

COMING UP Sample Treatment 1

PERFECT

TOBY is 33 years old and his Mum has just died. He is selfish, occasionally rude, and quite lazy, but he has a charm about him. He's had quite an easy life up to now. His Mum has done everything for him, and he's always been popular (albeit amongst people he doesn't want to be popular with – or claims he doesn't). TOBY has Downs Syndrome. Oh, and he hasn't told anyone that his Mum is dead. She's lying upstairs in her bedroom, slowly decomposing.

TOBY hasn't told anyone because he thinks if he does, he'll be moved into a group home. He doesn't like being around other people with Downs, he is more socially and physically able than most of them, and he's used this ability to distance himself from "them" as much as possible. He sees his Mum's death as the beginning of the end for his independence from his disability.

The trouble is, when your Mum has always done everything for you, it's a pretty tricky business even to make a cup of tea. And corpses smell, particularly in summer. And hunger is horrible. And missing your Mum is...not great. But TOBY thinks that if he can appear normal, then no-one will notice his Mum's absence and he can continue his life as it was. So he tries very hard to stop other people noticing his change in circumstances.

TOBY meets ANNIE at a bus stop. ANNIE doesn't have Downs, she's quite pretty and she's nice to him. Albeit briefly. When she gets on a bus, the 156, he doesn't strike up the courage to follow her. But he wishes he had.

He really wishes he had, the more he thinks about it, the more it eats at him.

Slowly, finding ANNIE again becomes a mission for TOBY. Travelling on the 156, looking for her, waiting for her, becomes the only thing that makes sense in TOBY's life. This perfect girl was nice to him. Maybe she'll make his life normal again.

But the obsession becomes a curse. TOBY's life slips even more. He stops going to his Day Centre (for adult's with learning difficulties), which leads to calls home for his Mum. Calls she obviously can't return. He shouts at the one person who's nice to him, the landlord of his local that he's been going to for 15 years. He refuses the advances of the lovely SHEILA, who also has Downs, and is worried about him. All he wants is to see ANNIE again. But he can't seem to find her.

As his hunger becomes more and more biting, TOBY starts seeing glimpses of ANNIE and his MUM in day-to-day life. He follows them and fears them, but of course they're merely hallucinations.

Crisis strikes when social services are bought in by the Day Centre. They try and make a home visit, and TOBY, realising the end is near, acts like a cowboy and

barricades himself in. He doesn't want the life they're offering. When the police are forced to break and enter, they discover TOBY lying on his bed with his very smelly Mum.

Later, and TOBY is in a home, and he is now made to go to Day Centre, and it's not too bad, but he's still not nice to the other adults there. There is a change in him, but it's subtle, it's a vulnerability he's just starting to allow himself to show. And when SHEILA asks him to the disco, he thinks about saying yes..

TOBY meets ANNIE at the Bus Stop again a few days later. It's the weekend, and he has a box of his Mum's clothes on his lap, which he's taking to the charity shop. ANNIE doesn't recognise him. Of course she doesn't, she's only met him once. TOBY starts laughing when he realises this, and laughs even more when he notices that the perfect ANNIE actually has a withered arm. The perfect ANNIE isn't perfect at all.

This is a coming of age tale of sorts. And yes, it's about self-acceptance. But it's not just a crude – bang you on the head with a tin-cup - type of film. I think the problem with disabled characters as they are currently represented on television and film, is that they either quirky (like that horribly miswritten doctor on Holby City) or just plain depressed. They always seem to lack a basic humanity. This is going to be an attempt to put that humanity back. TOBY is a complicated man, and he stays complicated.

I do feel like this is an area which I would be able to write about. My uncle has autism and paranoid schizophrenia, my Mum works in a Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties. I spent my childhood up and around the Centre (they loved having kids about). And I'm disabled myself, albeit a disability that most people don't notice, and so I know what it is to have your life defined by something seemingly out of your control.

My previous attempt at this area – THE MASCOT – wasn't successful, or at least I didn't think it was. It wasn't successful directorially, but also it lacked a bit of steam as a piece of writing. Partly because I didn't give JAMIE, the lead character, a young lad with Downs, enough to do. This is an attempt to rectify my mistakes by building a solid, deep and interesting drama.