as he continues.

TOBY

So the next night, Tuesday, I get in the car. Eventually I find the house. Drive past it three times. Finally I park the car. Look around for muggers and make a quick dash for the front door. Knock knock knock. Wait. Wait some more. Nothing. Just about to make a dash back to the car when the door creaks open. There's a ...

(MORE)

TOBY (cont'd)

woman on the other side. "Clearly I must have the wrong house. I'm looking for the Duffy family." "Not here. Up north. Cairns." "Do you have their new address?" "Come in." I'm led into a surprisingly comfy living room just off a well ordered kitchen. I've seen Court Houses messier than this. There's an old man sitting in a chair, listening to the radio. He smiles. The woman asks me if I want some tea. Strangely I say yes. She potters around in the kitchen for about ten minutes, leaves me to listen to the music with the smiling old man. Finally she comes back with the tea. Smells awful, not like any tea I've ever had, but tastes really good. She puts a photo into my hand.

We are further away now and we see the corner of a table to Toby's right, with some pamphlets stacked in a pile. The wall we can see is painted light blue, with some paint flaking, and there is the hint of the fluros hanging above his head.

TOBY

"Who's this?" "That's who you're looking for. Tony Duffy. He's our cousin." It's a blurry snapshot of a man standing in front of an old beat up car. Maybe the one they drove to Cairns. He's wearing a yellow T-shirt, red shorts and thongs and as my eyes slowly adjust to the half light of the living room, I see more detail. His hair is thick and wavy, just like mine, his lips dark red, just like mine and his fingers long and skinny, just like mine. But there's something else. His skin is dry, you can tell even from the photo. Bone dry, creased and patchy. And unmistakably, one hundred percent, a very definite shade of black.

(beat)

I'm out of the house in a flash. Back in the car. I'm sitting there, my head spinning. Trying to catch my breath. Next second - there's that bloody blackout. Every light in the street just goes -

Toby clicks his fingers. We are far enough away now to see his hand come into view in front of his chest.

TOBY

Sit there in the dark. Wonder if Mr. Duffy's cousins have any candles. Eventually, I drive home. Do you know how hard it is to drive across this city through pitch black ?

Toby looks down. Beat. He looks up again, tears welling in his eyes. The camera now begins to move slowly back towards him.

TOBY

I'm one-eighth Ningali. Nin-gali. I can't even say it. I'm humiliated, embarrassed, appalled. Back in Gordon, I look at my parents. My mother, serving the peas. My dad sipping his red wine. Did they know all along that I was ... ? Or had they, like me, thought my dark skin was from somewhere else ? I look at them sitting around our dining table. Suddenly I don't feel like this is home anymore. How did it go ?" says Mum. Dad looks up, anxiously. "Fine. Just fine." Dad nods. "That's good then. Juice?" All through dinner I have to force myself to swallow each mouthful. Stop myself from puking up all over the antique white table cloth.

Toby finds a rye smile on his face.

TOBY

So now I'm an alcoholic, aboriginal. Overnight I have become a cliché. Next thing you know I'll lose my job.

There is a smatter of chuckles from off screen.

TOBY

Jesus. What am I meant to do now ? Go and sit under a gum tree. Find the nearest corroboree. Indigenous. I feel about as indigenous as a Big Mac.

A few more chuckles break out.

TOBY

I don't even like the bush.

He becomes serious again.

TOBY

But I can still taste that old
woman's tea in my mouth ? And why
have I still got this photo?

Toby takes the photo out of his pocket. He looks down at it
then holds it up alongside his face.

TOBY

Meet the family.

Toby holds it there for awhile. Somewhere in the room someone
coughs. Toby lowers the photograph.

The camera is now back where it started in a tight close up
on Toby's face.

TOBY

Thank god I'm sober. Imagine
dealing with this half pissed.

Finally the tension breaks and from off screen we hear
laughter, ripple across the meeting hall.

Toby wipes the tears away from his eyes with his hand.

TOBY

Thanks for letting me share.

Toby looks out at the unseen audience. He tries to smile.

Freeze frame. Slow fade to black.