

Bloke

by Margaret Hickey



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Bloke

The stage slowly lights up like a golden morning in the country. A figure appears and in slow motion appears to leap into the air, next, a figure slowly reaches up, as if to mark a football. All this is done in a quiet and beautiful way — the promise of things to come. (I imagine the Powder Finger song These days or something like it playing and the series of voice overs before the words of the song start —)

VO Come on Ned, hands up, hands up!

VO It's the quiet I like

VO Hunt the ball Alex!

VO Dad says I'll bulk up

VO Hail Mary full of Grace

VO Piss off Jimmy

VO We love you Ned

VO It was magic!

This opening has been strongly influenced by the print 'The Escape' by David Frazer

AWKWARD

Lights up

A teenage boy of around fifteen years old stands on stage. He is nervously excited, awkward, and eager to please. He desperately wants to be liked and admired.

NED

Me and my mates right, we play this game? It's so funny, I swear we just piss ourselves laughing every time.

What we do right, is we go up to someone and say something stupid — just anything right, and then we'll time the silence before the other person says something.

It's so funny, like we'll go up to someone and say, 'I really like roast beef,' and then just time it to see how long it takes them to say something. Just like, time the awkward silence?

Like, down the street you might say to someone next to you at the bus stop, 'Being an adolescent is hard but rewarding at the same time.'

The person you're saying it to will just stare at you or try to say something or look the other way — man it's just so hilarious.

I swear my mates and I just crack up. Jimmy's the best, he'll get, say, twelve good seconds of awkward silence every time.

I did a good one last week, I went up to this girl, Stephanie Morrow from Year ten, I swear she's so hot she could work in a chemist, anyway I go to her and I say, 'Hey Steph, you're the prettiest girl in this whole school and I wish you'd go out with me,' and she's, like, silent for ten seconds and we're just standing there.

My mates were pissing themselves and she just ended up walking off.

I swear, it was so funny. You might have seen the post I put up about it on Facebook.

I got seventeen likes for that one.

Yeah but Jimmy's the best. He'll go to our mate Rabbit, 'Hey Rabbit, how come you hang around with us? Don't you know we all think you're a dickhead? Isn't it time you pissed off and made yourselves some new friends?'

There'll be this silence for about twelve seconds and then Jimmy'll start pissing himself and we'll all just crack up, Rabbit included.

That's what we're like our group, always cracking up.

Most weekends they'll all come around to my place. Mum and Dad are cool, my mates love them. Jimmy'll just hang around with Dad, talking to him about the footy or working on the boats with him.

I don't really care for the boats — I get sea sick, like Mum.

But yeah, Dad'll sometimes let us share a few beers and tell us about when he used to play for the Bulldogs, back in the late 80s. Footscray they were then. Dad played forty odd games for them, only gave up when he cracked a few ribs and ruptured his nuts during a clash with David Reece Jones, this real rough bloke from back then.

My mates just love Dad, always pestering me to get him out telling his stories, asking him what it felt like to have his balls smashed up and did he really smoke during quarter time.

Half the time I hardly get to see my mates when they're at my house, I swear it's totes funny.

I gotta give it to him, Dad's a good bloke. It's funny when I think about the two of us together.

I'm not as tall as him, and I haven't been picked for the school team yet, but Dad reckons give it a few years and I'll shoot up. I'll shoot up and bulk up.

What we have got in common is our bent noses. Both of us, noses bent slightly to the left, like we're constantly sniffing our way round a corner.

Yeah, Dad and me are like peas in a pod with our bent noses, everyone says so — Grandma and Mum and that.

Not long ago, Jimmy found a few old footy cards with Dad on them — put them in this old footy card collection book he's got, retro you know? And took it to school and showed everyone.

Stephanie Morrow couldn't believe it. 'Is that really your dad?' she goes to me, and Jimmy just shakes his head, 'I know,' he goes, 'unbelievable'.

'Just check out the noses,' I say and she shrugs.

Our noses are just so similar.

Jimmy didn't laugh. He just stared at the cards like he was angry at them. Flicked through the whole book of them, just like he hated everyone in it.

Jimmy might be the best footballer in the school, but his Dad is a real loser.

Drunk, drugs, you name it.

That's why he's interviewing my Dad for his Year ten project on notable people in your life. Don't think his Dad'd be much notable for anything except maybe spewing in his son's footy bag before the semi-final last year.

In this notable person essay we have to find out about all this person's history, achievements, and stuff. I thought about asking Stephanie Morrow if I could do it on her, but I'm now just using Mum.

Jimmy's already got Dad ... So anyway, I'm asking Mum all about her life and that and I'm looking at photos from when she was younger and she's telling me about her Master or Commander in English Literature, and the article she wrote for some magazine and the time she studied in Kiev and I'm thinking that although she used to look all right, she actually hasn't achieved all that much, and I'm asking her when Dad will be back 'cos I want to ask him if busting his balls would be worse than hacking your own arm off like that bloke did when he got stuck in the desert in America when suddenly she goes: 'Ned, I've got to tell you something.'

And I'm just sitting there on the chair and she says, 'Your dad is not your biological father'

Pause.

After she said that, after about a day when I'd gone off and thought about it, I asked her; 'but what about our noses? Always sniffing around the corner and that?'

But Mum said that noses aren't always biological. Dad broke his playing footy and I tripped over during cross country in Prep. Broke my glasses and my nose.

I wear contacts now.

By this time, Dad found out that I knew and they were doing the whole parental disclosure thing. Holding nothing back, like nothing. Pretty gross actually. Yeah, yeah, they loved me and they always wanted me and when they found out Mum was pregnant it was the happiest day of their lives and blah, blah, blah.

You know how Mum and Dad found me a biological father? They looked through a booklet, flicked through these pages and pages of blokes willing to donate sperm.

Flicked through pages of blokes saying they were six foot and blonde, university educated, and polite.

Yeah right, I thought.

None of them is going to say they're short weedy types who finished school at Year nine. None of them are going to say that they're crap at sport and have never had a girlfriend.

Just flicked through a book they did.

And here I am.

I knew that of course, about the biological stuff, and broken noses and that. It just got me thinking — like footy. I can't get a kick now, but Dad says I'll get taller/bulk up.

But will I?

Maybe the guy in the book that they flicked through never got a kick in his life. I don't like boats or salami or the feel of tin foil, but Dad likes all three. Biological? Your asking me? A fifteen year old? What do I know? I still don't fully get what an ovarian cycle is.

Pause.

Last week, Mum and I were waiting in the checkout.

This lady in front of us was reading a magazine and holding up the line.

When she saw us she goes, 'Sorry there, just flicking through the Weekly to see who won Master Chef.'

And then there's Jimmy and the footy cards.

Pause.

It's weird to think of it, but I can't stop. That flicking business, it's really gotten to me.

But anyway, yeah I've got off the track. The main thing I wanted to say right, the main thing is, at that moment when Mum first told me — when she first said, 'Ned, your dad is not your biological father' — you know what I did? I just went ...

*A long, awkward silence — full of meaning/hurt/anger/
betrayal — about fifteen seconds.*

And then she goes, 'are you okay Ned?'

and I go,

'That was fifteen seconds, minimum.'