

CRUEL

by

Mikey Jackson

Short film - comedy-drama (Approx. 11 minutes)

www.mikeyjackson.com

INT. BEDSIT BUILDING LOBBY/STAIRS - DAY

It's the lobby of an old building converted into bedsits. Twenty-somethings JESS and BEN walk through the lobby and climb the stairs. She looks concerned and anxious. He doesn't. In fact, he'd rather be somewhere else, anywhere but here.

BEN

I really don't get why you had to drag me here with you. It's my day off. I wanted to go bowling.

JESS

Oh, Ben, you know why. I haven't heard from Amber for days. No calls, no texts, no emails, no Facebook posts, nothing. I'm worried about her.

BEN

Maybe she's been busy.

JESS

Or maybe she's done something stupid. Don't forget, we're the reason she went on Britain's Got Talent in the first place.

BEN

She'll bounce back, she always does.

JESS

How can you be so sure? You saw how badly her audition went.

BEN

Yeah, I suppose. I've never heard Simon use the C-word before.

They reach their destination. JESS knocks on the bedsit door.

JESS

She was made to look a total laughing stock in front of all those people. The poor girl must be devastated.

The door flies open. AMBER appears at the doorway, all big eyes and cheerful, boasting a cheesy smile so huge, it's in danger of falling off the sides of her face.

AMBER

Hiya, Jess!!! Hiya, Ben!!!

JESS and BEN swap WTF glances.

AMBER

Are you coming in or what?

After a secondary unsure glance trade, they both enter the bedsit. AMBER checks there's nobody else about and promptly closes the door behind them.

INT. AMBER'S BEDSIT - DAY

Introducing a typical cheap bedsit. Decades old wallpaper throughout. On one side, we see a small kitchen area featuring student-esque unwashed plates/cutlery decor. Near the far wall, and a tad out of shot, stands a heavy oak wardrobe. An unmade bed dominates the centre of the room.

AMBER locks the door, pulls the key out and holds it in her hand as she turns to face an uncertain JESS and BEN. She's still sporting that mega-cheesy smile.

AMBER

Well? Spill the goss. What's been happening in the outside world?

It's obvious. JESS and BEN are still totally thrown by her cheery, happy-go-lucky demeanour.

BEN

Well, it's... still turning.

AMBER

Good... good.

JESS

What about you, Amber?

AMBER

What about me?

JESS

Are you... okay?

AMBER

Why wouldn't I be?

JESS and BEN swap further unsure looks. There's something weird going on, and they know it.

JESS

Well... this is why we're here. To make sure you're... um...

BEN

Not dead.

JESS scowls at him for his insensitive sentence-finishing. He shrugs a "What did I say?"

JESS

Look, Amber. What I mean is --

AMBER

There's no need to worry. I'm perfectly fine. That audition, I am totally over it.

JESS

You are?

AMBER

That's what I said, didn't I? Besides, I have good news to share. Simon has invited me in for a second look.

Surprise engulfs the faces of JESS and BEN. Then a hint of confusion. Then suspicion. Something doesn't quite add up.

JESS/BEN

Really?

A big nod from AMBER. And another humungous smile. Hmm, things still don't feel right, but JESS decides to humour her anyway.

JESS

That's... great. Isn't it, Ben?

She eyes him a prompt to also humour the girl.

BEN

Oh, um, yes. Well done.

AMBER

Well, when I say he's invited me back, discussions are currently at the probably-maybe stage. But I'm sure it'll only be a matter of time before I'm performing on that stage again.

Then come weird noises behind JESS and BEN; muffled, stifled, barely audible. Thumping on wood. And human mmmffffffffffing. The kind of noises... oooer, no way! The kind of noises a trapped and gagged man would make.

Nervous, alarmed, JESS and BEN slowly turn around to discover a huge antiquarian trunk situated at the far side of the room in front of the wardrobe. WTF? Until now, they hadn't even noticed it.

More thumping. More muffled mmmmmffffing.

We can see exactly what JESS and BEN are thinking. Oh, no. What the hell has this girl done?

JESS

Um... Amber. Who exactly have you got in that trunk?

AMBER

Who do you think?

No! It can't be. Can it?

AMBER

I've kidnapped Simon Cowell.

A pair of OMG faces. A sinister giggle from AMBER. And more thumping and mmmmmffffing from within the trunk.

JESS

Oh, Amber. Please, please, please tell me you're joking.

AMBER

Fine. Whatever you say. I'm having you on.

Phews of relief from JESS and BEN. Then --

AMBER

But we all know that's not true.

JESS/BEN

What?

AMBER

I really have taken Simon Cowell prisoner.

OMFG. She is serious. Deadly serious.

JESS

You can't just... abduct a celebrity.

BEN

Yeah. Especially somebody high profile like... oh, God. What have you done?

Cue a worried BEN pacing up and down the room.

AMBER

I had no choice. He was ignoring my emails. And my tweets. And my DMs. And his front door when I found out where he lived. This was the only way I could get him to listen to me.

JESS

Jesus.

JESS takes a deep breath. Tries to calm down. Knows she needs to take control of this situation.

JESS

Amber. Listen to me. So far, no harm's been done.

BEN

No harm?

She glares at BEN.

JESS

No real harm.

And then she re-aims her eyes at AMBER, attempting a cool, calm, collected demeanour.

JESS

Okay, so you've locked Simon Cowell in a trunk. It's hardly the crime of the century.

Major thumping and mmmfffffing from the trunk, clearly in protest at what JESS has just said.

JESS, suddenly angry, barks at the trunk --

JESS

Simon, shut the fuck up! Can't you see I'm trying to negotiate your release?

Oh, look, the thumping and mmmfffffing has ceased.

BEN

I can't believe you just told Simon Cowell to shut the fuck up. That must be soooooo against the law.

Once again, JESS throws him a glare.

BEN

Fine. Don't mind me. You just carry on with your negotiations. Be the hero.

JESS

Zip it, Ben. This has nothing to do with heroics. What I'm trying to do here is help a girl in need.

BEN

Yeah, a girl in need who's gone and kidnapped Simon bloody Cowell.

Another glare from JESS. BEN raises his hands in surrender.

BEN

All right, all right. Consider me zipped.

JESS turns to AMBER who looks a tad unhinged, half-grinning, half-unsure, nervously fiddling with the door key in her hand. JESS speaks calmly, slowly, like a softly-softly copper.

JESS

Amber. If you continue to keep Simon held here against his will, you will land yourself in serious trouble. You do realise that, don't you?

AMBER

Of course I do. I'm not an idiot.

JESS

That's right. You're not an idiot. You're a sensible, intelligent girl. Which is why, quite frankly, I'm surprised you've got yourself into a mess like this.

AMBER

Jess, you're missing the point. Don't you see?

AMBER fires an accusatory point at the trunk.

AMBER

Simon is the one to blame here. If he'd put me through to the next round... which I thoroughly deserved... instead of ridiculing me in front of hundreds of baying wolves, this mess would not be happening right now.

JESS falls silent, rubbing her face with both palms, not knowing what to do, what to think, this can't be happening. She plonks her bum down on the bed.

AMBER

You really think I wanted to kidnap Simon Cowell? By rights, I should be out getting drunk, celebrating my newfound success, spreading the word about how my acting career is finally beginning to take off. But no. He had to go and spoil things by hitting his stupid buzzer and saying all those cruel things about me... telling me I was totally pants... that I had no future in acting. So there you go. It's his fault he's here, not mine.

JESS

Oh, Amber. I'm sorry you feel that way. But believe me, locking him in a trunk is hardly likely to help matters.

AMBER looks away, defiant.

BEN

You might as well give up, Jess. You're not getting through to her.

JESS

I have to keep trying.

BEN

Why?

JESS

Because she's my friend. Our friend.

BEN

Friends don't kidnap pop moguls. Amber, consider yourself well unfriended.

AMBER

Oh, that's right, Ben. Kick me when I'm already down.

JESS stands up.

JESS

Ben, please. She needs our help.

BEN

What she needs is professional help.

There's a look on JESS'S face. Major disappointment.

BEN

What's that look for? This is all Amber's doing. Which makes it her problem. It's got nothing to do with us.

JESS

It has now.

BEN

What are you talking about?

JESS

Look at us. Present at the crime scene. With full knowledge of what she's done. Whether you like it or not, Ben, we are both well and truly involved.

BEN

Bollocks to that. I'm out of here.

He heads towards the door. Defiant, AMBER blocks his way, indicating to the key in her hand.

AMBER

I don't think so.

BEN

Give me the key, Amber.

He makes for the key. She yanks it out of his reach.

BEN

Give me that bloody key.

And then AMBER does something totally unexpected. She pops the key in her mouth.

BEN

No, no, don't!

One hefty gulp and it's gone. Swallowed whole.

AMBER

You are going nowhere.

BEN

I can't believe you just did that.

He flicks up both hands in despair, then turns to JESS.

BEN
Did you see what she just did?

JESS
I do have eyes, Ben.

More thumping and mmmffffing. They all scowl at the trunk.

ALL
And you can shut up.

Silence. They return their attention to themselves.

BEN
Now what?

JESS
Now... I guess we wait for nature to
take its course.

BEN
Yeah? And what happens when it does?
Where's she going to do her number two,
in a bloody saucepan? This building has
a communal toilet. Like, out there in
the lobby. And we're locked in here.

AMBER
Oh, yeah. I guess I didn't quite think
things through.

BEN then spots something to do with the trunk.

BEN
Look, Jess, she's left the key in the
lock of the trunk.

To AMBER'S dismay, BEN heads for the trunk, followed by JESS.

BEN
I'm letting Simon out and nobody is
going to stop me.

Unseen by the others, a desperate AMBER scampers over to the
kitchen area and opens a drawer.

BEN is just about to twist the key when --

AMBER
Get away from that trunk.

Oh, shit. AMBER has a kitchen knife in her trembling hand. Huge. Sharp. Dangerous. If she didn't look suitably unhinged before, she certainly does now.

Alarmed, JESS and BEN back away from the trunk. This is serious, and they both know it.

BEN

Amber, please. This is not the answer.

AMBER

Isn't it? There's already one person on my to-murder list. Another couple of bodies won't make a lot of difference.

Uh oh, brandishing that weapon, AMBER looks deranged, big-time.

JESS

Amber, this isn't you? You're no killer. Why are you doing this?

AMBER

You laughed at me.

JESS and BEN swap confused looks.

AMBER

At my audition. When Simon was slagging off my performance. The entire audience... mocking me... jeering at me. I felt so alone, so unloved. So I searched through all those faces, desperate to find my friends. You two. The only people in the world I was sure would be on my side. But no. There you were, giggling away, joining in with the rest of those brainless sheep.

#awkward!

JESS

Oh, Amber. I'm really sorry. We both are. But maybe...

A hesitant pause.

AMBER

Maybe what? Tell me!

JESS

Maybe you shouldn't have played both male and female characters.

BEN

Agreed. Those high and low alternating voices. Big mistake.

AMBER

I was demonstrating my range.

A forlorn look engulfs AMBER. Her bottom lip quivers. Her eyes well. And in a calmer voice --

AMBER

All I ever wanted was to be an actress.

BEN

Actually, these days it's "actor."

AMBER

Shut up!

BEN

Sorry.

And it's back to her wistful speech.

AMBER

My lifelong ambition. To perform in theatres. And maybe even on TV.

Wistful then surrenders to a hateful growl.

AMBER

But then Simon Cowell came along and shattered my dreams. And so did you. Which is why all three of you are going to pay.

Shit. This is it. The end. But then AMBER'S face changes. She chucks the knife in the sink and laughs. Loudly. WTF?

AMBER

No talent, Simon said. No class, Simon said. Not convincing enough as a performer, Simon said. Well, I certainly had you two fooled.

JESS and BEN gawp at her in silence, not quite sure what to say, not quite sure how to react.

AMBER

Relax. I haven't got Simon Cowell locked in that trunk. Take a peek if you don't believe me.

They head over to the trunk. It's a tense moment as they open it to find --

-- emptiness. Phew! Relief aplenty.

JESS

Okay, fair enough, Amber, you win. I think it's safe to say you've well and truly proven your worth as a competent actress.

BEN

Actor.

JESS

Shut up.

But then BEN has a Columbo style afterthought.

BEN

Hold on a minute. How did you create those noises?

AMBER

Oh, that was Simon. I'm holding him prisoner.

JESS and BEN, eh? WTF?

JESS

But you just said...

AMBER

I said he wasn't locked in the trunk.

More WTF looks from JESS and BEN. Looking more than a tad deranged, AMBER points to the wardrobe.

AMBER

He's trapped in the wardrobe.

Right on cue, desperate thumping and mmmmmffffing from within the wooden prison. JESS and BEN gawp at the wardrobe. Then at each other. Two loud gasps and --

-- SLAM TO BLACK.

THE END