

FAKE

by

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FADE IN:

INT. AUCTION ROOM, LONDON. DAY.

A busy viewing day. The walls are crowded with all kinds of paintings.

NICK, in his mid-thirties, but with a confident, boyish charm, wears a bespoke suit and silk shirt. He sits in an antique chair in front of a picture of a thoroughbred horse, veiled by darkened varnish and in an ornate gilt frame.

An ELDERLY MAN, aristocratic in his country tweeds and cravat, comes and hovers in front of it, finds the picture in his catalogue, then examines the picture from close to and at a distance.

Nick, with his perpetual half-smile, sidles up to him.

NICK

Isn't it gorgeous? One of his best.

ELDERLY MAN

Yes, it is good.

NICK

Thinking of bidding tomorrow?

ELDERLY MAN

Maybe.

NICK

Are you a collector?

ELDERLY MAN

Safer than the stock market.

NICK

Very true ... I can make you big money. One hundred percent profit in one day.

ELDERLY MAN

I learnt a long time ago that if a thing seems too good to be true -

NICK

Then it *is* too good to be true. Oh well, nothing ventured ...

Nick returns to his seat and studies his catalogue.

The elderly man carefully examines a couple of other paintings on view, occasionally looking across to Nick who is nonchalantly making notes in his catalogue.

The man finally trudges across and sits next to him.

ELDERLY MAN

What's your story?

NICK

I have an American client who's desperate to buy it. There's no point in us bidding against one another.

ELDERLY MAN

No?

NICK

We'd both be losers. I could make us both winners.

ELDERLY MAN

How?

NICK

I stay out of the bidding. You buy the picture. I give you double whatever you bid.

INT. AUCTION ROOM. DAY. LATER

Nick is talking to an OLD LADY, in a genuine sable coat and over laden with jewellery, standing in front of the horse painting.

NICK

... I stay out of the bidding. You buy the picture. I give you double what you paid.

OLD LADY

How can I trust you?

She looks him up and down.

NICK

Do I look like a crook?

His mock hurt expression melts into a disarming smile.

NICK(CONT)

I'll see you in the pub after the auction. What do you drink? Bollinger or Crystal.

OLD LADY

I'm not fussy.

NICK

Quite right. Will cash be okay? It's safer. Leaves no telltale paper trail.

INT. AUCTION ROOM. DAY. NEXT DAY

The horse painting is displayed on an easel by an AUCTIONEER'S ASSISTANT #1.

AUCTIONEER #1

Fifty-five thousand on my right. Do I have sixty?

The Elderly Man waves his numbered paddle a little nervously. The Old Lady tries to see who has bid.

AUCTIONEER #1(CONT)

Sixty thousand pounds. Sixty-five anyone?

The Old Lady is confused. She looks at Nick standing in the doorway. He gives an encouraging smile. The Old Lady nods at the auctioneer.

AUCTIONEER #1(CONT)

... Sixty-five on my right. Seventy?

The Elderly Man is distraught. He shakes his head, almost in tears.

The Old Lady grins in triumph when the hammer goes down and looks to the doorway, but Nick has gone.

EXT. BATH SPA TRAIN STATION. DAY.

The intercity train pulls in and Nick gets off.

EXT. WALCOT STREET, BATH. DAY.

Nick meanders along the street, on his mobile.

NICK

... Sixty-five. Am I the best? Or am
I the best?

He gives a grin as he listens.

NICK (CONT)

Trust me. Both of them would be
too ashamed to admit they'd been
conned.

He listens again.

NICK (CONT)

I'm almost with you ... and it's
your round.

Above a once empty shop converted to a makeshift gallery,
he sees a banner:

FIRST LOOK:

An Exhibition

of

Local Painters

He looks at the unframed oil on an easel in the window.

Nick is transfixed. He stares and stares at the landscape.

His concentration is only broken when a passer-by also stops in
front of the window.

Dazed, Nick moves on up the street and into a dilapidated
bric-a-brac shop.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. DAY

LATER.

Nick comes out of the shop, now casually dressed and
accompanied by SEXTON, 70, bearded, overweight and a
scruffy image of Karl Marx.

They stop at the gallery window. Sexton, with one glance at
the canvas, is awestruck.

SEXTON

You are absolutely right.

NICK

Why? Tell me.

SEXTON

When I look at it I want to cry.

They move on and stroll into a nearby pub.

INT. WALCOT STREET GALLERY. DAY

Bubble wrap and tape litter the floor of the deserted gallery. Paintings are stacked against the walls, some are already hung.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

The crowded workshop contains several horse paintings in various stages of completion.

Nick lounges on an old, cracked leather sofa watching Sexton sketching a landscape. Periodically, Sexton refers to reproductions in several art books.

Nick is still grinning with self-satisfaction.

SEXTON

Triumphalism doesn't suit you,
Nick.

NICK

She's so greedy and lacks taste. You
should have seen all the
jewellery... and worn in the daytime.

SEXTON

Tut tut.

NICK

She got what she deserved.

SEXTON

Plenty of people are greedy.

NICK

I'm pretty sure she works for
Moore.

SEXTON

Oh.

NICK

Yes. Oh.

He stretches his whole body.

NICK (CONT)

So, who's your latest painter?

SEXTON

Pissarro. Why is he an ideal
artist for me?

NICK

Um. Let me think.

SEXTON

No it should be at your
fingertips - he painted the same
scene over and over again in
various light conditions.

NICK

So if any new paintings were
discovered no one would be
suspicious.

SEXTON

What else?

NICK

Why not play fair and grill me
before the pub?

SEXTON

A good conman should stay in
control. Think on his feet. Now
tell me. NOW.

NICK

Pissarro ... Pissarro ...

SEXTON

Think Monet.

NICK

Oh yes. His eyesight failed in
later life.

SEXTON

Right. Makes my job easier. And?

NICK

That's all I know.

SEXTON

'Cause he was a pisshead.

NICK

Pissarro/pisshead. I see. So now our vocation is being influenced by a stupid pun.

SEXTON

Partly. But if you didn't insist on celebrating so hard you'd realize. It's harder to detect rip-offs of Pissarro because he did bad work when he was hung-over.

NICK

Who's it for?

SEXTON

Just a minor royal. It's a replacement. He doesn't want his missus to know he flogged off the original.

NICK

Why would anyone sell such a magnificent painting?

SEXTON

To buy hay for his polo ponies ... do you know why so many artists are alkies?

NICK

Go on.

Sexton represses his giggles.

SEXTON

Because they don't have to get up in the morning and go to work.

NICK

So when will it be ready?

SEXTON
It's in the oven.

NICK
What?

SEXTON
I thought of a new way of giving
it a crackled, age effect - by
applying several layers of dirty
varnish and then baking it.

Nick stops to think, then gives a wide smile.

NICK
Wasn't that Van Meegren's method?

SEXTON
He's dead. So now it's *my* method.

NICK
So when will it be ready? I'm a
bit short of cash.

SEXTON
Patience. Steady income from a
small con is better than risking
being exposed in a big one.

NICK
But less fun.

SEXTON
Cool it son. Don't let greed get
the better of you.

NICK
Me? Greedy?

SEXTON
Perhaps not. Impulsive -
definitely.

NICK
I can't get the landscape out of
my head.

SEXTON
Thanks mate.

NICK

Not yours - the one in the gallery window.

SEXTON

I know what you meant.

EXT. GALLERY, WALCOT STREET. NIGHT

The door of the gallery is guarded by SAM, petite and pretty, in her late teens and a classic little black dress. She is collecting the invitations.

When she's called inside, Nick casually takes her place with an extended hand and a welcoming smile. He is handed an invitation. He walks a few paces down the pavement and stares for a long time at the single unframed canvas, made even more captivating by the spotlights on it that exaggerate the magical contrasts between light and shade.

He forces himself out of his reverie and returns to hand Sam his invitation.

INT. GALLERY. NIGHT

The room is mostly filled with art students taking advantage of the freebie drinks and ignoring the canapés.

There are a few buyers. They are gathered around one particular group of paintings, various English landscapes and seascapes - all by the same artist as the work in the window. Each canvas has the same original manifestation of light flooding the scene.

Nick moves from one to another, examining the details and brushwork, then moving far enough away to see from a distance.

In front of the buyers he sees the back of a woman still painting one of the framed canvases on display. She wears a well-cut black satin trouser suit.

POPPY, late 20s, is dark, intense and vital. She is using a palette knife to rework a tree dominating a meadow white with oxeye daisies.

The doorkeeper comes up to her.

SAM

What are you doing, Poppy? The paintings are finished ... They're being exhibited.

Poppy is in her own world. She just squeezes oil paint from tubes of green and red into the palm of her hand and then thickly applies the crude mixture to the canvas.

When she moves back to examine her work, she bumps into Nick. She turns.

Their eyes lock. Time makes the interaction a stare. It goes on and on without the slightest change in expression from either of them. Nick is totally transfixed.

Sam watches from a distance, intrigued.

Finally, Poppy looks away when there is a disturbance at the entrance to the gallery.

MOORE is in his mid-fifties with an Armani suit and a MINDER. Pushing through the other guests, Moore inspects all the pictures with dismissive speed.

When he gets to Poppy's work, he looks and looks, lost in each landscape. Sam speaks to him then goes away and returns with a sheet of red paper dots. She peels them from their backing paper and sticks them onto the labels of Poppy's paintings.

Smiling, Moore whispers in her ear. Sam nods in Poppy's direction.

Quickly, Nick whispers to Poppy.

NICK

Is that what you want? To be bought
by a bloke out on a shopping trip?
Who casually makes and breaks
artists?

Ignoring Nick, Moore puts a hand on Poppy's shoulder.

MOORE

Congratulations. We have business
to discuss.

As he watches Moore and Poppy in quiet conversation, Nick overhears the people looking at Poppy's works.

GUEST #1

... An ability to mesmerize.

GUEST #2

Each time you look away and then back again it has more power, more meaning.

GUEST #3

My God, it's not just that. Don't you see? She's taken Impressionism into a totally new dimension.

Nick tries to attract Poppy's attention and fails. Finally, he gives up and starts to leave. He glances back at Poppy but she is still talking to Moore.

As Nick goes out the door, he's unaware of Poppy's gaze belatedly following him.

Moore shakes Poppy's hand then she turns away.

Sam appears at her side.

SAM

What was that all about?

POPPY

Mr. Moore wants to -

SAM

No. Before that. The guy you kept staring at.

POPPY

Was I?

EXT. INDUSTRIAL ESTATE. DAY.

Poppy is an insignificant, lone figure approaching the gates of a large industrial unit heavily fortified with double, high metal fences topped with razor wire.

Surveillance cameras monitor her every movement.

She presses a buzzer at the gate then speaks into the microphone.

POPPY

It's Poppy.

The gate slowly slides back.

Poppy enters and crosses the no-man's-land. Unseen guard dogs bark close by.

She undergoes the same procedure at the heavy steel shutters of the building. They too slide back under motorized power. With trepidation, she ventures into the dark portal.

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. DAY.

Lights flood the cavernous area.

It is a garage. Row after glittering row of cars in pristine condition. From vintage to the latest modern classic. Each is labelled with its make, marque, precise day it was manufactured, every owner, every repair.

The lights dim as another steel door slides back. The backlight from the new room turns the figure in the middle of the doorway into a black silhouette.

MOORE

Welcome to my world.

POPPY

Hello?

MOORE

Come in. Don't be put off by all the security measures. My insurers insist on it.

Poppy offers her hand. She is pre-empted by a kiss on both cheeks - close to the mouth.

They walk to an island of expensive furniture in the middle of the warehouse.

Poppy sits and peers all around into the darkness.

MOORE (CONT)

Later. Drink?

Moore sees her looking at a Georgian table on which lies, in strange isolation, a plastic card.

MOORE (CONT)

Ah.

He picks it up and shows it to Poppy.

POPPY

What is it?

She goes to take it but he moves it out of reach.

MOORE
You won't have seen one before.
It's a limited edition credit card.
American Express.

Poppy is unimpressed.

MOORE (CONT)
One cannot apply for them.

POPPY
Okaaaay.

MOORE
Amex send them only to a select
few.

POPPY
Ah.

MOORE
And they keep secret how many have
been issued.

Poppy doesn't respond.

POPPY
Why have you asked me here?

MOORE
Later. Tell me all about yourself.

POPPY
Well I was born -

MOORE
No. Why did you become a painter?
When Young British Artists are
making a fortune from conceptual
art. Dirty beds. Sheds turned into
boats and back to sheds.

Moore raises his eyebrows, an insolent professor holding a tutorial for a new undergraduate.

POPPY
I didn't choose painting. It's a
basic desire. Like the desire to
live.

MOORE

Right answer ... Married?

POPPY

No.

MOORE

Boyfriend? Long-term relationship?

POPPY

My work takes up all my time and energy.

MOORE

Do you want to make ...?

He gestures with his hand to include the whole of their surroundings.

MOORE (CONT)

Shed-loads of money?

POPPY

I have ambitions for my work - not for myself.

MOORE

You want neither cash nor cachet?
The public love sound bites like that. In today's cynical world.

He walks towards the side of the warehouse.

MOORE (CONT)

Come.

More lights come on automatically.

He pulls at a handle and a large rack slides out from the wall. It is hung with studies, sketches for the most famous paintings of the female nude. Poppy looks at them in awe.

POPPY

The female form has always been the greatest subject for a painter. I could never compete.

MOORE

No?

POPPY

Absolutely not. It's all been done.

He pulls out another rack which has a single, large oil sketch of a storm at sea.

MOORE
Do you know what that is?

POPPY
Of course. It's a Turner.

MOORE
Wrong.

She examines it more closely

POPPY
But -

MOORE
It's not a Turner. It's *my* Turner.

Moore quickly moves on, pulling out rack after rack of canvases, in childish glee. There are Bacons, Freuds, Hockneys.

MOORE (CONT)
What do you think?

Poppy has no time to reply.

MOORE (CONT)
There's more. There's more. And
now ...

He pulls out an end rack which supports all of Poppy's paintings from her exhibition.

She goes to ask a question but Moore places a finger on her lips. Poppy flinches.

As they walk to the back wall another shutter opens automatically. As they enter the new space more art can be glimpsed: a concrete molding of a room, video installations, a Duchamp urinal.

Moore and Poppy disappear amongst the contents of this treasure house.

MOORE (O.S.)
I love collecting.

POPPY (O.S.)
I had noticed. What do you do when
you've made your pile?

MOORE (O.S.)
Start another pile.

POPPY (O.S.)
Why?

MOORE (O.S.)
My wealth allows me to be a
patron. To make artists rich, not
dealers or collectors.

POPPY (O.S.)
And where do I come in?

MOORE (O.S.)
You're new.

POPPY (O.S.)
So?

MOORE (O.S.)
The business of art is the art of
business. I'm going to make you ...
the NEXT BIG THING.

INT. PUB. DAY SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Nick and Sexton sit at a table with half-drunk pints in front of them. Nick lifts his glass to check the clarity of the real ale.

NICK
Can't eat, can't sleep. Can't
think of anything else.

SEXTON
You're obsessed.

NICK
No. It's love.

SEXTON
Hormones, more like.

NICK
No, no, no. It's pure love. They
are truly great paintings.

SEXTON
I thought you were talking about
Poppy.

NICK

I am. I have to find some way of
protecting her from Moore.

EXT. MOUNTAINS. NIGHT

Out of the darkness comes a harsh clatter and slap of rotor blades. A helicopter lands on the snow on a mountain peak.

In its searchlight, the PILOT starts unloading bags, then an easel and a pile of primed canvases onto the snow.

Then Poppy emerges, wrapped up in mountaineering gear against the cold.

The helicopter takes off, blasting her with snow.

She removes her ear protectors and looks around in wonder as dawn slowly reveals the panorama of snowy mountains, rocks, and pine forests.

Poppy unfolds her stool, places a canvas on the easel and waits.

MOORE'S VOICE

I bought an island with it.

POPPY'S VOICE

Sorry?

MOORE'S VOICE

With my Amex card.

As the sun rises she works rapidly with vivid blue and green and red paint.

Soon she has made a dozen oil sketches: several include an impression of the sun as it rises.

Exhausted she stretches out on the snow.

MOORE'S VOICE CONT

The NEXT BIG THING.

She is woken by the rising cacophony of the approaching helicopter.

She jumps up and waves energetically.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. DAY

Nick approaches the shop that was the venue for the exhibition.

The window is empty. He tries the door but it is locked. He puts his hand up between the glass and his eyes to see inside. The room is empty.

NICK

Shit.

He backs away to examine the upper windows, then eyes the next door second-hand music shop.

He opens the door. A bell is set ringing loudly.

INT. RECORD SHOP. DAY.

The inside is packed with boxes of old vinyl records and posters of musicians.

The bell finally stops its cacophony. Silence. Then the spectre of a yawning SHOPKEEPER appears from the back of the shop.

SHOPKEEPER

Can I help? Looking for anything in particular?

NICK

No, I wanted some information. I'm a friend of Sexton's.

SHOPKEEPER

Don't do dodgy here mate.

NICK

I'm just looking for anyone from the exhibition next door. It's quite kosher.

SHOPKEEPER

Didn't really meet them. They weren't there long. Before that the place had been empty for years. Try the Council. They own the place.

EXT. GUILDHALL. DAY.

Nick takes the steps up into the building two at a time.

INT GUILDHALL DAY

In the marbled entrance hall, Nick is in intimate conversation with a plain young female RECEPTIONIST.

NICK

I know you probably have to maintain commercial confidentiality.

RECEPTIONIST

My boss is very keen on data protection.

NICK

Excellent. And you look as though you have very high ethical standards.

RECEPTIONIST

If that's supposed to be a chat-up line, I've got a boyfriend.

NICK

I would have known that without you telling me. Someone with those eyes is bound to have their pick of any man.

RECEPTIONIST

Think so?

NICK

Know so. You must know a lot about love and romance. That's why I'm here. I'm desperately trying to get in touch with an old flame. We were in junior school together. Then she moved away and we lost touch.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, bless.

NICK CONT

Then I saw her at the exhibition. But I lost her number. If you could just tell me the name of the person who rented the shop in Walcot Street?

The receptionist keys her computer.

RECEPTIONIST

If anyone asks, I haven't given you this information. Okay?

NICK

Thanks a million. And if you should ever get tired of your boyfriend ...

The receptionist concentrates on her keyboard to hide her thrill and embarrassment.

EXT. PULTNEY STREET. DAY.

Nick stands at the top of the steps to a house, talking to Sam. She can't stop playing with her hair.

NICK

... Was the first time I'd seen her since school.

SAM

The way you looked at her -

NICK

What?

SAM

It was as though you'd seen a ghost.

Sam can't meet his eyes.

NICK

She was about to give me her address when Moore nabbed her.

SAM

I'm not sure I should -

NICK

Please. It's important.

SAM

Things aren't as simple as -

NICK

Maybe you could give her my number?

Sam thinks for a moment and finally glances up to see Nick's friendly white-toothed grin.

SAM

Hang on.

She goes into the house.

Nick looks up at the facade of the terrace, then to the Georgian styled museum at the end.

Sam comes out thumbing her mobile.

SAM(CONT)

Here it is.

She shows him her mobile and Nick copies the number into his own.

NICK

I'm very grateful. She will be too. I'm sure.

He smiles, blows her a small kiss and goes.

She calls after him.

SAM

How did you find me?

But he pretends not to have heard.

Nick walks towards the city centre and turns left at the fountain. At the end of the truncated street he leans against the railings and, with a smile of triumph, surveys the green space of the Recreation Ground.

EXT. DESERT. DAY.

Poppy stands at her easel making oil sketches of the shapes, colours and texture of the sand dunes.

A breeze covers the wet canvas with grains of sand. She turns to see an approaching sandstorm, then rapidly starts another canvas.

The landscape darkens as the sun becomes obliterated by the storm.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

An old warehouse, gutted and painted white.

Leaning against the walls is a series of five metre high landscapes, all dominated by the rising sun. At the foot of each painting is the small oil sketch made outdoors.

At the far end is a scaffolding tower. At its top, a figure works on another large canvas.

Small completed landscapes are piled up in corners of the studio gathering dust.

Moore appears from the stairs. He first sees Poppy's bed. On a wooden beam above it is sprayed the graffiti:

*Painting is another word for
feeling.*

Constable

Unobserved, he surveys his commissions with pride.

He slowly claps his hands. The loud echoes resonate.

Startled, Poppy knocks over a large can of acrylic paint.

Scarlet paint splashes down, desecrating her canvas by obliterating its sun.

Poppy, deeply tanned, quickly swings down the tower and rushes to remove the spillage with rags and water.

Moore tries to help but fails as he is more intent on preventing his suit being dirtied. Their bodies bump into each other. Moore grabs her arm to stop her falling.

She quickly pulls away.

MOORE

What the -? I was just trying to -

POPPY

Sorry.

He looks down in dismay at the red hand print on his breast.

MOORE

This suit cost me seventeen grand.
Look: it's ruined.

Poppy looks at her desecrated canvas.

POPPY

It's ruined.

Blinking back tears, she climbs back up the tower and scrapes away the thick paint that formed the sun.

She climbs back down and stares at the painting.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY. LATER

Poppy is putting the finishing touches to the once ruined painting, now restored to a magnificent beauty.

She nods in appreciation. Then she takes a palette knife and starts to scrape away the thick orange and yellow hemisphere.

She smiles and nods in excitement.

Her mobile rings.

POPPY

Nick who?

She listens.

POPPY (CONT)

Can I ring you back this evening?

EXT. CAFÉ COURTYARD. DAY. NEXT DAY

Nick is already seated at a table when Poppy walks up.

POPPY

Sorry I'm late. Haven't you ordered?

NICK

I was waiting for you.

He stands to pull out a wicker chair for her.

Their eyes engage once again.

NICK (CONT)

You look well. What can I get you?

POPPY

Skinny Mocha latte, please.

NICK

Sure you wouldn't like a coffee instead?

Poppy laughs at his retreating back.

When he has disappeared inside, she closes her eyes and lifts her head to be bathed in the sunlight.

Nick returns carefully balancing a tray with coffees, orange juice, mineral water, pain au chocolate and peach tarts.

Poppy inspects the tray.

POPPY
I thought this was a business meeting.

NICK
That too.

He sets the food before her, acting like a fawning waiter.

NICK (CONT)
Bon appétit.

POPPY
Ta mate.

Nick sits and raises his glass of juice for a toast.

NICK
Here's to us.

POPPY
Us? ... Why am I here?

NICK
I want you to do something for me.

Poppy raises her eyebrows.

NICK (CONT)
I'd like you to do a portrait...

Poppy waits for him to continue.

NICK (CONT)
... Of me.

POPPY
I only do land and seascapes. As you saw from my exhibition.

He raises both hands in surrender.

NICK
I wanted to see you again.

POPPY

Why?

NICK

Because you are beautiful.

POPPY

I'm plain, ordinary.

NICK

I love ... your work. I think we -

POPPY

We?

Nick raises his hands again.

NICK

I want to spend some time with you.

POPPY

I'm flattered. But I'm also very busy - putting together a new exhibition for Moore.

NICK

You can't work all the time. What do you do for relaxation?

POPPY

Tennis. Movies.

NICK

Me too.

Poppy unobtrusively sizes up Nick's physique.

POPPY

Well, I'm always on the lookout for good opponents.

NICK

I'll book a court.

POPPY

Which movies?

Nick searches his memory and finally comes up with a name.

NICK

Kieslowski.

POPPY

Oh, yes.

NICK

You?

POPPY

Kubrick ... of course.

NICK

Which? I've got them all on DVD.
You?

POPPY

I don't have a DVD player.

NICK

How can you not have -?

POPPY

Because of Kubrick: Barry Lyndon.
When I was young I thought each shot
was as good as a painting. So I used
to keep freeze-framing so I could
look and look. I was mesmerized.

NICK

I know exactly what you mean.

His thoughts move elsewhere.

POPPY

It took me seven weeks to get to
the end of the film. I didn't have
that amount of time to indulge
myself. So I sold the DVD player.

EXT. TERRACE WALK. NIGHT.

Nick comes out of the film rental store. He carries a copy
of *Barry Lyndon*. He glances down and turns it around to hide
the title.

INT. COVERED TENNIS COURT. DAY.

Inside the polythene bubble, Nick struggles to maintain the
rallies with Poppy.

The sound of the struck balls and the conversation is
magnified and echoed.

NICK

Sex on the first date.

POPPY

Oh yes. Fifteen love.

A ball is well out, but still played: they are just knocking up.

POPPY (CONT)

Practice writing your boyfriend's surname with your Christian name.

NICK

Fifteen all.

They play several more strokes before Nick puts the ball into the net. Poppy takes a ball from under her dress and whacks it straight at Nick's feet.

NICK (CONT)

Invite your partner to meet your family after the first date.

Nick does a lucky drop shot that Poppy just manages to return.

POPPY

Oh yes. Fifteen thirty. Send a text message every ten minutes.

NICK

Thirty all.

POPPY

Use the word 'we' at the first meeting.

Nick goes to smash the ball but misses.

NICK

Point taken.

INT. TENNIS COURT. DAY. LATER

Nick and Poppy take drinks at the court side. Unobtrusively, he follows every movement as she wipes away the sweat from her face, arms and chest.

NICK

Barry Lyndon.

POPPY

Sorry?

NICK

The stillness of the moving pictures proves my point. The whole movie was about long, long looks that expressed a whole world of meaning: passion, fear, contempt.

POPPY

No. They were blank looks. Expressionless. The actors allowed the audience to put in their own emotion.

She bends over to pack her racket and towel into her sports bag.

Nick stares at her exquisitely muscled legs, tanned and smooth.

NICK

Tomorrow?

Poppy looks up and catches him grinning.

POPPY

Triumphalism doesn't suit you, Nick.

NICK

You owe me a favour - 'cause I won.

POPPY

What is it? And play fair.

NICK

Spend some time with me.

POPPY

It will have to be after I've finished work.

Nick is startled by her ready acceptance. He concentrates on zipping his racket into its cover to give himself time.

SEXTON'S VOICE.

You have to romance them mate. They may pretend to be above that sort of thing, but it never fails.

Chivalry. Lancelot and Guinevere.
Who can resist?

NICK
Tomorrow evening. In front of
Royal Crescent.

EXT. LAWNS OF ROYAL CRESCENT. DAY.

In the fading light, Poppy approaches the crescent.

In the middle of the lawns is a solitary lantern. She stares,
curious.

She feels something underfoot. She looks down at a crushed
flower - a scarlet poppy. Then there is another and another.
A trail of them leads towards the lantern.

She follows.

On a blanket lies a wicker picnic basket. Poppy looks up to
see a figure approaching.

EXT. LAWNS OF ROYAL CRESCENT. NIGHT.

Sitting on the grass surrounded by the remains of a gourmet
picnic, Nick and Poppy sip from crystal flutes of champagne.

POPPY
By scraping away and repainting,
again and again, I'm left with
ghosts.

She sips her drink.

POPPY (CONT)
They haunt, or give a subtext to
the images that follow.

NICK
Amazing.

POPPY
What?

NICK
Don't move.

Poppy is surprised.

POPPY

Why?

Nick carefully places his glass on top of the hamper. He stares at Poppy's silhouette, dark against the light from the lantern. Poppy turns as she speaks.

POPPY (CONT)

What?

Nick gently turns her head back to a profile.

NICK

Let me look.

He runs his finger down the middle of her forehead, down her straight narrow nose. Poppy starts to pull away.

NICK (CONT)

Stay still. Please.

He starts again from the top of her forehead, finally tracing the contours of her lips.

NICK (CONT)

You have the most beautiful profile. Imperious yet lascivious.

POPPY

Thanks. For the picnic as well. I'm impressed you took the trouble to cook.

NICK

That profile deserves it. And more.

POPPY

I just look my best in a dim light. And we've had a lot to drink.

Nick leans across and gives her a chaste kiss on her cheek.

He pulls back to stare into her eyes.

EXT. CIRCUS. NIGHT.

Nick and Poppy pass a drunken couple arguing.

A scream. They turn to see the man punching and kicking the woman.

Poppy's eyes widen.

NICK
I'll go and help.

Poppy trembles, then starts to shake.

Nick puts a comforting arm around her and she clings to him tightly.

POPPY
Just get me away.

NICK
What is it?

POPPY
Please. Get me away.

Nick is torn between helping the woman and staying with Poppy.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. DAY.

Poppy waits outside Sexton's antique shop.

NICK'S VOICE
You need me Poppy. I want to
convince you of that.

A few moments later Nick roars up in an old Porsche and skids to a stop.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

Nick and Poppy are cruising through a verdant landscape.

INT. CAR. DAY.

Nick turns to Poppy to break the silence.

NICK
What happened last night?

POPPY
I hate violence.

NICK
I wanted to try and stop it and -

POPPY

Please. Talking about it is almost as bad as seeing it.

She gives a bright but false smile.

POPPY (CONT)

So, are you going to tell me where we're going?

Nick just grins.

POPPY (CONT)

At least tell me what's so important that you need to drag me away from my work.

NICK

Do you need to ask?

POPPY

I *am* asking.

NICK

I like you.

Nick is silent as he negotiates traffic.

NICK (CONT)

I want to protect you from Moore.

POPPY

Why?

NICK

I tried to TELL you at your exhibition. Now I'm going to SHOW you.

POPPY

What?

NICK

He's a crook. He'll destroy you.

POPPY

He may not be the most charming of men, but I've no reason to distrust him.

NICK

He doesn't pay taxes in this country. He has an offshore

holding company. No one knows where his money comes from.

POPPY

Maybe he borrows it all?

NICK

The worst thing is, the whole art market is dependent on confidence in his judgment. What sells and what doesn't sell. It's stupid ... and wrong.

INT. AUCTION ROOM, CHELTENHAM. DAY.

The AUCTIONEER #2's hammer goes down and there is a scattering of applause.

An ASSISTANT #2 places a large, colourful painting on the easel. An excited buzz of conversation follows.

Nick and Poppy are latecomers. As they search for seats, Poppy passes a large mirror. She can't resist looking at herself, trying to catch sight of her profile.

AUCTIONEER #2

Sold to number 307.

Then Poppy's painting of a meadow from her exhibition is displayed.

Poppy turns to Nick in surprise. She goes to speak but he places his forefinger on her lips.

A butterfly flutters across the room and settles on the ox-eye daisies in Poppy's painting.

AUCTIONEER #2 (CONT)

One hundred and fifty thousand,
sixty ... seventy thousand

There are four BIDDERS.

EXT. AUCTION ROOM. DAY.

Nick and Poppy wait in his car.

INT. CAR. DAY

POPPY

Seriously. What do you want from
life?

NICK

I want to be happy I guess.

POPPY

You can't chase after happiness.
If you want to be with a butterfly
you must be still. Then it may come
to you. Flutter and sometimes
settle.

In the ensuing silence, Poppy looks round the car's
interior.

In the back is a paperback screenplay: *The Grifters*.

POPPY (CONT)

Any good?

NICK

There!

BIDDER #1 has come out. When he drives off, they follow.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL. DAY.

Bidder #1 parks in the driveway and goes into the hotel.

Nick and Poppy follow.

INT. HOTEL. DAY.

Nick and Poppy act like lovers on a date.

Nick indicates with a swivel of his eyes when Bidders #2 and #3
come in and sit with Bidder #1.

ALEKSEI, a blob that pit bulls would cower from for fear of
catching rabies, pads up. He surreptitiously hands them brown
paper envelopes. They all look very pleased with themselves.

NICK

It's a type of ring. Organized by
Moore.

POPPY

A ring?

NICK

The poor sucker who bought the painting paid ten times more than he should. He got carried away when he saw how many others wanted it, or seemed to want it.

POPPY

Is that legal?

NICK

It's business.

POPPY

I feel used.

NICK

In Moore's world, the art market is all about people, power, money. How many are interested in art for its own sake?

POPPY

But why would he go to all that trouble and risk just to bump up the price of one painting?

NICK

It's not just that one painting. All your work he owns has now soared in value. He's just made a killing.

POPPY

It's awful.

NICK

Happens all the time. A work of art is worth whatever someone is prepared to pay.

POPPY

If no one wants to *buy* something, it doesn't mean it's *worth* nothing.

Her eyes fill with tears.

POPPY (CONT)

Now I'm part of a scam.

NICK

I'm sorry.

POPPY

I only wanted a patron so I get to
paint in those special places,
have a studio large enough for big
canvases, money for the canvases
even.

He puts a comforting arm on her shoulder but she gently
moves away a little to shrug it off.

POPPY (CONT)

I want to go home.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

Poppy is curled up on her bed, silently weeping. She
sniffs, exhales forcefully and looks around the studio.

She gets up lethargically and goes round opening the
windows, then the skylights with a pulley.

After making an inspection of all her paintings, she picks
up a can and splashes solvent over them, one by one.

The paint runs and distorts the pictures to grotesque
parodies.

She contemplates the continuing destruction.

EXT. CAR PARK. NIGHT.

The paintings are in a pile in a deserted corner of the car
park. More solvent rains down on them before forming a
trail.

A book of matches is set alight and dropped. A flame leaps
along the trail and the paintings go up with a whoosh.

The flames illuminate one half of Poppy's staring face. With
every new flash of light, the eye in dark shadow
momentarily blazes.

Fire engine sirens becomes louder and louder.

EXT. TATE MODERN, LONDON. DAY. NEXT DAY

Moore is standing on the lawn in front of the gallery, preening himself. A sound boom hovers over his head.

INSERT. TV SCREEN.

INTERVIEWER #1 has joined Moore.

MOORE

You may call it self-indulgence, attention seeking. A criminal act. Iconoclastic. But it is a valid expression of her artistic temperament.

INTERVIEWER #1

Are you -?

MOORE

It is a statement. Yet, at the same time performance art.

INTERVIEWER #1

Are you still her patron?

MOORE

You cannot stay still in this business. You either move forward or go backwards. The business of art is the art of business.

INTERVIEWER #1

To sum up the -

MOORE

I'm always looking to support new Young British Artists. My philosophy is to make *them* rich, not the dealers or collectors. I have a great new conceptual artist, Paul Newman. He is completely self-taught. He's going to be the Next Big Thing.

INTERVIEWER #1

To sum up the story of her burning all her -

MOORE

A great loss ...

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. NIGHT.

Nick and Sexton are watching the TV.

NICK

Loss? He now owns every single one
of her remaining paintings.

SEXTON

Prick.

NICK

They must be worth ten times as
much today as they were yesterday?

SEXTON

Even more if she should give up
painting.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

When her TV goes off, the whole studio goes dark - all the
windows are covered with black blinds.

A match flares. Poppy lights a candle and sits motionless.
The only movements are the tears running down her face.

The entry phone buzzes impatiently but is ignored.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY NEXT DAY

Poppy is lying on her bed, partly dressed, mindlessly
staring at the beams on the ceiling.

Her face looks exhausted and her eyes are bloodshot.

Her entry phone buzzes. Stops. Then buzzes again and again.

Poppy clasps a pillow to her ears.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE STUDIO. DAY.

Nick gives up ringing the entry phone. He takes out his
mobile and rings a number, stands away from the door and
looks up at the attic.

INT. PUB. NIGHT.

Nick and Sexton are at their usual table with an OBESE MAN and SCRAWNY WOMAN.

OBESE MAN

The most unfair thing is that once the artist sells a painting, that's all the money they ever get. Even if it goes on to sell for millions.

Nick fiddles with his mobile.

SCRAWNY WOMAN

Why don't you ring her?

NICK

I've tried ... and tried.

OBESE MAN

Why are you still using a mobile? Don't you know a record is kept of all calls and texts?

NICK

I've put in someone else's SIM card.

They sit thinking.

SEXTON

So what are you going to do? Faint heart never won fair lady ... Seriously, she could be in a bad way.

NICK

For fuck's sake. Do you think I don't know that?

He stalks off, leaving his drink and astonished friends.

EXT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

Nick, holding a clinking plastic carrier bag, rings the entry phone. Again and again. Finally it is answered.

POPPY (DISTORT)

Go away. Please. Whoever you are.

NICK

It's me.

POPPY (DISTORT)

What do you want?

NICK

To cheer you up. I'll keep coming
back till you let me in.

There is a long pause. Nick is about to press the bell again, when the entry phone buzzes. He pushes the door open.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

In the darkened loft, totally devoid of all paintings, Nick and Poppy are sprawled on her sofa with several empty wine bottles on the floor.

Poppy suddenly becomes aware of the glass in her hand.

POPPY

This doesn't help.

She puts the glass down and buries her head in a cushion.

NICK

You're right.

He gets up and goes to a window and starts to pull up the blind. As a shaft of sunlight hits Poppy, she looks up anxiously.

POPPY

Please don't.

NICK

What's wrong?

POPPY

The light.

Nick quickly lowers the blind.

NICK

What can I do to help?

POPPY

Just go.

She throws herself onto her bed.

NICK

I can't leave you like this.

He follows her.

POPPY

I'll be all right... Tomorrow.

Nick looks down at her, concerned.

He leans down, and as his face comes close to her, she locks her arms around his head, and pulls him down. Then their hands begin to explore one another's bodies.

Nick suddenly turns away.

POPPY

What's the matter?

NICK

I'm sorry.

Nick stares at the wall.

NICK (CONT)

It's not you.

POPPY

It's okay. It happens.

Nick goes to the bathroom.

When he returns, she stares at him.

NICK

What?

POPPY

Let's talk.

NICK

I said I'm sorry.

POPPY

No. About us.

NICK

What about us?

POPPY

I don't know you.

NICK
Time will sort that out.

POPPY
But you never talk about yourself.

NICK
Of course I do.

She looks around in exasperation and her eyes come to rest on the graffiti on a beam:

Painting is another word for feeling

POPPY
Why don't you ever talk about your work?

NICK
It's complicated.

POPPY
Complicated or crooked?

Nick grabs his coat as he heads for the door.

INT. POPPY'S BATHROOM. DAY A WEEK LATER

Poppy comes out of the shower. As she brushes her teeth, she catches sight of herself in a small mirror above the sink.

NICK'S VOICE
That profile deserves it. And more.

She turns her head.

She lifts the mirror off the wall. She stands with her back to a full-length mirror and holds up the small mirror to see the back of her head. She turns the mirror slowly to a 45 degree angle where she sees her profile.

She raises her head and smiles at herself imperiously.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY

Poppy searches for her mobile, finds a number and rings.

Finally, she leaves a message.

POPPY

Nick. It's me. I'm sorry.

INT. PUB. NIGHT

Nick counts out a pile of tenners and pushes them across the table to Sexton.

NICK

She thinks it's to celebrate our making up after our first row.

SEXTON

What time?

NICK

The booking's for eight. I'll keep her out as long as I can.

INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT.

Poppy and Nick are in the middle of a meal.

Poppy is nervous and her hands have a slight tremor. Nick touches the back of her hand and is rewarded with a forced smile.

NICK

Where after that?

POPPY

Egypt, Nigeria. Spain -

NICK

How come?

POPPY

He was a diplomat.

NICK

So you never settled or made lasting friendships?

POPPY

It had one positive result.

Nick raises his eyebrows.

POPPY (CONT)

It made me into a painter. I was moved around from school to school

so much that I never got to grips with any one language. So I learnt to express myself in paint.

NICK

What about your mother?

Poppy fills both glasses to the brim before taking several large gulps.

POPPY

I never had a mother.

NICK

Huh?

POPPY

The woman who gave birth to me drank.

NICK

Why?

POPPY

She thought alcohol would 'open the doors of perception'.

NICK

And?

POPPY

They proved to be the gates of hell.

NICK

She was an alcoholic?

POPPY

She suffered cravings, withdrawals, was unable to stop. She was secretive and in denial. All the usual stuff ... Terminal egotism.

Nick looks at Poppy's face, tries to catch her eye, then looks at her hair and mouth and neck.

Finally she returns the look but soon turns her eyes away.

POPPY (CONT)

That's why I didn't learn English at home either.

Nick goes to say something, hesitates, then:

NICK

There's more, isn't there?

Poppy's eyes fill with tears.

Nick's eyes search the restaurant for nonexistent help.

POPPY

She was violent. She once broke my father's arm.

NICK

So that's why -

POPPY

Talking about violence is as upsetting as -

NICK

I'm sorry.

Poppy places her hand on his and gives a brave smile.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. NIGHT.

Sexton carries stretched canvases out of his shop into the back of a white van.

INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT.

Poppy and Nick watch the WAITER clear their table.

Then Poppy meets Nick's eyes for as long as he desires.

NICK

Your painting, removal and re-painting is a brilliant concept.

POPPY

I don't want to paint.

NICK

If you painted more pictures then they would lose their rarity value.

POPPY

I would have to be motivated by better things than revenge on Moore. Anyway, he could sell the collection now and make a fortune.

NICK

He can't.

POPPY

Of course he can.

NICK

If he starts selling - anything -
the public loses confidence. The
market collapses and -

POPPY

Money, money, money. Listen -

NICK

He would be finished as a player.

POPPY

Listen. Please. I ... do ... not ...
want ... to ... PAINT.

Nick covers Poppy's shaking hand with his and gives it
reassuring pats but she pulls it away.

EXT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

Nick and Poppy drive up in his Porsche.

The white van sits there with its lights off. Poppy doesn't
see Sexton inside it.

She stumbles as she gets out of the car and Nick puts an arm
around her as they enter the building.

The van drives off.

NICK (O.S.)

I have a surprise.

POPPY (O.S.)

Oh yes?

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

Poppy comes in with Nick's hand over her eyes. He sweeps
down the wall switches and the place is flooded with light.

The studio is filled with dozens of large stretched and
primed canvases.

Nick takes his hand away.

Poppy looks and moans and promptly pushes him away.

POPPY

Oh God, Nick. Please go away.

When Nick goes to comfort her, she moves further away.

NICK

I'm sorry. I just wanted to-

POPPY

I thought you understood me.

NICK

Poppy, I -

POPPY

You just don't listen, do you? ...

Go, just go.

Nick stands there in dismay.

INT. STUDIO. DAY. NEXT DAY.

Poppy paces up and down.

She sticks Turner prints to the wall. Some have thickly painted, dominating suns, the others are sketches, abstracts, where the sun is signified by unpainted white paper.

She rearranges the collection, then takes them all down. She rolls each up into its cardboard tube which she places on a shelf.

She continues pacing.

She spots a spray-can of paint. She obliterates the Constable quotation from the beam above her bed. Then writes a new one:

The sun is God

Then Poppy starts covering the walls with artistic graffiti. First the name *Turner* in red. Another design transforms the name into its anagram:

Turner

Then, with increasing agitation, she sprays the words *rut*, *runt* and finally *nutter*.

Her laugh turns into a howl.

She drops onto her bed and cries silently.

NICK'S VOICE

You need me.

Her phone rings.

POPPY

(choked up)

Hello?

She listens for a moment.

POPPY (CONT)

I'm busy. I'll call you.

She listens.

POPPY (CONT)

It's you that's secretive. I know
nothing of your past ... where you
live even. Now, I must go.

She replaces the receiver harder than necessary. She picks it up and replaces it very gently.

Seeing her graffiti, she crosses out *rut* and adds:

FUCK.

EXT. MILSOM STREET. DAY.

Nick selects a number on his mobile and stands in a shop doorway waiting for it to be answered. He gives up and pockets the phone.

EXT. CIRCUS, BATH. DAY.

Nick walks along, phone to his ear. He listens and listens, then gives up trying to get through.

EXT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Nick stands on the opposite pavement looking up towards Poppy's windows.

He crosses the road and rings her intercom. There is no reply.

EXT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

Nick is huddled in a doorway trying to keep himself warm. He inexpertly lights a cigarette and coughs when some of the smoke gets into his lungs.

Looking up at the studio, he sees the lights start to go on.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT. LATER.

Poppy is stripped off, pouring with sweat and covered in splashes of white emulsion paint.

She has almost finished painting all the walls of the studio. All her graffiti has gone, except for the sentence above her bed:

The sun is God

INT. BATHROOM OF STUDIO. NIGHT.

Poppy stands under the full force of the shower, soaping herself clean.

When she turns off the water she becomes aware of a buzzing noise. She looks up and notices a fluorescent tube flickering.

She leaves the bathroom.

She returns with the pole of the paint roller and knocks the light until there is a steady glow and the buzz is silenced.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE STUDIO. DAY.

Nick is curled up asleep in a doorway.

A noisy refuse lorry rushes by and wakes him. He stands up and stretches and looks up at Poppy's windows.

Seeing nothing, he looks at his watch and strolls down the street into a corner shop.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE STUDIO. DAY. LATER.

Poppy comes out of her front door, takes in the honey glow of the limestone buildings and looks up to the cloudless sky. She sashays down the empty street.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE STUDIO DAY. LATER

Poppy returns, weighed down with arms full of long cardboard tubes.

Without letting go of her burden, she struggles to find her keys which drop when Nick suddenly appears beside her.

POPPY
Christ, you frightened me.

NICK
Sorry, but I must talk to you.
Please.

As he picks up her keys. Poppy takes in his unshaven, dishevelled appearance.

POPPY
You look terrible, as if you've been up all night.

NICK
Party.

POPPY
What are you doing here? You're not following me, are you?

NICK
Please let's talk. I've been trying to ring you.

POPPY
I think we need some space. Anyway, I said I'd ring you ... There's a very narrow line between following someone and stalking them, you know.

NICK
I wouldn't do that. You know that.

POPPY
I don't know anything anymore. Please let me go.

Poppy has now got her key in the door.

NICK
Let me help you.

He tries to take the tubes, but Poppy pushes him aside.

POPPY

It's okay, I can manage.

Poppy closes the door in his face.

INT. STUDIO. DAY.

Poppy comes into the studio with her packages. She opens them: they are fluorescent tubes in all sizes.

She carefully adds these to already classified piles neatly stacked against the wall.

INT. STUDIO. NIGHT.

An enormous matrix of slender metal rods and clamps has taken over the studio.

Poppy is flat out on her bed, lightly snoring in her dishevelled clothes.

INT. PUB. NIGHT.

The lights are being flicked on and off.

LANDLORD

Last orders, please.

Nick stands and knocks back the remains of his pint.

NICK

Another?

SEXTON

I've had enough. Work tomorrow.

NICK

Where did we go wrong?

SEXTON

We?

NICK

Where did *I* go wrong?

SEXTON

You tried to control her. To *make* her paint.

NICK

So, are you going to do it?

SEXTON

No.

NICK

I thought you were supposed to be a friend.

SEXTON

It's because I am a friend that I won't.

NICK

That sort of remark is too clever to be true.

SEXTON

Come on, let's go.

They both leave the pub. The door swings closed.

NICK (O.S.)

All I'm asking is for you to go and see Poppy and tell her -

SEXTON (O.S.)

Tell her that you don't love her sufficiently to let her go?

NICK (O.S.)

Bollocks.

INT.STUDIO NIGHT.

A WEEK LATER.

Half the studio is filled with a tangled, incandescent mass of neon tubes, all sizes and colours.

There is a movement from within. Poppy is crawling around inside fixing more tubes to the supporting metal framework.

The intercom buzzes but she can't hear it over the buzzing of her construction.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

LATER.

Poppy stands at the window watching the city lights slowly come on. The streets are traced in neon lights, and the low clouds reflect an orange glow over the horizon.

She turns back to the room and stares at a small, light hammer propped against the wall.

Then she turns her attention to the glass and metal construction. She smiles.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE STUDIO. DAY.

Nick is back hiding in a doorway, keeping watch on Poppy's door. He lights a cigarette from the end of his previous one. He looks up to see Poppy emerging.

Making sure she doesn't see him, he follows at a distance.

When she turns into another street, he runs up to the corner.

But Poppy has disappeared.

EXT. STREET. CENTRAL BATH. DAY.

Poppy comes out of a sports shop with a metre-long object wrapped in plastic. She peels off the wrapping as she walks through the crowds of shoppers. It is a baseball bat.

She swings it like a pendulum synchronized to her pace.

The previous night's smile is back in place.

She hefts the bat onto her shoulder like a Guards officer with his rifle. The crowd parts in front of this woman-on-a-mission.

EXT. STREET. DAY. LATER.

Poppy comes out of the yard of a builders' supply firm. She is burdened with more packages.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE STUDIO. DAY.

Poppy turns a corner into the street and approaches her door.

Nick steps out of a doorway and shouts.

NICK

Poppy. Poppy, please.

She looks up but ignores him and quickly goes into her place.

INT. STUDIO. NIGHT.

In the dim light from the outside world, a leather-gauntleted hand picks up the baseball bat. Poppy wears a protective helmet with a plastic visor.

She walks to the dark installation of tubes caressing the head of the bat.

With deliberation she begins smashing carefully selected tubes.

The cacophony of breaking glass goes on and on, louder and louder. The noise segues into the harsh ringing of a bell.

EXT. PULTNEY STREET. DAY.

Nick rings Sam's bell. She opens the door and looks at him with mock surprise.

SAM

Nick.

NICK

Yes. But how do you know - ?

SAM

Your name? Poppy told me, of course. You're the man who *didn't* go to school with her.

NICK

Look, I'm really sorry about misleading you. It's just that I was desperate to see her again and -

SAM

And you're desperate to see her again - again.

NICK

I was wondering whether you could contact her and tell her that I -

SAM

Look, I'm her best friend. If *you* were a *real* friend of hers you would respect her wishes.

NICK

But I don't understand. I was just trying to help her.

SAM

You don't have to tell me you don't understand. Listen. She's an excellent artist, maybe even a great artist. She has creative highs so it follows that she has some lows.

NICK

I can't stand by and do nothing.

SAM

I've seen it all before. When life becomes overwhelming, she retreats into herself.

NICK

I want to help her.

SAM

If you have any feelings for her, you must learn to let go.

Nick walks away.

Again he turns left at the fountain. He gazes sadly over the green space of the Recreation Ground at the end of the street.

From a distance, he is just an isolated speck dominated by the ends of the houses - amputated stumps of a street that was never completed.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

It is almost dark. Then the overhead spot lights of the studio flicker on.

Poppy stands, arms akimbo, inspecting, admiring the hollowed-out structure.

She goes to switch off the lights. Her boots scrunch across the litter of glass.

In the semi-darkness she continues her destruction.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. NIGHT. LATER.

In the gloom, Poppy goes round switching on all the power points.

After a few hesitant flashes, the neon lights start coming on and the studio is transformed.

It houses a beautiful, enormous object.

A butterfly.

Each coloured light tube makes a brush stroke.

And the wings of the butterfly tremble nervously with the flicker of tubes.

It is a glass sculpture. Yet alive.

EXT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY

A limo draws up. Aleksei gets out and presses Poppy's bell continuously.

Finally the door opens a crack and Aleksei sticks his foot in the space.

Moore appears at his shoulder.

MOORE

Have you any paintings for me?

Poppy's is only partly visible.

POPPY

You must be joking.

MOORE

In that case I want all the money
I invested in you repaid.

POPPY

What?

MOORE

The moment you accepted money from
me we had a contract.

POPPY

You can't be serious. There was
nothing in writing.

MOORE

It was a verbal agreement. A debt
of honour.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Poppy leans with her back against the door, shaking.

She frantically searches the studio, ransacking every
corner and pulling out the furniture.

Finally, down at the bottom of her bed, she finds her mobile.
She calls a number.

INT. PUB. DAY.

Nick and Sexton are playing darts. On the table, amid their
glasses and litter, Nick's mobile rings. He looks to see
who's calling, then switches it off.

Sexton sees the pain on Nick's face.

SEXTON

Poppy?

Nick throws his darts.

NICK

Thirteen, double sixteen.

SEXTON

Not enough digits for that to be a
phone number. So I guess you're
not even going to talk to her on
the phone.

NICK

What more can I do?

SEXTON

Don't get angry, get even. Is that
your game? Revenge?

NICK

I just -

SEXTON

Moore is your enemy, not Poppy.

NICK

I know, but -

SEXTON

You should be trying to help her.

NICK

She has Sam.

EXT. NEW BOND STREET. DAY.

Poppy walks towards the Podium, mobile to her ear.

INT. LIBRARY. DAY.

Poppy comes in and goes to the enquiry desk. An assistant points to the far shelves.

Poppy searches the line of street directories, pulls one out and takes it to a table.

She leafs through the book, looks disappointed and sits deep in thought.

She sends a text.

EXT. VICTORIA PARK. DAY.

Poppy sits by the open-air tennis courts, mobile in hand, watching a group coaching session.

She looks at her watch, then rings a number. She lets it ring and ring.

Impatiently she jumps up and struts off.

INT. PUB. DAY.

Poppy sits alone with a glass of water, staring around, bored. She checks her mobile for messages.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. DAY.

Poppy comes out of the pub. As she passes Sexton's shop, she hesitates for a moment, then walks on past.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Nick is stretched out on a dilapidated sofa, mouth open, fast asleep.

Sexton shakes him by the shoulder.

Nick wakes, sees all the empty bottles, grimaces and grasps his head.

SEXTON

Better?

NICK

You must be fucking joking.

SEXTON

I mean about Poppy.

NICK

'Course not.

SEXTON

For every problem there's a solution.

NICK

A solution.

SEXTON

Exactly. Alcohol is the solution. It dissolves away all those emotions.

NICK

You should write a self-help book.

SEXTON

I'd need help to do that. So - what are you going to do?

NICK

Nothing.

SEXTON

In that case you can earn your keep. There's an auction down in Exeter. The minor Pre-Raphaelite.

NICK

How much does it need to go for?

SEXTON

Persuade the bidders to go up to at least fifteen grand. Anything less, people will suspect it's not genuine.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Poppy wakes and looks at the butterfly. She leaps out of bed and rushes round switching on the power points.

She is disappointed at the dullness of the tubes in daylight.

She pulls down all the blinds on the windows and skylights. The butterfly is once again a fabulous sight. Its wings vibrate with life.

First Poppy's hands, then her whole body, lightly tremble in response.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. DAY.

Poppy strides down the street and unhesitatingly pushes open the door to Sexton's shop.

INT. AUCTION ROOM, EXETER. DAY.

Viewing day. Nick sits admiring a Pre-Raphaelite painting.

A SCRUFFY YOUNG MAN with horn-rimmed glasses stops to admire the work. Nick sidles up to him.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Sexton is busy painting an early Sisley landscape.

Poppy quietly watches from the sofa.

POPPY

You're a wonderful painter. Why not be original?

SEXTON

I was - until I saw Francis Bacon. Then I knew.

POPPY

Knew what?

SEXTON

I could never be that great. I had exactly the same feeling when I saw your work.

In the embarrassed silence, Poppy glances at an untidy pile of old paperbacks on the floor beside her.

Sexton finally speaks.

SEXTON (CONT)

Of course, he's told me all about you.

POPPY

And?

SEXTON

You're both adults and must sort it out between yourselves. I'm sorry.

POPPY

I've tried and tried. I've sent loads of voice mails and texts. But he doesn't answer.

SEXTON

Are you surprised? He's really hurt.

POPPY

I'm sorry. I was really depressed.

SEXTON

And he didn't listen to you, I know. But what neither of you realize is that you are both in a love triangle.

POPPY

The two of us in a triangle?

SEXTON

Nick, you the artist, and you the attractive female.

Poppy goes to say something then thinks better of it. Then,

POPPY

I don't even know where he lives. Except he picked me up outside here once.

Sexton remains intent on his work.

POPPY (CONT)

He's not in the phone book. I've tried the street directory. Where does he live?

SEXTON

He moves around. He's an urban gypsy. He stops with friends -

POPPY

Who are his friends?

SEXTON

Sometimes he crashes here.

He nods at the sofa.

SEXTON (CONT)

That's one of his homes.

One of the paperbacks beside the sofa is a screenplay: *The Usual Suspects*.

POPPY (O.S.)

So where is he now? He seems to have disappeared.

SEXTON

Haven't seen him for a few days.

Unconsciously, Poppy is caressing the cracked leather of the sofa.

POPPY

Please tell me where he is. I need his help. Please.

SEXTON

Best not. You know, Nick and I go back a long way.

POPPY

I don't even know how he makes a living.

SEXTON

The art market.

POPPY

I know that, but what does he actually do?

SEXTON

When he was at art college he was a magnificent painter. Then Moore created -

POPPY

It's Moore I need to talk to Nick about.

SEXTON

Moore created the phoney market in conceptual art.

POPPY

(reluctantly)

How could he do that?

SEXTON

Being a trustee of the Tate may have something to do with it ... Anyway, the big collectors and galleries lost interest in painting and Nick knew he could never make a living out of his art ...

POPPY

And?

SEXTON

One ... he never made another picture.

POPPY

And?

SEXTON

Two ... he now makes a good living out of art.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. NIGHT.

The rain washed street is silent until a boisterous crowd of lightly dressed clubbers pass by, immune to the downpour.

Then it is quiet again until a car passes. Its headlights illuminate Poppy, sheltering in a doorway, watching Sexton's building.

SEXTON'S VOICE

I never copy living painters. That would be stealing, a breach of copyright.

POPPY'S VOICE

I didn't know ... like a lot of things these days.

SEXTON'S VOICE

All you need to know is that Nick
tries to live better than himself.

A light goes off inside, plunging the building into total
darkness.

EXT. PULTNEY STREET. DAY.

Sam's front door opens and she comes out to join Poppy
waiting on the steps. They hug.

SAM

How are you?

Poppy just looks at her mournfully.

They walk towards the city centre, heads together, deep in
conversation.

EXT. PULTNEY BRIDGE. DAY.

At the end of the bridge they wait at a pedestrian crossing.
On the other side of the road there is a sign above the
Victoria Art Gallery:

Think, Conceive, Install

2007

Sam and Poppy cross the road and enter the gallery.

INT. EXHIBITION ROOM. DAY.

Sam pushes open the door.

Just inside is a floor polishing machine, mop and bucket,
and a single rubber glove.

Poppy passes but Sam grabs her sleeve and pulls her back.
She point to a label.

SAM

It's an exhibit ... I could have
done that.

POPPY

You know what the artist would
say ... Maybe you could have - but
you didn't.

SAM

It fails on two counts. It's
neither interesting nor beautiful.

POPPY

They're into novelty, shock.

They carefully examine a vivarium containing a fat spider
sitting at the centre of its web and some soporific insects.

They spot a door into another room. A sign says:

Flasher's' Room

by

PAUL NEWMAN

They go into the total darkness.

Their movement activates a strobe light. They dance around
enjoying the glimpses of one another made intermittent and
jerky in the strobe. Then they notice they are not alone. The
still figure turns to face them.

It is Nick.

He and Poppy stare at one another, then seem to jerkily
move towards each other.

SAM

I'm going to look around the rest
of the exhibition.

She is ignored.

Nick and Poppy remain stationary: silent effigies.

When Sam has gone and any movement ceases, the flashing
light stops, leaving them in total darkness.

POPPY'S VOICE

Please let's take a walk together,
or something.

They come out into the main gallery.

As they near the exit, they pause in front of another
exhibit. The word '*REFLECT*' is crudely cut from a cardboard
cereal packet and pasted vertically on a horizontal mirror.

Further on, in the same fashion, the phrase:

'THIS IS

NOT A REFLECTION'

stands on another mirror.

EXT. TERRACE WALK. DAY.

Nick leads Poppy by the hand down a dingy alley, imprisoned by tall buildings and almost blocked with rubbish-filled skips.

NICK

I'm sorry they frightened you. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. I'll think of something. Don't worry.

Suddenly in front of them is the exotic, limestone facade of Ralph Allen's Georgian house. Its ornamentation instantaneously radiates gold as the sun breaks through a cloud.

POPPY

My God.

NICK

Yes.

POPPY

Thanks for talking to me.

NICK

Serendipity. Shouldn't ignore it.

POPPY

Sorry. I'm really sorry. I was in a bad space.

NICK

It's okay. Tell me, what were you doing in that crappy exhibition? That's not you.

POPPY

My work's taken me in a new direction.

NICK

How?

POPPY

When you put me in front of all those blank canvases, it frightened me. I became blocked.

NICK

I'm sorry, I -

POPPY

Don't apologize.

NICK

Tell me about your new work.

POPPY

Better if I show you.

INT. STUDIO. DAY.

Nick's head, lit by bold brush strokes of colour, is inside the butterfly, examining it in wonderment.

POPPY (O.S.)

I'm so pleased you're the first to see it.

An electrical buzz makes him jump away and Poppy laughs at his nervousness.

He moves back to admire the structure in its entirety.

Poppy lowers all the blinds accentuating the fluorescent beauty.

Nick gasps.

NICK

It *moves*. But-

POPPY

That was serendipity.

NICK

It's fantastic. But -

POPPY

Just look at it.

Nick paces round the construction full of admiration.

NICK

How did you build it?

POPPY

Like a sculptor carves a wooden fish, for example. By removing all the wood that isn't fish.

NICK

But I don't understand.

POPPY

What is there to *not* understand?

NICK

You. I don't understand why you're copying another artist.

EXT. FACTORY WORKSHOP. DAY.

Nick and Poppy stand in front of the open doors of a factory workshop.

Inside, in various stages of completion, are many insects made up of neon tubes. Around them swarms a crew of overalled workmen.

Poppy is white-faced, immobile.

POPPY

It's Moore, isn't it?

NICK

Of course.

POPPY

How could he know?

NICK

Did you tell anyone you were making the butterfly? Friends?

POPPY

I don't think so. I hardly went out. Only to buy materials.

NICK

Think.

POPPY

I don't know. Maybe I said something at one of the suppliers.

A faint sound of breaking glass becomes louder and louder, overlapping into the next scene.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Without any protective clothing. Poppy smashes the butterfly to bits with her baseball bat.

Flecks of blood on her face and hands expand and proliferate.

Soon the whole structure has disintegrated into shattered glass and a distorted metal skeleton.

An inconsolable moan intensifies into a long scream.

INT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

In a small ward, the silence is disturbed by a gentle conversation.

POPPY (O.S.)

They say if you're out for
revenge, then first you had better
dig two graves.

Nick looks at Poppy's bandaged hands then at the butterfly-sutured cuts on her face, then into her blinking and tearful eyes.

NICK

I'm going to do it anyway. With
you or without you.

POPPY

Nick -

NICK

Not just for you. To stop him
messing up other peoples lives.
What's it to be?

POPPY

I don't want to do anything
illegal.

NICK

Who does?

POPPY

You and Sexton and the forgeries

NICK

He never puts a signature on them,
so they're not forgeries. They are

just not painted by the person people think they are. Like fifteen percent of the artworld. You know about all the so-called Rembrandts and Reuben's and the rest in the great art galleries of the world that were painted by their pupils. How many Mona Lisas are there? Do you think da Vinci wasted his time painting the exact same picture over and over? What about all the actual forgeries? The market is so vast that every painting can't be subject to X-ray, ultraviolet, infrared or spectroscopic analysis or scanning electron microscopy. And what if a painting is discovered not to be genuine? What do the owners do with their fakes. Own up? Destroy them? No. They sell them on. Do you think that's right?

POPPY

Surely what you do isn't right either?

NICK

We just bump up the price. Then the dealers and speculators, those who make extortionate profits, think the pictures are kosher. Like in the rest of life it's a case of buyer beware.

POPPY

I didn't know. Like a lot of things these days.

NICK

Did your doubts stop you and I -?

POPPY

I'm sorry.

NICK

Saying sorry is easy. *Show me.*

POPPY

How?

NICK
By painting again.

POPPY
I can't. It's been contaminated by Moore.

NICK
Isn't that giving power to Moore?

POPPY
My work is infected.

NICK
Greater reason to put him out of business.

POPPY
How will my painting get revenge on Moore?

Nick is for once lost for words.

POPPY (CONT)
How?

NICK
Okay, I want you to paint again to please me.

POPPY
Is that it?

NICK
What do you mean?

POPPY
Sounds too simple.

Nick puts up his hands in surrender and laughs.

NICK
Okay ... I have an idea.

Poppy watches Nick's hand caressing the unharmed flesh of her inner arm. She looks up into his face and crinkles her eyes.

Nick pulls his hand away.

EXT. MOORE'S INDUSTRIAL UNIT. DAY.

Nick and Poppy get out of the Porsche. Poppy, her wounds healing, waves cheerfully at the CCTV surveillance camera as it turns to her and Nick.

The gate lock buzzes open.

When Nick puts a hand in the small of her back to guide her through the gate, Poppy flashes him a smile.

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. DAY.

Moore, Poppy and Nick sit in the spot-lit island of furniture.

MOORE

It's good to see you, but to what do I owe this honour?

Poppy gives him a winning smile.

POPPY

I'm here to say I'm sorry and to make amends. I was in a bad space.

MOORE

Amends?

POPPY

I'm ready to fulfil my contract by painting again.

MOORE

Wonderful.

POPPY

And I'm broke. I need money for canvas. A lot of canvas, in fact.

MOORE

Consider it done.

POPPY

And paint.

Moore turns to Nick.

MOORE

Are you a friend as well as a chauffeur?

NICK

I have an ulterior motive. When Poppy told me about your collection of cars, I couldn't resist the opportunity to get in here. Did I see a nineteen-twenty-five Bugatti - ?

MOORE

Isadora Duncan's.

Moore preens

MOORE CONT

And are you a painter too?

NICK

Not the car in which her long scarf got wrapped around the axle and broke her neck?

MOORE

Absolutely. There are still scraps of cloth. Every car in my collection has a story. A verified origin and list of owners that establish its authenticity. The same as the provenance of paintings ... so what do you do?

NICK

Film.

MOORE

You're a director?

NICK

Nah.

MOORE

Screenwriter?

NICK

Christ no. I make films HAPPEN. I'm a producer.

MOORE

What would I have seen?

NICK

None. They are special films for a limited audience.

MOORE
You mean porn?

POPPY
He's an artist.

MOORE
That's what they all say.

There is an embarrassed silence.

MOORE CONT
What sort of film?

NICK
Biographies. Art house. Very intimate. Only one copy. Copyright with the subject. Very special. Unique, in fact. Like your Bugatti.

MOORE
Never heard of them.

NICK
You wouldn't. You can't ask for them.

MOORE
Really?

NICK
I only do them for a select few.

MOORE
I see.

NICK
And I keep secret how many I've made.

MOORE
(musing)
A film biography of me? Sounds right up my street.

NICK
Absolutely.

MOORE
After I sold up my advertising agency *I* tried to write my autobiography.

POPPY

So you're an author as well as collector and patron?

MOORE

No. I changed my mind. I hated having to sit down hour after hour on my own. I'm a doer. Too much energy.

POPPY

Why didn't you employ a ghost writer?

MOORE

I did. I used a writer of best-sellers. He turned out to be almost illiterate. He was also a conman.

He smiles.

MOORE (CONT)

He went to jail.

NICK

Why?

Moore nods into the shadows.

MOORE

He was found guilty of perjury - I arranged it.

Aleksei pads silently into the light.

ALEKSEI

After I rearranged him.

Poppy and Nick look at one another in disbelief.

ALEKSEI

But that doesn't make me a bad person.

Moore looks at his watch and gets up.

MOORE

Send me a proposal.

He kisses Poppy on both cheeks.

Moore speaks to Aleksei without looking at him.

MOORE (CONT)

Show these people out.

He puts his hand on the small of Poppy's back and leans into her intimately.

Poppy turns her head so he doesn't see her flinch.

MOORE (CONT)

You didn't have to apologize for burning my pictures. It was great publicity. Even better than Tracy or Damien could ever think of.

When they have gone, Moore takes out a handkerchief and wipes invisible dust from the chrome of a Rolls Royce Silver Ghost.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Poppy and Nick lounge around watching Sexton paint another Impressionist.

Poppy bursts out laughing.

NICK

What?

POPPY

Can you believe it? I thought that only happened in the movies.

NICK

What?

POPPY

(in an exact impression of Aleksei)
'After I rearranged him.'

NICK

A case of life imitating art.

SEXTON

I'm an impressionist too.
(in an exact impression of de Nero)
'Are you talkin' to me? ... Are you talkin' to me?'

NICK

I'm worried.

SEXTON

I was only acting.

NICK

What if Moore finds out?

POPPY

He's a powerful man. And ruthless.

NICK

Maybe I should try and get out of it?

SEXTON

Out of what?

NICK

Well, I was following the standard rules of the game. I feigned an enthusiasm for cars so we had something in common. Then I thought I'd get inside his world by feeding his craving for fame. I tempted him with a film biopic.

SEXTON

Jesus H Christ.

POPPY

What's up?

SEXTON

(to Nick)

Why not stick to what we do best. What we're good at. What's tried and tested.

NICK

I wanted to try something fresh.

SEXTON

It's not 'fresh'. I did it years ago.

NICK

You never told me.

SEXTON

Did you think of every contingency, every permutation and combination, every risk, everything that can go wrong - ?

NICK

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

SEXTON

Well it's too late to back out now. You were right about one thing.

NICK

What?

SEXTON

When you said: 'feeding his craving'. That's what his obsessive, compulsive collecting is. An addiction. On top of a fear of failure.

A silence falls as Sexton contemplates his next marks on the canvas.

SEXTON (CONT)

Did you hear about the psychiatrist who would only see obsessive compulsives?

POPPY

Why?

SEXTON

Because they always turned up on time and paid their bills.

POPPY

What do we do?

SEXTON

We make him fail. We break him. Where it hurts. Financially. Remember, people lose fortunes because of the same forces that made the fortunes. Greed. Egotism -

NICK

How do - ?

SEXTON

So we sustain his confidence. Make sure we're consistent,

predictable. Surprises upset people. Makes them insecure.

NICK

I don't know how I'm going to make this 'very special, unique film'.

SEXTON

You're not ... yet. Keep him waiting.

EXT. COVERED TENNIS COURT. DAY.

Nick and Poppy are in the middle of a rally. Taken out of court by Poppy's shot, his return sits up and Poppy sends it down the opposite line like a missile.

Nick drops his racket and holds up both hands in surrender.

NICK

Well done.

POPPY

Winning a tennis match is very simple. All you have to do is take the final point.

NICK

That's one way of looking at it.

A mobile rings in a sports bag. Nick goes to the chairs to answer it while Poppy dabs the sweat off her face.

NICK (CONT)

Hello?

A pause.

NICK (CONT)

Hang on. I'll just check my diary.

He just stands there for a while, smiling at Poppy.

NICK (CONT)

Next week. When I get back from New York.

He switches off the phone without any farewell.

NICK (CONT)

Got him. He's desperate to meet.

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Moore and Nick sit in the Bugatti.

MOORE

You said you would send me a
proposal for the biopic of me.

NICK

Sorry. Got a lot on at the moment.

MOORE

You said you would ring when you
got back from New York.

NICK

Sorry about that too. We had one
date, then *I* didn't write, didn't
call. Sounds familiar.

Moore stares, his blood pressure rising.

Aleksei appears from nowhere.

NICK CONT

Sorry.

MOORE

What were you doing in New York?

NICK

Seeing my co-producers

MOORE

What about?

NICK

Sorry. Confidential.

MOORE

One thing in your favour. You are
not a blabbermouth. It's a film,
isn't it?

NICK

I couldn't possibly comment.

MOORE

About your films ...

NICK

What?

MOORE

Tell me about them. I could be interested.

Aleksei reads the blurb of a DVD in his hands. It is *The Grifters*.

NICK

They're very expensive.

MOORE

Money's not an issue.

NICK

It is for me. I like to eat sometimes.

MOORE

What's so special about the films?

NICK

I told you. You can't ask for one to be made. You have to be offered and ...

Nick strokes the steering wheel.

NICK (CONT)

Can I drive this?

MOORE

No ... And? ... You said 'and'.

NICK

They are unique films. Can only be made for a special type of person. Someone who has a broad mind. An open mind. Someone who is not confined by the commonly accepted strictures of ethics.

MOORE

It is porn.

NICK

Only to the narrow minded.

MOORE

Then something very illegal?

NICK

I can't tell you.

He looks at his watch.

NICK (CONT)
Sorry. Gotta go. Can I just start
the car up?

Moore pulls an envelope from his breast pocket.

MOORE
Here's some walking around money.
That's what they call it in
Hollywood isn't it?

NICK
How would I know? I'm Somerset
born, Somerset bred ...

He flexes his biceps.

NICK (CONT)
Strong in the arm ... weak in the
'ead.

Moore is not amused.

INT. PUB. DAY.

Nick and Sexton are at the dart board.

NICK
Hook, line and sinker ... but ...

SEXTON
I sensed one of those coming.

NICK
What?

SEXTON
One of your 'buts'.

NICK
It's a big butt.

SEXTON
A Jennifer Lopez?

NICK
You're not going to like it.

SEXTON
I sensed that coming too.

NICK

He insists on meeting the US producer.

Sexton stops as he's about to throw a dart.

SEXTON

That's GOOD. We can make some extra dosh by flying this non-existent, non-executive producer over and putting him up at a ridiculously expensive hotel.

NICK

That's what I thought. You -

SEXTON

Oh no.

NICK

Yes. You have to play the producer - everyone else is busy. And another thing.

SEXTON

Oh no.

NICK

Moore wants proof I am who I say I am.

SEXTON

I'll put you in touch with Ezra.

NICK

Who is Ezra?

SEXTON

A magician.

NICK

Hunn?

SEXTON

He can make people disappear.

A long silence.

NICK

I give in ... how does he make people disappear?

SEXTON

Easy. He just plants your identity at the scene of a disaster: tsunami, train crash, whatever.

NICK

Are you trying to kill me off just because you're landed with the producer role?

SEXTON

He can also create people.

INT. PRINTER'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Nick is being shown around the old presses by the owner of the printing firm, EZRA. He is elderly, balding with a goatee beard.

The noise blots out their conversation.

They walk into a glassed-in office.

INT. OFFICE. DAY.

Ezra clears a pile of brochures from a chair for Nick to sit down.

Nick focuses his attention on Ezra, keeping eye contact and smiling.

NICK

She's such a beautiful person too. So how about it?

EZRA

Definitely not.

NICK

Sexton assumed you would. He says you were partners.

EZRA

Partners in crime, Yeah. Things have changed since he and I last met. How is he these days, anyway?

NICK.

Busy. If you know what I mean. Don't you see him?

EZRA

I had to give up sharing in his hobby.

NICK

Because you couldn't stand the hangovers?

Ezra giggles.

EZRA

Not just that. Everything, always ... over the top.

NICK

So how many people did you two con?

EZRA

Not many ... considering the size of the population.

He giggles again.

Nick becomes sincerity personified.

NICK

I would really appreciate your doing it -

EZRA

You certainly know how to charm. What is the con?

NICK

The secret, exclusive, expensive film biography.

EZRA

That's a beauty. I saw one of those DVDs. Some B-list celebrity in a very compromising situation with Madonna and Brangelina. But remember. The less you explain to the mark, the more they desire it.

NICK

Don't satisfy their craving.

EZRA

Who is the mark, anyway? Are you able to tell me?

NICK

Moore.

EZRA

Why didn't you say? Tell me who you want to be and I'll give you a perfect provenance: birth certificate, passport, driving license, credit cards -

NICK

A limited edition Amex card?

EZRA

Sure.

NICK

Why have you got it in for Moore?

EZRA

He once said my name was Arze backwards.

NICK

In other words, you're not going to tell me.

Ezra indicates the surroundings with a sweep of his hand.

EZRA

I once had much more than this. By the way, do you want a degree certificate? Oxford and Cambridge are always popular, but Bristol -

Nick cuts him off with a shake of the head.

EZRA (CONT)

You're probably right. Don't want to overdo it.

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. DAY.

Aleksei is shuffling a stack of DVDs. One is *The usual Suspects*.

Moore is flicking through a file of documents.

MOORE

That's fine. You are who you say you are. I had to check. You can't be too careful these days.

NICK

No. There are so many con men around. Tory politicians for example: Aitken, Archer ... and they haven't even started on the names beginning with B.

They both laugh. Then Moore is serious.

MOORE

What about the producer?

NICK

He can come over in two weeks. But he has a lot of conditions.

MOORE

Conditions?

NICK

We have to pay expenses. His Learjet, a week's rental of a mansion next to Wentworth golf course. Food bills -

MOORE

Next thing you're going to tell me is he wants free tickets for the West End.

NICK

He *does*.

MOORE

How much does this diva want?

NICK

£25K.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. NIGHT.

Sexton and Nick lean over the coffee table, slurping up spaghetti.

NICK

You don't think that was asking too much?

SEXTON

Nah. It's a good double bluff. Who would think a con man would have

the cheek to ask that amount? To
be so over the top?

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Sexton is the epitome of vanity: underneath his silk shirt, his gut is held in by a corset that is visibly uncomfortable, his shiny, patent leather black shoes are a size too small, his hair, beard and eyebrows are dyed black.

MOORE (O.S.)

What can I get you to drink?

SEXTON

Two large whiskies.

He has the cracker accent of the American South.

Moore crosses to an antique table laden with dozens of bottles.

SEXTON (CONT)

Aren't you going to offer my
friend Nicholas a drink?

MOORE

Sorry, I thought you said *two*
whiskies.

SEXTON

I did. For me. I'm having Nicko's
because he's driving.

NICK

Fizzy water please.

Nick unobtrusively frowns at Sexton and with a slight wave of his hand, tells him to cool it. Sexton pretends he hasn't seen.

SEXTON

I guess my friend Nickle Arse has
fully informed you of the project?

MOORE

Yes, but -

SEXTON

I've had good meetings with my
creative people on the West Coast
and the money men on the East
Coast.

MOORE

Has it been green lighted?

SEXTON

Has it what? I just love the way you limeys talk. Is that cockney?

MOORE

Has the film got the go-ahead?

SEXTON

Now that is for me to decide. That's why I'm here taking up my valuable time talking to you, sir.

Nick gives an unobtrusive shake of the head which Sexton ignores.

MOORE

Of course, money is no object.

SEXTON

Absolutely. When I hear people say they're not interested in money, I know one thing for sure -

MOORE/SEXTON

(together)

They are interested in money.

SEXTON CONT

However, I never dirty my hands with it. I pay people to deal with details like that.

Moore nods in agreement.

MOORE

Who is going to direct?

SEXTON

They will remain anonymous. But you would know them immediately. They are hyper-famous.

MOORE

Why would they accept having to remain anonymous?

SEXTON

Four reasons. One - because I insist on it. Two - the subject of

the biography is what's important,
not the director. Three - the film
is so sensitive, artistic and
ground-breaking that it could never
be distributed.

MOORE

I see ... And the fourth reason?

SEXTON

The same as the first. Because I
insist on it.

He guffaws at his joke and Nick and Moore join in with
polite laughter.

Aleksei looks up from reading the back of a DVD case, *The
Spanish Prisoner*.

MOORE

I hear what you say, but I would
really need to know who the
director would be.

SEXTON

Use your imagination. You don't
think someone as great as George
Lucas has spent his whole life
only directing *Star wars* and
American Gigolo do you?

NICK

American Graffiti.

SEXTON

Yeah. That's what I said. *American
Graffiti*. I'm not saying he is one
of the directors I use. I'm just
using him as an example, a
paradigm ... a sort of ...
unnerstandwhatimean?

Nick notices that sweat, black with the hair dye, is
starting to trickle down Sexton's forehead.

NICK

Marty, you only have twelve
minutes before -

MOORE

I loved the recent Woolf movie.
What was it called? ... If the

biopic about me could be half as evocative, capturing the Zeitgeist ... I know ... it was called *The Hour* -

SEXTON

Bonfire of the Vanities. It was crap.

NICK

The Hours. Yes. Brilliant.

Nick pointedly examines his watch.

NICK (CONT)

Marty, I think we should go now if you are to make your time slot at the airport.

SEXTON

My plane will leave when I'm ready to leave. But sure, son. I never keep my people waiting.

He gets up and gives Moore a perfunctory handshake.

SEXTON (CONT)

Good to make your acquaintance, sir. I'll let my boy Nicky here liase with you.

Moore watches them leave.

SEXTON (O.S.)

Am I correct that in your cockney language a Richard the Third/turd has been updated to a Brad Pitt?

EXT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Sexton and Nick get into a black limo where Nick punches Sexton's arm, again and again, with increasing severity,

NICK

You and your fucking mouth. You always have to take things too far.

SEXTON

I got thrown. I never go to the flicks. You know that. But I think we got away with it.

NICK
Another fucking 'but'.

SEXTON
Be fair. I researched the role the
best I could - in the time
available.

Nick starts the engine.

The noise segues into the loud buzz of an intercom which overlaps into the next scene.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Poppy's wounds are completely healed.

Brush in hand, she stands back to examine a series of canvases with round objects in all shades of yellow, orange, red.

Moore strolls in through the open door.

MOORE
Great, you're painting again.

POPPY
Trying to. What can I do for you?

MOORE
Nothing in particular. I'm just
doing the rounds of my protégés.

He walks round the studio inspecting the paintings.

MOORE (CONT)
And now you're an abstract
painter.

POPPY
Definitely not.

MOORE
So what do you call -

POPPY
It's realism ... as always. These
are the sun.

MOORE
How have you -?

POPPY

I paint them, then scrape away the paint to create a ghost, then repaint them, over and over and -

MOORE

Of course. They're good.

POPPY

They're rubbish. They mean nothing. The sun is merely a source of light. It only becomes important through its effect on other things: landscapes, clouds, mists. Don't you ever look at paintings, or do you possess so many you don't have time to look at them?

MOORE

I studied to be a painter. Two years at Art college.

POPPY

So why -?

MOORE

Why did I stop? I had to earn a living. I had a wife and newborn baby. I couldn't indulge myself. Where did you train?

POPPY

Goldsmiths.

MOORE

And Nick?

Poppy takes a palette knife and starts scraping away the still soft paint from a canvas

POPPY

Don't you ever have those 'what if?' moments? What if I had stuck to painting?

MOORE

I would really like to see some of Nick's other films. Just to satisfy my curiosity about how mine will turn out. You must know where some of them are.

POPPY

You're probably right. Being a painter is a complete waste of time these days.

She looks up to see Moore waiting for her to continue.

POPPY (CONT)

Nick, he never talks about his business affairs. He's very discreet.

EXT. TERRACE WALK. NIGHT.

Aleksei comes out of the video rental store. He carries a copy of *Six Degrees of Separation*.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Nick smiles up at the CCTV camera. The gate lock gives a loud buzz and clunk.

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

All the cars have vanished.

Nick sits in the spotlight island of furniture in the middle of the dark, cavernous space.

Out of the darkness comes a jovial voice, echoing in the void.

MOORE (O.S.)

Good evening, Nick. Sorry to be so late. I was held up at an Arts Council meeting.

NICK

Where's the Bugatti? And all the others?

MOORE

Secretly sold as a job lot and for three times what I paid. Same as my collection of conceptual art.

NICK

Who to?

MOORE

A Hollywood star.

NICK

Why?

MOORE

I'm starting a new pile.
Impressionists. I'm going to make
them the next big thing.

He stares at Nick, waiting for him to say something.

NICK

Talking about Hollywood, I've got
good news. My negotiations are going
very well.

MOORE

I don't believe you.

NICK

Sorry?

MOORE

I think you are trying to con me.

NICK

Me? What makes you say that?

MOORE

Six Degrees of Separation.

NICK

Six what?

MOORE

The film: *Six Degrees of
Separation.*

NICK

Never saw it.

MOORE

It was also a stage play. Well
known.

NICK

Not to me. What does it have to do
with anything?

MOORE

It's about a con man. Getting
suckers to invest in a film, a non-
existent film.

NICK

But you met Marty.

MOORE

Yeah, sure. And what a phoney he looked.

NICK

He's an American. He's vain. He's in the movie business. He lives in La La Land. The land of facelifts, Botox, liposuction, hair implants and chest rugs. Of course he looks a phoney. They all do.

MOORE

I know all about Hollywood. I've fucked film stars.

NICK

Were they present at the time?

Suddenly Aleksei is hovering behind Nick's chair.

ALEKSEI

Nobody has ever heard of you.

NICK

I told you. All my work is done on the quiet. They become unique, intimate collectors items. Valuable because they are unique.

MOORE

I want my money back.

NICK

Well, I -

MOORE

Do you have it here? No? Well then, I will have to start charging you interest. How about 100% per month?

NICK

I -

MOORE

So, in twenty eight days you will bring me fifty thousand. Cash.

Nick starts to smile in disbelief.

MOORE (CONT)

I will give you a reminder. I'm a cultured man. I don't like hurting people ... I pay people to do that.

He nods to Aleksei, who pulls out an automatic and puts it to the back of Nick's head.

There is a loud click. Nick is terrified.

MOORE (CONT)

Sorry. I must have let slip the 'c' word. Every time Aleksei hears the word culture, he reaches for his gun.

Nick's whole body is shaking. He loses control of his bladder. He looks at his wet lap in shame. His words stumble out.

NICK

If you kill me, you won't get your money back.

MOORE

(sarcastically)

I hadn't thought of that.

He looks at Aleksei.

MOORE (CONT)

What shall I do?

Nick is about to reply but is preempted.

ALEKSEI

Make him sign a debt of honour certificate.

MOORE

A little harsh, I think.

NICK

A debt of honour cer- ?

ALEKSEI

As good as hard currency. Better.

MOORE

Aleksei learnt it when he was on temporary attachment to the Triads.

ALEKSEI

It is very simple. You sign an agreement that you will be executed if you don't pay.

NICK

Oh, shit.

MOORE

What should I do Aleksei?
Something a little less barbaric?

ALEKSEI

I think he needs a lesson.

Aleksei yawns.

MOORE

What do you suggest?

Aleksei yawns again.

ALEKSEI

We need a break.

Aleksei grabs Nick's arm. He places the back of the elbow against the wooden arm of the chair and pushes hard against the joint.

A loud snap is followed by a prolonged scream.

Moore gives another nod to Aleksei, who places his hand over Nick's mouth.

MOORE

That was for trying to con me. *Me* of all people. If you don't pay the £50K on time, it will cost you an arm and a leg ...

Aleksei removes his hand from Nick's mouth releasing a jarring scream, which segues into the loud buzz of an intercom overlapping into the next scene.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Poppy is still working on her series of suns. Some of them have been scraped away, leaving a ghost image, others have been repainted.

She carries on painting when Nick comes in.

POPPY
Hi. How's it going?

Then she looks up and sees his plastered arm in a sling.

POPPY (CONT)
What's happened? Have you had an accident?

She sees the greyness of his face and the hint of tears in his eyes.

He tries to speak but can't.

POPPY (CONT)
Nick?

She goes to him and tries to hug him but the plaster cast gets in the way. She pulls his head down onto her breast. Nick's voice is muffled.

NICK
It wasn't an accident - Moore did it.

Poppy pulls away and holds his head so he is forced to look at her.

POPPY
What?

NICK
Moore's thug bent my elbow the wrong way until it snapped.

Poppy is horrified.

NICK (CONT)
It hurts like hell.

Poppy screams.

POPPY
GET OUT.

NICK

What?

POPPY

You heard. Get OUT. How dare you bring violence back into my life.

NICK

I was trying to help you. I can't believe -

POPPY

GET ... OUT ... OF ... MY ... LIFE.

Nick stares at her. He looks around the loft for help. Finding none, he shakes his head, turns and goes out the door.

When he has gone, Poppy stands and stares at the space he occupied and cries silently. Her whole body trembles.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. NIGHT.

Sexton takes a swig from an almost empty bottle of Scotch and passes it to Nick.

SEXTON

You're what? Thirty-five? And you don't understand women? Well take my advice.

Nick slurs when he speaks.

NICK

What?

Sexton takes back the bottle. He attempts to read the label, in the end he has to close one eye.

SEXTON

What is this stuff? It makes you see double but feel single.

NICK

What advice?

SEXTON

Never buy cheap Scotch. It gives you a hangover just by looking at it.

NICK

No ... no ... no. Advice about women.

SEXTON

Forget it.

NICK

What?

SEXTON

Understanding women.
Forgedaboutit. I'm seventy and
still don't understand them.

NICK

How can I forget about it? I vowed
to protect her.

SEXTON

Time. Give her time.

NICK

Time is one thing I don't have.
How the hell do I find £50K in
twenty-six days?

SEXTON

First off, by getting some kip. You
can't do anything in your state.
We'll get everything sorted
tomorrow.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Nick is stretched out on the sofa, mouth open, fast asleep.

Sexton shakes him to some sort of consciousness.

SEXTON

How do you want your coffee?

NICK

Neat ... I mean black, no sugar.

He starts to fall asleep again and Sexton barks out.

SEXTON

Come on. Up. Things to do. People
to see.

Nick groans.

EXT. STREET. DAY.

The sun has brought the people out, making the streets bustle.

Nick has recovered his energy. He makes a call on his mobile.

EXT. VICTORIA PARK. DAY.

Nick walks across the lawn in front of Royal Crescent.

Then he is walking along the crescent admiring the facade. Passing a uniformed DOORMAN, he disappears through the discreet doorway into The Royal Crescent Hotel.

INT. LOUNGE, ROYAL CRESCENT HOTEL. DAY.

Nick, sitting alone in the lounge on a plump sofa, looks out at the park.

He stands and smiles when he is joined by the obese man and scrawny woman.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Sexton is sketching on a primed canvas, once again referring to a book of prints.

NICK (O.S.)

They'll do it. There's a suitable auction at Christie's in two weeks.

Sexton looks up at Nick.

SEXTON

But?

NICK

But at a price. They know they're screwing me.

SEXTON

You told them how you got your arm?

NICK

Yeah. All they did was autograph it.

Nick displays the plaster cast with its signatures.

SEXTON

They don't let their emotions
interfere with their work.

NICK

Tell me about it.

Nick walks across and closely examines the picture Sexton
is referring to. It is a Monet.

NICK (CONT)

Nice one. Better than the real
thing.

SEXTON

Everyone's a sucker for an
Impressionist. Reminds them of
chocolate boxes.

NICK

Aren't all his paintings
catalogued? And anyway, he wasn't
a drunk, was he?

SEXTON

This is going to be one he did
when he was almost totally blind
and later ordered destroyed.

NICK

Where's it going to be discovered?

SEXTON

After I've aged it, my royal
friend will find it in his
stables.

NICK

Why's your 'royal friend' helping
you?

SEXTON

He needs more hay.

NICK

And you'll need a provenance.

SEXTON

Ezra's already gone to the British
Library and inserted new pages into

the latest reference books. He's now printing some old auction house catalogues.

NICK

Brave man.

SEXTON

Why do you say that?

NICK

When they were autographing my plaster cast they told me ... years ago Moore made Ezra sign a debt of honour certificate.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Sexton is putting the finishing touches to the Monet.

Nick is moving around him with a digital camera, making sure that both Sexton and the painting are captured in the same shot.

INT. CHRISTIE'S AUCTION HOUSE, LONDON. DAY.

Moore is sitting, Aleksei beside him, scanning the spectators.

The obese man and scrawny woman are both there but ignore one another.

Moore's attention is drawn to AUCTIONEER #3 as the Monet painting is displayed on an easel.

AUCTIONEER #3

Lot 273. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we have an Impressionist oil painting of a flower garden. Probably the one at Giverny. It is unsigned but attributed to Monet. I will start at five hundred thousand pounds.

He scans the room for a bidder.

The obese man raises his numbered paddle. The bidding takes off.

AUCTIONEER #3 (CONT)

Six ... seven ... eight ...

Many people bid but Moore remains impassive.

 AUCTIONEER #3 (CONT)
 One million, one hundred
 thousand ...

There is a pause in the bidding and the scrawny woman starts in.

 AUCTIONEER #3 (CONT)
 One million three hundred ...?

Now the obese man and scrawny woman are the only two left bidding.

When the bid gets to one million seven, Moore raises his forefinger, mouthing the word 'two'.

 AUCTIONEER #3 (CONT)
 Two million.

Everyone looks around to see who made the bid. Moore cannot resist basking in the limelight and applause.

INT. SEXTON'S STUDIO. NIGHT.

Nick gently massages his arm, now out of plaster, as he watches TV with Sexton.

INSERT. TV SCREEN.

Moore is being filmed with INTERVIEWER #2 walking round a gallery filled with Impressionist paintings.

 INTERVIEWER #2
 It is indeed a remarkable
 collection. Have you any idea as
 to its worth?

 MOORE
 No, money doesn't mean much to me.
 It's like poker chips, they are
 just a means of communicating with
 your opponents.

 INTERVIEWER #2
 So why have you brought all these
 works together?

They pause in front of a canvas.

SEXTON'S VOICE

That's another of mine.

INTERVIEWER #2

Are you trying to corner the market?

The TV screen goes black.

RETURN TO SCENE.

Nick and Sexton look at one another and start to snigger.

Then Sexton jumps up and does a *Riverdance* jig. But he is soon out of breath and collapses into a tatty chair and takes a swig of Scotch.

SEXTON

Damn, I'm good.

EXT. CIRCUS. DAY.

Nick wanders along, admiring the Georgian facade, mobile to his ear.

NICK

I think you will want to see what I've got. Congratulations on your TV show, by the way.

He listens.

NICK (CONT)

I thought you were a business man. The cheque cleared okay?

He listens again.

NICK (CONT)

No. I made a mistake and was punished. I don't let emotion interfere with business.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Nick looks up at the CCTV camera and when it hones in on him, he lifts up a parcel covered in bubble-wrap. He also carries a DVD.

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Nick walks into the island of light in the middle of the warehouse. He shakes hands with Moore and winces a little at the pressure.

MOORE

Still sore?

NICK

No, it's healed well.

MOORE

That's not what I meant ... So ...
let's see what you have.

NICK

It's an offer you can't refuse.

Nick places the DVD on the antique table where the Amex credit card is still on display.

Then he walks towards the wooden armchair in which he was tortured. Ripping away the bubble wrap, he sets the painting on the chair.

The framed picture is a beautiful misty scene of the Thames in London, dominated by the rising sun.

MOORE

My God. Is that a late Turner sketch? Where did you get it?

NICK

Don't ask. You like?

MOORE

I could cry. I love it.

NICK

How much?

MOORE

How much will I offer?

NICK

No ... how much do you love it?

MOORE

More than I can express. But why have you brought it to me?

NICK

I just want to see your face.

Moore is mystified.

NICK CONT

When I ...

Nick picks up the picture and smashes it across the armchair.

Moore leaps on Nick, pinning his arms to his sides. Nick manages to break free and pushes Moore to the floor.

Nick takes out a Stanley knife and slashes the canvas, continuing the destruction until everything is in small pieces.

Moore is too horrified to move.

MOORE

What the hell ...?

NICK

I have something else for you.

Moore is on his knees, desperately collecting the shreds of canvas. Nick tries to force him to take the DVD but fails. Moore is oblivious.

Nick places the DVD on a table, and starts to walk out.

He looks back over his shoulder at the pathetic sight of Moore in tears.

NICK (CONT)

Take a look at the DVD.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Nick walks through the gates to his car. He jumps and clicks his heels together in joy.

NICK

Yessss.

INT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. NIGHT.

Moore watches the DVD. Sexton is painting the Monet garden picture in Moore's collection. Then he sees Nick and Sexton standing in front of more pictures in his collection. He closes his eyes, opens them and becomes catatonic.

INT. NICK'S FLAT. NIGHT.

Nick is slouched in front of the TV.

NEWSREADER'S VOICE

... Result of global warming.
Finally, in one of the biggest
sensations in the art world,
Thomas Moore has filed for
bankruptcy.

Nick suddenly sits up straight.

INSERT TV SCREEN

A female news reader talks to camera.

NEWSREADER (CONT)

A DVD sent to *The Sun* newspaper
proved many of his recent
acquisitions were forgeries. They
were the nucleus of his
international exhibition at Tate
Modern. The loss of his reputation
means that, according to many
experts, his vast collection is
now worth a fraction of what he
paid for it. He has relied on
public confidence throu -

The TV goes mute.

RETURN TO SCENE.

Nick jumps up and punches the air.

NICK

Yessssss.

EXT. CAMDEN ROAD. DAY.

Nick and Poppy stroll along, occasionally stopping to admire glimpses of the city below.

Judging by stolen looks at one another, neither seems to know how to open the conversation. Poppy looks down at her feet.

POPPY

I'm sorry.

Nick looks at her bowed head.

NICK

Don't say that.

POPPY

I shouldn't have dumped all my stuff on you -

NICK

I want to be there for you. That's what friends do.

POPPY

It was heartless. You had a broken arm. You were in pain.

Nick flexes his arm a few times, showing it works.

NICK

Strong in the arm. See?

Poppy puts out a restraining hand.

POPPY

It was all my fault. Taking my problems out on you.

NICK

It's Moore's fault ... And I want to be involved in your problems.

POPPY

I know I'm selfish. My work takes up all my time and energy.

NICK

I accept that.

POPPY

And *I* owe Moore an exhibition
and -

NICK

You haven't *heard*?

POPPY

What?

NICK

You didn't see the news yesterday?

EXT. CITY COLLEGE. DAY.

Moore, as slickly dressed as usual, strides along the pavement towards a college building.

He passes the entrance, littered with smoking students, reaches the end of the street, then retraces his steps.

He repeats his journey and begins attracting curious glances.

INT. COLLEGE. DAY.

Moore passes down a corridor to a studio littered with artists' materials.

He shakes hands with a TUTOR.

They inspect the paintings which crowd every inch of the walls. They are a mixture of contemporary and traditional.

TUTOR

If you're lucky some collector
will buy up all your work, corner
the market and make you both
filthy rich.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL UNIT. DAY.

Nick and Poppy look through the wire fencing into the compound. A removal van is being loaded with numerous oil paintings.

NICK

There are even more than I
anticipated.

POPPY

Look, there's one of mine.

NICK

We'll buy them back at auction.

POPPY

How?

NICK

With Moore's own money. I still
have plenty left.

Poppy smiles at the irony.

POPPY

How can I ever thank you?

Nick just looks at her. His stare drops from her eyes to
her mouth and then up again.

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

They are the only two people left on the streets and both a
little under the influence.

Nick carries a nearly empty bottle of Champagne. He offers
Poppy a swig. As she drinks, she staggers a little until she
backs into a street sign:

IT IS AN OFFENCE

TO DRINK ALCOHOL

IN THIS PUBLIC AREA

PENALTY £500

Nick holds her up and kisses her clumsily.

NICK

I think we need to find somewhere
to sober up with a coffee.

POPPY

Good idea.

NICK

Then I'm going to buy you
breakfast in The Royal Crescent
Hotel.

POPPY

Bad idea.

NICK

Why?

POPPY

Because I've got a better one.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Nick is at the stove, so intent on a Turkish coffee pot, that he doesn't see Poppy tearing off her clothes.

NICK

I don't know about sobering up,
this stuff will make us fly.

There is no response. He turns to see Poppy at the other end of the studio, lying on her bed.

She is naked, her left hand splayed across her pubis and with the confident stare of Manet's *Olympia*.

She raises her arms in invitation.

Nick moves towards her, stops, returns to the stove to switch it off, then approaches her again, discarding his jacket and starting to undo his shirt.

She takes him in her arms and pulls him down on top of her.

She whispers in his ear. He listens intently. They kiss deeply.

Poppy rolls over on top of him. Nick opens his eyes to see her face that is starting to flush and glow.

He is about to speak when his attention is taken by something beyond her head. Something written on an exposed beam above.

The blur becomes focused to read:

The Sun Is God

He looks back at Poppy's face and for the first time it registers that she is quietly crying.

Nick grabs Poppy's waist, and lifts her away from him.

He gets up from the bed.

Sadly, Nick watches her shocked, disbelieving expression.

NICK

I'm sorry, I can't do this.

He starts to leave. Poppy jumps up and runs to him.

POPPY

Please Nick. What's wrong? ... Tell me ...

She clings to him.

He takes her wrists and pushes her away.

He crosses to the shelf and takes down an armful of cardboard tubes which he dumps in the middle of the floor.

POPPY (CONT)

Talk to me Nick. Nick, please, say something.

He pulls out the Turner prints and keeps them flat with objects at hand.

He grabs Poppy again and forces her to look at them.

NICK

This is you. I'm not your life.

Poppy tries to embrace him again.

She stares into his eyes.

POPPY

I thought you wanted me.

NICK

I do. Believe me: I'm too drunk to lie.

POPPY

So why reject me?

NICK

It's because I -

POPPY

Don't say *it's because you love me*. That's such a cliché.

NICK

I was going to say: it's because I
can't help you ... with your painting.

He turns her head towards another Turner, with a thickly
painted sun dominant.

NICK (CONT)

Doesn't that make you want to spend
your whole life painting? Not be
distracted.

Poppy's eyes once again fill with tears.

POPPY

I could do both.

NICK

And dilute both? And feel guilty
that you can't devote all your
energy to either? No. With your
talent you have a duty.

POPPY

Duty?

NICK

A duty to stand on the shoulders
of giants. To -

POPPY

To ...? To ...?

NICK

To live closer to the sun.

Nick grabs her hand and pulls her from painting to painting.

NICK (CONT)

That's how you will find
fulfillment. Then someone will
come along and stand on your
shoulders.

POPPY

I don't know. It's too much -

NICK

You must become strong enough to
bear their weight.

Poppy is transfixed by the Turners.

With a last look around to take in and remember everything, Nick walks to the door. As he leaves, Poppy finally looks up at him - expectantly. But he is gone.

Poppy stares after him, long after he has gone.

On the beam above, she sees what distracted Nick from the lovemaking - the graffiti:

The Sun Is God

INT. COLLEGE, STUDIO. DAY.

In the middle of the studio, on a chaise longue, a young female MODEL is in the same *Olympia* pose as Poppy was on her bed.

Around her are easels partly hiding the life class students. They are mostly in their late teens or early twenties.

The tutor stands behind a student and guides his hand to form a strong line across the hesitantly marked paper.

The student is Moore. His bespoke yellow moleskin suit and black silk shirt contrast with the other students who seem to be dressed by charity shops. Moore looks up at the tutor and smiles.

MOORE

Thanks.

TUTOR

Just let yourself go. Confidence.

INT. SEXTON'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Nick watches Sexton at work sketching on a primed canvas.

SEXTON

How are you coping?

NICK

One day at a time.

SEXTON

That's the thing.

NICK

If only I had two lives. You know, when you come to a fork in the road, to be able to go both ways.

SEXTON

Parallel universes. What was the deciding factor?

NICK

The person that stayed with Poppy was someone else.

SEXTON

You've done the right thing. That's a consolation.

NICK

Think so?

SEXTON

Keep busy. That's the thing.

NICK

Doing what? Nothing seems important.

SEXTON

You can help me. I'm overwhelmed with commissions. Everyone wants to own a genuine Sexton copy. Can you believe it?

NICK

You're becoming a filthy capitalist.

SEXTON

Earning an honest crust. Cheer up, your luck's bound to change.

NICK

Yeah. Like - get worse.

SEXTON

It's the new opium of the people.

NICK

What?

SEXTON

Work. Keep busy. Then you don't have to think about important things.

NICK

With Poppy I lived in a finer
world. She made me live better
than myself.

Sexton looks up from his easel and notices Nicks watering
eyes.

SEXTON

Serendipity. You'll be all right.
What goes round comes round.

Nick pulls himself together.

NICK

Christ, what's happening to you?
Have you given up the Communist
Manifesto for psychobabble?

SEXTON

Got to move with the times,
sunshine.

INT. POPPY'S STUDIO. DAY.

Poppy is scraping away the paint of a large sun.

From a skylight, a stray shaft of sunlight from a breaking
cloud hits the back of the canvas.

The ghost of the painted sun glows.

Poppy becomes animated, excited. Her eyes dart around the
loft. She cannibalizes neon tubes from the remains of her
butterfly installation. She piles them up and, with shaking
hands, plugs them in.

Her whole body shakes as she struggles to hold the heavy
canvas up against this intense light.

The sun seems alight. A flickering fire. It pulsates.

It is alive.

EXT. WALCOT STREET. DAY.

Nick meanders along, hands in pockets and dejected. He
glances in at the shop windows but is uninterested.

He passes the empty shop where he first met Poppy and his
attention is caught by a movement inside.

A darkly attractive WOMAN is displaying some figurative paintings. Nick pauses. The woman senses she is being watched. She looks up. She gives a quick polite smile.

Then she takes in Nick's stare.

FREEZE FRAME

FADE OUT.

THE END