

MEET THE WHITES

by

Amy Robertson

FADE IN:

INT. TRENDY COFFEE SHOP (SET ON A MOVIE SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

MELODY White, (18 to 22, slender, pretty, dressed in a pink silk sleeveless blouse and skinny jeans) perched at a table drinking her fancy coffee, texts on her even-fancier phone.

A velvety, black, FEMALE VOICE speaks:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

This is Melody White. She's a pretty little thing -- a bit pasty, but that's not her fault. Just the skin the Lord zipped her up in.

Melody stands, slings her designer purse over her shoulder, picks up her coffee. Melody looks right at us, smiles a big "I-know-how-perfect-I-am" grin (with perfect white teeth).

While Melody continues to smile at us, TWO experienced GAFFERS appear. One is PORTLY, the other is GANGLY. Otherwise both are dressed in typical gaffer clothes (caps, T-shirts, jeans, and work boots), and exhibit a quirkily-effective simpatico.

Portly Gaffer pushes the COFFEE SHOP B.G. away on rollers, while Gangly Gaffer removes Melody's table. The few CUSTOMERS in the shop walk away with the b.g. Exposed is --

EXT. GENERIC HIGH SCHOOL (SET ON SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

Portly conveys BOB and JUDY White (late 40s to early 50s) to the left-hand corner of the shot. They smile proudly at Melody, who still flirts with the camera. Bob has his arm around Judy. The marquis in the far b.g. reads, "SHAKESPEARE WEEK: 'No legacy is so rich as honesty.' All's Well that Ends Well, Act 3, Scene 5."

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Melody was blessed -- born with many privileges, though she never thought about 'em much.

Portly bears a CROWN and an ARMFUL OF ROSES. Gangly quickly wraps a full MATCHING PINK SILK SKIRT around her waist, and places the crown on her head. Now in a prom dress, Melody accepts the roses, feigns tears, and does a parade wave.

Now Portly brings in a big HUNKY FOOTBALL PLAYER holding his helmet. He kisses Melody on the cheek and stands proudly beside her, aw shucks, as she waves to all of us. Judy wipes a tear; Bob, chest out, gives Judy a little squeeze.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Things came easily to Bob and Judy White's daughter, without her needing to make much effort. At least not her effort.

Bob pulls out a handkerchief, wipes a little sweat from his brow, while Judy continues to marvel at her girl.

Gangly strides in, escorts the now-bewildered Football Player away -- just as Portly Gaffer brings in pale EMO BOY, with tight "girl" jeans and other thrift-store attire.

Emo Boy looks Melody up and down, nods in approval, then swipes his long, too-black bangs off one eye. Portly returns, takes her crown, roses, and skirt. Gangly glides in, replacing those items with a BERET and a TINY DOG WITH A MATCHING BERET.

The demon dog starts YIPPING at Emo Boy who tries to be cool, but can't help being anxious; Portly wheels in a NEW B.G., introducing us to --

INT. MELODY'S STUDIO APARTMENT (SET ON SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

Gangly moves in modern furniture, and we see a to-die-for VIEW OF DOWNTOWN and an abstract painting of Melody over the mantle. Portly takes Emo Boy away. Bob and Judy still stand proudly in the corner. Melody remains unchanged.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Melody's father, Bob, saw to it that his only child had everything he didn't have growing up.

Portly hands Bob PAPERWORK, "RENTAL CONTRACT" writ large on it. Bob glances at it with furrowed brow, then pockets it.

Gangly and Portly appear again, taking the beret and dog and replacing them with a GRADUATION CAP and COLLEGE DIPLOMA. They wheel away the STUDIO APARTMENT B.G., and we find ourselves in front of an --

EXT. UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS HOME ON A NICELY SHADED STREET (SET ON SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

The house is white; the lawn perfectly manicured. Bob and Judy still in the corner, stand in front of their home. MR. METRO-SEXUAL is now herded up to Melody still in her same position. He poses like a GQ model. Judy, liking what she sees, fans herself a little. Bob raises one eyebrow at her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And because of the ease of her life,
Melody's heart -- which should have
been full of gratitude for the
kindness that was shown to her over
and over again -- shrank smaller and
harder and selfisher. Yes, I said
"selfisher"...

A WHITE SPORTS CAR, with a big pink ribbon on it, pulls up
behind Melody, its windows fully tinted. Portly and Gangly
get out of the car. They take Melody's college gear, and
bestow on her a CELL PHONE and CAR KEYS. They try to escort
Mr. Metrosexual off, but he resists. A comedic scuffle begins,
and continues as --

Melody remains apathetic, still looking at the camera.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

What Melody didn't realize was that
something -- or rather someone --
bigger was watching her comings and
goings. And everyone else's comings
and goings too... Poor pitiful things.

Portly and Gangly finally disappear with Mr. Metrosexual,
and Melody for the first time breaks her eye contact with
us. After a flip of her hair, Melody turns, gets in her car,
and disappears behind the dark tinting.

INT./EXT. MELODY'S CAR/MOVIE SOUNDSTAGE - DAY (MOVING)

Melody TEXTS ON HER CELL PHONE while driving; she sees a
real cityscape go by. But we see the Gaffers spinning a ROAD-
SIDE CAROUSEL; a big photo of a cityscape is printed on it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Sometimes, when a person gets off
track, they need a subtle, little
nudge --

QUICK CUT TO:

A HUGE SEMI-TRUCK COMES BARRELING RIGHT AT US!

Melody, behind the wheel, barely has time to flinch.

CUT TO BLACK.

A MASSIVE CRASH, the SLO-MO RIPPING OF STEEL, a SCREAM!

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Or sometimes, not so subtle.

A long beat of nothing. Then, HOSPITAL NOISES and:

JUDY (O.S.)

I think she moved her pinkie finger!

BOB (O.S.)

I didn't see anything.

JUDY (O.S.)

Well, you weren't looking at her left hand, now, were you, Bob? I'm telling you she moved her pinkie finger... Melody, can you hear me? Can you hear your Mama? Move your finger again, baby! I know you can.

A long beat. More HOSPITAL NOISES, RISING BRIGHTNESS, then:

JUDY (O.S.)

I swear I saw her finger move!

BOB (O.S.)

Maybe you should eat. I'll stay with her.

FLASHES OF BLURRY LIGHT, as if Melody's eyes are blinking.

JUDY (O.S.)

I'm worried about her face, Bob. Look at her! What if the scars don't heal properly?

BLURRY FORMS appear and move.

JUDY (O.S.)

What if she's deformed for life? If she would have just married --

BOB (O.S.)

Judy! She might be able to hear you!

MELODY'S POV: The scene blurs into focus, so she sees --

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (SET ON SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

Standard room, with Bob and Judy beside her bed looking weary and rumped. Bob is unshaven. Faded flower bouquets wilt in the b.g. Bob and Judy argue, neither looking at Melody.

JUDY

I wish she could hear me! How long am I supposed to endure this? I haven't seen any of my friends in weeks, and I'm not sleeping at night, and everyone here acts like having a daughter in a coma is a perfectly normal thing!

BOB

Everyone here has been wonderful,
Judy. You really should eat something.

INCLUDE MELODY in the hospital bed; she's hooked to an IV. Her unaccustomed-to-light eyes are half open, and she's looking around trying to make sense of everything. Heavy bandages cover part of her head; her casted leg is up in traction.

Melody lifts her arm to inspect the IV. Bob notices, says:

BOB

Melody! Honey! You're awake!

Judy spins around.

JUDY

Baby girl!! Melody? Can you hear me?

Judy grabs Melody's hand; Bob wipes a tear. NURSE TAYLOR (our Narrator) enters. She's a middle-aged black woman in scrubs, and often with a knowing smile.

NURSE TAYLOR

Well, I see Sleeping Beauty is finally
awake. Do you want anything, dear?

Judy and Bob turn and look expectantly at Melody, who still looks confused. She doesn't know what to say.

NURSE TAYLOR

I know it's overwhelming, Melody.
Let's start simple: Do you recognize
your folks?

Melody nods and smiles. Bob comes closer, and the three share a moment of relieved family reunion. Nurse Taylor busies herself (even while her narration continues):

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Melody's life, as she knew it, was
yanked right out of her tight little
white fists. Some people might call
that a clean slate... Others, an
annoyance.

Nurse Taylor comes over, gestures Judy and Bob around her, all with their backs to Melody. Melody looks at us, concerned and confused.

Nurse Taylor walks out with Judy and Bob, pointing to things on a chart. Melody looks desperately alone... then perturbed. But Portly quickly guides in DR. HANDSOME, and hands him a stethoscope. Dr. Handsome looks at him blankly until Portly shows him how to use it.

Melody smiles coyly at him, then looks at us with a know-it-all raised eyebrow.

Portly takes off Melody's bandages, revealing her still-perfect face, then unplugs her IV and rolls it away.

Gangly enters fluffing a girlish BEDSPREAD, and throws it over Melody. He fluffs a matching pillow behind her, then leads Dr. Handsome away, who goes along happily playing with his new toy. Melody's smile fades as Portly rolls away the HOSPITAL B.G., revealing --

INT. ADOLESCENT GIRL'S BEDROOM (SET ON SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

Pink with stuffed animals and an 'N Sync poster with the song title *For the Girl Who Has Everything* on the wall. Melody's in bed at her parents' home.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Nothing makes you appreciate things
more than when you have 'em almost
yanked away from you.

Portly and Gangly finish up the scene change. Portly tucks a STUFFED DOG beside Melody; she just looks at us.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

At least that's what a lot of folks
would think... but not our girl
Melody.

Melody looks away from us; JUDY'S VOICE RISES in volume, and Melody reacts to what she (and we) are hearing from O.S.

JUDY (O.S.)

Yes, of course she remembers you,
Mom. And I don't know if she remembers
the socks you knitted for her last
Christmas... No, I am not asking why
she didn't send you a thank-you card.

Melody picks up the stuffed dog, looks at it.

JUDY (O.S.)

Yes, she will live with us until she
gets off disability and starts working
again. She should walk on her own
within the next few weeks -- though
she acts like it's a great imposition
for her to do the simplest exercises.
It's not like she has anything else
to do. And Bob refuses to keep paying
for her cute little apartment while
she's with us. Men! If she had just
gotten married --

Melody makes a face at that, puts the stuffed dog up over her face, falls over on her side so she (nor we) don't hear Judy's whine anymore. The LIGHTS DIM.

CLOSE ON the fallen-over Melody. A little SNORE comes out.

BOB'S HAND reaches over and touches Melody's nose. That nose twitches, and Melody's eyes flutter open.

THE SHOT WIDENS

Bob sits beside Melody's bed, a loving smile on his face. She smiles at him, stiffly sits herself up.

MELODY

Hi, Daddy.

BOB

Did I interrupt your busy day?

MELODY

(sourly)

Did you come to make fun of me?

She stretches.

BOB

No, Sweet Pea.

He hands her a stack of bills.

BOB

I thought you might want to go through these. I know the service to your phone got turned off while you were in the hospital, and the others look like credit-card bills.

MELODY

Daddy! I wish you would have thought to pay these. Won't there be late fees now? Sheesh!

Bob stands up, shaking his head a little.

BOB

I was a little distracted by the fact that my only child was clinging to life. Cut me a little slack, Princess.

MELODY

Don't call me that. I hate it when you call me that.

BOB
Sorry Melly -- Melody.

He turns to go... But hesitates, turns back, says seriously:

BOB
You have no idea what it was like
for your mom and I, not knowing if
you were ever gonna wake up or not.

MELODY
Are you sorry now that I did!?!?

ANGLE ON Bob studying her sadly. Gangly and Portly suddenly show up and wheel Melody's furniture and BEDROOM B.G. away, revealing --

INT. BOB'S OFFICE (SET ON SOUND STAGE?) DAY

Portly maneuvers an impressive desk in, with a name plate "ROBERT WHITE" and family pictures on it. Bob sits down just as Gangly slides a chair under him. Gangly then picks up the phone and puts it up to Bob's ear before he disappears.

BOB
Hugh, I need to tell you something.
And this something needs to have
attorney-client protection.

Bob waits for the answer, then sighs with relief.

BOB
It's just a matter of time before it
comes out, and I can't take it
anymore! It's completely eating me
up, and I can see now it's done more
damage than anything...

He pinches the bridge of his nose; the Narrator takes over.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Robert White lost focus; he worried
so much about giving things to those
he loved, he didn't think twice about
taking from those who paid for his
trustworthiness. That was until
recently. Melody's accident was just
the nudge Bob needed to see more
clearly.

Bob continues to explain M.O.S., gesturing with his hands.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

So he decided to come clean: Do his best to pay back what he embezzled, and pray that his employer would rather have him making restitution than making license plates in prison -- or whatever they make in prison these days... What do they make in prison these days? I should Google that.

Portly scurries by, holding a LAPTOP. It faces us, so we get a glimpse of the Google home page going by.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Oh. Thanks, honey.

Bob hesitantly hangs up the phone. Gangly guides in HUGH, who has a serious look and a briefcase. Portly plops down a chair; Hugh sits across from Bob. O.S., a LAPTOP CLICKS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

What-do-ya-know! Ohio! Ohio inmates still make license plates. Hmmm.

Gangly marches in with SIX CORPORATE SUITS -- all serious, with briefcases, and flanked on either side of Hugh. Portly and Gangly effortlessly, expertly, provide chairs for all.

The Suits SIT AT THE SAME TIME; the Narrator continues.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Since Bob approached his boss of fifteen years with sincere contrition and a realistic plan of repayment -- no charges were filed. But of course, Bob no longer had a job --

Everyone in the room stands up; the ELDEST SUIT shakes Bob's hand. Enter Portly and Gangly; Portly herds everyone out (except Bob), while moving Bob's desk in the same direction. Gangly rolls away the OFFICE B.G. to reveal --

EXT. UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS HOME ON A NICELY SHADED STREET (SET ON A SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

Portly struggles with a "FOR SALE" sign, parks it in front of the house, while an uncomfortable Gangly ushers in a sobbing Judy, holding a tissue to her nose. Bob tries to console her with his handkerchief. She throws the used tissue down, takes Bob's offering, but refuses to be consoled.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

-- Or a house.

Portly drives by in an EXPENSIVE SEDAN with windows rolled down. He nods his head in time with the LOUD HEAVY-METAL MUSIC coming from the custom stereo.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

-- Or a car.

This brings on a new wave of SOBS from Judy, but Bob looks almost relieved. At peace. Finally. Gangly tiptoes by to pick up the used tissue, holding it at arm's length, while Portly rolls away the HOUSE B.G., revealing --

INT. ADOLESCENT GIRL'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The "FOR SALE" sign is removed by Gangly, and Melody's bed is brought in by Portly with Melody perched on top of it; her arms and legs crossed. She glares at us.

Gangly lugs moving boxes in, stacking them next to the bed. He then leaves with Judy. After they are gone, Melody snaps her head over toward Bob.

MELODY

You have ruined us, Dad!

BOB

Melody, I don't know how many times I have to ask your forgiveness for taking that money --

MELODY

I don't care that you took the money, Dad! I just can't believe you would turn yourself in like that! That is what ruined us! You're a smart guy -- your boss would have never have found out! But no, you have to go all noble and ruin everything!

Startled by all this, Bob lets it sink in for a few beats.

BOB

Melody, you can't know what it's like to live with something that heavy clinging to you. My life started revolving around covering my tracks. I couldn't even walk by our accounting department without having heart palpitations! It was utterly exhausting. I couldn't enjoy one penny of it.

MELODY

Well, I did! And so did Mom. And I'm not ashamed to admit it.

Judy's MUFFLED SOBS can be heard through the wall.

BOB

I will not apologize for finally
doing the right thing, Melly.

He glances at the wall where the sobs came through.

BOB

Mom's gonna be just fine. Under all
the tears, she is actually proud
that I was honest about what I did.

He smiles as he ponders something.

BOB

Your mom and I somehow got off track,
and now we get to start over again.
I'm looking forward to that. And my
sincere wish for you is, that you can
as well. I love you so much, Melly.

Melody stands up -- her leg is healed.

MELODY

If you will excuse me, Dad -- I need
to pack.

Bob almost says something, but doesn't. With sadness, he
exits, leaving Melody pouting at us.

Portly and Gangly charge in to roll away her bed, the moving
boxes, and the BEDROOM B.G. We find ourself back at --

INT. TRENDY COFFEE SHOP (SET ON SOUND STAGE?) - DAY

Gangly places a small table in front of Melody; she sits
just as Portly brings her chair. She breaks her gaze at us
to pick up her fancy coffee (which comes with the table) and
the latest copy of Cosmo magazine (also with the table).

She starts flipping through the magazine; an article "Do You
Only Want Him For His Money?" faces us. She frequently, almost
nervously, glances O.S. as our Narrator resumes:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Now, I could bore you with all sorts
of tired, over-used proverbs like:
"The way of the fool is right in his
own eyes," or "A dog that returns to
its own vomit..." But that's just
unnecessary -- and not very ladylike.
And now I need a breath mint.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So I'll just say that our Melody was
faced with a few different paths,
but chose the most... familiar.

Melody glances O.S., suddenly grabs her designer purse and her coffee. Timing it, she stands up right as Dr. Handsome passes by, PURPOSELY COLLIDING with him. He's in his scrubs and lab coat, and carrying his coffee. Both coffees SPILL.

MELODY

Oh! I'm so sorry! I am such a klutz!

She looks up, slays him with her flirtiest apology smile.

DR. HANDSOME

Oh, it's okay -- it had too much
foam any --

A moment of recognition stops him. He smiles warmly back.

DR. HANDSOME

Do -- do I know you? You look so
familiar.

Melody turns to look at us arching an eyebrow; she once again has that "I-know-how-perfect-I-am" grin.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Mission accomplished. Fool.

Portly darts in, rolling away the COFFEE SHOP B.G.; Gangly pulls in a BLACK SCREEN with "THE END." printed on it. Gangly then approaches Melody and stops. She breaks her gaze with us, looks at Gangly defiantly, grabs Dr. Handsome's hand and walks O.S. without his assistance. Gangly leisurely follows.

We are left for a few beats looking at the screen.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Now I really need that breath mint...
I'm serious!

Portly scurries past, shaking a TINY BOX OF ALTOIDS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Now that's more like it...

FADE OUT.

- THE END -