

PUNCH AND JUDY

by  
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Company Name: Scar Tissue Films Ltd

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Fade In:

INT. BASEMENT.

A puppeteers workshop. It resembles a mad professors Laboratory.

Marionettes hang in manacles from an iron bar, like prisoners hanging in a dungeon, Punch and Judy posters adorn the damp walls and the faces of wooden puppets stare out from gloomy shelves.

The dull light reveals a mans gnarled and painfully twisted form. A hunchback. THOMAS

Thomas slumps at a work bench that stands like an altar to Punch. Half-finished, gaudy little puppets lay all around.

He removes PUNCH PUPPET from an old LEATHER SUITCASE. The puppet is a miniature version of himself, sharing the same humped-back, the same prominent chin and the same penetrating gaze. As he holds it up, the puppet is silhouetted in light that shines from candles. It gives off an almost religious glow.

Thomas strokes it's head lovingly.

FOOTSTEPS can be heard coming down the stairs behind him. His wife, JOAN appears.

She walks towards him and kisses him gently

JOAN  
You're back early

Thomas remains silent.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Thomas what's wrong?

Thomas breathes out slowly and takes a letter from the suitcase. He hands it to Joan.

THOMAS  
They've cancelled my contract

Joan scans the letter. She looks shocked

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
He was the Great Pulcinella in the Commedia Del Arte. He's performed in front of Kings and Queens. He's practically a God!

JOAN  
Jesus, Thomas what are we going to do? We need the money

THOMAS (BEAT)

I want to sell the house and go  
on tour.

Joan's mouth opens in surprise. She looks at Thomas's face.  
His expression suggests he is quite serious.

JOAN

Have you gone mad?  
What are we going to live in, a  
caravan?

Thomas looks at her intently.

THOMAS

I've had an epiphany. We'll take  
the show round the country, have  
a different audience every week.  
We'll be like missionaries.

Joan looks at him in disbelief

JOAN

You have gone mad.

THOMAS

You don't see what's happening  
out there. I see it everyday.  
Single mothers, kids with no  
respect. People need to be taught  
morality, tradition. They need  
Punch and Judy.

Joan approaches him and rubs his shoulder gently.

JOAN

Thomas, it's just a story.

Thomas slams his fist on the desk.

THOMAS

It's more than a story.

Joan removes her hand slowly from Thomas's back.

Joan kisses Thomas and turns to leave. She steps to look  
back at him once before continuing up the stairs.

Her FOOTSTEPS clatter on the stairs as she departs.

Thomas turns to Punch and takes him in his arms.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

She doesn't understand.  
No-one does...

He strokes Punch's hair and cradles him in his arms.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
...But we'll make 'em.

Thomas gently kisses Punch good-night and leaves, turning the light off. Punch's maniacal grin slides into the darkness...

INT. LIVING ROOM. -DAY

...CLUNK.

Light streams through a letterbox.

A brown envelope drops through the letter box. A bill.

Joan, in a dressing gown, picks it up and looks at it. She shakes her head in exasperation and places it on a table with a host of other bills.

She walks into the kitchen to find...

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

...Thomas sat at the dining table teaching Timmy how to use the PUNCH and JUDY puppets. In front of him are the beginnings of a script.

THOMAS  
That's it. Thumb and little  
finger.

Joan enters the room and walks towards the sink. She starts to wash the dishes.

The cloth makes a hideous screeching sound as it drags back and forth over the pots.

Timmy gets a little boisterous.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
Careful, they're not toys.

Thomas gently rests his hand on Timmy's arm.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
Remember what I told you?, Punch  
and Judy is a re-telling of an  
old myth, do you remember what a  
myth is? No?

Timmy shakes his head. In the background, Joan stops her work and stares out of the kitchen window.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

It's a story that goes way, way back into time. Like a religion. It's the job of puppeteers to teach people about it, that's why they call us Professors. One day you'll do the same.

Joan drops a plate into the sink.

She turns to the table to look at Thomas's face.

JOAN

Timmy, go and watch the telly.

Timmy leaves gleefully.

Joan closes the kitchen door.

JOAN (CONT'D)

What are you putting in that child's head? He needs to go to school, get an education, get a job, a career.

THOMAS

He's not going through what I went through

JOAN

It won't be like that for Timmy he's not...

THOMAS

He's not what...a cripple?

JOAN

...I didn't say that

(BEAT)

What about his future?

THOMAS

I can teach him everything that he needs to know. He can help with the show.

Joan rubs her face in exasperation

JOAN

You haven't earned a penny in over two months.

Thomas turns and picks up his script. He waves it at Joan.

THOMAS

I'm working on a new script.  
Something contemporary, something  
people will respond to. These  
things take time.

(BEAT)

I would have expected a little  
support from my wife

Joan grabs a Judy doll from the table.

JOAN

Support? I quit my job to look  
after Timmy, so you could carry  
on playing with your stupid  
dolls. It's about time you took  
responsibility for your family.

Thomas stands up and takes the puppet back, staring into  
Joan's face. He grabs his things from the table and storms  
off towards the basement door.

JOAN (CONT'D)

That's it run away and play with  
your toys...

He stomps downstairs.

Joan shouts at the door as it closes.

JOAN (CONT'D)

...Forget about your sons future,  
forget about your wife. Go and  
play with your silly little  
dolls.

Joan slams her hand against the door and then storms out of  
the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM. -DAY

She crosses the room quickly and slumps heavily onto the  
couch next to her young son. She strokes his hair absent-  
mindedly as he watches the television.

Her attention is drawn to the phone. She walks to the table  
by the front door and picks up the PHONE. She dials.

JOAN

Dr. Walker please...

INT. BASEMENT.

Thomas broods at his workbench. He seizes his script and tears it up in frustration.

He grabs his dolls.

JUDY and the BABY are surrounding PUNCH, shouting at him:

The words are distorted, unearthly. Thomas has inserted a swazzle\* into his mouth.

JUDY

Let him go to school.  
Kids want to learn about sex,  
they want to be violent, it's  
only natural.

Punch is shrivelling under the pressure.

BABY

Come on Dad, everyone's doing it.  
If they can take drugs and have  
little babies, why  
can't I?

PUNCH

I want you to learn about  
morality, tradition...  
Do something important with your  
life!

JUDY

You think you can change the  
world with a puppet  
show ?

Judy starts to laugh at him.

Baby starts to laugh at him.

The two dolls jiggle manically in front of Thomas.

He takes another puppet. The DEVIL.

The DEVIL seizes the BABY by the arm and starts to drag him away.

THOMAS

He needs an education, job  
prospects.

The BABY'S other arm is grabbed by someone else... PUNCH.  
He tries to tug the child away from the DEVIL.

The DEVIL refuses to let go. A perverse tug of war.

The Baby see-saws between the combatants. Back and forth. They pull harder. And harder.

The Devil wins. Punch releases the baby and leaps at the DEVIL, bashing his skull with the slapstick.

THWACK!

THWACK!

THWACK!

Thomas throws the two dolls down.

He picks Punch up and stares fiercely into the puppets eyes.

THOMAS

Help me Punch. Help Me.

He looks at Punch as though he expects him to say something.

Nothing.

He lays Punch down. Just a little too quickly.

The doll slips off the desk. He lies in a crumpled heap on the floor

Thomas bends to retrieve him.

Underneath the desk are numerous BOXES, stuffed with assorted household things, children's toys and sports gear, including one containing a BASEBALL BAT.

A box marked FAMILY VIDEOS catches his eye. He drags it towards him and takes out an old video camera.

He looks at Punch.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You're a genius!

The camera turns on with a PING, framing Punch's face. The camera tracks in until the black pupil fills the screen...

INT. BASEMENT. -DAY

...A flickering Title screen appears. PUNCH AND JUDY.

The camera pulls back.

Joan and Timmy sit facing the wall of the basement which has become a temporary cinema screen. The harsh light of the projector dissects the gloom.

Thomas stands behind the projector, dressed in full Punch regalia, like a full sized version of the man himself. He trembles with excitement.

THOMAS

This is it. The big one. Punch and Judy re-invented for a whole new audience. Just wait till you see it.

Thomas starts the film.

It flickers into life.

ON SCREEN:

Punch is walks across the stage, carrying a bunch of flowers and a briefcase.

He opens the front door, and walks in whistling

PUNCH

Honey. I'm home.

There is no reply.

He cups his ear to the side of his head.

PUNCH (CONT'D)

Honey?

He listens again. There is a faint noise...

A low groan. He walks through to the next room...

...the bedroom. Judy is on the bed, grinding into the male puppet beneath her. Her moans mingle with the sound of a baby crying out on the other side of the stage.

PUNCH (CONT'D)

Honey?

He sees what is happening. And recoils in horror.

PUNCH (CONT'D)

Honey? How could you?  
With our child in the room?

JUDY

What makes you think he's our  
child?

Both Judy and her beau begin to laugh out loud.

Punch staggers around the stage and then disappears behind the curtain.

He reappears carrying his slapstick and THEN...

Leaps at the couple.

He bashes their heads with his slapstick

SLAM!

SLAM!

SLAM!

Joan covers Timmy's eyes.

Punch turns to face the audience. The camera sweeps into an Extreme Close Up.

PUNCH

That's the way you do it!

He bows. The curtains close.

THE END appears on the screen.

Thomas turns of the projector light and walks over to the wall to turn on the main light.

As he stands before it, there is something of a religious glow created around his head.

He has a triumphant, maniacal grin on his face.

He applauds with gusto.

THOMAS

Well...what do you think? It's only rough, but you get the idea...

JOAN

Don't you think it's a bit...

THOMAS

...I'll tidy it up, then we can get the show on the road. Put it in shopping centres, festivals. Really get the ball rolling.

JOAN

...Thomas, it's awful!

THOMAS

What do you mean?

JOAN

It's violent, misogynistic...

THOMAS

It's Punch and Judy! It's supposed to be bloody violent!

Thomas turns away angrily.

Joan moves towards Thomas in a conciliatory fashion.

JOAN

You've got to be realistic.  
People don't want to watch puppet shows on television, they want reality, things like that.

Thomas sits down.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Thomas. There's no future in this. For any of us.

Thomas slams the table with his hands.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(BEAT)

I called Doctor Walker  
There's a vacancy in the  
physiotherapy department.  
I'm going to take it.

THOMAS

What about the tour?

JOAN

There is no tour!

The words echo round the room.

Joan breathes out slowly

JOAN (CONT'D)

I have to do what's best for Timmy.

Thomas stands up.

THOMAS

I know what's best for Timmy  
I know what's best for this family! Punch and Judy...

JOAN  
Punch and Judy is stupid!

CRACK!

Thomas strikes her across the face

Joan staggers back in shock, her eyes wide.

JOAN  
You hit me

Her face contorts in rage.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
You hit me you bastard.

Timmy screams and starts to cry hysterically. Joan hurries towards him. Thomas follows closely behind.

THOMAS  
It's your fault Joan. You shouldn't have said that. It's your fault...

Joan gathers Timmy.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
It's all right. Your mummy's just being silly. You want to help daddy with the show don't you?

JOAN  
Stay away from him.

THOMAS  
Do you think I'd hurt my own...

She turns to the exit. Thomas moves surprisingly quickly and slams the door shut.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
(Shouting)  
I know what's going on here. You're trying to alienate me. Turn him against me. I won't let you take his legacy away from him. I won't.

JOAN  
Listen to yourself. You're sick, you've gone mad.

Thomas goes crazy. He bangs the wall with his fist. His words spill out venomously.

THOMAS

Mad? I'm the only sane one left!  
I'm the only one that can see  
what's going on.

Joan backs away with Timmy, terrified.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

It's a conspiracy. That's what  
this is, a conspiracy. Punch had  
it right...

Punch sits upright on the workbench, as though he is  
surveying the scene.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

...It's there in all the plays. You  
can't trust anyone.

JOAN

Thomas, you're not thinking  
straight. You're not yourself

THOMAS

How could I be with you  
whispering in my ear the whole  
time?

JOAN.

Thomas, please, calm down

THOMAS

Put Timmy down. Put him down!

Joan obliges.

JOAN

Just rela...

Thomas grabs her arm forcibly and drags her over to the  
iron bar that holds the marionettes.

JOAN (CONT'D)

...Thomas you're hurting me.

He chains her up with an empty pair of manacles.

Joan starts to cry.

THOMAS

You've been at it from the start.  
Haven't you eh?

Thomas moves frenziedly about the room. His movement sends  
the hanging light bulb spinning.

Violent shadows streak over the walls. All of them in the twisted shape of the hunchback.

He picks up the Judy and the Devil dolls and starts to impersonate Joan's voice.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

We need the money Thomas...  
It's just a story Thomas. It's  
violent, misogynistic.  
Every turn you've been there  
stopping me. Whispering in my ear  
like the Devil himself.

He puts the Devil by the head of Joan.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

He needs an education, job  
prospects. You've gone mad.  
You're sick. People want TV, not  
stupid Puppet shows! Trying to  
turn him against me aren't you  
eh?

JOAN

Stop it!

Poor Timmy clings to his Mummy in terror.

Thomas walks over to work surface. Puts his dolls down.

The light from the electric fire casts glowing red light over Thomas's features. A dawning realization spreads across his face.

THOMAS

Maybe you're right. Maybe they do  
want reality. And if they want  
reality. That's what they'll get.

He picks up the VIDEO CAMERA and turns it on.

His face fills the screen. He looks just like a human sized Punch.

He laughs manically, grabs some face paint from his work bench then carries the camera over to Joan, filming her up close.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

We'd better get you ready for  
your performance!

He grabs some paint from on his desk and starts to apply it to the face of Joan. She struggles against it, but her limited movements only serve to smear it horrifically across her face.

As a final insult Thomas puts a ridiculous wig on her head.  
He claps enthusiastically.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
Oh you look lovely! Timmy?  
Doesn't your mum look nice?

He laughs again, then moves over to the workbench to retrieve his baseball bat. He feels the weight of it in his hands.

Timmy cries harder.

JOAN  
Thomas, please you can still go back. Just let me go and we can sort everything out.

Thomas kneels by his wife.

THOMAS  
Sssh! Don't cry. You're going to be the star of the greatest Punch and Judy show ever made.

JOAN  
Thomas it's me, Joan, your wife! Please don't do this. You've been under pressure I know that. But I can help...

THOMAS  
Sacrifices have to be made for the greater good. This is a chance to be part of something bigger than ourselves. People die, but morality, tradition can go on forever. You'll be a martyr for a new religion.

JOAN  
Thomas whatever you're thinking of doing, don't, please don't.

THOMAS  
We're going to tell a story about a little boy called Timmy.

He films Timmy, who clings desperately to his mummy. Joan attempts to cuddle him, but the chains hold her back. She pulls at them with all her might, but the iron bar remains distressingly firm.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Timmy was a good little boy whose father trained him from an early age to be a great Punch and Judy Professor. But his Mummy had other ideas, she twisted him, coerced him into wanting to do other things. She offered him all the trappings of the modern world.

So Timmy was confused. Which way would he turn? Torn as he was between the good that requires sacrifice and hardship and the evil that seemed so easy? What was little Timmy to do?

Thomas aims the camera at his young son.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

What's it to be Timmy. Do you want to choose your Mummy or your Daddy?

JOAN

Please don't do this to him. It's me that you're angry at. Promise me you won't hurt him

THOMAS

Don't you remember how the story goes? The baby always dies first. Either way, the film works.

Timmy and Joan are crying. Timmy hugs his mother more tightly than ever.

JOAN

Please Thomas let us go, we'll help you with the show, I promise.

Thomas looks at her in disgust. He knows that she is just playing for time.

THOMAS

Make your choice Timmy.

Joan makes it for him.

JOAN

It's alright Baby. You go with your Daddy OK?

Timmy shakes his little head.

THOMAS  
Come here Timmy.

Joan sniffles.

JOAN  
You be a good boy and go and  
stand with your Daddy. I love  
you. Always remember that.  
Everything is going to be fine

Timmy walks reluctantly behind his father.

Thomas films him as he walks towards him.

THOMAS  
And so the brave little Timmy  
turned his back on evil ways for  
all time.

Joan breaks down. Tears stream down her red face.

Thomas addresses her.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
I'll send tapes of your death to  
all the papers, it will be  
reported all over the country.  
Maybe the world. From now on  
whenever someone watches a Punch  
and Judy show they'll realize,  
this isn't entertainment, it's  
real. Interest in the show will  
be rekindled. People that have  
never heard of Punch will  
discover it for the first time.  
New Professors will spring up in  
Virgin lands with new ideas.  
And in the background will be  
Timmy and I, orchestrating it  
all. Every time interest  
threatens to dwindle, we'll  
release a new show and make  
disciples of everyone.

Thomas leans down to her and uses Punch to whisper.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
Don't be sad. Be proud.  
You're the first disciple of a  
new religion.

He kisses her on the cheek with his Punch puppet and then  
raises his baseball bat high in the air. The shadows of  
Thomas and Joan are projected onto the wall and we watch  
them as Thomas brings his bat crashing down repeatedly on  
Joan.

Little Timmy stands with his hands pressed tightly over his ears, drowning out the hideous sounds of his mothers moans as the bat crunches her bones.

The horror ends. Thomas lowers the bat. His job done.

Joan's lifeless body hangs like one of the marionettes.

Timmy clings to his dead mother, crying. Thomas turns him to face him.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Your Mummy's was bad and she had  
to be punished. I know it's hard,  
but one day you will understand.  
I'll teach you everything I know.  
You'll become the greatest  
Professor the world has ever  
seen.

He offers Timmy his hand.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Come with me boy

Timmy, still sniffing, takes his fathers hand. Thomas leads him away through the basement door.

FADE TO BLACK.