

CREEPED OUT

"Slapstick"

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From a story by
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SHOOTING SCRIPT

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1 **EXT. BEACH - DAY 1(09:00)**

1

A bright, sunny beach.

Close on a metal BUCKET, full of sand. Two hands slam it onto the beach, upside down.

A hand taps the bucket on the top three times, before it's carefully removed, revealing an oddly shaped sand castle underneath.

 NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He caught me once, trying to see
 under the mask.

Reveal: kneeling on the sand, THE CURIOUS.

 NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He fixed me with that long stare of
 his. I never did it again.

He stares down at his handiwork, tilts his head, admiringly.

 NARRATOR (V.O.)
 I say 'he'. I honestly couldn't
 tell if it was a boy or a girl...
 or even human.

A beat, before The Curious furiously scoops sand back into the bucket, like an animal burrowing.

 NARRATOR (V.O.)
 No one's ever seen under the mask.
 (then)
 No-one but the Curious.

The Curious stops, freezes. He sniffs the air, sensing something, then he slowly turns his head to stare in the opposite direction.

 NARRATOR (V.O.)
 I don't know why he wore it. Maybe
 he was embarrassed to show what's
 really under there.

The Curious POV: staring at something in the far distance...

A tiny PUPPET BOOTH. We can just make out it's red and white in colour. In front, watching, is a small gathering of kids. We can just hear their faint laughter-

 NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Some people go to extremes to avoid
 embarrassment...

Jessie enters. A small sigh at the familiar morning sight:

MUM, a maternal bundle of energy, dressed in a LION ONESIE. Hers was the laugh we heard. She scoops chunks of brown gunk into a blender.

Next to her is DAD, a warm, John Candy type, in tatty old tracksuit. He dances in time to music on the radio.

DAD

(spots Jessie)

When did this one slink in, eh?
Morning, Dinky.

JESSIE

Dad. We agreed to stop calling me-

Too late. Dad scoops her up in a bear-hug.

DAD

(does breaking wind sound)

Oop! Somebody needs to cut down on
their fibre diet.

Mum snorts a laugh. Despite having heard that gag a thousand times.

JESSIE

Yep. Never gets tired that one.

As Dad frees her, Jessie swipes the jar of marshmallows from the side. She just manages to undo the top of the jar, when -

MUM

Uh, uh, sneaky badger.

Mum replaces the jar with a glass of murky brown blended goodness. Jessie sniffs it, retches.

JESSIE

Rank. What is even in that?

MUM

Surprise. Do you a lot more good
than those revolting bits of fat.

Jessie holds up the invitation to The Peterson's party. There's a glossy photo of The Peterson clan bang in the middle of it.

JESSIE

Please can you try to resemble
normal humans at the party
tomorrow?

MUM

The annual Peterson's smarm-fest.

DAD

Still don't get why we force
ourselves over there every year.

MUM

(snuggles into Jessie)
Shall we not? Cosy up on the sofa.
Horror movie marathon?

JESSIE

Guys. No. We have to make the
effort. Patty's like, the coolest
girl in my year.

DAD

That one? Really? Surely that prize
should go to you, Dinky?

JESSIE

Dad! Seriously! Mum, tell him.

MUM

Del. You know she hates that name.

DAD

Why though? It's so cute.

JESSIE

It *really* is not. And come away
from the window. They'll see you.

MUM

Relax. Not like they're the royal
family or anything.

Jessie sighs. She ponders, then-

JESSIE

Patty got those trainers I told you
about- the Angel ones...

MUM

Jessica. Sweetheart. Not again with
the shoes.

JESSIE

Patty's Mum gets her what she wants. You don't see her begging.

DAD

Keep dreaming about someone else's life, kiddo... you'll end up missing out on your own.

JESSIE

Wow, Dad. Deep.
(notices)
And guys!! Come away from the window!!

Slinking low into her seat, Jessie prays for the world to come swallow her up.

5

EXT. KINGSTON COVE - STREET - DAY 1 (12:00)

5

The BOARDWALK. An eclectic strip of shops, facing the beach. The centre of all activity in the village.

Jessie leans on a wall, watching: in the distance, Patty Peterson strolls along, kitted out in her lavish birthday gear. She notices Jessie...

...Jessie smiles, offers her a friendly wave.

Patty screws up her nose, then deliberately blanks Jessie as she approaches her gaggle of school friends.

Jessie lowers her hand. Feels pretty stupid.

Patty's friends immediately spot her new trainers. They start screaming. Patty screams back. Much screaming at shoes.

Jessie sighs to herself. Mum and Dad appear beside her. Mum's carrying shopping bags. Dad's sloppily devouring an ice-cream. Some of which has made it onto his shirt.

MUM

Del - that was a clean shirt.

DAD

And? I'm saving that bit for later.

JESSIE

Are we going then?

Jessie's keen to move, before Patty and her crew spot them.

MUM

I take it you won't be wanting your present then?

DAD

Drum-roll maestro, please...

Dad starts drum rolling. Mum produces a SHOEBOX from one of her bags. Jessie's eyes light up. They haven't? Have they?

JESSIE

No. Really?

Mum smiles to Dad, who's still drum-rolling. Jessie pulls the box lid open. Just about containing her excitement.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

You actually got me a pair of...

She parts the tissue paper to see: a cheap knock-off pair of Angel's. The shoebox reads AYNCEL too.

MUM

I know they're not the exact ones you wanted. But the man promised these were just as good. And for a quarter of the price. Kerching!

Disappointed, Jessie holds them up, like rotting apple cores. They're a squillion miles away from Patty's trainers. The colours are all off, they look cheap, tacky.

DAD

I actually think they look cooler. Am I right?

He really isn't.

MUM

At least try them on.

JESSIE

Can't I do it at home?

DAD

If they don't fit, the man said we can exchange. Go on. Give us a show. Shoes! Shoes! Shoes!

Mum and Dad chant, excited. Jessie sighs - fine! She slips off her own shoes, then reluctantly puts these monstrosities on. Unfortunately for Jessie -

MUM

Budda boom. Perfect fit!

JESSIE

(reluctant)

Yay!

Mum slings an arm around Jessie, then playfully makes her walk an imaginary catwalk with her. Jessie's initially reluctant, but relaxes into it. Dad pretends to snap away like a photographer. Jessie and Mum giggle.

The touching family moment's instantly soured by:

PATTY

Nice shoes, Gerstenberger! Where can I get a pair?

Jessie spins to see: Patty and her crew, enjoying the impromptu fashion show. This. Is. Not. Happening.

DAD

(missing the sarcasm)

Shop down the corner, girls. Called 'Footloose'. They're on sale too!

JESSIE

(shut up)

Dad!

DAD

You won't see anything as hip as these bad-boys in there though!

Dad lifts his leg to show off his savvy sandal, sock combo. Patty and her friends fall about laughing.

Jessie rips off her Ayngel shoes. She throws them down.

MUM

Sweetheart, what's wrong?

JESSIE

Are you actually kidding me? Them. They're laughing at me.

Mum eyes Patty's crew. They continue to point, snigger. Mum's face darkens. No-one messes with this lioness' cub.

MUM

Why don't you witches shut it? Shoo! Go on. Bunch of brats.

JESSIE
(mortified)
Mum!! Stop!

Patty and her mates slowly scatter, still giggling. Mum's outburst adding fuel to their hysterics.

Jessie's close to tears. Humiliated. Angry.

JESSIE (CONT'D)
I can NOT believe you. First you buy me these... these *things*. Then I'm forced to parade up and down in public. Why would you do that to me? *Why?* Everyone's gonna know about this.

DAD
Don't overreact, Dinky.

Mum winces. Jessie's face turns red: that name! She screams in anger. Dad holds his mouth.

DAD (CONT'D)
Sorry. I - wasn't thinking.

JESSIE
And you never do. Either of you. Not when it comes to me...

MUM
Jessie. Hun. We just- didn't want you missing out that's all.

JESSIE
Why are you like this? *Why?* I just wish you were both - normal!

Dad opens his mouth to speak, then stops, thinks better of it. Mum looks down, a little stung.

Jessie eyes her discarded Ayngel trainers, splayed on the floor. For a millisecond, there's a pang of guilt. But her humiliation's too raw. Hurting, she storms off.

Dad lowers his shoulders. He shares a guilty look with Mum.

6

EXT. KINGSTON COVE - BEACH - DAY 1 (12:30)

6

Jessie trudges along the beach. Kicking sand. Worst day of her life.

She passes a gathering of kids, sat in a group, mesmerised by:

A PUPPET SHOW.

Children's puppet show. British seaside tradition. A red and white striped booth. The front's open, resembling a stage.

Mum and Dad hand-puppets bounce about on-stage. They argue and barter with each other. Something about the puppet's shrill voices - it reminds Jessie of her own parental woes. She's slowly drawn toward it.

She watches the performance, escaping the world.

As it finishes, the puppets take a bow on-stage. The audience starts to disperse.

Jessie remains. In no real hurry to return home.

Circling the audience is THE BOTTLER, a young boy, around 14. He collects change in a bottle from parents and kids who saw the show. He makes his way toward Jessie.

JESSIE

Sorry. I don't have any cash on me.

BOTTLER

(studies her)

Bit old for a puppet show?

JESSIE

I wasn't watching. I just - needed to sit.

The Bottler continues to study Jessie. Examining her face.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

What?

BOTTLER

There's someone you need to talk to. Over there-

The Bottler gestures toward the booth.

JESSIE

Look. I said I don't have any money. And I wasn't even properly watching, so-

BOTTLER

Not about that. He just wants to say hello.

JESSIE

Who?

BOTTLER

Mr Scaramouche.

Jessie stares over at the booth. It's empty. But, then, as she watches, something slowly creeps up and into view:

MR SCARAMOUCHE.

A mysterious, centuries-old puppet. He wears a purple velvet pin stripe suit. He has real hair fashioned into a grey quiff; black eyes: dead, like a shark's. And that grin. Oh, boy the grin. It's wide, teathy, harrowing.

There's a real sense of unease just looking at him.

BOTTLER (CONT'D)

He won't bite.

(corrects)

He shouldn't do.

Curious, Jessie tentatively heads over. As she draws near the puppet, she hears an unsettling giggle emanating from him.

MR SCARAMOUCHE

You look troubled? Not giving you the heebie Jeebies, am I?

JESSIE

(yes)

No.

Mr Scaramouche's voice is odd. Unnatural. Mischievous with underlying menace. The pitch ranges from high when he's excited, to low when things don't go his way.

MR SCARAMOUCHE

The handle's Mr Scaramouche. To make your acquaintance is my utmost pleasure.

JESSIE

(humouring)

Um. Okay. I'm - Jessie.

MR SCARAMOUCHE

Okey dokey. Pig in a pokey. By my reckoning, that makes us pals! Penny for your thoughts, Jessie?

Jessie looks around, wary of being seen here.

MR SCARAMOUCHE (CONT'D)
No need to fear. Unburden your
woes...

He laughs. Slow. Eerie. Jessie's getting a bit freaked out.

JESSIE
Nothing. Just - my stupid parents.

MR SCARAMOUCHE
We all know that feeling. My Mum
and Dad were thick as two short
planks. Literally.

He laughs again. His body spasms, jolts: a puppet with a tic.
Jessie frowns.

MR SCARAMOUCHE (CONT'D)
(hurt)
You don't find me funny?

JESSIE
I - have to go now.

MR SCARAMOUCHE
DON'T!
(mellows)
You haven't heard my proposition...

JESSIE
Yeah. I'm good.

MR SCARAMOUCHE
What if I said you could have the
power to control your parents?
Inteeeeeerested?

Jessie's really freaked now, but slightly intrigued.

MR SCARAMOUCHE (CONT'D)
Wouldn't you wanna? Huh? Huh?
Huuuuuh?

Mr Scaramouche's wild eyes are hypnotic.

MR SCARAMOUCHE (CONT'D)
It's easy peasy, lemony squeezy.
Just gotta rap on your forehead.
Three times. Then repeat back to
me... that's the way to do it.

Jessie hesitates.

MR SCARAMOUCHE (CONT'D)
Come on, friend. Unless you're
scared?
(Jessie scoffs)
Ooooooh. That's it! A yella belly!

JESSIE
Shut up!

Mr Scaramouche makes a screechy Chicken sound, taunting.

JESSIE (CONT'D)
(losing patience)
Fine. If it shuts you up...

Mr Scaramouche stops. He leans in, excited, as Jessie taps on her head three times.

JESSIE (CONT'D)
That's the way to do it.
Happy?

But Mr Scaramouche doesn't move. He stares straight at her. Jessie frowns - well?

And then it comes. A burst of laughter. Maniacal. Irrepressible. The puppet shakes. Like a bolt of electricity tickling his insides. It's proper freaky.

We push in on Mr Scaramouche's face - and, for a millisecond, his eyes appear to become HUMAN.

Jessie stares, mouth agape, as Mr Scaramouche WINKS AT HER.

A shiver runs down Jessie's spine. Did that really happen? No time to question as: Mr Scaramouche ducks out of sight.

A curtain drops on the booth. Calm again. Silence.

Suitably weirded out, Jessie quickly marches away.

JESSIE (CONT'D)
Freak show.

FADE TO BLACK.

7 INT. GERSTENBERGER HOUSE - JESSIE'S BEDROOM - DAY 2 (08:00) 7

FADE UP ON:

Jessie wakes in bed. Slowly, she sits up. Listens out for the standard, chaotic, morning routine...

But - nothing.

She muses. Odd.

8 **INT. GERSTENBERGER HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 2 (08:10)** 8

Jessie enters. The kitchen's empty. No parents. No mess.

She frowns. *Really* odd.

9 **INT. GERSTENBERGER HOUSE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAY 2 (08:15)** 9

Jessie knocks on her parent's door. No response. She pushes it open...

...Mum and Dad are lying in bed. But not asleep. In fact, they're wide awake, eyes open, staring up at the ceiling.

JESSIE

What's this then? The silent treatment?

Nothing.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Because I stormed off yesterday?

Silence. No movement.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

(losing patience)

Fine. If you're planning on ignoring me. Can you at least do it while making me a normal breakfast for once? Toast. OJ. Forget the brownny gunk smoothie...

With that, Mum and Dad sit bolt upright. They climb out of bed, in total silence, then compliantly head downstairs.

Jessie watches them go. Eh?

10 **INT. GERSTENBERGER HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 2 (08:20)** 10

Jessie's at the breakfast table. Mum presents a plate of neatly buttered, brown toast, cut into triangles. Dad pours out a glass of fresh OJ.

Jessie studies the breakfast, then looks at her folks. They're stood, blank-eyed, staring into the distance.

JESSIE

Er, is this like, one of Dad's jokes that I never get?

(confused)

Seriously?

Mum and Dad blink, emotionless.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Fine. While you're in normal mode... how about Dad sticks on some decent trousers for once?

As instructed, Dad sparks to life. He snatches up a pair of trousers from the washing bin. He starts pulling them on. It's a struggle: they're Mum's skinny jeans.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

(chuckling)

What are you doing?

DAD

(monotonous)

What you told me to.

He manages to yank them over his knees. They just about cover the bottom of his thighs. This is beyond a joke. Jessie ponders, slowly walks over to the counter. She eyes the Marshmallow jar. The one that Mum detests so much...

JESSIE

So, if I told Mum... to cram as many of these as she can into her mouth...

...Mum takes the jar from Jessie's hand. She flips off the lid, then proceeds to stuff her face with marshmallows.

Jessie's stunned: what is going on?

JESSIE (CONT'D)

This is messed up.

And that's when she remembers:

11

EXT. KINGSTON COVE - BEACH - FLASHBACK

11

Close on - Mr Scaramouche.

MR SCARAMOUCHE

What if I said you could have the power to control your parents? Inteeeeeerested?

Dad carries a decent bottle of red. These two couldn't be any classier. Jessie made sure of it.

Jessie scans the room. Various faces from the neighbourhood gather in groups. Small talk. Eating. It's a pretty generic affair. Her folks'll blend right in.

JESSIE

(sotto)

Recap time. Remind me of the party rules. Dad?

DAD

(monotone)

I must not crack jokes. Nor will I embarrass Jessie. If someone initiates conversation, I shall simply nod and smile...

JESSIE

Bingo. And Mum - what do you do if there's group laughter?

MUM

(monotone)

...I must join in. But using only an acceptable level of giggles.

JESSIE

Oh, this is gonna be great. Okay, perfect parents... let's do this thing.

Patty passes, in a fancy party dress.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Hey, Patty. Loving the dress.

PATTY

Gerstenberger. Loving the -
(notices Jessie's
identical trainers)
Shoes?

She looks up, Jessie gives her a smile. Frustrated, Patty frowns. Jessie exhales. A mini victory. Good start.

Mrs Peterson joins them.

MRS PETERSON

(thinly veiled smile)

Ah. The neighbours.
(then surprised,
impressed)
(MORE)

MRS PETERSON (CONT'D)

You all look - delightful. Please,
come in, make yourselves at home.

Jessie smiles. Mrs Peterson turns to Patty.

MRS PETERSON (CONT'D)

Patricia. Drinks are running low.
Head to the kitchen and top us up,
dear.

PATTY

Mum - my friends are on their way?

Mrs Peterson gives a glare. Patty wilts.

JESSIE

I'll lend a hand, if you like?

PATTY

(gritted teeth)
Perfect.

Jessie beams.

15

INT. PETERSON'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 2 (17:20)

15

Jessie and Patty load drinks onto trays in total silence.

JESSIE

I was thinking. Being neighbours
and all. Plus, we are in the same
class... that it makes sense if
we... maybe walk to school
together?

PATTY

(cold)
I - really don't want to do that.

Patty quickly loads her tray. Jessie nods, stung. She bends
down to retrieve drinks from a cupboard. Mrs Peterson passes.
She doesn't see Jessie. Her eyes lock onto Patty's dress.

MRS PETERSON

Patricia? What is that?

Mrs Peterson centres on the tiniest of dirt marks on Patty's
dress. Barely even noticeable.

MRS PETERSON (CONT'D)

Have you been wrestling pigs in a
sty?

(MORE)

MRS PETERSON (CONT'D)

After all the effort we've put into tonight... if the plan was to show us up: mission accomplished!

Jessie keeps hidden. She strains to see the problem.

MRS PETERSON (CONT'D)

Get those drinks distributed. Then take your self upstairs to change.

Patty nods, obediently. Mrs Peterson storms away, furious.

Jessie looks at Patty: humiliated. For the first time in forever, she's thankful she *isn't* Patty Peterson.

PATTY

(sadly)

It must've been when I sat on the bench. Bird poop.

JESSIE

(warm)

I - still think you look great.

Patty slowly looks at Jessie, her eyes almost thankful. She collects up the tray of drink and heads off to serve.

Jessie loads the second tray. Her eye-line meets the wall of PETERSON family photos.

Each frame is predictably expensive, but the images themselves are surprisingly cold; stilted holiday shots; faked Christmas cheers. Every pose planned. Every smile faked. No personality. No intimacy.

Jessie's filled with a tinge of sadness just looking at them.

MR SANDFORD (O.S.)

Oh, thank my stars. Del!

Jessie turns to see a cheery looking neighbour - MR SANDFORD - approaching Dad. He's stood on his own in the corner, staring off into space.

MR SANDFORD (CONT'D)

Almost didn't recognise you. Thought I was destined to suffer this hell alone.

As taught, Dad nods, plasters on his fake smile.

MR SANDFORD (CONT'D)

Same old Peterson guff every year! Why do we force ourselves, eh?

Dad nods again. Robotic.

MR SANDFORD (CONT'D)
How's your Jessie doing? Sam's
fine. Progressing with the choir.
Say, how about one of your jokes?
Couldn't hurt to lighten the place
up a bit.

But Dad just stares ahead.

MR SANDFORD (CONT'D)
Del? Is - everything alright?

Mr Sanford's disappointed by this 'new' Dad. And, for the first time this evening, so is Jessie.

16

INT. PETERSON'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 2 (18:00)

16

Jessie's eating some food, bored. Patty and her friends head over. Patty, back on cruel form, grabs a ketchup bottle.

PATTY
Gerstenberger. Want sauce for that?

Patty squeezes the bottle, way too hard. A glob of red condiment splatters Jessie's clean top. The girls laugh.

JESSIE
Why would you do that?

PATTY
Er, cos it's funny.

The kids giggle harder. It so isn't. Jessie can't believe it. This is who she wanted to impress?

JESSIE
Mum was right. You lot are just -
losers.

Jessie turns to Mum, stood blank eyed in the corner. Jessie shoots her a pained look: *Mum help?!*

Mum observes the girls laughing. But this time, her face doesn't darken. Misreading Jessie's request - she starts laughing too!

Humiliated. Covered in sauce. Jessie stares around at the party. Her folks were right, why do they force themselves over here? Mum continues to laugh along with Patty's crew.

Worst. Party. Ever.

17 INT. GERSTENBERGER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 2 (20:00) 17

Jessie's squigged in the middle of the family sofa. Snug. Flanked by Mum and Dad. A raucous comedy blares from the TV.

Jessie giggles, popcorn leaps from her mouth. She notices Mum and Dad:

No laughter from them. Not even a smile. Before, it was all snorting guffaws and warmth. Now, dead eyes and confusion.

JESSIE

So. Mum. I was thinking...
tomorrow, maybe you could do me one
of your smoothies?

MUM

(robotic)
And what would you like in this
smoothie?

JESSIE

Well, I dunno.
(smiles)
Surprise me.

MUM

And how would you like me to
surprise you?

Jessie wilts: hardly the reaction she wanted.

JESSIE

Actually, don't worry.
(ponders, then, to Dad)
Haven't been subjected to an
annoying bear hug in a while, Dad?
Go on, then? As we're here...

Dad raises up his limp arms, he wraps them around Jessie's body, like two dead snakes.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

No. It's more like-

She squeezes his arms around her tighter, but he doesn't get it. Frustrated, Jessie tries again -

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Remember?
(squeezes him, makes a
breaking wind sound)
Stupid fibre diet?

She looks to Dad, hopeful. Then to Mum, surely she'll remember? But they only offer confused stares in return.

Jessie lets his arms go. She looks down, wanting to cry.

18 **INT. GERSTENBERGER HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT 2 (20:15)** 18

Close up on: The Gerstenberger family photos on the fridge. Jessie pores over them. Like she's seeing them for the first time. Each snap bursts with warmth, personality, fun. Everything that's sorely missed now.

She looks back at her parents, sat rigid on the sofa.

JESSIE

Okay. I think it should stop now.

I'm - done. Game over. Just...

(desperate)

Go back to how you were.

Mum and Dad turn their heads. Then, in unison -

MUM

And how do we go back to how we were?

DAD

And how do we go back to how we were?

Jessie frowns, scared. She shakes her head. But then she remembers-

JESSIE

Wait. Hang on...

(she knocks three times on her head)

That's the way to do it!

Hopeful, Jessie eyes her folks: no change.

Determined, she tries again. Louder. More passion. Knocking on her head simultaneously -

JESSIE (CONT'D)

That's the way to do it! That's the way to do it! Please!

(shouts)

THAT'S THE WAY TO DO ITTTT!

But, nothing.

Jessie's wild eyed. She MUST fix this...

19 **EXT. KINGSTON COVE - BEACH - DAY 3 (09:00)** 19

The same spot as before. Jessie races up to it...

And there it is again. The laugh. Louder this time.

Slowly, Jessie rises to her feet. She follows the noise, tracking it...

22

EXT. KARTER BAY - BEACH - DAY 3 (12:31)

22

...Jessie's led around a corner, she turns to see:

The Puppet booth.

A crowd of kids settled in front of it, loud laughter.

Jessie can still hear Mum's vivacious laugh. And then she hears someone making a breaking wind sound, and -

DAD (V.O.)

Oop. Someone needs to cut down
their fibre diet!

That was Dad! He's here too. Both her parents. She can hear them! God, she missed their voices.

But where?

She scans the crowd. Desperate. She can't see them. Where are they?

Frustrated, Jessie steps in for a closer look.

And that's when it catches her eye, up in the booth... Mum and Dad aren't watching the puppets...

THEY ARE THE PUPPETS.

Hand-carved in wood, with Mum and Dad's distinct features. That's where the voices are coming from.

Jessie can't believe it. She watches in horror:

Mum and Dad puppets prepare breakfast. Mum uses a bottle prop, it sprays out into the crowd. The kids cackle.

MUM (V.O.)

It'll do you a lot more good than
those revolting bits of fat!

Jessie watches the crowd loving her parents' banter. She can't help but smile at their antics too.

The show draws to a close. Mum and Dad take a bow. The curtain drops.

The audience is departing. Jessie heads behind the booth, determined.

JESSIE
Whoever's in charge. Come out.
Right now!

Silence.

JESSIE (CONT'D)
Okay. I'm coming in...!

Jessie takes a deep breath, grabs the edge of the curtain, enters...

23

INT. MR SCARAMOUCHE'S TENT - DAY 3 (12:33)

23

Jessie enters. There's no sign of Mr Scaramouche.
Confused, Jessie spins her head round, searching the place.
Then she hears it: that eerie little laugh...

MR SCARAMOUCHE
Well, well. My ol' pal, Jessie.

Jessie turns as Mr Scaramouche pops his head out from the corner of the booth.

JESSIE
I want you to come out now.

MR SCARAMOUCHE
Say, you lost your noodle? Who are you talking to?

Jessie's had enough games. She peeks behind the curtain, expecting to confront the puppeteer... but no one's there.

This puppet is ALIVE!

MR SCARAMOUCHE (CONT'D)
(firm)
That's right. I'm the one in control.

Jessie feels sick to her stomach.

MR SCARAMOUCHE (CONT'D)
So, regretting your decision, huh?
Not surprised. Your Mum and Dad are a big hit!

BOTTLER (CONT'D)

There was only one way to free them. My parents. I had to find replacements.

MR SCARAMOUCHE

Ah, ah, ah! I prefer the term... understudies!

BOTTLER

Took me a long time. Travelled all over.

(sad smile)

Then I found you. And as soon as you uttered those words.. they came back to me. My parents.

The Bottler's eyes, kissed with tears. He holds out his bottle.

BOTTLER (CONT'D)

This is yours now. You must go out. Find your own understudies.

A guilty, pitying look, then The Bottler exits the tent...

24

EXT. BEACH - DAY 3 (12:34)

24

Jessie peeks her head out. She watches as the bottler joins a man and a woman. They look just like the puppets from the first Punch & Judy show.

Together they walk off, hand in hand on the beach, fading into the distance...

A eerie laugh bubbles inside...

25

INT. SCARAMOUCHE'S TENT - DAY 3 (12:35)

25

Jessie turns back to see:

MR SCARMOUCHE

It's all yours now, kiddo.

(giggling)

Good luck, Jessie.

Jessie looks down at the bottle. Can she do this?

FADE TO BLACK.

The Curious POV: he stares at a lamppost. At a flyer for the puppet show with a big pic of a grinning Mr Scaramouche on it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
If you could undo a terrible
mistake, by passing those
consequences to a complete
stranger...

The Curious gently peels off the flyer. Then, he gently folds it in half, then half again.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
What would you do?

He places it in his satchel for safe keeping.

People walk past him in the foreground, obscuring full view of him.

On the third person to pass - The Curious disappears. Off to seek his next story adventure...

END OF EPISODE