

Jumper
by
Nick Hopkins

A short film.

1

INT. BLUE PETER STUDIO - EVENING

1

1979. SIMON GROOM, Blue Peter presenting legend, is talking to camera. Around him are children's paintings on easels.

SIMON GROOM

But the one that really caught our eye was this brilliant painting of Doctor Who battling the Daleks.

The camera focuses in on a pretty good painting of Tom Baker facing off against some Daleks.

SIMON GROOM

You might have guessed the artist is a bit of a Doctor Who fan, but if there's any doubt, here's a photo of him in all his Time Lord finery.

A monitor flicks to a Polaroid photograph of a young boy in a huge, unwieldy home-knitted scarf and a too-large-for-him floppy brown hat.

SIMON GROOM

So congratulations Eliot Chalker, aged 11. A well deserved Blue Peter badge is on its way to you.

2

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

2

ELIOT CHALKER sits motionless, crossed legged on the floor, a piece of toast and jam in his hand, frozen mid-way to his mouth. He is transfixed and horrified by what he's watching.

SIMON GROOM

(on the TV, chuckling)

Let's have a look at that marvellous costume again shall we?

The TV again switches to the photo of ELIOT as The Doctor.

Back to ELIOT, still unable to move. The sound from the TV drains away. Time slows.

ADULT ELIOT (V.O.)

A painting of mine. On national television. Sent in by my mother without my knowledge. Along with the photo. I was outed. I was a Doctor Who fan.

Time returns to normal. ELIOT drops his toast.

3

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - MORNING

3

Quick cut. A busy playground. ELIOT stands alone. A ball hits him smack in the side of the head. KIDS laugh.

SCHOOL KID 1

Spanner!

4 EXT. SCHOOL PLAYING FIELD - DAY 4

ELIOT is tackled to the ground by a grinning TALL KID.

TALL KID

Knobhead.

5 INT. SCHOOL CANTEEN - DAY 5

A GIRL flicks a pea from her plate, it hits ELIOT in the eye.

GIRL

Fucking Joey.

6 INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY 6

ELIOT walks down the corridor.

ADULT ELIOT (V.O.)

I was always led to believe only spanners, knobheads, and Joey's like me watched Blue Peter, but it seemed the entire world had seen me and my scarf that previous evening.

Ahead of him appear a GANG of FIVE KIDS.

GANG LEADER

There he is.

SPOTTY KID

Oi flid, where's your TARDIS now?

FAT KID

Bundle!

The KIDS race towards ELIOT in slow motion. ELIOT stands facing them, too frightened to run.

ADULT ELIOT (V.O.)

Kids these days don't know how lucky they are. Back then a lad coming to school in pigtails and a dress was safer than being known as a Doctor Who nerd.

In slow motion the boys leap as one at the terrified ELIOT, who is taken down as if by a pack of starving hyaenas. They descend towards the floor, ELIOT hitting the ground first, his mouth opens wide as the air in his lungs is pushed out under the weight of his attackers.

Time returns to normal and the gang pummel and jump on ELIOT till the GANG LEADER pulls them off.

GANG LEADER

Shit.

He pulls back ELIOT's blazer to reveal blood and gore splashed across his shirt. They all stop for a moment then the SPOTTY KID reaches into ELIOT's blazer inside pocket and pulls out a squashed jam sandwich which has squeezed its contents from within the cling film wrapping.

SPOTTY KID

You bender.

The SPOTTY KID drops the sticky remains in ELIOT's face. ELIOT lies there, resigned to his fate.

Pull out and fade.

7

EXT. RAILWAY BRIDGE. LEDGE - DAY

7

Present day. A railway line snakes through beautiful countryside. A vast Victorian brick bridge stands a dizzying height above a fast moving river. ELIOT, now mid forties, sits watching the view, leaning against the crumbling bricks, his legs dangling over the ledge. From where he is he can't be seen from the line side. He's wearing a Blue Peter badge.

ELIOT

(to camera)

Now, that experience taught me the only thing I ever really took away from school. Never be yourself. Never expose what you really think or who you really are. That painting on Blue Peter was probably the only honest artistic work of my life. Now, I admit, things may not have turned out exactly like I'm painting them - excuse the pun - I haven't spent a life on the streets or sought succor in alcohol. I have actually been very successful. In a way. And from painting. But what's my legacy? Water colours of bloody steam trains. Endless postcards of supposedly cute, fluffy animals. And my greatest triumph? The cover of a shortbread box which sells by the million the world over.

He reaches into his jacket and takes out a jam sandwich wrapped in cling film. He unwraps it and eats, taking in the spectacular view.

ELIOT

(to camera)

That shortbread box. You'll have seen it.

(MORE)

ELIOT (CONT'D)

Twat in a kilt with a highland terrier next to him, packet of Glen Hambleton shortbread sticking out his sporrón. Ghastly. Bought me a house with a pool, that. Fucking hate shortbread though.

A noise behind him makes him turn to see a woman in her early 20s clambering over the rail side wall and drop down to the ledge. She spots him and they regard each other awkwardly.

ELIOT

Hello.

RUTH

...Hi.

RUTH stands selfconsciously. She points to the ledge.

RUTH

Do you mind?

ELIOT

Not at all.

They are about ten feet away from each other, but there's at least a hundred feet either side of them.

RUTH

If you need some space..?

ELIOT

It's OK.

RUTH sits, her legs also dangling over the edge. They both look out across the countryside.

ELIOT

It's a lovely day.

RUTH

Yeah...

A long silence.

ELIOT

Are you from around here?

RUTH

Here and there.

ELIOT

That's a nice necklace. It suits you. Matches your eyes.

RUTH doesn't know what to say to that, she turns to look back at the view.

ELIOT
(aside, to camera)
You've come up here to commit
suicide, a final desperate act of
artistic emancipation and you're
chatting up some woman?! What's the
matter with you?

He discreetly looks over to her legs.

ELIOT
(to himself)
Great legs though.

RUTH
I'm sorry?

ELIOT didn't realise he'd said that aloud.

ELIOT
The ledge... It's... Great.

RUTH is puzzled and looks at the ledge.

ELIOT
...The brickwork...

He tails off and looks back out across the view for a few moments before turning back to her.

ELIOT
No, you know what, I wasn't talking
about the ledge. I think, in
whatever time I have left I should
just cut the bullshit. I said, you
have great legs.

Another silence while they both process that. She looks down at her legs.

RUTH
You like them?

ELIOT
Yes.

RUTH
Huh.
(a pause)
Strange place to try and pick
someone up.

ELIOT
I wasn't trying to pick you up.

RUTH
Oh.

ELIOT looks puzzled.

ELIOT
Did you want me to?

RUTH
No.

ELIOT
It's just you seem disappointed.
That I wasn't trying to pick you
up.

RUTH shrugs.

ELIOT
I mean if I was in a bar or
something, I'd definitely want to.

Silence again.

RUTH
In whatever time you have left? Are
you going to die soon or something?

ELIOT looks down at the drop to the river.

ELIOT
Well...

RUTH
You're not a jumper?

ELIOT
Course I am.

She points to the second sandwich, still wrapped up on the ledge.

RUTH
Who brings a sandwich to a suicide?
Worried you might get hungry on the
way down?

ELIOT
I'm eating a jam sandwich because
jam sandwiches remind me of a
certain time in my life.

RUTH
Like Proust and his madeleines?

ELIOT
I don't know... What that means.

RUTH
How can you have an appetite at a
time like this?

ELIOT
(pointedly)
You know just now you asked if I
wanted some space?

RUTH shrugs.

RUTH
So what brings you here?

ELIOT
A lot of things.

She looks at his left hand, there's a tan mark on his ring
finger.

RUTH
Ah, divorce.

ELIOT
Amongst others.

RUTH
34% of marriages end in divorce
before the 20th anniversary.

ELIOT
And?

RUTH
I don't see any of them up here.
You're divorced, you're unhappy.
Just sounds like one of your lines
in that pick-up bar.

ELIOT
For starters, that was a
hypothetical pick-up bar, but..
I'm in my mid-forties, I'm unhappy,
unfulfilled...

RUTH
'I Can't Get No Satisfaction.' I
don't believe Mick Jagger when he
says that either but at least it's
a good tune. So. Are you some kind
of failure?

ELIOT
Artistically, I think so.

RUTH
Only people with no real problems
say that. You're not broke? Or
destitute?

ELIOT
Well, no...

RUTH looks at him.

ELIOT

But I hate what I do. I'm a sell
out. I paint crap.

RUTH

Do they pay you for it?

ELIOT

Yeah, but...

He tails off again.

RUTH

How many paintings have you sold?

ELIOT

I don't know. Hundreds.

RUTH

Van Gough sold two.

ELIOT

People always say that. Bloody Van
Gough. At least they were two good
ones!

RUTH

Bloke jumped off here a few years
ago, hit the water so hard his head
flew off.

ELIOT

Jesus!

RUTH

They found it six weeks after the
rest of him.

ELIOT

Do you mind?

RUTH

Aren't you worried about who you're
leaving behind?

ELIOT

Nope.

RUTH stands up.

RUTH

Let's go together.

ELIOT

What?!

She shuffles over to him.

RUTH

Let's jump.

She goes to pull him up, almost sending him over.

ELIOT

If you push me, it's technically
murder you know?

RUTH

(impatient)

If we're going, let's go. Come on.

ELIOT

I didn't realise there was a rush.
Or a 'we.'

Despite himself ELIOT gets up. They pause.

ELIOT

Isn't this going to seem weird? The
two of us? People'll assume it was
some lovers death pact or
something.

RUTH

That's romantic.

ELIOT

Yes, but we've never... I don't
know anything about you.

RUTH

Worried I might damage your
reputation?

ELIOT

No, but...

RUTH

Neither you, your jam sandwiches
nor your expensive watch are going
anywhere but home today.

She scrabbles back up the wall, then turns back to face him.

RUTH

You know, really Eliot, it seems to
me you just need to be less of a
knobhead.

She disappears onto the track side. ELIOT stands puzzled for
a second then grabs his remaining sandwich, stuffs it in his
inside pocket and jumps over the wall.

8

EXT. RAILWAY BRIDGE. TRACK - DAY

8

He drops down onto the track side. The bridge and track lie straight for hundreds of yards either side. No sign of RUTH. He looks down at his shirt. In climbing the wall his jam sandwich has squished through his jacket pocket.

RUTH

Boo!

ELIOT jumps and turns to see RUTH poke her head from behind a junction box by the bridge wall. He looks faintly disappointed.

RUTH

Aw, did you think I was an angel or something? Sent to rescue you?

ELIOT

No...

RUTH

Spanner. Thanks for the compliment on my legs by the way. People always say it's what's on the inside that counts. That's partly true, but the outside's important too. That's the bit that entices you in.

She takes something out of her pocket and chucks it at him. He catches it. It's a packet of Glen Hambledon Shortbread with Eliot's illustration on the front.

He looks up. Ruth has gone again. He looks behind the box. He looks up and down the track. Impossibly, she's nowhere to be seen. He looks at the packet, opens it and takes out a piece of shortbread. He pops it in his mouth, crunches it cautiously and nods.

ELIOT

Not so bad after all.

Eliot walks down the track.

THE END

Nick Hopkins came to UEA after seventeen years in the film and television industry. For much of that time he was an assistant director on numerous films and TV shows. Subsequently he has written three episodes of the BBC drama New Tricks and currently has a series in development.