

‘The Saddleworth Constable’

A two-act play

by

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'THE SADDLEWORTH CONSTABLE'

A two act play

Synopsis

"Sandy is an artist who has fallen out of love with art but more specifically, her own.

Steve is the retired local policeman who has recently discovered art having fallen out of love with life.

When Sandy returns to her Saddleworth roots, she has no plans other than to get some respite from her fast-paced life. To make space and certainly not to make connections.

But a slow-paced life can sometimes be just as challenging. Because when you slow it down, the blurs are soon replaced with the sharply focussed reality of the life that's been passing you by.

In returning to her roots, Sandy discovers hiding within the blurs, a sardonic, eccentric, but deeply private man who does not appreciate what he has to offer to the world and her. And in stumbling across each other they also rediscover two things we all need: a passion and a purpose.

'The Saddleworth Constable' is a simple, lighthearted story about rediscovering the life you need, the love you deserve and the home you never lost ... and leaving well alone which county you're in. Oh, and cheese and onion crisps."

Approximate running time: Act 1: 50 minutes. Act 2: 55 minutes

Setting: Present day, Saddleworth.

Cast: 1M, 5F. Playing ages are very flexible. Accents all local/northern.

Sandy: 50's. Well spoken with more than a nod to her roots. Born in Saddleworth but rarely returns. Anne's daughter. An art expert and previously a successful artist. Now living in Paris. Has had quite a public profile but it became too much and she avoids the public and the limelight. Consequently, protects her privacy and can be guarded which colours her character. Strong, intelligent, business like, sharp, good humoured when revealed. A loner and difficult to get to know. Not looking for love but warms to Steve as the plot develops and opens up to him.

Steve: 50's. Retired local policeman. Straight talking, sarcastic, sardonic but good humoured. Immersed in his roots. Close to Anne and her friend of many years. He is a loner, intensely private and has recently joined the local art group. As with Sandy, he is difficult to get to know but he opens up to her. They are very different and yet have a synergy. Attracted from the off to her which develops with the story.

Anne: 70's. Sandy's mother. Retired, warm, friendly, open, but strong-willed and vocal when required. Close to Steve whom she has introduced to painting and brought into the art group which she runs. Has had a difficult relationship over the years with her daughter, but has been supportive and positive towards her. Whatever history they did have is not explored within the plot but alluded to.

Rachel/Sharon/Karen: 30's/50's. All three women are friends of Anne and Steve and members of the art group. Larger than life characters, full of fun and humour. They are protective of Steve and enjoy having fun at his expense and each others. All are equal in role size and collectively feature together in both acts.

Staging: Ostensibly, one set. A large kitchen (dated) fitted out as such in a rambling, old country house. Two entrances (an internal and an external door). Large table dominates the centre but the space needs to be able to be used around it. At times it is used for the art group so requires the space for four easels/stools (say) around the table. Two other scenes: an art exhibition which is simply an easel set away from the main playing area/picked out using lighting. The other is a pub, which is just a table and two chairs. Maybe one area D/L and the other D/R. There are no special requirements for lighting (other than zoning the specific playing areas) and no requirements for sound other than a doorbell and mobile phone (NB: a prop's list is provided in the script).

The original artwork for this play is a commissioned work by the artist Victoria Mironenko.

SCENE 1

*A local arts exhibition in a church hall.
There is an easel with a painting on it.
LX:*

STEVE is standing front, facing out, looking at the painting; studying it, concentrating.

An air of someone not very impressed with what he is looking at.

SANDY wanders into the scene, looking around at 'the works' on display and then, over to STEVE.

SANDY Excuse me? Are you one of the exhibiting artists?

STEVE No.

SANDY Do you know who painted this one?

STEVE Me.

SANDY So, you are an exhibiting artist?

STEVE No.

SANDY Right.

STEVE Only recently started. Painting. At art class. No idea why. Especially now, standing here looking at it.

SANDY Perhaps, because there is something of you within it?

STEVE What? A tree in a field?

SANDY In the intent, the expression. A myriad of things.

STEVE Myriad is it? Right.

SANDY Are there any brochures or catalogues for the works being exhibited?

STEVE Catalogues? No chance. All proceeds are going to this place. Our beloved church hall. It was hard enough to get the vicar to let me have some tables. If he thought he could get away with it, he'd charge you for breathing his air in.

SANDY Are you local?

STEVE With this accent? Lived here all my life. Third generation at least. My gene pool is probably more like a dried up muddy puddle by now.

SANDY I'm visiting. Sort of. I saw the poster in the village. Thought I'd wander up and see what it was all about.

She looks at the painting. Considers it.

STEVE Well?

SANDY Well what?

STEVE You've not said owt.

SANDY About?

STEVE My painting.

SANDY I'm still considering it.

STEVE "Considering it." It's a tree in a field. What is there to consider?

SANDY A great deal.

STEVE I see. You know about this stuff then?

SANDY "Stuff." Art you mean? Some would say not.

STEVE And what would you say?

SANDY I write about it these days. I'm an arts correspondent for newspapers and magazines. I'm the 'go to' when someone wants a boring arts person to talk about boring arts things to an equally bored audience. I spend much of my time living in Paris. That's the part which makes boring bearable.

STEVE An expert then?

SANDY I did used to paint but I stopped.

STEVE Why was that?

SANDY Fell out of love with it I guess.

STEVE Can you fall out of love with a passion?

SANDY That's profound. I apparently did.

STEVE Odd thing to do when it's who you are.

SANDY Doubly profound. This runs the risk of turning into therapy. Let's just say, it's complicated.

STEVE Ahh. The 'get out of jail' answer for everything.

SANDY Is it?

STEVE Oh yeah. "It's complicated." Bit like the other ones: "Not right now." And "I need time to think." And my favourite "I need space."

SANDY And is this turning into a therapy session for both of us?

STEVE "Not right now."

SANDY "Do you need time to think?"

STEVE "Let's just say, I need space."

They laugh.

STEVE You must be qualified then. In art. Degree?
SANDY PhD.
STEVE A doctor. Know your stuff though I would guess. They don't hand them out for nowt.
SANDY I know what I know.
STEVE I see. Why are you here then?
SANDY Lived here. A lifetime ago. But the odd times I'm back home, it grounds me. Nobody ever allows you to think you're more than you are. People say it how it is. I don't think 'filters' ever found Saddleworth.
STEVE I'll give you that. You said 'home' though.
SANDY Yes. No great story to it. I was born here, I left here,
STEVE And didn't want to die here?
SANDY No, I just left.
STEVE Left or ran away?
SANDY Ouch. Therapy alert. Look, I'm the journalist. Do you always interrogate strangers?
STEVE Only the dodgy looking ones.
SANDY And do I look dodgy?
STEVE I'll give you the benefit. For now.
SANDY Then, thank you. For now.
STEVE Old habits die hard.
SANDY Meaning?
STEVE I'm a - was, a policeman. The local one. I was born here. Worked here. Never left here.
SANDY Or is it that you were too afraid to run away?
STEVE Touché, mon cher Docteur.
SANDY And now, taken up a new career as a landscape artist I see?
STEVE No, no, no. I've not taken up anything. Certainly not a career. And certainly not as an artist. And now you're here, I'm doubting I'd describe that as a landscape.
SANDY I like it.
STEVE Really?
SANDY It's good. In fact, it's very good.
STEVE For a retired cop.
SANDY For a landscape artist, actually.
STEVE Give over.
SANDY No, I'm sure of it. I'd go as far as to say you're a bit of a find.
(They consider each other)
STEVE You know, you don't sound it.
SANDY Sound what? Sure?
STEVE Local.
SANDY Give it time. A day with my mother will bring my accent back.
STEVE Then I must know her.
SANDY Possibly. Anne she's called. She lives in the large house as you travel up towards ...
STEVE ... Dobcross. I know her. Very well. See her most days. But I've never seen you.
SANDY I guess I've been successful at staying below the radar.
STEVE And Saddleworth is your "go to" for that?
SANDY Sometimes.

She smiles, stares at him.

SANDY So, tell me, how do you know my mother?
STEVE She's a grumpy old cow.
SANDY And there it is.
STEVE What's that?
SANDY That inescapable Saddleworth bluntness.
STEVE Sorry, I just meant ...
SANDY That she's a grumpy old cow. No need to apologise. Yes, that's my mother alright. A lifetime captured in a sentence.
STEVE Small world though. Fancy you being Anne's daughter. Chuffin 'ell.

SANDY laughs.

STEVE What's so funny?
SANDY That phrase. "Chuffin 'ell." Not one I hear that much in Paris. It tells you that you're back in England. Like, a swallow in spring, the White Cliffs of Dover, a red telephone box, fish and chips, black pudding, Yorkshire pudding ... and your first "chuffin 'ell."

They laugh and then consider each other again..

SANDY Did I read on the poster that the ticket price included refreshments?
STEVE Yeah.
SANDY Where do guests go for it?
STEVE "Guests?" Oh no. There's no guests invited to this. I'm not having no freeloaders.
SANDY And there's that no frills Saddleworth hospitality too. Let's try it again. Is there any food for visitors who have paid for a ticket?
STEVE Oh aye. Paid up, grub up. It's all laid out on a trestle table in the room at the back.
SANDY What is there?
STEVE Meat and potato pie with red cabbage and mushy peas.
SANDY Is there a vegetarian option?
STEVE Yeah. Red cabbage and mushy peas.
SANDY Isn't that just the accompaniment to the meat and potato pie?
STEVE It is if you're having meat and potato pie. If not, the vegetarian option is ...
BOTH ... red cabbage and mushy peas.
SANDY Some things will never change here.
STEVE A lot has changed here I'll have you know. Nowadays, you can get more frothy coffees on the high street than in Monte-bloody-Carlo. You know, I saw a man sat on a bench near the canal the other day and you'll never guess what he was eating?
SANDY I dread to think.
STEVE Hummus.
SANDY Very cosmopolitan.
STEVE With 'carrot batons.'
SANDY Whatever next?
STEVE I'll tell you what'll be next because it's already here. Couscous. That's what. And "deconstructed burgers" "bespoke salads" "smashed avocado."
SANDY "Foraged mushrooms."
STEVE "Curated Quinoa."
SANDY "Artisan sausage."
STEVE It's the slippery slope to dietary perdition. The comer-inners know nothing of their roots, their heritage. They wouldn't know a sheet of tripe if it slapped them across their chops.

SANDY looks away to stifle a laugh.

STEVE When I was a kid, we called mushy peas 'Oldham Caviar.' I bet there's not many exhibitions where you're served classy wine and caviar now is there?
SANDY There are, as a matter of fact. And is the wine 'classy?'
STEVE Well, you'll appreciate it.
SANDY Why?
STEVE It's French.
SANDY Have you tried it?
STEVE Oh yes.
SANDY And?
STEVE It tastes like you'd want to dip chips in it. But the Oldham Caviar is to die for.
SANDY Well, I can't wait to write my review.
STEVE Review?
SANDY Yes. I told the Editor of one of my newspapers I was briefly coming back here. He asked me to write a piece. A local interest and community angle about the creative scene. I'm calling it, "Discovering the 'art' of rural Greater Manchester."

STEVE stares at her.

STEVE I beg your pardon? Greater what?

She bursts out laughing.

SANDY Sorry, I forgot the delicate sensibilities of you all. I meant the "Historic County Palatine of Yorkshire West Riding." Don't worry officer. I won't disturb the peace again with the use of profane language.
STEVE Good job. "Greater bloody Manchester." Very funny. It's only "Greater" when they want your soddin' money.

(A beat, then)

They both laugh.

SANDY Well, this has been very interesting. I'm now quite looking forward to writing my article and peppering it with illustrations of the characters that I've met.
STEVE How many have you met?
SANDY Just you.
STEVE In that case, I can't wait not to read it.
SANDY Afraid of what you might read?
STEVE I'm saying nowt. Especially to the press. I'm sure you'll do a good job though, love.
SANDY "Love." Thanks.

She goes to leave

SANDY Oh and, enjoy your meat and potato pie.
STEVE I'm not having any.
SANDY Why not?
STEVE I'm vegetarian. I'd go fill your boots if I were you before all the peas and red cabbage are gone. I mean. Look at them. There's nothing to these arty-farty types. They look like they need either feeding up or burying.
SANDY Do we really?
STEVE Not you though.
SANDY And dare I ask why?
STEVE Because chuck, I'd say, there's something of perfection about you love. "A Yorkshire Rose by any other name."
SANDY "Chuck." And I'm sure Shakespeare didn't include the word 'Yorkshire' in his version.
STEVE We'll forgive him that. With him not being from Yorkshire.
SANDY Well, I've been called some things in my time, but 'Yorkshire Rose' isn't one of them. Your sarcasm knows no bounds.
STEVE Perhaps that wasn't me being sarcastic. Just my well-concealed Saddleworth honesty.
SANDY I'm lost for words.
STEVE I'd have lost a bloody bet on that.

She goes to leave.

SANDY Sandy, by the way.
STEVE Steve, by the way.
SANDY Oh and Steve, stick with the painting. You have promise. You should try a subject more challenging next time. You know. Where you've not had to follow the numbers.
STEVE I thought you didn't appreciate sarcasm?
SANDY I'm home now. Thought I'd blend in with the locals again. "Ta ra chuck."
STEVE You are your mother's daughter you know.
SANDY Then, I'll take that as a compliment. Is she a Yorkshire Rose?
STEVE A Yorkshire cow.

They both smile at each other.

SANDY Bye Steve.
STEVE Bye Sandy. Safe journey back to France.

She exits. He smiles broadly and then looks at his painting.

STEVE By eck. The Doctor only reckons I'm a bloody artist. Chuffin' hell.

SCENE 2

LX:

*The following day, mid-morning.
We are in a large country kitchen of an old house in Saddleworth, ANNE's house.
There is a large kitchen table, centre of the room and around it, four
easels facing front with at a stool at each.
There is a stool downstage of the table.*

RACHEL *(off stage)* It's only me, Anne. It's Rachel. Door was open.

RACHEL *enters the room and goes straight to one of the easels. She begins to unpack her bag.*

KAREN *(off stage)* Anne. It's Karen. Your door's open you senile old fart.

KAREN *enters the room, talking as she makes her way to another easel.*

KAREN Morning, Rach.

RACHEL Morning Karen. The door was open again.

KAREN I heard. We all heard. All prospective burglars probably heard.

RACHEL Who'd want to burgle here? And for what? All our art class stuff? Has Anne been down yet?

KAREN No.

SHARON *(off stage)* Hi Anne. It's Sharon. Your door's left open.

SHARON *enters the room, talking as she makes her way to another easel.*

SHARON Bloody door open ...

ALL Again.

SHARON Only us this morning?

KAREN Yes. All the others cried off. Didn't want to do this particular class.

RACHEL Why?

KAREN Something on the group chat about them not wanting to paint the subject.

RACHEL Group chats. Never read that rubbish. Not interested in what a group of women are talking about.

KAREN What was that?

RACHEL I'm not interested in what a group of women are saying.

SHARON Say again?

RACHEL I said, I'm not interested in what ... very funny.

SHARON So. What ~~are~~ we painting today?

KAREN A model, apparently.

They turn to her.

RACHEL A what?

KAREN A model. That's what the group chat said.

RACHEL A model? What of?

SHARON Like, a toy model?

KAREN No, stupid. A human model.

RA/SH What?!

SHARON Male or female?

KAREN Calm yourselves. She'll have got one of her old blokes to come and pose for us.

RACHEL I won't get my hopes up then. It'll be Maurice from church.

SHARON Please tell me he's not taking his clothes off.

KAREN Sharon, at his age and with his back, he'd struggle to put the bloody things on in the first place.

RACHEL A bloke? We're painting a real man?

SHARON No, we're painting Maurice.

KAREN I reckon it'll be one of her allotment crowd.

SHARON Or one of the husbands who help out at her ladies choir concerts.

RA/KA No!

RACHEL God help us.

KAREN They're very nice but, seriously?

SHARON Oh well. By the end of today, I will probably have honed my skill in painting tweed jackets.

KAREN And brown brogues.

RACHEL And the intricate reflections created from bifocal lenses.

SFX: Doorbell.

SHARON I thought you said no one else was coming?

RACHEL Cue Maurice!

KAREN It'll be Steve. If he's not painting with us, he still calls in of a morning to check in on her. To see if she needs any shopping.

RACHEL No one ever checks if I want any shopping.

SHARON That's because the off-licence isn't open yet love.

RACHEL Cow.

SFX: Doorbell.

KAREN Why doesn't he just come in?

RACHEL Because it's Steve. He stands on occasion outside, waiting to be invited in. Like a bloody vampire.

SHARON (*shouting out*) Come in Steve! The doors open!

STEVE enters, carrying a holdall.

STEVE Morning. I see she's left the front door open.

ALL Again.

KAREN Why don't you just come in, Steve? You know she never locks the door.

STEVE I don't like to. She could be doing something.

SHARON Like what?

STEVE Something private.

R/K/S Private?

RACHEL Steve, what do you think she's going to be up to? A swingers meeting?

KAREN Ooo. Do you think?

SHARON One of my girlfriends was telling me there's a group of them in Delph.

KAREN How have I missed that?

RACHEL Come off it. Everyone who lives in Delph is a swinger.

(a beat, then)

KAREN Eh, hang on. I live there.

RACHEL I rest my case.

STEVE You lot are dreadful.

KAREN You love us really.

RACHEL Does someone need a hug?

STEVE No! Do not start on that nonsense. What is it with you lot and hugging? Just keep your distance.

KAREN (*shouting out*) Group hug!

STEVE NO!

STEVE Has Anne been down yet?

SHARON Not yet. Are you picking up some shopping for her?

STEVE Later on.

RACHEL You're not painting with us then?

STEVE She's asked me to sort a small job for her.

KAREN But we'll miss you!

STEVE Somehow, I think you will easily endure the pain and the loss. Don't worry. I'll be around the house, so you'll see me later.

They cheer. ANNE enters.

ANNE Noisy lot. Morning Steve. All got a brew?

KAREN Not yet. All want one?

R/S/A Yes!

KAREN Sods. You lot never brew up.

(During what follows, she makes the drinks and passes them around)

ANNE Well, we've had lots of emails about the arts exhibition. Really positive feedback. People loved it. And I don't think we could have managed it without you, Steve.

The women all clap.

R/K/S Hurray!

STEVE It was nothing. A poster. Putting tables out. Not as if I'm actually doing owt else, is it?

ANNE Speaking of which, how much time have you got?
 STEVE Couple of hours? That should be long enough to do your job. Need to get home after that.
 RACHEL You're retired. What are you rushing home to do?
 STEVE Oh, you know. Existing. Clock watching. Achieving nothing. You don't appreciate how tiring it is, watching back-to-back 'Homes Under the Hammer' and 'Bargain Hunt' on the box.
 KAREN Give over. Is it a secret?
 STEVE I don't have secrets from my favourite group of women.
 RACHEL How many groups of women do you have?
 STEVE Depends which village.
 SHARON Then you'll probably have heard about Karen's secret, Steve.
 KAREN My what?
 SHARON Secret.
 KAREN I have not got a secret!
 RACHEL Really? Check out her front garden. Pampas Grass Central I've heard.
 STEVE You little dark horse.
 SHARON Secretary of the Delph Swingers Society.
 KAREN You cheeky sods. I'll have you know that it's an urban myth about swingers. I don't grow pampas grass to signal to strangers my "sexual proclivities".

(a beat, then)

KAREN I just put a card in the Co-op window.
 ANNE I'm so grateful for you sorting this job for me.
 STEVE Give over. Pointless spending money on someone to do a job when I can do it for nothing.
 ANNE I know, but still.
 STEVE Anne. We've discussed it. I'm happy to help you. Breaks up the tedium of life.
 ANNE What would I do without you?
 STEVE I'll go get sorted.
 R/K/S Bye Steve!
 STEVE Bugger off.

STEVE exits.

ANNE He's a love.
 SHARON I must say, I'm still surprised that he's stuck it out with painting. With us.
 ANNE He needed to settle down after he retired. He's still not adjusted. I think he's still trying to figure life. And himself.
 KAREN Has he ever been married?
 ANNE He never speaks about personal things so I don't ask. But I have to say, his painting has come on so much. His landscapes are quite exceptional. And you discover a lot about yourself when you paint.
 RACHEL Yes. Like where the swingers live.
 KAREN Be very careful you.
 ANNE Whilst it's just us girls, I just wanted to mention something. Sandy's home.
 SHARON Sandy? Back from France?
 ANNE Yes. The other day. I wasn't expecting her. Just turned up, like, well
 RACHEL A bad penny?
 SHARON Or "the prodigal daughter?"
 ANNE Neither, I hope. Dropped her bags and then went out. She'd seen the poster for the exhibition as she drove in and said she wanted to drop in and have a look. Something to do with work.
 KAREN Is everything OK with her?
 ANNE I never know. But I'm sure I will soon. She probably needed some space again. I'm just glad that I'm still her 'go to' for when she does. We know where each other is. And that suits us both. Right. Less chat. Time to paint.
 RACHEL What are we doing?
 ANNE It was on the group chat. Did you not read it?
 RACHEL No. You see, I was really busy and ...
 K/S Li-ar!
 KAREN She never read it Anne.
 SHARON Wasn't interested Anne.
 RACHEL Snitches!
 ANNE Well, I have a little surprise for you all. Today we are painting ... a life model.
 KAREN I told you. Tweed!
 SHARON Brown brogues!

RACHEL Bifocals!
ANNE You really are dreadful.
RACHEL Maurice from church, in a thong!
ANNE God forbid!
KAREN No! One of her allotment crowd, hiding his bits behind a cabbage! Freshly plucked!
SHARON I know! Peter, the choir conductor, with his modesty protected by a raffle prize!
RACHEL That'll be exciting.
KAREN Why?
RACHEL Well, they always have such small prizes!
SHARON And large conductors!
RACHEL And he does like to wave his baton!
ANNE Very funny.
RACHEL Come on then Anne, cue Magic Maurice walking in wearing nothing but his tweed posing pouch!
SHARON No, no ... 'The Diggie Chippendales!'
R/K/S Hurray!

They burst out laughing. KAREN starts them chanting as ANNE shakes her head in despair!

R/K/S Off, off, off, off off ...

The door opens and STEVE enters wearing a dressing gown. The chanting quickly fades out.

STEVE Where do you want me, Anne?
(Stunned silence)
ANNE At the front, sat on the stool please, Steve.
RACHEL Stop messing with us you daft bugger. She's set us up!
KAREN Very funny.
STEVE It isn't funny and I'm not messing.
SHARON You mean, you're the ... he's the ...
R/K/S Model?
ANNE He is indeed.
RACHEL At least he's dressed.
STEVE Not for much longer.
(a beat, then)
R/K/S What?!
SHARON You mean he's, he's ...
KAREN Getting his kit off?
RACHEL All of his kit off?
SHARON When?
STEVE Right now.

STEVE takes his boxer shorts off from under his dressing gown.

KAREN This is a wind-up, right?
STEVE Nope.
RACHEL Well. Art group has suddenly perked up. Let's hope it's not the only thing.
SHARON And, you're OK with this? I mean, you're not embarrassed?
STEVE Nope.
KAREN I think I'm a bit embarrassed.
SHARON I'm not.
KAREN And of all times.
SHARON Why?
KAREN I haven't brought my glasses.
RACHEL You can go home if you like.
KAREN You can bugger off.
ANNE Look girls. Steve offered. When I told him how much a live model would cost us, he said he'd do it.
STEVE It's just a body and this is just a painting.
SHARON Beats Maurice in a tweed thong.
KAREN What difference does it make that we know him? It's like any other painting. Like fruit. I'll think of this as, well, painting a person with a, well,

RACHEL A banana.
 SHARON And a couple of satsumas.
 KAREN Oh no. Plumbs.
 RACHEL Apples.
 SHARON Oh yes. Those small juicy ones. You know, what are they called?
 KAREN Cox.
 STEVE Have you all quite finished?
 ANNE Alright girls, enough now. Anyhow. I was thinking more of ... walnuts.
 STEVE Don't you bloody start. It's a good job I know you bunch and that I'm not a sensitive type.
 ANNE Sorry Steve.
 R/K/S Sorry Steve.
 RACHEL We're just, you know,
 SHARON Breaking the ice.
 KAREN And it was a shock.
 RACHEL Just a bit. You have to admit.
 STEVE Yes. But if you're fine with it, so am I.
 R/K/S *(together)* Oh yes ... absolutely ... no worries ... not embarrassed ... just art ... fine with me ... etc
 STEVE And next week, one of you can take a turn.

(Silence)

STEVE That shut them up.
 ANNE Touché Steve, touché!
 STEVE And at the end of the day, I'm used to this.
 KAREN I beg your pardon?
 SHARON Used to what?
 RACHEL Nudity?
 STEVE Absolutely. I'm comfortable with being naked around people. It goes with the job.
 KAREN A policeman?
 STEVE Secretary of the Delph Swingers Club.

A beat, then he bursts out laughing and they join in.

STEVE Shall we start?
 SHARON I'll tell you something Steve, you've got some ...
 STEVE Balls?
 KAREN Confidence. I can't believe we're doing this; that you're doing this, for us. Thank you.
 STEVE It's all fine. It's just art, like I said.

He walks down front and sits on the stool with his back to the audience.

RACHEL Deep breaths girls.
 KAREN Deep breaths? I might need gas and air.
 SHARON Wishful thinking!
 ANNE Oh, hang on, I forgot the props.
 KAREN Props? What props?
 RACHEL So, we are having some fruit then?
 SHARON Or vegetables? Maybe a courgette!

ANNE produces a large pair of headphones and sunglasses,

ANNE I thought Steve could listen to some music and also, wear these to add some interest?
 R/K/S Interest?!
 RACHEL Are you joking?
 SHARON Depends on what he's hanging his headphones from.
 ANNE He's wearing them, thank you. On his head. To add another dimension to the composition.
 KAREN It'll do that alright.
 ANNE Steve. Press the button on them and it'll connect to the wifi. And perhaps, close your eyes. I know you've got the glasses on, but I don't want to make this difficult for you.
 R/K/S Difficult for him?
 ANNE Well, it might be hard.

SHARON goes to say something.

KAREN Don't you dare!
ANNE Shall we begin? Is your music coming through Steve?
KAREN What's the music?
RACHEL The Stripper?
ANNE Shush! Settle down everyone. Focus. Concentrate. Thank you, Steve.

STEVE settles himself on the stool and then lets his gown fall open. There is a gasp from the four of them.

RACHEL Oh sweet baby Jesus.
SHARON Forget the courgette.
RACHEL This won't work
KAREN Why?

RACHEL turns her canvass from landscape to portrait.

RACHEL That's better. It'll all fit on now.

KAREN turns her thumb horizontal as she looks at STEVE. Then slowly turns it vertical then adds her other thumb!

KAREN I'm not sure I can do this?
ANNE Why?
KAREN I don't think I have enough thumbs.
RACHEL I don't think I have enough paint.
ANNE Then just focus on one small aspect.
SHARON Being?
ANNE The sunglasses?
R/K/S Right.
SHARON And, he definitely can't hear us?
ANNE I don't think so.
KAREN Steve? Can you hear us?
RACHEL Eh up, cock?
ANNE Right, stop it. You're not being fair. Come on now, focus.
SHARON Oh, I am. Soooo focussed. At this rate I'm going to be focussed out.
RACHEL I'm seeing double.
SHARON You wish.
KAREN Hold on, what do I say when I get home?
RACHEL The truth. That you've been at your art class.
SHARON With your friends.
KAREN And what do I say we were doing?
ANNE Hanging out?
RACHEL That you did cock all.
ANNE This is very unfair. He can't hear you. Be respectful.
KAREN You're right. Come on girls.
STEVE I hope you lot aren't laughing at me.
ALL No!

The door suddenly opens and SANDY enters, talking as she speaks.

SANDY Hi mum, only me. What are your plans for today? I thought we could ... oh sweet baby Jesus.

She walks into the scene and stops in her tracks and slowly lowers her sunglasses. She stares at STEVE.

ANNE Hi love. You know the girls in the art group.

They all slowly, sheepishly raise a hand simultaneously, waving without speaking.

ANNE We're painting.
SHARON A man.
RACHEL We've made it more interesting by having him, well

KAREN Wear headphones.
 SANDY Isn't that ...?
 R/K/S Steve.
 ANNE You've met him?
 SANDY Yes. At the exhibition. But I didn't instantly recognise him with his, his ...
 KAREN Headphones on?
 SANDY Something like that.
 ANNE Nothing untoward is going on love.
 R/K/S Nope.
 ANNE Just, well
 R/K/S Art.
 ANNE And he's the same man that was our local ...
 R/K/S Policeman.
 KAREN Not right now, obviously.
 SHARON Obviously.
 RACHEL An upstanding person, actually.
 KAREN Not right now, obviously.
 SHARON Pity.
 SANDY Right. Well. I'll, you know. Go and, well, go.

She doesn't and still stares.

ANNE Oh, and Sandy? Before you go? Close your mouth love.

SANDY goes to leave, then

SANDY Right. Fine. Mum?
 ANNE Yes love?
 SANDY What time is it?
 ANNE Just gone 11. Why?
 SANDY I think I need a drink.
 ANNE Tea?
 SANDY Oh no. Having seen ... I think I need ...
 RACHEL A stiff one?
 ANNE Don't.
 SANDY Gin. This needs gin.
 SHARON Alcohol? At this time of the day?
 SANDY Steady my nerves.
 RACHEL Oh, we might need steadying too.
 SHARON Sod it. Count me in.
 KAREN I best go along and keep an eye on you steadying your nerves.
 RACHEL And I'll steady you whilst you steady them.
 ANNE You can't leave Steve sat like this! And what about the painting?

RACHEL takes out her mobile and takes a picture of STEVE.

RACHEL There. We can work from this.
 ANNE I'll show you where the drinks are.
 SANDY Large G and T's all 'round?
 ALL Yes!
 STEVE What's going on you lot?
 ALL Nothing!
 KAREN (*shouting*) And keep those eyes tight shut, Steve. Don't you ruin your concentration or our composition!

They erupt into stifled giggles and quietly sneak out.

SHARON I'm not planning on being composed for much longer.
 ALL Ssh!

They exit.

(a beat, then)

STEVE *(calling out)* No problem. Need to be gone soon, remember?

ALL *(off stage)* Fine!

(Silence)

STEVE Girls? Girls?

Steve slowly removes his headphones. He stands, initially with his back to the audience and then, fastens his dressing gown and walks to the door, listening to it. STEVE calls out.

STEVE You bunch of sods.

We hear them burst out laughing off stage.

WOMEN *(then, from offstage)* Hurray!

STEVE I'm guessing G and Ts? Well, if you can't beat them. And mine's a large one!

He suddenly opens the door and SANDY is stood behind it.

SANDY So it would appear.

STEVE Oh, shit. You. Here. I mean, you didn't ...

SANDY Oh yes. And I saw, Officer, that you were more than capable of taking down your own particulars.

SANDY winks at him, turns on her heels and disappears.

STEVE Chuffin 'ell!

STEVE follows her and exits.

L.X.

SCENE 3

That evening, 7pm.

SANDY is sat at the kitchen table. Her laptop is open and she is working. She is wearing a dressing gown over her clothes. She picks up her mobile and makes a call.

SANDY Hi Dexter. Thought it was better calling you at this time. How are things in New York? Yes. All fine here. It never changes. Not a problem calling you, is it? It's only 7pm here. I hope to be over in a couple of weeks. Oh, and I've got an angle for a piece which has got legs on both sides of the pond. The local art scene over here? I've already started sketching it out. I think you'll love it as will your American readers. 'Quintessential British' with all the eccentricity that you yanks enjoy. No worries. Be in touch.

She ends the call. ANNE enters.

ANNE You still working?

SANDY Just a few emails and calls. Now's the best time to reach my contacts in New York. It's just after lunch there. I needed to speak to an Editor in the USA about a piece I'm doing which I think they'll be interested in.

ANNE About art in America?

SANDY No. About art in the UK actually. It's for their London edition. But the Americans do like the quirkiness of us Brits, so it might appeal there too.

ANNE What will it be about?

SANDY Oh, just a local art scene and the people in it.

ANN *(Jokingly)* As long as it's not about us!

SANDY Who'd want to read about you?

ANNE Sounds fascinating.

SANDY Hopefully.

ANNE Drink?

SANDY Please.

ANNE gets a bottle of wine and two glasses and pours them.

ANNE sits at the table, staring at SANDY as she types and she is clearly aware of it.

SANDY Well?

ANNE Well what?
 SANDY You've not asked?
 ANNE Asked what love?
 SANDY Mother. For God's sake. Do we have to play this game every time?
 ANNE This is your game, not mine.
 SANDY I came here to catch up. That's the only reason I'm here. No agenda. I've caught up. I'll be gone soon.
 ANNE But you haven't "caught up." I haven't see you. And you don't need to go anywhere.
 SANDY I do.
 ANNE Where?
 SANDY I have work. Writing projects.
 ANNE I wish they were painting projects.
 SANDY Please don't go there again.
 ANNE But you were so good. And famous. You know you miss it.
 SANDY Do you reckon?
 ANNE And you can do your writing here.
 SANDY Which you know I can't.
 ANNE I don't know anything. And every time you come home, I know you a little less.
 SANDY Thanks.
 ANNE It's not a criticism.
 SANDY But it's certainly not a compliment.
 ANNE Do you need compliments?
 SANDY I just need ...
 ANNE What? What do you need? What can I do? What can I say to convince you that you have a home here and that you are always welcome and for as long as you like. You just need to tell me what I can do to ...
 SANDY Space. Peace. Anonymity. Invisibility. That's what I need.
 ANNE In that order?
 SANDY Whatever works.
 ANNE Anything else?
 SANDY To be left alone.
 ANNE Is caring so much of a threat?

SANDY gets up to leave.

ANNE Sandy, sit back down. Please.

She does so.

ANNE I'm sorry.
 SANDY You've nothing to be sorry for.
 ANNE And neither have you love.
 SANDY I know. It's just ...
 ANNE Hard. And no, I don't know how much and I never will. It's not a crime for life to become too much and to walk away from it. But never forget one thing. There's a curmudgeonly old trout in Saddleworth who loves you very much. And I'm hoping there's a younger one who hides away in Paris who might like to reciprocate now and again.

SANDY takes her hand.

SANDY And you're not a trout.
 ANNE Thank you.
 SANDY You're a cow.
 ANNE Thank you.
 SANDY Don't thank me. Thank your retired policeman friend.
 ANNE Oh really?
 SANDY Yes. One of his many insightful observations when we first met. And as for our second meeting.
 ANNE The life modelling?
 SANDY And some.
 ANNE I'll have you know he was very embarrassed at you seeing him.
 SANDY Is that so?
 ANNE It was all tastefully posed.
 SANDY I guess that'll be the headphones?

ANNE He looked fine to us.
SANDY And me.
ANNE Pardon?
SANDY Nothing.
ANNE He looked as good in the photo actually.
SANDY Photo? What photo?

ANNE gets her mobile and gives it to SANDY.

ANNE One of the girls took it. To finish our paintings from.
SANDY And naturally, she sent it to you?
ANNE For reference purposes.

SANDY still has the mobile.

ANNE See? Just modelling. Think I just need to get my glasses to show it to you properly.
SANDY You don't need your glasses to show me anything.

ANNE goes to her handbag. As she does so SANDY still has her phone.

SFX: Mobile phone message alert beep.

ANNE I've got a message? At this time?

ANNE takes her mobile back.

SANDY No, it was mine. Just ignore it.
ANNE The picture quality on these phones now is amazing. Such detail.
SANDY And I don't think you need to keep zooming in.
(A beat, then)
SANDY Seems a nice guy.
ANNE Who?
SANDY What's his name. The ex-policeman.
ANNE Steve. He's called Steve.
SANDY Yeah. Of course. That's him.
ANNE He said the same about you.
SANDY Who?
ANNE The person we don't appear to be having a conversation about.
SANDY When?
ANNE When what?
SANDY Did what's-his-name ...
ANNE Steve ...
SANDY ... ask about me?
ANNE In a text.
SANDY And why was he texting you? And about me?
ANNE We often text. When it's important.
SANDY And am I important?
ANNE Always dear.
SANDY Answer the question mother.
ANNE Just a passing reference daughter.
SANDY Hmm. Is that so? And what was this reference?
ANNE From Steve?
SANDY Yes. Him.
ANNE Oh, you know.
SANDY Mother?
ANNE Daughter?
SANDY He was right about you.
ANNE And you.
SANDY Meaning?
ANNE Oh, you know.
SANDY I could have you put in care.

ANNE Then, you'll never know what thingy said.
SANDY Cow.
ANNE Trout.

SFX: Doorbell

SANDY Who will that be?
ANNE A delivery.

She exits and returns with STEVE. He is carrying a bag of shopping.

STEVE Oh crap.
ANNE Sandy, you remember Steve.
SANDY Mother, I have met him before. I guess it's just a pleasant surprise to see him.
STEVE So soon?
SANDY So overdressed.
ANNE I'll get my purse.
STEVE Settle up some other time. I need to be off.
ANNE No, we'll settle up now.

ANNE exits.

(An awkward silence)

SANDY Wine?
STEVE No thanks.
SANDY It's not French.
STEVE Still, no thanks.

(Another awkward silence)

SANDY So. Policing, painting, shopping, modelling. What else is there to Steve I wonder?
STEVE What you see is what you get.
SANDY So I saw.

SANDY knocks back her wine and stares at STEVE.

STEVE What?
SANDY I believe you've been texting Anne.
STEVE I text. She replies in gobbledygook. She's not very good at texts.
SANDY The most recent gobbledygook was about me I believe.
STEVE Was it now?
SANDY You're as bad as her. I can see why you're friends.

(a beat, then)

STEVE She misses you.
SANDY Was that a different text?
STEVE No. A daily discussion topic. And you surprise me.
SANDY That I'm so popular with you both?
STEVE That you're still here.
SANDY My, my. It appears you two do like to chat.
STEVE And it seems you were right.
SANDY About?
STEVE Not took you long to bin the humour and rely on sarcasm.
SANDY A lot can change when you're back home.
STEVE 'Home' now, is it?
SANDY For now.

SANDY slowly closes her laptop, picks up her glass and the wine bottle and goes to leave.

STEVE It would appear that you don't just run away from home.
SANDY Meaning?
STEVE You run away from conversations too.

SANDY stops and turns to him, contemplates him.

SANDY 11.00am. Tomorrow.

STEVE What about it?
SANDY Coffee. Here.
STEVE I don't drink coffee.
SANDY Tea. Here.
STEVE I don't drink tea.
SANDY 11.00am tomorrow.
STEVE To do what?
SANDY To watch me drinking coffee apparently.
STEVE And?
SANDY That interview you were so keen to contribute to. You're on.
STEVE You might be surprised by what you find out about me.
SANDY Is that so?
STEVE There's more to me than you think.
SANDY So I saw earlier.

ANNE enters. She hands money to STEVE.

ANNE Here you go, Steve. And thanks again for doing the shopping. Off to bed love?
SANDY Yes. Thanks for the meal.
ANNE My pleasure.
SANDY And for the chat.
ANNE Really?
SANDY Really.
ANNE I'm glad. I'm out for the day tomorrow. Will I see you for dinner?
SANDY Yes. If it's OK with you. And it would appear that I'll be staying a little longer than usual.
ANNE Oh Sandy, I'm so pleased. What's changed?
SANDY We'll see.
ANNE You've made my day. And has that made your day Steve?
STEVE We'll see.
SANDY Well, that's saved you both a text.
ANNE Sorry? Have I missed something?
SANDY And Steve will be calling around tomorrow morning to see me.
ANNE Right.
SANDY He's coming to watch me drink coffee.
ANNE Right.
SANDY And this time, he might even keep his clothes on.
ANNE Right.

SANDY turns to STEVE.

SANDY "Ta ra chuck."

She exits.

ANNE What the hell was that all about?
STEVE I'm going to be interviewed. Well Anne. It would appear that not only does the doctor think I can paint. She also thinks I'm interesting.

He exits.

ANNE Chuffin' hell.

LX.

SCENE 4

*The kitchen, the following morning, 11.00am.
The room is empty.*

SFX: Doorbell.

SANDY *(off stage, calling out)* Come in. Doors open.

STEVE enters.

STEVE *(to himself)* Burglars paradise. Just like her mother.

He is carrying something wrapped up (it is a drawing). He places it down, out of the way.

SANDY *(off stage, calling out)* Get yourself a drink.

STEVE Ordering me around. Just like her mother.

STEVE does so and then paces around. Clearly uncomfortable. He looks out front as if in a mirror and checks himself out.

He stops and looks at some photos which are on the side. SANDY enters but he is unaware. She has her mobile phone in her hand and takes a picture of him.

SANDY Say “cheese” or whatever makes you smile.

STEVE Beer.

SANDY wanders over to the photos STEVE has been looking at.

SANDY Photos of me when I was younger.

STEVE Is that your dad?

SANDY Yes. Died years ago. Just me and mum. Feels like it’s always been that. And you?

STEVE Just me. Feels like it’s always been that too. I don’t have anything like this though. Photos.

SANDY You don’t have any family photos?

STEVE Not one. Not having any family for years doesn’t help. I don’t think I have any of me to be honest.

SANDY Why not?

STEVE Because, there has never been anybody around to take one.

SANDY That’s sad.

STEVE That’s life.

SANDY No “significant other?”

STEVE No significant anything. Not for a long time. You?

SANDY I don’t have an “other” - period. And I don’t seem to take photos any more. Seems little point.

STEVE Then, what was the one you just took of me?

SANDY For the article.

STEVE Right. So, you’re definitely doing one?

SANDY Absolutely. That’s why you’re here.

STEVE And I’m definitely in it?

SANDY Let’s say, I’m definitely doing an article.

STEVE What’s my fee?

SANDY The pleasure of my company.

STEVE *(under his breath)* Definitely her mother’s daughter.

SANDY Pardon?

STEVE Nothing. Crack on.

SANDY sits and opens her laptop.

SANDY You’re not a very good negotiator. Some would’ve insisted on a fee.

STEVE I’m waiting to see if your company measures up. You never know, I might talk crap on purpose.

SANDY Would I realise?

STEVE OK. I surrender.

He sits down. She places her mobile on the table and presses the screen.

SANDY Tuesday 14th at 11am. Speaking with Steve for the article “Discovering the art of rural Greater Manchester.”
Sorry. Old habits.

STEVE leans into the mobile phone.

STEVE “This interview is being tape recorded and is being conducted in an interview room in Saddleworth, Yorkshire.” Sorry. Old habits.

SANDY You seem a little tense.

STEVE Is that a question for your article?

SANDY Just an observation.

STEVE Then I guess I am. This isn't me. I don't do talking about "me." The world these days seems full of people who constantly speak about themselves; makers of noise without a purpose. No one listens any longer.

SANDY I'm listening.

STEVE You're also recording.

SANDY Do you want me to turn it off?

STEVE No, it's fine. Although, I'm not sure I have anything worth saying or hearing.

SANDY Let me be the judge of that.

(A beat, then)

SANDY OK. Let's make a start. Question. What brought you to painting?

STEVE Honestly?

SANDY Hopefully.

STEVE I thought I'd stumbled into painting by accident. But it was your mother. So, it was no accident. She'd planned it all along. I know that now. When I retired, she realised I was lost. She also realised that painting could be my saviour. You see, it's more than a hobby to her. It's her life, her very being. Part of who and what she is. And I found that infectious, even overwhelming at first.

SANDY Go on.

STEVE I think, if you examined her DNA under a microscope the helix would have strands of Titanium White, Cadmium Red and Ultramarine Blue. Even her personality is a palette. She silently floods a room like a rainbow. She infused me with, something. Wasn't entirely sure what it was at first. Hard to describe in words. But she gifted me, through painting, energy and purpose. Things I'd lost. Maybe, I'd never had. Some people bring light into your life, others dark. Many make you as grey as they are. For the first time in such a long time after a career of black and white, she showed me what colour felt like. She's not a "noise maker." She gives silence a purpose. In the stillness of painting, for the first time, I could hear myself. Breathing and creating. Existing. I could see the world and my place within it. I feel at home with art. More. I feel that I've found my home. A home I no longer need to feel resentful of.

(Silence)

The moment is broken as SANDY suddenly stands and walks away, her back to him.

STEVE Have I said something wrong?

SANDY No.

STEVE I apologise if I've ...

SANDY There's nothing to apologise for. I was suddenly deafened by the resonance. For a man not sure if he has anything worth saying or hearing, that was quite profound.

STEVE Not sure I'd go that far. You asked me what I thought and I told you.

SANDY It's just. You've made me remember something.

STEVE Something or someone?

SANDY All of the above. My mother, this place, art. Three things which at one time, made me whole. In the end, they divided me. And now I'm telling all this to someone I've only recently met.

STEVE Memories do that to you. You know what your problem is?

SANDY This, I've got to hear.

STEVE You've got too much going on in your head. You know what you need?

SANDY What's that?

STEVE Cheese and Onion crisps.

SANDY Crisps? As in crisps?

STEVE Yes. I probably need to explain the ritual of crisps to you. In the right circumstances, they set the world right. Perhaps, that's for another time.

SANDY I can hardly wait. Will every conversation with you end up being so intriguing?

STEVE Will there be more conversations?

SANDY I'm really not sure. But there's definitely something about you. You're ...

STEVE Interesting?

SANDY Different.

STEVE Different good or different bad?

SANDY Not bad. Not bad at all.

(A beat, then)

STEVE But I don't think I answered your first question.

SANDY I'm pretty sure you did. You just gave me an answer that I didn't want to hear. Question two?

STEVE Fire away.

SANDY Why did you never leave here?

STEVE Because the path of least resistance led me back to here. Life only offered me fate. So I took it. One big default position, that's me.

SANDY "I resemble that remark." And are you glad you stayed?
 STEVE Is that question 3?
 SANDY I'm a journalist, not a genie granting wishes.
 STEVE Point taken. I always was. Glad I stayed. But now that it's too late, I no longer know. I think painting allows me to explore 'me' far more than I anticipated. To reach out to beyond, not just here, but somewhere far more; to what might have been. A palette seems to give me substance. A passport to an undiscovered world.
 SANDY Again with the profound.
 (a beat, then)
 SANDY It's never too late to leave.
 STEVE It's never too late to return.
 SANDY Do you have an answer for everything?
 (Silence)
 SANDY Well?
 (a beat, then)
 STEVE Sorry, that was just me trying to not have an answer for everything.
 SANDY Smart Alec.
 STEVE I think this interview isn't panning out how either of us expected. It's not going to be the article you wanted to write either.
 SANDY Don't be too sure. But perhaps it's the conversation I needed to hear. And that you needed to have. Anyhow, you've made me rethink the title.
 STEVE Go on.
 SANDY I'm leaning towards, "Discovering the Art of Rural ... Yorkshire."
 STEVE I knew I liked you.

SANDY laughs.

STEVE. I wasn't being funny.
 SANDY Meaning?
 STEVE Just that Saddleworth honesty. After all, saying what you think can lead you into telling people how you really feel. Even strangers.
 (a beat, then)
 SANDY Look, Steve ...
 STEVE Here they come.
 SANDY Here what comes?
 STEVE "It's complicated?" "Not right now?" "I need time to think?" "I need space?"
 SANDY It's not you.
 STEVE Shit. I knew I'd missed one the other day.
 SANDY Just stop for a minute.
 STEVE Just stop what? Getting to know you?
 SANDY It's not that.
 STEVE Then what? Scared of being given a reason to stay? Or would you prefer, an excuse to escape?
 SANDY We don't know each other.
 STEVE Yet.
 SANDY My life is in Paris.
 STEVE My life's here. Your point?
 SANDY I only came here for a break from, from ...
 STEVE Life? Or was it from you? Look Sandy. You just wanted an interview. Fine. But in my old job, an interview was a discussion with a purpose. All I'm saying is, let it find it's purpose. Our purpose. Whatever that may be. And with that in mind. I've brought you something.

(Silence)

He stands and collects the package he had brought with him.

SANDY What's this?
 STEVE Open it. A gift. For you. A remembrance, it would appear, of a world, of a life you left behind.

SANDY takes the paper off and stares at the picture.

SANDY It's me. It's a sketch of me, in here.
 STEVE I drew it last night when I got home. I thought you might like to be reminded of who you really are. And how others see you.

(SANDY is clearly a little overcome, but resists it)

STEVE Look. My art is all I have. So, here you are. A part of it and a part of me. And shall I give you something else for your interview?

SANDY Don't stop now.

STEVE Painting has made me see the value of existing in "the now." It allows me to pause time. To consider the nuance of it. Because now only lasts as long as it takes to say the word. None of us know how many words we have left. But logic and my bathroom mirror tell me I'm running out of them. I'm seeing the world differently Sandy. And unexpectedly, you're now in my view.

SANDY is still staring at the picture.

SANDY People don't talk like that any longer. And you did this for me. People don't do things for me.

STEVE Then maybe, you spend time with the wrong people.

SANDY Maybe. Probably.

STEVE So?

SANDY This is a stunning sketch.

STEVE You're changing the subject.

SANDY No, I don't think I am. I think I really have found the 'Art of Yorkshire.' You are the subject. You really are my story.

STEVE Just a story?

SANDY Who knows?

(a beat, then)

SANDY I ran away from here and Anne to discover the world when "here" wasn't enough. Home was suffocating. But, soon I found the world was a place I was drowning in. Art was supposed to bridge the two but it brought me something I came to hate. Notoriety. Constantly running helped me from ever stopping to think about it. But there's one thing I still have and that life has given to me. A knowledge of art. Good art. And I'm pretty good at recognising it. And I'm looking at it. You have a talent. Genuinely. This article might end up being far more than either of us expect.

(a beat, then)

SANDY And who'd have thought it?

STEVE What's that?

SANDY That I was right about your art. You clearly don't need to do it by numbers.

STEVE Cheeky sod. That took me at least ten minutes.

SANDY Joking apart. Anne has guided you very well. Finding a natural talent like yours is the thing of dreams in the art world. Your work, your story, it's fresh, exciting ... saleable. This interview is a beginning.

STEVE Then, where do I sign?

SANDY Steve, yes, be excited. But equally, tread carefully. I believe you are at the start of, well, god knows. But I have a saying which comes from the bitter pill of my own experiences: "control the genie." Once it's out, life changes. And it can't be put back to how it was. Today's wishes easily become tomorrow's nightmares.

STEVE That's cheery. Don't ever take up motivational speaking, eh?

SANDY I don't think that will ever happen.

STEVE Fair enough then. I'm game.

SANDY Any questions?

STEVE Not at the moment chuck.

SANDY Do you know what you will need if you ever go viral in the USA?

STEVE What's that?

SANDY Subtitles. "Chuck", "Chuffin hell." The Americans don't speak Saddleworth.

STEVE I'll educate them. Think of it as missionary work. "Bringing art and mushy peas to the masses."

(a beat, then)

STEVE And as long as you're around, what have I got to worry about? You will be around?

SANDY I'll be around.

(a beat, then)

STEVE I have an opinion.

SANDY Another one? I'm all ears.

STEVE Art has already taught me one thing. There's so much you can achieve if you just go with your instinct and your passion.

SANDY In what way?

STEVE takes the painting from her. Turns off the recording and kisses SANDY.

SANDY I think you've just compromised my journalistic integrity.

STEVE Trust me, I'm a policeman.
SANDY Retired.
STEVE Then trust me, I'm an artist.
SANDY Who told you that?
STEVE My doctor.
SANDY Your doctor?
STEVE We'll see.

They kiss again. SANDY walks to exit but turns back.

SANDY Oh, one last question, purely for the interview. Now that you've posed as a life model. Do you still feel uncomfortable taking your clothes off in front of a stranger?
STEVE Yes.
SANDY Pity.
STEVE But we're not strangers.

SANDY goes to the doorway and turns.

SANDY Chuffin' hell.

She exits and STEVE follows her through the door and closes it.

L.X.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

SCENE 1

L.X.

*The following morning, 10.30am.
There are the four easels set up around the table as before and four mugs of fresh coffee by each.
There is a large bowl of fruit in the centre of the table.*

ANNE is sat at the central easel as before. She is reading a newspaper.

SFX: Doorbell.

ANNE *(calling out)* Come in girls.

We hear voices off, then RACHEL, KAREN and SHARON enter.

R/K/S Hi Anne.
ANNE Welcome, make yourselves comfortable. I've made you all a coffee.
KAREN You are a love.
SHARON A god.
RACHEL Can I come and live with you?
KAREN And me. There's never a brew waiting for me when I get in.
SHARON My problem is, there's always something waiting for me when I get in.
ANNE What's that?
SHARON Four helpless, hungry mouths.
RACHEL But, you've only got two kids.
SHARON I have. But I'm also stuck with a cat and a husband.
KAREN Doesn't your husband do anything?
SHARON I'll give you a clue. The cat does more than him. My husband has made "bugger all" into an art form. He plies his trade like an expert. He has a degree in it, y'know.
KAREN A degree?
SHARON Yes. A 'Batchelor of Arse' degree.
SHARON There's no rest from any of them. It's like living with a nest of fledglings. I come here in search of sanity, coffee and adult conversation.
RACHEL Afraid all we can offer is coffee.
ANNE Now girls. I thought we'd try the bowl of fruit again.
R/K/S No!
RACHEL No nude blokes today?
ANNE Actually, Maurice from church should be here in ten minutes. He said he can pose but not for long because of his back. And he'll need to keep his boxers on.

The women all look at her, horrified.

ANNE Joke.

Sighs of relief and laughter.

SHARON Don't do that to me.

RACHEL Nightmare Central.

KAREN Where is our current model by the way?

SHARON Oh yeah. What's happened to Steve?

ANNE It's odd. Not been in touch this morning.

KAREN That is odd. No texts?

ANNE Nothing.

SHARON Is he due with your shopping?

ANNE Over an hour ago.

RACHEL Have you tried ringing him?

ANNE His phone's off.

SHARON This isn't like him.

ANNE I'm sure he's fine. Actually, Sandy was interviewing him yesterday morning. For one of her articles.

R/K/S Oooo.

ANNE He seemed very excited about it. Well, as excited as he gets about anything. And he seemed to be texting me a lot of questions.

KAREN About?

ANNE Sandy.

R/K/S Oooo!

ANNE They've certainly made an impression on each other.

RACHEL That bloody dark horse!

SHARON Good on him I say. He deserves to be happy.

KAREN Well, between the two of them and how much they both play their cards close to their chests, it's a perfect match.

ANNE I won't going buying a new hat just yet. This is Sandy we're talking about. Sticking with anything has never been her thing. Especially life.

RACHEL Well, this article might tell us more than Steve ever has.

ANNE Sandy said that her readers would find his story interesting.

KAREN She didn't ask me for an interview.

RACHEL The key word in that was "interesting."

KAREN Check.

SHARON And what is it about?

ANNE Just about the local art scene. She never goes into any great detail about her work. I know that she always does a lot of research first. You know, getting the measure of her subject.

RACHEL Well, she certainly got the measure of him the other morning!

SHARON When she walked in, her chin nearly touched the ground.

KAREN Wasn't the only thing!

KAREN Is Sandy going back to Paris soon?

ANNE No. Oh, forgot to tell you. Great news. She's decided to stay on.

R/K/S Oh lovely ... that's brilliant ... so pleased for you ... you must be really happy etc

ANNE Sent me a text. Not had the opportunity to talk to her about it. I got home late from the theatre and she'd already gone to bed. Out again first thing this morning I guess. I'm sure I'll discover her plans soon enough. Anyhow, enough of me. Let's make a start.

They start preparing themselves for painting. The kitchen door bursts opens and SANDY suddenly walks in wearing a dressing gown. She stops in her tracks.

SANDY Oh. Hi. Didn't realise you were all in this morning.

R/K/S Morning.

ANNE Hi love. Yes. Thought I said? Didn't think you were still home. You're late getting up.

SANDY Yes.

ANNE How did the interview go with Steve yesterday morning? Did you get everything you wanted?

SANDY Pretty much.

ANNE And did he behave himself?

SANDY You bloody lot. Steve's gone out the back door. He can't face you again.
RACHEL Right you. Brew, sit down, the low down. And spare us nothing.
ANNE I think we've had enough excitement for this morning.
SHARON Well, they have!
ANNE That bowl of fruit won't paint itself. And if you don't get on with it, there's always Maurice!
R/K/S No!
SANDY I need to get this article started and emailed off. I'll catch you all later.
KAREN We are available for interview if required.
RACHEL You know. An insight from the female perspective on the arts scene.
SHARON From, you know, a younger woman's angle.
SANDY I best get dressed and go find some then.
R/K/S Cow!
ANNE Right you lot,
R/K/S Paint!

ANNE comes over to SANDY and moves her away to speak whilst the others paint.

ANNE Everything OK?
SANDY Yes. Why shouldn't it be?
ANNE Of course. Just checking. You know.
SANDY No?
ANNE With developments being, well, you know.
SANDY No?
ANNE You're not making this easy for me.
SANDY No? Two grown adults mother. Just focus on that.
ANNE I just worry, that's all.
SANDY It's OK. I won't get hurt.
ANNE It's not you I'm worried about.

ANNE returns and sits.

SANDY exits.

LX:

SCENE 2

*A local bar, the following evening.
A table and two chairs.*

STEVE is sat with a pint. After a short while, SANDY walks in, clearly stressed. STEVE stands to kiss her but she ignores him and sits down. SANDY has a camera. She looks around the room.

SANDY I need more photos of you for the article. Look out of the window for me.
STEVE Hello by the way.
SANDY Window?

STEVE looks off and she takes an unposed picture and looks at it.

SANDY And now, towards the bar, with your drink in your hand?

He does so, another picture.

SANDY Perfect. Just what they need.
STEVE You've got more photos of me than I've had taken in fifty years.
SANDY You leave the journalism bit to me, yes? Deadlines. I hate deadlines. They stress me out. Now, clothes.
STEVE Take them off? Here?
SANDY Funny. What do you wear when you paint?
STEVE Whatever I have on.
SANDY You are joking? You don't have a signature overall or shirt, covered in paint and character?
STEVE Nope.
SANDY Casual wear?
STEVE I'm not a "wardrobe" type of bloke.
SANDY Then, what's your style, your look?
STEVE This.

SANDY Dear lord. OK. Conversation for another day. And a shopping trip the day after.

STEVE Can't wait.

SANDY Right. I'll download these to my mobile when I get back to mum's house and send them to the Photo Editor this evening.

STEVE I'm guessing it'll be weeks before they tell you what they think of your article?

SANDY They already have.

STEVE It's done?

SANDY First one is. Done, sent off, read and accepted.

STEVE And?

SANDY They love it.

STEVE They love me?

SANDY No. They love the article. You are a problem for another day.

STEVE And you were going to tell me this, when exactly?

SANDY I just have.

STEVE But it's about me!

SANDY And?

STEVE Don't I have an input?

SANDY You've had an input. You spoke. I listened. I wrote. I emailed. Done. Remember that genie? Well, it's out of the bottle and now and it's also winged it's way across the water.

STEVE To where?

SANDY America.

STEVE America?

SANDY Yes. My Editor in the U.S. has also read it. You're everything they want: quirky, weird, sardonic, slightly odd.

STEVE I am sat here you know. And when were you going to tell me that bit?

SANDY Again, I just have.

STEVE So. What happens next?

SANDY If the Photo Editors in London are happy with what I send them, they'll decide the best edition to place it in and a date. I'm thinking next week. And we need to plan for a second interview. After that, I need to think about what response the TV networks might have to it. You need to be ready for that. And as you don't have an agent ...

STEVE Agent?

SANDY They'll use me as a contact.

STEVE This is all a bit, you know.

SANDY What?

STEVE Quick. Overwhelming. I'm just a bloke who paints a bit.

SANDY No. You are an undiscovered local talent who the art anoraks and the public will want more of.

STEVE But it's not my life.

SANDY It is now. And it's business. I can guarantee that it won't just be the print edition that this will be big in either. It'll be the online version. And when their social media feed starts spinning it in the USA.

STEVE Social media?

SANDY Boom.

STEVE Not sure I like the idea of "boom." And 'Social Media?' I don't even watch telly. And I don't like people.

SANDY Best get used to it. Because they will want to know all about you. Oh, and you need to get painting. How many have you done so far?

STEVE Not sure. About a dozen.

SANDY A dozen?

STEVE I'm a newbie, remember?

SANDY And where are they?

STEVE In the shed.

SANDY In your shed?

STEVE Not my shed. I haven't got one. They're in Doug's allotment shed. I use his as it's normally rainproof.

SANDY "Normally rainproof?" Don't be saying this to me. Are you telling me that my latest find, my breakthrough artist has his entire works in a leaky shed?

STEVE No. They're in the spare bedroom at home.

STEVE laughs. SANDY doesn't.

STEVE Oh come on. Chill.

SANDY There isn't the time or the space to chill. This is business, remember?

STEVE OK boss.

SANDY Now. How long does it take you to paint a new work, on average.

STEVE Not sure. I haven't painted enough to have a batting average yet.
SANDY Guesstimate then.
STEVE If it's a small one, two days tops? The exhibition one did take a week though.
SANDY Then you need to get painting. Let's aim for two a week.
STEVE I'm not a machine. I need inspiration you know. We artists are like that.
SANDY And where, pray, might that inspiration come from?
STEVE Another pint of this might help.
SANDY Seriously?
STEVE Absolutely. You know there was a bloke across the valley who was a painter. Didn't pick a brush up before 11 in the morning. And he needed to have a large whisky and a cigar before he started.
SANDY What was he called?
STEVE Barry Hayes.
SANDY Never heard of him. Was he exhibited?
STEVE No idea.
SANDY What did he paint?
STEVE Local stuff.
SANDY Urban Landscapes?
STEVE Kitchens and lounges mostly.

STEVE laughs. SANDY doesn't.

STEVE Worst Painter and Decorator in Saddleworth. Crap at wallpapering.

SANDY is unimpressed.

STEVE You need to laugh more you know.
SANDY Why? Does it improve me?
STEVE Well. Makes you look younger.

She breaks and smiles. He goes to take her hand. She pulls it away.

STEVE What?
SANDY Not here?
STEVE Why?
SANDY There's people.
STEVE I know. Problem is they're pretty much everywhere on this planet.
SANDY Then not now.
STEVE Then when?

He tries to take her hand again but gets the same response.

SANDY Let's just slow things down.
STEVE Bit late for that.
SANDY Time and a place. Yeah?
STEVE Fair enough.

(A beat, then)

STEVE You know, when I was working ...
SANDY And no more war stories? I'm stressed. There's a lot to do. You don't realise what this means for me. This is work, and it could be huge.
STEVE You mean, "us?" What it means "for us?"
SANDY Yes, of course, us.
STEVE So, work is 'now' but 'us' isn't.
SANDY I can't afford to miss this opportunity and ...
STEVE ... and there you go again with the "I." So I'm guessing that, because this is an opportunity, then we're not?
SANDY It's complicated.
STEVE "Complicated?"

(Silence)

STEVE What's going on?
SANDY Nothing. OK. Something happened. But nothing's going on. You just need to remember that. There's a difference.

STEVE I need to remember that? Do I now? I think you need to take a deep breath love, because this next part is going to hurt.

SANDY What is?

STEVE You getting your head out of your arse.

SANDY (*indignant*) I'm sorry?

STEVE Accepted. Right. (*he goes to leave*)

SANDY Hang on a minute.

STEVE Nope. Not here, not now, not ever. I don't hang on for a minute for nobody. Not sure what's happening in your head, Sandy. And I'm sure I'm supposed to say something sensitive and intelligent. But I'm not wired like that. This might be how you sort your shit out, how you deal with people, but not me. There's only one thing which will sort this out and you now have a choice to make.

SANDY Ultimatums is it?

STEVE You're dead right.

SANDY And that is?

(*A beat, then*)

STEVE Crisps.

SANDY Crisps?

STEVE Cheese and Onion or Salt and Vinegar?

SANDY What?

STEVE Wrong answer. Cheese and Onion or Salt and Vinegar. It's very simple. And if you ask for Prawn Cocktail, I'm out of here

SANDY But ...

STEVE Cheese and Onion or Salt and Vinegar. I haven't got all day. I've got a chuffin' painting to do when I get home. Well?

SANDY (*hesitantly*) Cheese and Onion?

STEVE Good choice. There. See? You don't need reasoning, debate or counselling. You just need crisps. Crisps sort everything out. You'll see. They stop arguments, resolve differences. That's why this would never work if we were in France.

SANDY And you're going to tell me why?

STEVE I am. Because the French are incapable of sorting a problem out. And shall I tell you the reason?

SANDY I can't wait.

STEVE Because they don't do proper crisps. "Potatoe Chips." Perverts. And nobody ever sorted a problem out with cheesy garlic bread and wine either. That's why the French are always arguing. Trafalgar might never have happened if Nelson had taken crisps.

SANDY Steve, I don't want to challenge your apparent knowledge of the workings of *detente* and *entente cordiale* but I'm pretty sure that cheesy garlic bread is not a traditional French dish.

STEVE It is in that restaurant on the high street. They do cheesy garlic bread. And no crisps at the bar. Weirdos.

SANDY That I'm even having this conversation is insane. This is surreal.

STEVE No, it's Saddleworth. And your life would have been a lot simpler if you'd stayed here, do y'know that?

SANDY I guess I do now.

He goes to walk away, but stops.

STEVE And whilst I think on, stand up.

SANDY Why?

STEVE Stand up.

SANDY Why?

STEVE Is there an echo in here? Stand up.

SANDY reluctantly stands up. He takes her in his arms and kisses her.

STEVE There.

SANDY What was that about?

STEVE Now I've snogged you in the tap room, holding your hand is bugger all. Sorted. Crisps will seal it.

He exits. RACHEL, KAREN and SHARON enter.

R/K/S Hiya!

SANDY (*under her breath*) Great.

RACHEL Hiya Sandy. OK love?

SANDY Fine thanks.

SHARON With Steve we see?
SANDY Well spotted. He's just gone to the bar for crisps.
KAREN Who for?
SANDY Us.
SHARON You?
KAREN Crisps?
RACHEL For you?
SANDY Yes. We had a small difference of opinion and crisps are going to settle it apparently. Thought you'd know that, being local.
R/K/S Right.
RACHEL And that was some kiss.
KAREN In the tap room.
SHARON In front of folk.
SANDY I know. I usually settle all disagreements like that. It's how they do it in France.
SHARON Really?
KAREN Wow. Fancy.
SANDY But in France, they do it with cheesy garlic bread and wine as well (*a hushed aside*). And between us girls. It can get positively obscene.
R/K/S Ooo.
RACHEL You know, I wasn't looking forward to my holiday, but now I'm quite excited.
SANDY Where are you going?
RACHEL Disney Land, Paris. And I hear the french can be very argumentative. Hopefully.
SHARON We best leave you to it then.
KAREN Won't keep you. It's clearly serious. You know. With crisps on the way.

STEVE returns with crisps.

STEVE Oh hello.
R/K/S Steve.
SHARON Glad you've sorted your problems.
STEVE Eh?
SHARON Another time. Must dash. I've just remembered. I'm having it out tonight with the man who fitted our kitchen and I need to prepare for the argument.
SANDY Why do you need to prepare?
SHARON He's called Pierre.
RACHEL The plumber? From Shaw?
SHARON High Crompton if you don't mind. And he's very swarthy is a gallic sort of way.
KAREN That's because Shaw is nearer the equator.
RACHEL Y'know, I've always thought Shaw town centre had a Parisienne vibe.
SHARON And just in case things get heated, I'll get a cheesy garlic baguette from Iceland on my way home.
RACHEL Ooo, you mucky thing.
SHARON Well, best be off. And as they say in High Crompton, "Au revoir chuck."

They exit. SANDY bursts out laughing.

STEVE What's just happened?
SANDY You wouldn't believe me if I told you.
STEVE You OK?
SANDY Yes. And I'm sorry. Head removed now. I don't think we need your argument remedy, but at least I know for future reference. And promise me something.
STEVE What's that?
SANDY Promise me that, whenever anybody interviews you, you won't come out with any of that magic about crisps, the French or cheesy garlic bread.
STEVE "Message received, over." I don't have the finesse or the chat that you're probably used to. I guess I'm a little eccentric.
SANDY A little?
STEVE But you have to admit. I hide it well.
SANDY Stand up.
STEVE Sorry?
SANDY Stand up.

STEVE Why?
SANDY Is there an echo in here?

He does so and she kisses him. They sit down.

STEVE What was that for?
SANDY Look lad, if you're expecting more, then it isn't happening after we've eaten cheese and onion crisps.
STEVE "Lad" is it?
SANDY Well, I am back home.
STEVE Home is it?
SANDY For now.
STEVE So, not embarrassed to blend in with the locals then?

She takes his hand.

SANDY For now.

LX:

SCENE 3

The kitchen. The following evening.

ANNE is sat at the table eating a sandwich. There is a mobile phone on the table (SANDY's).

LX: *Mobile phone ringing.*

(a beat, then - calling out)

ANNE Sandy? Your phone's ringing?

(no response)

ANNE answers the call.

ANNE Hello? No, I'm her mother. Who's speaking please? Dexter? Is that a nickname? Oh, I see. American. That explains it. Where are you at the moment Dexter? America? How lovely. Is the weather nice? And how long are you on holiday there? You live there? Of course. Are there a lot of you there? It must be very big. It always looks big on the telly. Bit like Dovestones. But with sunshine. You live in an apartment. Lovely. And have you got a horse Dexter? No cattle either? A French Poodle? Lovely. And what do you do? Newspapers. I see. Do you have a paper round? An Editor? And what do you want to do when you grow up? You're 30. Gosh. You're a bit old to still have a paper round then.

SANDY enters.

SANDY Mother! What are you doing with my mobile?

ANNE It rang so I answered it.

SANDY grabs her mobile.

ANNE It's Dexter. In America. He doesn't have a horse. Can't be much of a cowboy. But he does have a paper round. Oh, and he's gay.

SANDY What?

ANNE He has a French Poodle.

SANDY Shit.

(on her mobile)

Dexter? Hi, it's Sandy. Yes. That was mother. No, she's fine. She's always like that. She's from Saddleworth. No. They're all like that. No. She's not medicated. Yes. She probably should be. Yes, I'm safe being with her. Look, did you get all the photos? Great. Might be some rubbish mixed in. If it's not to do with the piece, just delete it. That's great. Sorry? How did she know you were gay? No matter.

ANNE *(calling out in a southern states accent)* Bye Dexter! Y'all come back now, do you hear?

SANDY My mother said ... no, she's not been drinking. Bye Dexter.

ANNE What a lovely young man. Are all Americans like him?

SANDY I guess. And why did you call out like that?

ANNE That's how they ended episodes of 'The Beverley Hillbillies.' Thought he'd appreciate it.

SANDY Mother, he's 30.

ANNE Everyone remembers 'The Beverley Hillbillies.'

SANDY Yes. Everyone watching TV sixty years ago.

ANNE Where's Steve by the way? You two have been joined at the hip. Not literally. Though, you were the other day. For quite a while by the sounds of it.

STEVE That's it really. I often wake up with an image in my mind, something I've seen. So that's when me and brush go to work. I get a brew, she gets a jam jar of water, and off we trot into the land of watercolours.

SANDY "She?"

STEVE That brush is a woman alright. Nobody else would put up with me.

SANDY And you're telling me, that's it?

STEVE What else could there be? I did watch that American guy on the telly years ago. You know, the painter? The one with the red frizzy hair hair? He used what looked like decorator's paint brushes to create something from nowhere. In 30 minutes. With a stroke of his hand, a tree. With another, a shaft of light. Then a mountain. Like the hand of God.

SANDY That's quite profound.

STEVE It was to a 12 year old who, at the time, was destined for working in a factory.

SANDY Did it spur you on to try it?

STEVE Oh yes.

SANDY And how did that go?

STEVE It didn't. I got a clout off our dad.

SANDY For painting a picture? Did he not like it?

STEVE No. He said it looked nothing like him. That and the fact I'd painted it on the gable end wall of our house.

SANDY Why did you paint there?

STEVE Where else was there? I had no fancy canvasses or paint or brushes.

SANDY Then, what did you paint with?

STEVE His two inch bristle brush and a four leftover tins of gloss. Took me all summer with a wire brush and a block of carboloc soap to shift that bugger. For years after, in a certain light, the gable end looked like The Turin Shroud.

(a beat, then)

STEVE You have very interesting features you know.

SANDY Is that so? I can't honestly say that anybody has ever said that to me.

STEVE Have you ever been painted?

SANDY No.

STEVE Would you sit for me?

SANDY I'm not sure I have the time.

STEVE That's a no then.

SANDY I didn't say no.

STEVE You as good as did. Pity. I'd let you keep your clothes on.

SANDY Really?

STEVE Only for travelling in.

SANDY And 'end recording' I think, before we offend the delicate sensibilities of the readers.

They laugh.

STEVE And there she is. I knew if I tried for long enough, I'd find you again.

SANDY Find me? I'm here. What is there to find?

STEVE That smile. You hide it so very well. For a time, we lost it in the pub.

SANDY I'm the one who does interviews.

STEVE And I'm the one making it a little bit more interesting.

SANDY For whom?

STEVE You, me, your readers.

SANDY The readers don't want to know about me.

STEVE But I do.

SANDY Have you ever read our magazine?

STEVE No. And you just changed the subject.

SANDY And what was the subject?

STEVE You. OK. Rain check then. But I will find you out.

SANDY Is that a threat?

STEVE The investigation has only just begun.

They laugh.

STEVE So.

SANDY So.

STEVE Is this the calm before the media storm?

SANDY I'm expecting an email very soon. I wouldn't be surprised if the posts on social media have already been released. So yes, it's on it's way. But there's no need to worry. I can guarantee this will be a very positive experience. You've got me looking out for you, remember?

STEVE All's good then. Will things change do you think?

SANDY Such as?

STEVE Me? Here? Us?

SANDY Everything changes, Steve. Life is just like the weather.

STEVE (*A beat, then*) "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date."

SANDY Did you really just quote Shakespeare at me?

STEVE I've always thought that he has an observation for every moment.

SANDY stares at him.

STEVE What?

SANDY How much more is there to you?

STEVE Nothing. But you? As someone said only the other day, there's a dissertation there. I'm just a retired cop with a new found love of art and a long standing appreciation of Shakespeare, sarcasm and crisps. And now, a worry about what I'm getting myself into.

SANDY And does that include us?

STEVE Is there an us?

SANDY I'm coming around to the idea that there should be.

STEVE Then it's just my impending celebrity status to consider.

SANDY Steve. Just focus on this. I believe that you have an amazing talent. That talent deserves to be recognised, as do you.

STEVE But being recognised is what you hate.

SANDY I don't think I'm qualified to give anybody advice. And I had nobody holding my hand.

STEVE But you don't like holding hands.

SANDY reaches across the table and takes STEVE's hands.

STEVE And in public?

SANDY It's winning me around.

STEVE If there is a problem, we will always have one thing to help us through it all.

SANDY Each other?

STEVE Crisps.

SANDY's phone beeps. She reads it.

SANDY Email from Dexter. The London office are publishing the article next week. The promo's with a short version article went out on social media a few hours ago.

STEVE And that means what, exactly?

SANDY Wow.

STEVE What is it?

SANDY Dexter says he loves the photo they've used.

STEVE No hiding boyish good looks.

SANDY The only thing they've changed is my title. Oh, I love it. "The Saddleworth Constable." You see? A former policeman, painting landscapes, it's a play on...

STEVE Words. I think I've figured it. Would that be the female version of 'mansplaining'?

SANDY What do you think of the new title?

STEVE I think they've put me in a big pair of boots that I don't deserve. Especially considering the boots I used to wear.

SANDY You'll be fine. Trust me. I'm a doctor, remember?

STEVE Am I able to see what's gone out?

SANDY Of course! Just have a look at their post. Ahh, I can't imagine you're a social media type. It'll be on the three main platforms. I think, this one first.

STEVE Feel free to 'womansplain' this one.

SANDY hands her phone to him.

SANDY I think it's only right you see it before me. Just click on the link and the post on social media will come up.
You just scroll up.
STEVE Do what?
SANDY Here. Luddite.

SANDY shows him and STEVE does so.

STEVE "Wow" was right. There's a lot of words. Did I really say all of this?
SANDY You certainly did.
STEVE It doesn't read like anything I would say.
SANDY Not one word has been changed. Trust me. We need to present you in the best light, just as you are so the public see who you really are.

(his demeanour changes)

STEVE What's this?
SANDY The online article.
STEVE This is a joke right?
SANDY Joke?
STEVE If this is a joke, it isn't funny.
SANDY What?
STEVE No.
SANDY It's the social media post about the article, that's all.
STEVE Who can see this?
SANDY The world.
STEVE Please tell me this is a joke. No, no, no. Everyone, everywhere can see this?
SANDY Of course they can.
STEVE Why would you do this to me?
SANDY Steve, I've not done anything other than what we agreed. What is it?
STEVE Are you really that sick?
SANDY What?
STEVE Have you any concept of what you have done?
SANDY Steve, what are you talking about?

STEVE pushes the phone back towards her.

STEVE For a woman who avoids any public recognition, you've got a twisted way of treating other people's privacy. People who you supposedly care about. Have you any idea of what this will do to my reputation? "Trust me" you said. You've used me.
SANDY Steve?
STEVE Not good enough destroying your own life, you just needed to share the pain, destroy one more. You were right. Anne was right. This isn't your home. You don't know us. And you certainly don't know me. The sooner you leave the better.

SFX: Doorbell

SANDY Steve! Wait. I don't understand.
STEVE Looks like 'art' wasn't content with just using you for its own ends. I made the right choice staying here and being a nobody. But it's taken an outsider to ruin it. Go back to France, Sandy. Go back to being a nobody. Because you are certainly nothing to me.
SANDY Steve!

RACHEL, SHARON and KAREN enter.

R/K/S Oooo.
SHARON The man himself.
KAREN In the flesh
STEVE Excuse me, I have to leave.

STEVE exits.

RACHEL Well Sandy. When you said you were going to make Steve famous, you weren't joking.
SANDY I have no idea what you're ...
SHARON Bloody hell love.

KAREN You really do know how to get him exposure. I never thought he'd let you do that.
SANDY What?
RACHEL We've just been in the cafe on the high street and I was looking online on my phone.
SANDY And?
SHARON My word Sandy. I'll give it to you. When Anne said you were going to get him in the media, I never expected how much of him!
KAREN I think everyone in that cafe was looking at it.
RACHEL Who'd have thought it? Our Steve has gone viral.

SANDY frantically looks at her phone and finds the post.

SANDY (*horrified, shocked*) No. This is ... how have they got that photograph?
RACHEL More importantly, how did you manage to get a copy of it? I took that of Steve when he was posing for us. So we could finish the painting later.
KAREN I assume he only went along with it going viral because they blurred out his important bits!
SHARON Even with that, I still can't believe Steve would have gone along with anybody seeing that photo, let alone the whole world. Just goes to prove how little you can know someone.
KAREN By the way, how did you get hold of it?
RACHEL Come to think of it, the only other people who I thought had it was us and Anne. She's a rum old bird sending it to you.
KAREN And then you send it the world!
SANDY Anne didn't send it me.
RACHEL What?
SHARON Please tell me she knows you've done this?
KAREN Please tell me that Steve knows?
SANDY No. I just ... she left her phone on the side. She showed me the photo, so I sent it to my phone from hers. I thought it would be a laugh to have a copy.
RACHEL A laugh? To share it with the world?
SANDY No!
KAREN You've published a naked photo of our friend online and he didn't know?
SHARON Do you realise what you've done?
SANDY I didn't do anything. Not on purpose. I was rushing that much to send a photo to the Editor, I sent them everything and that must have been included. This will ruin me.
KAREN Ruin you? Is that all you can say?
RACHEL All you can think of?
SHARON You utter cow.
SANDY No, not me, I just mean,
KAREN I think we know exactly what you mean. And we know exactly what you are.

The door opens and ANNE enters, pretending to cover her eyes.

ANNE It's OK you two. I'm just getting a ... oh, hello girls. This is a surprise.
SHARON Were you in on this?
ANNE In on what?
RACHEL Ask Sandy.
ANNE What's going on? Sandy? Is something wrong?
KAREN Where to start.
SHARON No, ask Steve, Anne. I'm sure he'll give you the low down.
KAREN "Low down" being the operative words.
ANNE What's wrong with Steve?
KAREN Like I said, where to start. But betrayal, humiliation and deceit pretty much sum it up.
RACHEL Your daughter isn't content screwing up her own life.
SANDY Anne's done nothing. I've done nothing.
SHARON All evidence to the contrary. Come on girls. Let's see if we can find Steve. He'll be in need of friends. Real ones.
SANDY I'll come with you.
RACHEL You're going nowhere with us lady. And Anne? I think you'll find no one will be at your painting class tomorrow.
ANNE Why not?
KAREN Not whilst you have your lodger here.

RACHEL I'm particular who I mix with.
SHARON Me too. Rather be with my own. You can trust them.
KAREN Strangers? Not as far as I can throw them.
ANNE We're not strangers, we're all friends.
RACHEL Sorry Anne, but the jury's out on you.
SHARON But the verdict's conclusive on her.

The three of them exit.

ANNE What have you done now?
SANDY Now?
ANNE (*souting*) What have you done?! Well?
SANDY When you showed me your phone the other day, I sent the picture of Steve modelling to my phone. That's all.
ANNE You did what? You had no right.
SANDY It must have got mixed up with the others I sent.
ANNE Sent? Sent where?
SANDY To my Editor.
ANNE The newspaper have that photograph? Then get it back.
SANDY I can't. It's been posted on line.
ANNE Posted where?
SANDY Everywhere.
ANNE Then delete it.
SANDY I can't it's too late.
ANNE Do you realise what you've done? He's my friend. These. These people are my friends. And because of you, I've betrayed them.
SANDY But, I'm your ...
ANNE Don't. Don't you dare. And this was supposedly an accident?
SANDY Mum?
ANNE Bored with him already are we? Got rid of him with an artistic flourish? Had your fun and thrown him under a bus? And used us in the process.
SANDY It was an accident!
ANNE Your life has been an accident. Because it's always someone, something else that's wrong, isn't it? There's only ever you. But then, it's always been about you. The woman who wants to be anonymous. Who's had everything but wants nothing. You've got a bizarre way of garnering privacy.
SANDY But mum.
ANNE You need to leave.
SANDY What?
ANNE First thing in the morning. Before I get up. And don't get back in touch. This was one accident too many in our relationship. Not content in ruining your life, you destroy others. I don't care about me. But these are my friends. They're all I have. They are my family.
SANDY I'm your family.
ANNE Not any more.

ANNE goes to leave.

ANNE I need to find Steve. Make him realise that I had no hand in this.
SANDY Mum?
ANNE Be gone by morning.
SANDY But I've done nothing wrong!
ANNE Try telling the world that. Then try the harder one. Try convincing Steve.

ANNE exits leaving SANDY alone.

LX:

SCENE 4

One month later.

RACHEL, SHARON and KAREN are painting at their easels. The bowl of fruit is back. They each have a glass of wine. There are two empty bottles.

(*Silence*)

RACHEL Have I ever told any of you how much I hate fruit?
SHARON Tell me about it.

(a beat, then)

RACHEL Have I ever told any of you how much I hate fruit?
KAREN It's only made bearable having convinced Anne to let us bring wine today.
SHARON I must admit, my painting is so much better after wine.
KAREN What are you painting?
SHARON No idea.

They gulp their wine back as ANNE enters

ANNE Well, we all seem to be enjoying our painting this morning. It's only 11am ladies.
RACHEL Really?
SHARON So late.
ANNE You've only been here an hour.
KAREN Time flies when you're painting.
ANNE So does the wine by the looks of it.
RACHEL I find painting makes me so thirsty.
SHARON It's all that concentrating Anne.

ANNE looks at KAREN as she gets another glass.

KAREN What they said.
ANNE Well, if you can't beat them.

They all laugh. They all get a glass of wine.

ANNE You three are a bad influence. A toast. To art.
ALL Art.
KAREN To wine.
ALL Wine!
ANNE To not painting Maurice from church naked.

They all cheer.

RACHEL And to friends.
SHARON To family.
KAREN To us.
RACHEL And to realising what and who are important in your life. And to those unique people who add value to you. To your spirit. And to that one person who makes up complete. Who makes us realise that we're valued and how much we need to hold onto friendship. To Anne.
R/K/S Anne.
ANNE Thanks girls.

(A beat, then)

RACHEL How's Steve?
ANNE Steve is fine. He knows that you all care, that you ask after him. He's tough. He knows he has friends and where they are. Give him time. Now the furore has died down, it's all history. The media has moved on and found something, someone else to shine a light on.

(A beat, then)

ANNE And thank you for, well, understanding.
RACHEL Anne, there was nothing to understand.
SHARON We know now what happened, how it happened. You weren't a part of it.
KAREN You were a victim too.
ANNE Not really. Just an unwitting participant. If you're fine with me, then ...
R/K/S Of course we are ... we love you ... you did nothing ... we're the ones who should be sorry etc.
RACHEL Group hug!

They do. The three women then pause, waiting for one of them to speak, then

SHARON OK. I'll say it. We were talking before you came down about ...
ANNE Sandy? She's gone to ground. I was angry. She was upset. We haven't spoken since that day when I told her to leave. Four weeks. I've had time to think about it. Boy have I. She made a careless mistake. I do genuinely

believe that and that she didn't mean to send them that photo. The press are the press and they reverted to type. Literally. It was too good an opportunity and they sold her down the river. But getting it off my phone in the first place? She shouldn't have done it, no matter what her reasons. I genuinely believe that her and Steve had something. It could have been good for both of them. It's a tragedy, simple as that.

KAREN Is she in Paris?

ANNE No. I think she must be back over here. The vicar actually thought he'd seen her the other day, but you know what his eyesight is like.

SHARON I certainly do. The cheeky bugger said "Morning Karen" to me the other day.

They laugh.

KAREN Hang on. What's wrong with him thinking you were me?

RACHEL I guess it's understandable.

KAREN Meaning?

RACHEL Well, he wouldn't have his glasses on at your swingers group, would he? To him, one gyrating pile of jiggly bits is the same as another.

KAREN I do not gyrate. Jiggly, however, is a wholly different matter!

ANNE I'm not labouring it. But thanks girls. Thanks for your understanding.

SFX: Doorbell

ALL Door's open!

STEVE enters. He is carrying a box. They all instinctively stand.

STEVE Sit down, for god's sake. You make me feel like the vicar.

RACHEL Good to see you kid.

STEVE And you. All of you.

STEVE goes to ANNE and kisses her.

ANNE Thanks Steve. I've missed you.

STEVE And you.

KAREN You OK?

STEVE Nearly. What am I saying? Of course I am. I am pleased to say that the fan mail from around the world has begun to trail off. Still getting a number of wedding proposals. And a very odd approach to make an advert for aubergines. And by the sounds of it, there wasn't a huge budget for wardrobe.

SHARON Bloody hell!

STEVE But perversely, people are genuinely interested in my painting. It really is taking off. Commissions would you believe. From here and abroad. But no more interviews. Ever.

SHARON Anything we can do?

STEVE No. But thanks for asking. Sorry for going off the radar. It's my way.

KAREN Where've you been?

STEVE I've been wondering around.

ANN You mean wandering?

STEVE No, wondering. It's much the same. It involves lots of aimless bimbly around where you live. But, instead of taking in where you are, you think about why you stayed.

RACHEL And what has it led you to?

STEVE To here, to you. All roads seem to lead to all of you. I'm still trying to figure out why.

KAREN Because we're lovely?

SHARON Because we're all you have?

STEVE Chuffin' hell. What a thought.

SHARON Group hug?

STEVE Please god no.

RACHEL Tough luck.

STEVE You know I hate this.

KAREN Incoming!

STEVE Oh bugger.

SHARON No, hugger!

They all stand and surround him in an attempt at a group hug.

ANNE We've missed you.

STEVE And I've not missed you, so get off me.

They laugh and break.

STEVE Joking aside, it's good to see you all. Really, it is.

ANNE All of us? Even this old trout?

He hugs her.

STEVE Especially you. And you're not an old trout, remember?

ANNE Thanks Steve.

STEVE You're an old cow.

They laugh. Then,

STEVE And Anne, this was on your step.

She picks up the box and looks at it.

ANNE But it's not for me.

STEVE For next door?

ANNE No. It's addressed to you.

STEVE Me? Why would you get a delivery for me?

ANNE No idea. You best open it.

RACHEL It might be from a fan.

STEVE Then you can bugger off if you think I'm opening it. It might be that woman who keeps sending me underwear.

SHARON Which woman?

STEVE Veronica from Doncaster.

KAREN You get sent underwear?

SHARON How did she know your size?

They all stare at her.

SHARON What?

STEVE Not men's underwear you daft sod. Women's. And more importantly, they're hers!

SHARON Now, that is a painting I would love to do.

RACHEL You are so weird.

ANNE Steve, like it or not, you did go global.

STEVE Aye. It would appear I'm big down south.

KAREN goes to speak.

ALL Don't!

STEVE Well, I'm not opening it.

KAREN For god's sake, I will.

KAREN opens it.

STEVE What is it?

KAREN Six packets of cheese and onion crisps. And a card.

STEVE Well? Open it.

ANNE takes it and begins to read it out loud.

ANNE "I need to talk to you so badly and I thought these would be needed." The handwriting. It's from ...

The kitchen door suddenly bursts open and SANDY enters, slightly out of breath.

SANDY Me. It's from me.

(Silence)

ANNE Girls, come and see those flowers in the garden I was telling you about.

KAREN What flowers?

RACHEL Shut it and move.

KAREN Where are we going?

SHARON The garden you numpty.

SHARON pinches her arm.

KAREN Ow! What did you pinch my arm for?

SHARON To get you moving. Garden. Now.

KAREN But I haven't finished my wine. And I don't want to go outside.

RACHEL knocks back her wine.

RACHEL You have now.

KAREN Hey!

ANNE I've got a fridge full of wine in the summer house.

(a beat, then)

KAREN Just let me get my bag.

ANNE ushers them out.

SANDY opens two packets of crisps and tentatively pushes one towards him.

STEVE I see. You play me at my game and that makes everything fine does it?

SANDY I'm sorry.

STEVE Is that it?

SANDY No.

STEVE You hurt me.

SANDY Yes.

STEVE You humiliated me.

SANDY Yes.

STEVE You made a laughing stock of me.

SANDY Yes.

STEVE You ran away.

SANDY Yes.

STEVE It was all an accident.

SANDY Yes ... what?

STEVE I'm not the stupid one. I saw what happened and I realise there's no way you would have done it on purpose. Anyhow, it is what it is. I guess there's no mitigating against stupidity.

SANDY Erm, hang on.

STEVE And on reflection, I can't blame you for getting hold of that photo of me.

SANDY Why?

STEVE Because, any right minded woman would want a picture of me naked. Many still do. Especially Veronica in Doncaster.

SANDY Doncaster?

STEVE I went viral, remember? Conversation for another packet of crisps.

(a beat, then)

STEVE Well?

SANDY Well what?

STEVE I'm guessing a full apology is brewing?

SANDY It genuinely was a stupid mistake. You must believe me. And me simply talking to you, the easiest thing of all, could have fixed it. But you're right. I did what I've spent a lifetime doing. I ran away again. From here, from mum, from art and now, from you. And at the heart of it, my only concern was me. And that's unforgivable. When I met you those few weeks ago at the exhibition, for the first time, something mattered. You. I sat in my apartment in Paris watching the emails and messages piling up and realised, it's all pointless. Nothing means anything unless you have a purpose in your life. And everything that matters is right here.

STEVE That's nice. I'm just a purpose, am I? And you really think turning up here, now, will fix it all? With a bag full of crisps and a mouth full of pleasantries?

SANDY I hoped.

STEVE No way.

SANDY I see. Is there nothing else I can say or do?

(Silence)

SANDY I guess that's a no. I'm sorry for everything. Sorry for what happened. Sorry for losing what might have been.

SANDY goes to leave.

STEVE You could try stopping being bloody sorry. Did I teach you nothing?

STEVE starts eating his crisps.

SANDY Well?

STEVE Calm yourself. This can't be rushed. Stop being so bloody European. Lot to think about. Might need another packet.

SANDY Well?

STEVE For something so serious, salt and vinegar would have been better. Maybe even pork scratchings.

SANDY You're not making this easy for me.

STEVE It wasn't meant to be. And how did you know I was here?

SANDY I've been here for a week. Driving around aimlessly with this box. Hoping to just come across you. Frightened of what you'd say. Not knowing what I would say. Then, I caught sight of you and I followed you here, to home.

STEVE Home is it now?

SANDY If it wants me.

STEVE finishes his crisps and then stands up.

STEVE Right. I have conditions on putting this behind me.

SANDY Anything.

STEVE You will not criticise my dress sense or ever take me shopping for clothes.

SANDY OK. Is that it?

STEVE Nope. Not constantly having a smile on my face is acceptable.

SANDY Alright.

STEVE Sarcasm is always appropriate.

SANDY Agreed.

STEVE Crisps may be consumed at any time of the day or night and are the only means of settling disagreements.

SANDY If that's what you want.

STEVE No cheesy garlic bread. Ever.

SANDY Seriously?

STEVE Ever.

SANDY Fine. What else?

STEVE Irrespective of history or public opinion, Saddleworth is in Yorkshire.

SANDY I'm not entirely sure if ...

STEVE Yorkshire?

SANDY Yorkshire.

STEVE And one final thing. And this is the most important one.

SANDY Anything.

STEVE I want to paint you in the nude.

SANDY I'm not sure about that.

STEVE It's a deal breaker.

SANDY OK. You can paint me in the nude.

STEVE Good. Naturally, you can stay dressed.

STEVE smirks. They both slowly start laughing.

SANDY You silly bugger. Were you going to forgive me all along?

STEVE Probably.

SANDY Sod.

STEVE Stand up.

SANDY What?

STEVE Stand up.

SANDY Why?
STEVE Is there an echo in here? I'm not asking again.

SANDY does so and he moves close in to her.

SANDY You smell of cheese and onion.
STEVE Did you know that in Diggle, that's considered a proposal of marriage?
SANDY I wouldn't know. Not been around here in a while. Actually, I'm currently homeless.
STEVE Pity. Any plans?
SANDY Need to have a think. I hear Saddleworth isn't too bad. People are weird though.
STEVE Not all of them. But steer clear of Delph. More swinging than Glen Miller.

They go to kiss. The door opens and the girls appear around the door in turn.

RACHEL Will you two get your finger out and make up. It's chuffin' freezin' out here.
KAREN And she lied about there being wine.
SHARON And I need a pee.

They all come back in.

(a beat, then)

ANNE Well?
STEVE Well. Despite Sandy's obvious faults, errors of judgment, poor decision making and previously choosing France over Yorkshire ...
SANDY ... thanks ...
STEVE I've forgiven her. But, you'll have to decide for yourselves girls what you all think. I can only speak for me. And that can only mean one thing - and performed in the time honoured manner.
ANNE Agreed.

ANNE gives the three women a packet of crisps which they all open and eat from.

(Silence)

SANDY Seriously?
STEVE You're not in France now love.
ANNE Well girls? What do we think?

(a beat, then)

R/K/S Forgiven.

They cheer and then continue to chat as SANDY and STEVE move away from them.

STEVE Did you know that, in your absence, it would appear the art world consider me as 'The Saddleworth Constable?' And that's all down to you. What do you think of that? Does that sway your decision to stay?
SANDY Not in a position to say just now.
STEVE What? Why?

The others are now watching.

SANDY There are more important things in life. They can make the difference between a relationship being a fad or a fling. You've made your decision. Now it's my turn.
STEVE And?

SANDY goes to the table and collects her packet of crisps and begins eating them.

STEVE Well?
SANDY Hold your horses lad. You're not in France. We don't rush things in Yorkshire. So. I have my own test for you. A scenario. And you need to get this right, or I'm afraid I will have to reconsider my position.
STEVE Fair enough.
SANDY Right. This is a biggie. A lot is resting on this. Are you sure you're ready?
STEVE Go on.
SANDY Scenario. A dinner date. The waitress gives you two choices of starter: Black Pudding or Hummus.
STEVE God forgive you. Black Pudding. And a fried egg. Between two slices of it.

(a beat, then)

STEVE And if you want to get all “lah-di-dah” and continental ... you can poach the egg. Go anywhere near it with garlic and there’ll be hell to pay.

SANDY Agreed.

STEVE And if it’s Black Pudding ‘au naturel’ it’s with mustard. Always. But you dare ask “English or French” and even crisps won’t fix it.

SANDY I think I’m in love. But hang on a minute. When we first met, you told me that you were vegetarian!

STEVE I am. Sort of. I mean, I only eat free range Black Puddings.

SANDY You lying sod.

STEVE And tell me, after all that’s happened. Did your research eventually discover “The Art of Yorkshire?”

SANDY Oh aye. And much more. I discovered that the ‘art’ also has a heart. A very large one. And you only truly appreciate it when you’re home.

STEVE Will it keep you here?

SANDY Absolutely. That and the people. And the weather, obviously. And the prospect of painting again. So much painting. But there’s one particular thing I have missed so much. A thing they don’t seem to have in France.

STEVE Really?

SANDY moves close in to him.

SANDY Something I know you love.

STEVE Really? Can this be mentioned in company?

SANDY Oh yes. And you do like getting up close and personal, don’t you Steve?

STEVE I might do.

SANDY So, in true Saddleworth tradition, it can mean only one thing.
(a beat, then)

STEVE Group Hug!

ALL Chuffin hell!

They all cheer and converge on STEVE ... and group hug!

LX:

THE END