

Secrets

by

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Short film script

EXT. THE DERELICT HOUSE - DUSK

The house stands alone and derelict by the road. It has obviously been deserted for some time; the windows are broken and most of the paint has peeled from the weathered timbers and from the rusting iron roof. We treat the house as a landscape, gliding across the close detail of the surfaces - the cracked, weathered contours of the weatherboards with their tongues of peeling paint, the broken glass of the windows, the battered architraves and weathered brick, the corroding swells of the corrugated iron.

The images of this macro landscape dissolve rhythmically into one another, building the overall image of the deserted building through the accumulation of detail. We find the title graphics carved raggedly - like rough hewn graffiti - into the wood.

INT. NICK'S SHED - DAY

Nick is polishing his rifle when he hears the sound of his father's car pulling up. He puts the gun down and moves to the window. Dulcie is at work in her flower garden and pays no attention to Ron's arrival at first.

RON

Hey, Dulce, brought you a present.

With the air of an enthusiastic adolescent about him, Ron brandishes a large, gift-wrapped package at his wife. Dulcie turns her bruised face towards him and looks at him coldly. He thrusts the offering at her and she takes it, maintaining her frostiness.

RON (CONT'D)

Well, aren't ya gunna open it?

Only at Ron's prompting does Dulcie start to unwrap the parcel - she is stunned by the lavish gift - the dress is a window into another world.

DULCIE

Oh, Ron. Its beautiful.

Ron beams at her with unaffected pleasure.

RON

Well, let's see it on you, then.

Dulcie exits towards the house.

INT DAY

NICK'S SHED

Ron removes two smaller packages from the car and walks towards Nick's shed. Inside, Nick hurriedly resumes his seat and goes back to cleaning his gun, as the door opens.

RON (CONT'D)
Thought you'd be in here. World's
cleanest gun, eh?

Nick does not react to the joke.

RON (CONT'D)
Here. Brought you something.

He tosses a package to Nick.

NICK
(without enthusiasm)
Thanks.

RON
(good humouredly)
Well, aren't ya gunna open it?

Nick mechanically opens the package, revealing a gleaming new hunting knife. His hostility melts before this wonderous gift. He opens out the blades, turning it so the light catches the metal.

RON (CONT'D)
Thought you'd like it.

Nick recovers himself; he is being bribed and he knows it, but he can not bring himself to reject the knife.

NICK
(with some of his
previous flatness,
but rattled)
Thanks.

Ron is deflated by Nick's reaction to the knife.

RON
Thought you and me might do some
hunting together, sometime. 'Bout
time that gun of yours got some
use.

NICK
Yeah, sure.

At a loss, Ron stays a moment longer, but the silence defeats him.

RON
Well, I'll go and find Nipper
then. Got something for him too.

Nick picks up the knife, but the wonderful object has been tainted.

EXT. NICK'S SHOOTING RANGE IN THE BUSH DAY

Nick is shooting with exceptional accuracy at an array of cans and bottles. He does not see Rogers watching from his horse some distance away behind him.

MR ROGERS

Getting to be quite a crack shot,
young Nick. I was wondering who's
shooting range this was.

Nick looks up, startled by the intrusion.

NICK

Oh...G'day, Mr Rogers

MR ROGERS

You must be making a few bob out
of the possums.

NICK

(looking down,
embarrassed)
Don't like shooting real things
much.

ROGERS

(genuinely taken
aback)
They're only possums, boy.

NICK

(refusing to look
up)
Yeah, s'pose so.

Rogers looks at Nick for a moment, bemusedly but not unkindly.

MR ROGERS

Well, be seeing you.

He begins to move off, and only now does Nick lift his eyes. He lifts his hand in a hesitant farewell, which Rogers returns with a smile. Nick's eyes follow him long after he has moved out of sight.

EXT. THE DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Ron's car sweeps down the drive; Nick watches it go, then exits for the shed.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HOUSE -- NIGHT

Ron stumbles, cursing, from the car, towards the house. Dulcie appears backlit in the golden window.

INT. NICK'S SHED. NIGHT.

Nick and Jimmy are sitting in Nick's shed with the sounds of the violence from the house filling the night air.

NICK
It'll be just like every other
time. No big deal.

JIMMY
But you said...

NICK
Yeah, well, I changed my mind.

JIMMY
You're always sayin you're gunna
do something, but you never do,
do ya?

NICK
(angry)
Well, its fuckin easy for you to
talk, isn't it?

JIMMY
I'll do it myself, then.

NICK
Don't be fuckin stupid. You
couldn't even hold the gun
straight.

They both fall silent as the voices becomes shouts and screams. Jimmy's excitement has gone now, and his expression mirrors the curious flatness of his brother. Then there is sudden silence, nothing but the frogs and the crickets and the boys' breathing.

NICK (CONT'D)
Time to pick up the pieces.

EXT. THE HOUSE, NIGHT

Ron lurches from the house - in the background, towards the shed, the two boys take a diagonal dodge around the other side of the house to avoid him.

INT. THE HOUSE. NIGHT.

The living room is a chaos of upended chairs, broken glass and china; and in the middle, face down, the prone figure of their mother.

NICK (CONT'D)
Jesus.

Nick kneels next to his mother and turns her over. The sight shocks them both. She has been badly beaten and is unconscious.

SCENE 10. INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Jimmy switches on the bedside light. Nick and Duclie enter and the two boys lie their mother on the bed and pull the covers over her.

DULCIE
(faintly)
You're good boys.

Ron appears like a dark ghost in the doorway.

RON
(growls, slurring
slightly)
What you two doin in here?

NICK
(caught off guard,
losing his temper)
What's it fuckin look like?

Ron slams Nick viciously into the wall, punctuating his words with the blows.

RON
Don't you ever, ever use language
like that to me, boy.

He throws Nick into the hallway. Nick lands in a crumpled heap against the wall, consumed by impotent fury, but frightened of his father as well.

RON (CONT'D)
Now, piss off the pair of you.
(Jimmy slides from
room)
Go on, piss off.

EXT. OUTSIDE DULCIE AND RON'S BEDROOM WINDOW - NIGHT

Nick and Jimmy are in the branches of the old macrocarpa tress watching the soundless tableau being played out inside. Ron is kneeling, leaning his forehead against the bed, crying, while Dulcie strokes his hair.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - DAY

Dulcie, Ron, and the two boys are seated at the table. Ron is finishing saying grace.

Nick and Jimmy catch each others' eyes across the table; neither has any time for this ritual. Dulcie has her new dress on; she has attempted to hide her bruises with makeup, but she has succeeded only in creating a parody of herself, a pantomime face.

RON
 (chewing
 appreciatively)
 You're a wonder, Dulce. Dunno
 how you manage to get these spuds
 just right every time.

Dulcie glows with pleasure at the compliment, but quickly casts an anxious glance at her sons, who are eating in stolid silence.

RON (CONT'D)
 Your mother's a wonder, boys.
 One of the world's great cooks.

Neither of the boys reply. Ron slams down his knife and fork. Dulcie instantly pales.

RON (CONT'D)
 (angrily)
 What's the matter with you two?
 Your mother cooks this great meal
 and you can't even show a bit of
 appreciation?

JIMMY
 Its really nice, Mum.

NICK
 Yeah. Really nice.

Ron catches himself and smiles, though the smile has a forced quality.

RON
 Ah, you wait, you blokes. You
 just don't know how lucky you
 are, having food like this. Eh,
 Dulce?

A fragile smile reappears on Dulcie's face, but it has been a near thing and she is rattled.

EXT. THE HOUSE. NIGHT.

Nick and Jimmy are outside, looking in through the living room window. Their parents are dancing slowly in one another's arms to Elvis's "Love Me Tender". Dulcie's eyes are closed; she is smiling dreamily, her head on Ron's shoulder. Ron's eyes are open, but he is far away. The boys turn around and sit back against the wall below the window.

NICK
Just like a fuckin merry-go-round.

JIMMY
You gunna go huntin with him?

NICK
Not if I can help it.

EXT. THE BUSH. NIGHT.

Ron fires his rifle into a spotlight tree. The possum falls to the ground.

RON
Got the bastard.

He walks ahead and throws the dead possum into a sack.

RON (CONT'D)
Next one's yours.

Nick looks anything but enthusiastic. They move on, Ron beaming his torch into the trees. The light catches the glittering eyes of another possum.

RON (CONT'D)
There you go.

Nick takes aim at the possum, but with the animal in his sights he hesitates. The possum blinks back at him.

RON (CONT'D)
(impatiently)
Come on boy. He'll disappear on ya.

Nick fires and the bullet crashes into the branches. The possum bolts.

RON (CONT'D)
(disgusted)
You better get out and do some practicing, boy. Clean gun's no fuckin good if you can't aim the thing.

NICK
(flatly)
No, s'pose not.

Ron moves on. Nick stays, watching. As Ron walks he draws a sight on his father.

RON
Look, about the other night. Bloody booze... you do things you don't really mean sometimes.

See, you gotta straighten out your women from time to time. Show em who's in charge. They appreciate a bit of firmness.

Nick still has his father in his sights, but he gives up; he can't do it.

RON (CONT'D)

Best piece of advice my old man
ever gave me, he said to me, moment
they think they're running the
show, you might as well pack up
and go.

Nick closes his eyes and leans his forehead against the cool steel of his gun.

INT. THE KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - NIGHT.

Dulcie is cooking the evening meal. Time has passed: there is no sign of bruising on her face. She and Nick are talking and she is deflecting him by hiding in her activity around the stove.

NICK

(exasperated)

You're always making excuses for him.

DULCIE

(carefully calm)

You just don't understand, Nick.

NICK

What's there to understand?

DULCIE

(resentful of her
son's presumption)

You don't know him like I do, and you never will. He's a good man. When the booze gets him, its not him doing it, its the booze.

NICK

You do this every time, Mum. He comes right for a while and all of a sudden its different.

(pauses, anguished
and frustrated)

Well, you've had your ration now. Look at him. He's turning ugly again. We know what comes next, don't we?

DUCLIE

(composure near to
cracking)

I don't need this from you, Nick,
and I don't want it, alright?

NICK

We could go somewhere. Maybe
it'd make him think about it.

DULCIE

(wearily)

Nick, Nick. Where would we go?

NICK

We could get a place. I could
get a job.

DULCIE

You're fifteen. We've got no
money and we've got nowhere to
go.

(tone softens)

You only see him now with all his
troubles on him. If you could
see him like I do... He gets so
frustrated, and I'm just not very
good at getting things right
sometimes...

They fall silent at the sound of the car approaching the house. In tense silence they listen to the door opening and slamming shut - they are listening for clues. Dulcie's face is a mask of apprehension. Ron enters; his face is closed, hard. Dulcie makes a brave but incongruous attempt at cheerful bravado. She and the boys stand still as statues.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

How was your day Ron?

Ron does not notice the frozen figures. He heads straight to the fridge.

RON

That shit Blazely was up me again.
(opens fridge door)
Are we out of fuckin beer again?

Nick shepherds Jimmy quickly and quietly outside. They wait and listen just outside the kitchen window.

DULCIE

I...I thought you were going to...

RON

(snarls)

You thought, you thought. All I
want's a beer and you can't even
manage that. What do you do all
fuckin day when I'm at work?

Dulcie makes herself suddenly and frantically busy around the stove. Ron stops and looks at the cooking food with distaste.

RON (CONT'D)

What's that?

DULCIE

(badly rattled)
Spaghetti.

RON

What the fuck you cooking that for? You know I don't like it.

DULCIE

But last time you said you said you liked it. You said...

RON

You gunna start telling me what I said now?

DULCIE

No...

RON

Fuck this, I'm going to the pub. Get something decent to eat and drink.

He stalks out and slams the door so hard it shakes the house, leaving Dulcie pale and shaking. Nick and Jimmy come back into the room.

NICK

He's really winding up, Mum.

DULCIE

(her nerve gone)
We've got to get this house straight before he gets back.

JIMMY

(hopelessly)
What difference does that ever make?

NICK

(stubbornly)
I reckon we oughta get out of here before he comes back.

DULCIE

(composure cracking)
How many time's do I have to tell you there's nowhere to go, Nick. It'd only make it worse, don't you understand that?

She makes a great effort to control herself, again by turning to the stove. She ladels out three platefuls of spaghetti and puts them down on the table.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Sit down and have your dinner.

NICK

I'm not hungry.

He turns and storms from the room.

DULCIE

(shouting after
him)

Nick! Come back here!

(losing control)

Nick! Nick!

She stands white with impotent rage, facing the empty doorway.

INT. NICK'S SHED - NIGHT.

Nick is feverishly cleaning his gun, his face grim. Jimmy is sitting opposite him.

JIMMY

She's right though. Where we
gunna go, Nick?

NICK

Oh fuck, I dunno. Tell you what,
though, one day I'll just up and
go.

JIMMY

You haven't got any money either.

NICK

Well I'll find myself a job then,
won't I.

JIMMY

Pretty hard round here.

NICK

You come in here just to have a
go at me?

JIMMY

No.

NICK

Otherwise you can just piss off.

JIMMY

Maybe he'll be too pissed tonight.

NICK

Some hope.

Jimmy sits down hopelessly. Nick focuses manically on his gun.

INT. NICK'S SHED - NIGHT.

Clouds drift across the moon. Nick is asleep in bed. We drift down towards him to peaceful night sounds, punctuated by the sharp cry of a kiwi.

RON (O.S.)

(roars)

I asked you a question, woman.
Do you think I'm fucking blind,
do ya?

(pause, then shouts
in rage)

Come back here.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The vase of flowers shatters the window, and lands broken on the grass outside.

INT. NICK'S SHED - NIGHT.

Nick wakes in fright at the the crash, and pauses, stunned, listening to the noises from the house.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.- NIGHT

Jimmy, wrapped in a blanket, is walking down the side of the shed.

INT. NICK'S SHED- NIGHT.

The door opens and Jimmy enters. Jimmy sits on the end of the bed, hugging his knees to his chest.

JIMMY

He's gunna kill her one day for
sure.

Nick gets out of bed and exits frame

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(hesitant)

Nick?

EXT NIGHT

OUTSIDE THE SHED

Nick crosses the darkness between the shed and the lights of the house .

INT NIGHT

THE HOUSE

The hallway and the adjoining rooms leading to his parents bedroom are a distorted maze of light and shadow. Reluctantly, he enters, seeming to move through molassas. His heartbeat and breathing are a crescendo now. He comes up hard against the doorframe, golden light pouring from the doorway into the darkness and stops, sweating, breathing hard. He leans his head back against the wall, frozen at the threshold of what he must do, holding the gun tight against his body. He closes his eyes, slips the bolt on the rifle, and throws himself into the light pouring through the doorway and into the room.

The conclusion happens in seconds that become elastic in the tension of the moment. Ron and Dulcie, turn, freeze momentarily, then Ron's astonishment turns to rage, and he turns on Nick.

Nick levels the gun at his father and closes his eyes, half turning his head away as he does so. Dulcie throws herself between Ron and the gun, but Nick, turning away, does not see her move; the time of the action distorts; the image blurs and stutters. The roar of the gun backs this image.

EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The explosion of the gun cuts us outside to a moonlit exterior of the derelict house, the reverbed echo of the shot filling the eye. We mix through to the final image of clouds passing across the implacable moon as the echoes of the gunshot die slowly away and mix with the eirie call of a kiwi.

The credits come up over the image of the moon.

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