

FOXED

by

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EXT. CHISWICK - MAGIC HOUR

A burnt orange sun sets on a bucolic small town with cobblestone roads. A sign reads "Welcome to Chiswick. It's home!" Package delivery dirigible drones crisscross the sky.

Electrified horse carriages and vintage cars with satellite antennae, bubble windows and rivets holding chunky metal parts together chug up and down the road.

It's a STEAMPUNK world.

AUNTIE FOX (V.O.)
Chiswick. Nice place to raise kids.
If you're human.

"**Goo Is Good**" on a billboard -- featuring an interracial family in a shiny new ride while a soot-covered family frowns upon their broken-down old steam vehicle.

All sponsored by the "Amalgamated Consolidated Corporation."

Behind the billboard: at the treeline, a towering contraption, five storeys high, is under construction. Work crews weld at a feverish pace.

AUNTIE FOX (V.O.)
The Goo-ulator. You'll know it when
you see it.
(sarcastic)
Amalgamated Consolidated's love
letter to the planet.

A HOODIE GIRL (10) gazes at this monstrosity. Smaller goo-drilling platforms extend into the razed hills. A blight.

AUNTIE FOX (V.O.)
Not long ago, we used to frolic
through sunlit meadows. Rest our
heads on soft moss. Build our homes
in the shade of massive oak trees.

TOWN SQUARE

Hoodie Girl walks amidst vendors selling steam-powered robot duck toys and people riding expando-domed unicycles.

AUNTIE FOX (V.O.)
Then they came. They fenced off the
meadows, chopped down the trees and
hunted us mercilessly.

Hoodie Girl spots

SHERIFF TONY DERRINGER (50s)

Beefy, intimidating, with salt and pepper goatee and bristling with weaponry. There's no mistaking he has a certain charm, with a twinkle -- and a hint of menace -- in his eye.

He's flanked by two MALE DEPUTIES. They wear hunting gear with orange vests covered in gadgets and rifles with scopes. Foxtails dangle from hats.

AUNTIE FOX (V.O.)

Now they want to destroy our last refuge. When that mechanical beast comes online... we're done.

Sheriff is clearly the big man on campus. People bow and scrape when he saunters past. He feasts on the adulation.

AUNTIE FOX (V.O.)

This is our line in the sand. It's why we have to send you away. Do you understand, honey?

-- Hoodie Girl, nods and whispers "yes" and TRANSFORMS into a pale, spotty-furred, creepy-looking FOX right before everyone's eyes.

Everything comes to a full stop when a BYSTANDER points at --

BYSTANDER

A fox!!!

HOODIE GIRL/FOX

Uh-oh.

Families SCREAM. Hoodie Girl/Fox desperately digs through her pocket for BLUE CAPSULES. But her hands, now paws, can't handle them properly, and they scatter. Panicked, she bolts.

The horrified Sheriff lifts his piston-festooned rifle.

SHERIFF DERRINGER

Miserable pest!

BANG! The blast wallops the corner of a building a nanosecond after Hoodie Girl/Fox rockets past.

Sheriff and his Deputies stumble over each other, bringing up the rear.

SHERIFF DERRINGER

Get the fox! Get the fox!

DEPUTIES

Get the fox! Get the fox!

Hoodie Girl/Fox jumps over garbage cans, crawls through fences, jinks and weaves through running legs.

She swipes a bag of groceries right out from a YOUNG DAD'S arms. Apples fly as she scrambles through an intersection --

WHAM! 3-vehicle pile-up with an OLD LADY DRIVER. No one is hurt, but lots of smashed metal, CAR HORNS and SHOUTING. Hoodie Girl/Fox chortles as she bites into an apple.

OLD LADY DRIVER

Filthy fox menace!

Young Dad shakes a can of aerosol cheese at the fox.

YOUNG DAD

When will this foxy reign of terror
end?!

The can EXPLODES, coating Young Dad in orange spray-cheese.

But Hoodie Girl/Fox still can't shake Sheriff, who emerges from behind the pile-up on a scooter contraption.

SHERIFF DERRINGER

You're dead, ya rodent!

He fires round after round! She hoofs it to the city line.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Thick, dark, foreboding -- at least the parts that haven't been clear-cut to make room for ugly goo-drilling derricks.

A SQUIRREL peeks out from a knot in a dead tree, extending its paw. Hoodie Girl/Fox HIGH-FIVES Squirrel as she flies past and flips it a bag of peanuts from a grocery bag.

SQUIRREL

Sh-weet!

Sheriff and Deputies peter out to a confused halt. The Deputies look under rocks, move aside leaves, shrug helplessly.

Sheriff FIRES his rifle in the air several times.

DEPUTY LANAGAN (30s), burly and baby-faced, and trying to look tougher than he is, huffs and puffs up alongside.

DEPUTY LANAGAN

Sir, you're not supposed to shoot
your gun --

-- BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The bullets rain down, ripping three
holes in the brim of Deputy Lanagan's hat.

DEPUTY LANAGAN

... into the air.

Deputy Lanagan, his white face set in a rictus of terror,
faints. Ignoring him, Sheriff seethes.

SHERIFF DERRINGER

In the name of Frederic... I won't
rest until every last fox is in a
wooden box!

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A warm space lit by gas lamps. Oddball appliances everywhere.

EMILY STERLING (12)

Tomboy cool with grass-stained knees, difficult brown hair
and plain-Jane clothes that complement her big, expressive
eyes, whistles as she works.

She sits on a rug surrounded by rivets, bolts, glue and
wires. She is building something... but what?

JOSH STERLING (9), Emily's bratty little brother with mopy
brown hair and chipmunk cheeks, watches from around a corner.

Emily rivets a hand-painted wing into place. It's a
mechanical butterbug (sort of a butterfly meets a cootie
bug). She presses the "START" button expectantly --

-- it whirls and rattles... then SHAKES TO PIECES. Clink,
clank, clunk. Metal parts scatter.

Defeated, Emily slumps onto the couch. Josh rushes in. He
expertly gets to work on Emily's machine, reassembling it.

EMILY

Hey! That's my science project! I
was gonna fini --

JOSH

Sure you were. Watch and learn from
the master.

The mechanical project COMES TO LIFE. It scuttles forward like a crab, front legs snapping and taunting Emily.

Upset, Emily stomps it to pieces. Josh snickers. Enraged, she gives him a wedgie, stuffs him in the coat closet. Locks the door.

JOSH (O.S.)
(muffled)
Dad? DAD?!

JULES (40s, balding, milquetoast) rushes in, but trips and face-plants, ripping his white collared shirt with a "Cochrane Engineering" laminate.

He gets up, adjusts his eyeglasses, puckers and smacks his large lips as he thinks.

JULES
Emily, what did you do?

The closet door pops open. Josh, tighty-whities up by his armpits, holds a small gizmo (think car alarm remote.)

EMILY
How...?

JOSH
Universal key. Built it after the last time you stuffed me in there.

She rips it from his hand, throws it into a fish tank. Josh flashes a smug grin.

JOSH
Oh, did I forget to mention it's waterproof? Silly me.

Emily's eyes narrow. She points to her crushed project.

EMILY
You are rottener than a year-old jelly donut, Josh Sterling.

JULES
Emily, you should, umm, really know better, dear.

EMILY
Me? What about him? He's always ruining my stuff! Bratty Bratwurst!

JOSH

If by "ruining" you mean actually finishing it and making it way awesomer in the process, guilty as charged.

He's standing in front of the Wall of Josh: shelves of ribbons, medals, and trophies. "1st Place -- Mathletes." "Academic Excellence." "Student Inventor of the Year." Etc.

Buried in the back, almost out of sight, there's a laughably small karate trophy for Emily. "Thanks for showing up!"

JULES

Josh, just because you inherited my scientific mind, doesn't mean you should lord it over your sister. And, Emily, as the eldest, I, umm, expect you to set an example.

Emily fumes, but before she can respond:

JULES

Will you both, um, sit down?

Grumbling, they disobey his order and keep fighting.

JULES

Hey, hey... you guys... would you rather me do this, or your mother?

That gets their attention. They knock it off. Jules is clearly unsure how to handle this situation.

He sees an old photo on the mantel: Jules (13), with his arm around a TEENAGE GIRL (15) who looks a lot like him.

JULES

Your Aunt and I...
(he fights emotion)
When we were kids, we fought day and night. She called me "Julie Drooly," "Jules the Pest" and my favorite, "Platypus Lips." No idea where she got that one.

He absently smacks his lips, a la a duck bill.

JULES

Used to glue her shoes together, she'd rewrite my homework to make me seem like an idiot. Good times.
(sighs)
Since she vanished, all I've wanted
(MORE)

JULES (CONT'D)
 is to be able to tell her how much
 I love her, how much I miss her...

He returns the frame to the mantel, looks at Emily and Josh longingly... finds them rolling on the ground, GRAPPLING.

JULES
 Please, umm, stop...
 (they keep fighting)
 Hey, I said, umm, knock it off...
 (they tussle even harder)
 Enough...!

Emily and Josh immediately stop fighting and stand up straight. Jules thinks he was the reason and smiles. Until he turns and sees --

-- his wife, VERNA (30s), standing in the doorway. She wears grease-streaked "Town of Chiswick Blimp Maintenance Crew" coveralls. Clearly wears the pants in the family.

VERNA
 To your rooms, the both of you.

EMILY / JOSH
 Yes, ma'am.

They scam. Verna kisses Jules' cheek. He eyes her sheepishly.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Teddy bears and dolls are pushed into corners, unused. Emily can't put together pieces of cloth and a copper pipe. She tosses them aside, frustrated.

A KNOCK. Verna enters.

VERNA
 I'm not here to take sides.

EMILY
 Yeah, right.

Verna sighs, sits next to Emily.

VERNA
 When you were three, you took baby
 Josh and put him into the trash
 can. I asked you "Why?" and you
 said, "Bad gobbich."

Emily tamps down a devilish grin.

VERNA

Honey, you have to get over this...
this sibling rivalry.

Emily makes a guttural, disgusted noise.

VERNA

Ah, the classic pre-teen groan. I
expect a certain amount of
respect... and respectable
behavior.

EMILY

But he... know what? You guys NEVER
listen to me anyway.

VERNA

Enough. Emily Aurora Sterling,
you've been nothing but stubborn
and difficult lately.

Emily loses it, her eyes welling up.

EMILY

You don't have to deal with him
like I do. And I'm expected to set
an example because I'm the "big
sister." But that just means he
gets away with everything!

VERNA

Dad knows how strong you are.

Emily doesn't get it. Verna puts a hand on Emily's shoulder.

VERNA

You know, your dad is our best
mediator on the council. Deals with
people who couldn't be farther
apart. Somehow... he gets them to
meet halfway.

EMILY

By giving in to the bully?

Verna is stunned. But her eyes betray the absolute truth in
Emily's words. Verna considers her daughter for a beat.

VERNA

The way you are... your... your
damn gumption. How you stand up for
what you believe -- even if that
means not listening to your parents
or teachers or anyone -- not easy

(MORE)

VERNA (CONT'D)

things for a parent to stomach. But some day, Emmy... some day they'll lead you to do great things. Until then, you've got to let your emotions cool before reacting to Josh, or any other challenging situation, for that matter. Understand?

Emily's gazes up into her mom's eyes and finds warmth and understanding and a goofy smile. What she needs. They hug.

Verna bites her lip... a little worried.

THROUGH EMILY'S MIRROR

Two sets of beady eyes narrow, watching her...

INT. EMILY'S SCHOOL - 7TH-GRADE CLASS - DAY

Inkwells clash with built-in round computer screens. Shadows move randomly; cobwebs fill the corners. Creepy.

The KIDS, including Emily, stare at the front of the class.

MRS. PATTERSON (40s) horn-rimmed glasses, beams at teacher's pet... Josh. He scribbles calculations beside a diagram of a football field on the board.

JOSH

Then this -- quadrilateral X-Y -- equals forty percent of the total.

Mrs. Patterson smiles her approval. Josh chucks himself on the chin, saunters back to his seat, high-fiving as he goes.

Emily grumbles under her breath.

MRS. PATTERSON

Thank you, Josh -- proof, yet again, that your parents were correct in having you skip ahead three grades last year.

Emily rolls her eyes.

MRS. PATTERSON

Now... Miss Sterling. Maybe you could enlighten us about how we can find the fastest way from one end of our football field to the other?

All eyes are on Emily... a few snickers here and there.

Emily's BFFs CORINNE (a ditzy airhead, dolled out in pink clothes and makeup) and MAKIKO (Asian, mousy with glasses, slyly playing with her steampunk smartphone on her lap) look on nervously as Emily grasps for a response.

EMILY

Zipline!

MRS. PATTERSON

What?

EMILY

There's a steam turbine next to the bleachers and one on top of this building. They're connected by a wire. So ziplining would be the fastest way to get from one end to the other. Assuming the voltage doesn't fry your butt. Bzzt!

The kids burst out laughing. Emily preens. The befuddled Mrs. Patterson stares at Emily, but before she can respond... the BELL rings. The students pack up books, grab coats, etc.

EXT. SCHOOL - ROAD - DAY

Corinne freshens her makeup and Makiko focuses on her smartphone as they walk with Emily. Goo derricks in the BG. The girls stop when they see Josh and his FRIENDS laughing.

JOSH

"Zipline"? Seriously?

CORINNE

Ignore them, Emmy.

MAKIKO

(without looking up)
Brainiacs.

Corinne and Makiko board a yellow school bus. But Emily, her anger boiling, slows her gait --

EMILY

Got something I gotta do, guys.
I'll see you tomorrow.

INT. STEAMPUNK ARCADE - DAY

Football-sized, brightly-colored fish with propeller tails float through the arcade, dispensing glowing game tokens.

Emily plays RUMBLE-STILTSKIN -- a monster-truck-driving game with gearshift, pedals and oversized piston contraptions.

Emily owns it. Expertly throws her vehicle into a skidding side-stop to wipe out a slimelord cluster, then backs up (beep, beep, beep) to score a power-up.

Kids gather, watching the master at work. Emily's clearly been getting her money's worth from that one token.

Then: she spots a SAD REDHEADED GIRL (7) alternately staring at the game and her token-less hand.

Emily bites her lip, conflicted. Then she steers deliberately into a tree, wrecking her vehicle. Game Over.

EMILY

Darn. Hey. Hey. Did you want to try this game?

The Girl nods timidly. Emily digs in her pocket. Last token. She hesitates, but then... she helps the Girl into the cockpit. Pops the token in. Redheaded Girl lights up as the game powers up.

SAD REDHEADED GIRL

You rock!

Emily shrugs "not really," but smiles at her.

EXT. STEAMPUNK ARCADE - DAY

Emily exits, kicking the ground... and an empty METAL CAN. POP! The lid springs open, revealing eyes as the can comes to life. Via spidery metal legs, it scurries into a storm drain.

EMILY

Whoa! Hey! Hey, where you going, little 'Tinny' can?

O.S. WHISPERY, INDISTINCT VOICES draw Emily's attention. She kneels at the drain, listens. Voices echo before fading away.

WHOMP! A mudball splats against her face --

JOSH

Boom! The hammer!

A fuming Emily spits mud, wipes her face, forces composure.

EMILY

Ten, nine, eight, seven...
(her rage surfaces)
(MORE)

EMILY (CONT'D)
 ... Oh, who'm I kidding? TWERP!
 Fist sandwich, comin' up!

Josh turns and runs. Emily disappears after him.

TWO SETS OF EYES in the sewer grate watch. The first set turns to the other and nods. The second set nods back.

EXT. WOODS - SUNSET

Josh runs towards the woods on the edge of town. Emily picks up a branch, ready to clobber him.

JOSH
 Why don't you try ziplining?

He sticks out his tongue and speeds farther ahead.

Teeth grinding in anger, Emily jumps over a boulder -- but her foot gets caught. BAM! She falls, scraping her knee.

EMILY
 Owwww!

Emily scrambles to her feet, limps after Josh.

EMILY
 (calling out to him)
 I wish those garbage men had taken
 you away.
 (she limps faster)
 I wish a sinkhole would open up and
 swallow you.
 (she gains on him)
 I wish --

-- She stops dead in her tracks. Ahead of her, FIVE BIG FOXES (pale, patchy fur, cartoon scary and almost adult human-size) stuff a screaming and writhing Josh into a burlap sack.

EMILY
 Hey!

JOSH
 EMILY! HELP!

Emily charges them. The foxes close the bag -- with Josh's left foot sticking out -- and disappear into the undergrowth.

EMILY
 JOSH!? JOSH!