

THE PUPPET SHOW**By ROSS MUELLER**

THIS IS A PLAY.

ANYBODY IN YOUR HOUSE CAN PLAY ANYBODY IN THIS SCENE. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT YOUR AGE MAY BE. THERE ARE FOUR CHARACTERS TO PLAY WITH.

THE ONLY PROPS YOU NEED:

AN X-BOX OR PLAYSTATION CONTROLLER

A CARDBOARD BOX WITH OLD SOCKS AND UNDIES.

A BEAT IS A SMALL PAUSE

LIGHTS UP!

(Sam is holding the controller, playing FIFA on the PlayStation. Junior is sitting next to Sam watching the match. It is the FA Cup Final so there is a lot of excitement from Sam, but Junior is just watching. Rabbit is pottering about making a cup of tea.

After a minute.

Max leaps into the room holding a cardboard box full of socks and underwear)

MAX Stop everything!

RABBIT I'm not doing anything worth stopping. Cuppa tea Max?

MAX Not right now, Rabbit! I have just had a fantastic idea!

SAM Get out of the way.

MAX Put down that controller, Sam.

SAM We are "one all" in the eightieth minute!

MAX No time for X-Box!

SAM PlayStation.

MAX Whatever!

SAM It's the FA Cup Final.

JUNIOR Penalty!

SAM Oh!!! That's just great!

JUNIOR Slide tackle in the Box! What was Ronaldo thinking?

SAM I couldn't see what I was doing! *(to Max)* This is all your fault! If he scores we're going to be two one down.

JUNIOR He's taking his time, he's looking to the crowd.

RABBIT What's in the box?

SAM I have to save this penalty –

JUNIOR He shoots, he scores!

SAM No way!

JUNIOR The crowd is going crazy!

SAM I dived the right way!

RABBIT What's in the box?

MAX A do it yourself kit for happiness in the home!

SAM This game is rigged.

MAX So put it down Sammy!

SAM Why would I do that?

MAX We are going to make a puppet show!

SAM I don't have time for puppets.

MAX Come on -

JUNIOR Two, one! Five minutes left!

SAM If Ronaldo loses the FA Cup I am blaming you forever!

RABBIT I remember puppet shows. They were fun.

MAX See, Sam? Puppet shows are fun!

RABBIT Puppets used to be everywhere. Play School. Mr Squiggle. Magic Roundabout.

SAM Sounds creepy.

RABBIT What made you think of puppets, Max?

MAX I have been spending too much time on the internet.

RABBIT There's nothing there.

SAM Except the rest of the universe.

RABBIT Nothing worth knowing that you don't already know.

SAM Two minutes of Extra Time, come on!

MAX People are doing all sorts of things with their families. And I thought... Gee, it looks like so much fun out there. TikTok and gardens and sourdough and jigsaws and pets and puzzles and then I thought... well what do we do together?

SAM Can you please move to the left?

JUNIOR There's no way you can win now.

SAM Junior! I am trying to concentrate.

JUNIOR Don't call me Junior.

RABBIT But that's your name.

JUNIOR It wasn't my choice.

MAX "Junior" was my father's name.

JUNIOR I hate it.

MAX Don't say that –

JUNIOR Makes me feel like a secondary character.

MAX Well, what would you name yourself if you had a chance?

JUNIOR That's easy. I would be "Zeus, God of the Sky".

MAX Oh.

RABBIT Sounds nice.

JUNIOR I would rain fire on my enemies and control their beating hearts. Oh! *(re the FA Cup)* It's all over! That's time! Ronaldo is holding his head in his hands, he can't believe what just happened. He is in a state of shock! Fa-zahh!

SAM Nice one, Max!

MAX What have I done?

SAM I lost the FA Cup!

RABBIT The penalty was a huge mistake.

SAM Max was standing in front of the screen!

MAX I'm sorry about the crushing defeat – but now maybe we can do something together. Look at this box.

RABBIT That is my underwear.

MAX Yes. It is.

SAM Count me out!

MAX They are clean.

SAM How gross!

MAX There is nothing wrong with underwear.

RABBIT Why is my underwear in a cardboard box?

MAX These are old ones I use for dusting.

JUNIOR You use old underwear for dusting? In this house?

MAX Everybody does that!

SAM You dust our house with poo!!

MAX They are thoroughly washed and besides, I've been doing this for years. You never help, so you don't know! Now put down that controller, Sam. We are making a puppet show.

SAM Out of Rabbit's stinky underwear?

MAX No... I've got a few pairs of yours in here too, Sam.

SAM Wait a freaking second!

JUNIOR Ha! Ha! That is hi-lar-i-ous!

MAX Yours are in here too, Zeus.

SAM That! Is! Disgusting!

MAX Okay! Hands up if you live in this house and you are not wearing underwear right now! (*nobody puts their hand up*) Exactly... Everybody wears it, but nobody wants to admit it! Guess what happens when you put them in your laundry basket! I pick them up and I wash them for you! Everybody! Yes... Hang your heads! Exactly. I handle the smalls and the socks and I do not complain! This is family. This is how we live our lives together. We put our dirty underwear in a basket and it is magically cleaned by silent fairies, well news flash! I am the silent fairy! And I've had enough. (*pause*) So, I was on Instagram watching families work out together and play Monopoly and I thought -

RABBIT "Maybe I can use old underwear to entertain my family?"

MAX No! I thought "Gee, we have so much time on our hands and I have all these odd socks and undies I use for rags... and we can't go anywhere – we can make puppets!" Puppets are a positive family activity... So let's all dive into this magic box of possibility. (*pause*) Every culture in the world has some kind of relationship with puppets.

SAM Except mine.

RABBIT When did you become so objectionable?

SAM I am not.

JUNIOR *(to Sam)* I Zeus, command you to stop objecting to everything in the world! Fa! Zaaaaaaah - hasssser!

(beat)

MAX So according to the internet - puppets have a rich history.

JUNIOR *(to Max)* Speak to the Gods!... I am ready to hear your puppeting tales, your plans, your research on this thing you call the "internet".

SAM Oh brother.

JUNIOR I am not "brother"... I am "Mighty Zeus". Fa! Zaaaaaaah - hasssser! *(to Max)* Puppets, you say?... These sound like mythical creatures. What can they do on earth that Gods can not?

(beat)

MAX Well, Zeus. I guess the people who operate the puppets are actually a little bit like gods. They design the universe with -

SAM Stinky underwear.

MAX I was going to say "their own imaginations..."

SAM You are standing in front of the screen.

JUNIOR Why for are we be puppeting?

SAM It's not called "puppeting".

RABBIT People who make puppets are called "puppeteers".

JUNIOR *(to Rabbit)* Fa! Zaaaaaaah - hasssser!

RABBIT Don't Fazah me, I'm on your side.

SAM Oh, so there are "sides" now.

MAX There are no "sides". We are a family!

SAM I need to read that screen. I am in the middle of a Transfer Window. I'm buying new players. This is extremely important.

MAX You are testing my patience.

SAM - said the person carrying a box of dirty underwear.

MAX *(drops the box onto the floor)* Okay! You want the truth?! Other families are doing really cool things together. Everybody else out there looks like they're having a really great time together and... we're not. So... What is wrong with us?

SAM We don't have to be like everybody else.

MAX But I want us to be happy and normal.

RABBIT Normal? Nobody knows what "normal" means any more Max.

JUNIOR Zeus knows not what "normal" means neither.

RABBIT Either.

JUNIOR Fahhh – zahhhh!

SAM Zeus needs to get a grip.
(Beat – Junior stands)

JUNIOR Zeus is a god.
(Junior starts sorting through the box)

SAM Your hands are going to be so disgusting...

MAX Leave Zeus alone.

SAM I'm just being honest.
(Junior holds up a hand wrapped in an old football sock)

JUNIOR *(using hand in sock as a puppet)* Let there be life!

MAX Yes!

JUNIOR I am Footy, the friendly puppet!

RABBIT Pleased to meet you Footy, old pal.

JUNIOR Old pal? Yes! Yes! I do so hope I have some friends to play with.

SAM This so sad.

RABBIT I'll find a friend for you to play with Footy!
(Rabbit dives into the box and hunts around in the box with Junior)

MAX *(to Sam)* Come on... Pause the game.

SAM I'm busy.

MAX Don't you want to be in control of somebody else's life? ...Command them to walk the earth and devastate armies of my enemies, win battles... do the laundry.

SAM This is a critical Transfer Window.

MAX X-Box is just a game.

SAM PlayStation.

MAX It can wait, it's not real.

SAM This is better than real, this is FIFA. I can make Ronaldo play like Ronaldo, make him celebrate and dive and kick or I can bench him and make him shake his head.

MAX Just like a real boy.

SAM The best part is - I can turn the sound off. They don't talk back.

MAX Sam.

SAM What?

MAX This is tough on everybody. Everybody in here and out there and everybody... But it's been good to see you so much and... We used to spend hours crawling around this room, making forts, hide and seek... Sammy...

I know you came second in the FA Cup.

I know how much work you've put into the season to build the team. You're the Manager. I'm sorry.

Will you come and play with me?

... Please?

(Sam looks to Max)

No PlayStation, no Instagram, no internet. Just us. Fifteen minutes.

RABBIT *(with a pair of old undies on hand)* BEHOLD! The ancient Old Uncle Undies Puppet! Fresh air is such a tonic! Ohh Zeus! The absence of the toxic skid marks makes a puppet pleased to be alive.

(beat)

SAM Rabbit. That is pretty funny.

MAX Toxic skid marks...

JUNIOR Come on Sammy. Let's play.

(Silence then Sam drops the controller and the four of them make puppets with old socks and undies. They play for fifteen minutes together improvising a scene that only they can see.

We all share some silliness together)