

SELL/OUT

written by

Daniel Smith

"Art is anything you can get away with."

~~Andy Warhol~~

Marshall McLuhan

OVER BLACK:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

What is art?

(beat)

Fucking stupid fucking question.

FADE IN:

FOOTAGE:

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

A TIGER SHARK curls through the empty water; slow, strong, purposeful.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living". Hirst. You may even have heard of it. This isn't it, by the way, I mean, it's really a very expensive image to use. What do you reckon? Moving? Ugly? Stupid? Pointless? Provocative? What's it about? Don't answer - you're wrong. All you can do is give your personal impression of it, and, sorry, nobody cares about that. I'll tell you. Seven million pounds, that's what it's about. Seven. Fucking. Million. It was bought by this chap.

STILL:

A bespectacled bald BUSINESSMAN, pallid and flabby in his boring black suit.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He's a hedge fund manager. His company pleaded guilty in one of the biggest insider trading cases in history. Wire and securities fraud. He's also a big-time Republican, if your interested in that type of thing. This is what an art lover looks like. In 2008, Hirst graced us with a daring new piece called "The Kingdom".

FOOTAGE:

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

A different, smaller tiger shark flits hither and thither.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

How does he do it? This mimetic little fella sold at Sotheby's for nine-point-six. I know, I can feel your disgust, but hey, if it ain't broke...

Interestingly, it was part of an auction that raised eleven million dollars on the sixteenth of September 2008. That's a day before Lehmann Brothers bank collapsed. I don't know why that came to mind.

(beat)

You know what they say, right? About sharks that stop swimming? That's the art world. Constant motion. It's only unrelenting connectivity that keeps it from being crushed under the waves. Like a maelstrom. A vortex, a fucking miasma of gossip and hearsay, cliques, bandwagons, backers, retainers, promises, threats, hucksters, clients, cash, and talking, talking, talking.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

SAFF OKOMBE (24): serious, grim-faced, of Kenyan heritage, stands squeezed tight between the end of her bed and the canvas on the wall facing her in her crummy little London bedsit.

Bright little dots of paint throw themselves at her face as she wields her brush like a conductor's baton, striking at her creation with a tired but willing arm. She is focused and unrelenting, jaw clenched, eyes burning.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And if it stopped for a second?
Well, people might start taking a
closer look.

Saff drops the brush, and flops backwards onto her mattress, spent. She takes a moment to breath, and looks at her work. She leans towards it, wants desperately to touch it. A single tear rolls down her cheek as she lets her work stir her soul.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We don't want that. Seriously.
They might realise no one knows
what the fuck it is they're
talking about.

We see the painting. Puddles of colour that a seven-year-old might be pleased with.

EXT. GALLERY - DAY

EZRA (26), posh and lanky, suited up, paces up and down past the gallery doors, racing through his cigarette. Nervous, jangly, stooped. He lights another after stubbing out and dumping his fag onto the growing pile in the pavement.

Noise burbles out as the door is opened. Out steps FIONNULA (30), tall and dark haired, in an immaculate figure-hugging white dress, wearing sharp white glasses perched before her sharp blue eyes.

FIONNULA

Ezra. Ezra!

EZRA

Do they like it?

FIONNULA

What?

EZRA

Does everyone like it?

FIONNULA

What are you doing?

EZRA

What do you mean what am I doing,
I'm freaking out! What are you
doing?

FIONNULA

Don't freak out.

EZRA

It's shit, isn't it?

FIONNULA

No!

EZRA

It's shit, isn't it? That's what
they're saying, isn't it?
Rehashed, recycled, derivative
balls on the fucking shelf. I saw
them looking around in there, you
know. I watched them. They think
it's all crap. They're right. It
is crap. They were trying not to
laugh. They thought it was a
joke. Even when I was talking to
them they just stood there
smiling in that really wanky way.
Wankers. They don't know what
they're looking at, hacks and
frauds, lying whores!

FIONNULA

Put that out, it absolutely
reeks.

EZRA

No. Sod off.

Fionnula snatches the cigarette from Ezra's mouth and
discards it.

FIONNULA

Look, I get the whole tortured genius thing but it's not a foregone conclusion that you're a genius yet so this is just torture. Now - do you want to hear what I've come out to tell you or do you want to keep parading around like a big mad penguin?

EZRA

I just want to go home. This was a mistake. Christ, now I need to get a job. I don't want to get a job.

FIONNULA

Ezra, they loved it.

EZRA

What?

FIONNULA

They fucking love it. They love you. We're selling, we're selling really well.

EZRA

You are pulling my- Fionnula! Come on! Are you joking? Don't joke.

FIONNULA

Nine grand and counting.

EZRA

Oh-my-god-are-you-for-real?

Ezra laughs wildly, completely transformed. He gives Fionnula a big hug before turning and marching away from her.

FIONNULA

Hey! Where are you going?!

EZRA

(without turning)

My dear, I'm off to get completely cunted!

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Fionnula returns indoors and is immediately confronted by THE DIRECTOR, his hipster beard and glasses at odds with his slovenly, immature sports attire, with his small CAMERA CREW at his heels.

DIRECTOR

What's he doing?

FIONNULA

Ssh! He's celebrating.

Fionnula walks away, the crew jostling behind her.

DIRECTOR

Shit, man! Goddamn! Hey fuck it, maybe that's what we should all do, huh? Here we are making a motherfucking art documentary and the motherfucking artist isn't here to motherfucking document. It's groundbreaking stuff. Like if "Cats" didn't have any cats in it.

FIONNULA

"Cats" doesn't have any cats in it.

She leaves them behind to stand at the back of the small crowd at the far end of the room. The Director folds his arms sulkily, and turns to the crew.

DIRECTOR

Guess we're stuck with this Mardi Gras then.

Connoisseurs and aficionados mill around, stroking their chins and murmuring appreciatively as they examine the assortment of statues, which are mostly shiny black or cream coloured, roughly phallic but could really be anything.

Fionnula scans the crowd, never switching off. From the crowd, a figure approaches her.

YANARA (33), professionally pretty, wearing a carefully curated study of tasteful bright colours and deliberately loud patterns, holding a notepad she doesn't appear to use, and a phone she regularly glances at.

YANARA

A hit. Congratulations.

FIONNULA

(still scanning)

Yeah we're incredibly delighted.

YANARA

I can imagine. What an eye you have.

FIONNULA

Thank you.

YANARA

What a mouth you have too. Had to hit out with some instant classics to try and make sense of this heap of garbage. What was it? "A bold disavowal of contemporary techniques in favour of a twisted take on classical evaluation of the concept of shape?" I never thought salad could make me feel so ill.

FIONNULA

Well, if you can't see what we all see maybe you're in the wrong business.

YANARA

I see just fine. I see another spoiled white boy making a good living while the culture rots and perishes, starved of warmth or nourishment.

FIONNULA

You moving to the Guardian, Yanara?

YANARA

Darling. You've made a mistake. You may be making money today but there's no long game here. No paper's gonna wanna touch this kid. He's a repeat. We all want a new show. And anyone perceived to be running ads for the repeat is gonna be left behind. This boy - for you, for your business... he is a virus.

Fionnula masks the unease brought on by Yanara's words with difficulty.

FIONNULA

Yes, well... at the risk of sounding populist I think the people have spoken.

She gestures to the approving audience around them.

YANARA

The people? They'd eat shit straight from the bull if you told them to. They don't get a vote.

FIONNULA

Have a good day.

YANARA

And you.

Yanara walks away, and Fionnula's plastic smile falters as the next item is brought up.

INT. GALLERY - EVENING

The sculptures are carefully placed in boxes filled with bubble wrap before being liberally taped shut.

A couple of WORKERS are piling the boxes by the open back door.

Fionnula comes out of her office, tired after a long day.

WORKER #1

Oi boss. Where we going?

FIONNULA

What?

WORKER #1

Where's the buyer wanting these
took?

FIONNULA

Oh. Just leave them in the van.
They're not going anywhere.

She leaves the workers looking confused.

FIONNULA (CONT'D) (O.S.)

God I need a drink.

INT. BASEMENT BAR - TABLE - NIGHT

DRINKS ARE SLOPPILY CLINKED around a table to raucous cheers.

Saff sits smiling at the table, surrounded by her friends from The Peckham Collective - a loose association of artists and vagabonds - in a dark little room with a few other tables of people trying to ignore their hollering.

At one end of the room is a bar, at the other, a small stage and mic. A banner behind it reads POETRY NIGHT.

Most of the noise comes from TOMMY CANCER (40), fat and dread-locked in a slightly grubby, slightly tight plain tee; beside them is RINA IKARI-MAITLAND (20), small, skinny and psycho; slightly further back, holding up a battered old super 8 camera is GREG (27), bearded and weird.

TOMMY

Fuck them, fuck us and fuck it
all else too!

(sips)

Ah! Screw the feds, man, for
real.

RINA

Pigs.

TOMMY

Exactly! Bloody lollipop ladies
is all they are, fam.

SAFF

Lollipop ladies?

TOMMY

Bright jackets, big sticks what
are meant to scare us to do what
they say, nah! Daft hats. They
move like fat old lollipop ladies
anyway.

RINA

Did you finish it then, Tommy?

Saff's eyes slide over to the stage. A pretty young woman,
LOLA (22) stands at the mic, reading her poetry from a card
in her hands. Saff can't hear her over her friends' voices.

TOMMY

What?

RINA

Did you finish your piece?

TOMMY

Nah, well they were coming my
way, know what I'm saying, like I
had to scarper, know what I'm
saying?

RINA

Oh my days--

TOMMY

Nah, nah, listen, what, am I on a
deadline or something? Them
sticks are big, man.

GREG

I thought they moved like fat old
ladies.

TOMMY

Greg, shut up man! Why am I even
talking to you, put the camera
down, they get a hold of that
I'll be in the back of the van!

GREG

It's for personal use.

TOMMY

You're dirty, bro.
(downs pint)
Who's is it?

SAFF

(turning)

I reckon it's yours, man. It's been yours for years, like.

TOMMY

Money is evil and I don't carry evil with me anywhere.

RINA

I'm not sure you know what collective means, Tommy.

TOMMY

(thumbing to bar)

Saff.

SAFF

You know where I'll put it if you ever do that again, mate.

TOMMY

I apologise. But please. I'm broke.

SAFF

(standing)

We're all broke. What makes you so special?

TOMMY

I can't be fixed. Are you still filming me, cunt?!

INT. BASEMENT BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Saff leans at the bar. She looks across as Lola joins her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I've always been a people person. They're a fucking indispensable commodity. Kinda like Bitcoin.

Their eyes meet. Lola smiles wide.

SAFF

Uhm. Well done, man. You was good up there.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Not for everybody. But if you can find a buyer, they'll pay any asking price.

LOLA

I didn't think anyone could hear me.

SAFF

Nah... sorry.

LOLA

They're loud. Your lot.

SAFF

Yeah well, well done anyway. I couldn't get up there in front of everyone, fuck that.

LOLA

Thanks.

(to bartender)

Large red please.

SAFF

I'll get it. I'm Saff by the way.

LOLA

Oh thank you. Can I sit with you?

SAFF

Yeah well that's what I was suggesting, like...

INT. BAR BASEMENT - TABLE - MOMENTS LATER

Saff and Lola sit close together as the rest of the collective continue to ruin everyone else's night. Another POET soldiers on at the microphone. Everyone's nice and drunk.

LOLA

Why is he filming everything?

SAFF

That's Greg. He's doing a project... something about...

GREG

I'm exploring the dichotomy of preservation and motion. To keep things fixed, yet never still. It's a paradox.

LOLA

So you're all artists.

GREG

No, I'm a coke dealer, but I dabble.

SAFF

Yeah we're a collective--

TOMMY

We represent resistance to the other bastards what plunder real art from the underground and put it in sanitized displays in Chelsea or fucking Shoreditch or wherever, robbing it and us of any actual meaning or profundity what could have been observed therein, used instead to pull us as a society deeper into the corporate capitalist cynicism and materialist dick measuring that is the modern art market.

RINA

Yeah!

TOMMY

Excuse me.

Tommy heaves himself up to find a bathroom.

LOLA

That's cool. You guys are like, proper underground then?

SAFF

Yeah.

LOLA

You're all the crazy artist type.

SAFF

For real. Rina got kicked outta Goldsmiths for tattooing her good bits on her tutor's back for an assignment.

RINA

Goldsmiths are pigs.

SAFF

Tommy's been arrested for graffiti more times than Banksy.

GREG

Twice more.

LOLA

How many times is that?

RINA

Twice.

SAFF

And yeah, Greg is actually a drug dealer.

LOLA

Oh.

Tommy returns, and puts a hand out under the table. Saff does likewise.

SAFF

You want..?

LOLA

Uhm...

TOMMY

It's all shit, man.

The poet glances up, distracted.

SAFF

I'd recommend it, to be honest. He's about to go off on one.

TOMMY

They're all so shit. No one's done anything real since the last fucking century. They're all so... unconvinced. No one's fucking saying anything.

RINA

We need something real. Something fucked up. That would really fuck 'em up.

LOLA

Like what?

SAFF

Nah. Come on.

Saff starts to lead Lola away by the hand.

RINA

Blow up the zoo.

TOMMY

Yeah. That would do it. Get a tiger and just... loose it in the Tate.

GREG

(beat)

Blow up the Tate. With everyone inside. Tiger too.

TOMMY AND RINA

Yeah.

POET

Excuse me, sorry, would you shut up please, this is a poetry night!

The Collective slowly turn their heads to face the stage.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Saff and Lola come out of the dirty stall, sniffing and giggling. They turn to each other as they squeeze through the narrow door, almost folded into one another. Like it's the most natural thing in the world, they simultaneously go in for a clumsy, boozy kiss. At the last second Lola puts her hand between them.

LOLA

Not here.

Their foreheads touch as they giggle breathlessly. They head out the door.

INT. BAR BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

As soon as the door is pushed open Lola staggers toward Saff for a kiss - but Saff is distracted by the scene in front of her.

Tommy has taken the stage. The poet cowers in a corner with the few remaining punters. Greg films as Rina smashes glasses.

TOMMY

How's that then? Eh? Begging your ardy-pardon for interrupting your insipid neocon eulogy--

LOLA

Oh my God.

SAFF

Come with me.

INT. FANCY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fionnula perches on the edge of a big luxurious bed. She is faced away from the soft shape of SEB (55) who lies spread across the sheets, smiling stupidly at her back as she fastens her bra. We can see in her eyes that she would rather be anywhere but here.

SEB

That was tremendous. Real ripsnorting stuff.

FIONNULA

You think so?

SEB

Ouch.

(beat)

Don't move.

Seb rolls over to pick up his joint rolling paraphernalia from the bedside cabinet.

FIONNULA

I'm not staying.

SEB

Okay darling. But could you--

She rolls her eyes and takes the weed from him.

FIONNULA

I don't know why you do this. It doesn't suit you at all.

SEB

I'm full of surprises, aren't I?

FIONNULA

You've got a flight in the morning. You'll sleep in.

SEB

I can't tell if you think I'm a hundred or six.

FIONNULA

The first one.

SEB

That's worse.

FIONNULA

Mm, not really.

SEB

You're bored of me, aren't you?

FIONNULA

I see where he gets it from. The neuroticism.

SEB

You are though, aren't you?

FIONNULA

Call it that if you like.

SEB

So did it work? Anyone seem more interested?

FIONNULA

I don't know Seb, we'll wait and see.

SEB

They better be because I'm not doing it again. Little asshole needs to get a job.

FIONNULA

I've got to go.

SEB

For fuck's sake. Can I call you when I get back?

FIONNULA

You're going for a month. A lot can change in a month.

SEB

You might miss me.

FIONNULA

Seb. Don't call.

Fionnula finishes getting dressed and leaves Seb failing to conceal his hurt. He looks at the joint in his hand, and stubs it out. He is up early.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Saff and Lola lie in bed, cuddling. They look pretty spent. Lola nuzzles into Saff, smiling quietly.

LOLA

Your flat is tiny you know.

SAFF

Cheers. Tell the landlord, maybe he'll cut rent. Where do you live?

LOLA

Not here.

SAFF

Okay, mystery girl.

Lola moves away to put on a t-shirt.

LOLA

So you really liked my poem then?

SAFF

Yeahhh..?

LOLA

(laughing)

You didn't hear it.

SAFF

Nah, I just thought you were fit innit.

LOLA

"Innit".

SAFF

Fuck you.

LOLA

No I'm exhausted. What's that?

SAFF

(looks where Lola
points)

Oh. Nothing.

LOLA

Is that your painting?

Lola starts to crawl towards the opposite wall.

SAFF

No, don't.

Saff tries to pull at Lola's T-shirt, but is batted away.
Lola looks at the painting for a long moment.

SAFF (CONT'D)

I don't know if it's finished.
Might work on it some more.

LOLA

It's amazing.

SAFF

Thanks.

LOLA

It's so... you're really
talented. It's really amazing.
What does it, like, mean?

SAFF

Uhm it's like...
 (laughs self-
 consciously)
 I dunno really. Come on, words
 are your forte, not mine.

LOLA

How would you know?

SAFF

Shut the fuck up.

Lola crawls back into bed so Saff can spoon her. She takes her phone from beside the bed, and points it for a selfie. Saff plays along, unfazed, sticking her tongue out.

INT. COOL BAR - NIGHT

This place is way cooler than anywhere you've ever been. Too small to feasibly support itself.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I know. It's way cooler than
 anywhere you've ever been.

Fionnula enters and glances around, before her eyes fall on a figure sitting alone in the corner.

HETTIE ALEPPO (40); a professional, busy American in a pointy suit. She has the air of being overqualified for any possible situation that she might encounter.

She slides a drink across the table by way of invitation without looking up from her phone. Fionnula sits.

FIONNULA

Hi.

Hettie continues to type on her phone.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

So did you enjoy the exhibition?

HETTIE

Small talk. That's all I ever
 hear in this damn city. No one
 ever just says what they wanna
 say.

FIONNULA

Mr Wren... he didn't buy anything.

HETTIE

That's better.
(lowers phone)
He found nothing that stirred his heart.

FIONNULA

He wasn't even there.

HETTIE

I found nothing that would stir his heart. Besides, that kid's going nowhere. The press already know where they're gonna dump his body. You need to drop him.

FIONNULA

Yeah.

HETTIE

Really? That easy? I thought you'd put up more of a fight for your guy.

Fionnula shrugs.

HETTIE

Mm. So. You'll need to find a replacement.

FIONNULA

I've got some portfolios on my desk--

HETTIE

We can help you streamline the process. Mr Wren has some criteria he would like met.

FIONNULA

Mr Wren does not decide who my gallery chooses to represent.

HETTIE

He is your single biggest buyer so yeah, he does. We want something... new.

FIONNULA

Oh good, nothing vague then.

HETTIE

Something different to what we know now. Uncharted, unseen territory.

FIONNULA

Unwanted, in other words.

HETTIE

Then you'll take the unwanted and make people want it. That is what your job entails. You are a salesman. That's all you are. And you'll sell Mr Wren what he wants you to sell him, and if you can't find what we want you to sell us we'll find someone else who can.

A MIDDLE EASTERN MAN (40s) slides towards their table, almost apologetically.

FIONNULA

I get it.

MAN

Miss Aleppo. Your car is outside. He is waiting for you.

HETTIE

Complete unknown.

FIONNULA

I get it.

HETTIE

(standing up)

I know you do.

(draining her
cocktail)

London prices are a scandal, aren't they?

She leaves Fionnula to sip at her drink.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Saff wakes up to an empty bed. She turns sleepily to find a fully dressed Lola standing in front of her painting. She doesn't notice Lola pocketing her phone.

SAFF

(sitting up)

Alright?

LOLA

God I'm in bad shape. How are you feeling?

SAFF

Pfft. I'm fine. Just another night, know what I mean.

LOLA

I've got to go.

SAFF

Cool.

LOLA

(heading out)

See you later.

Saff smiles until the door is shut behind her, then collapses back into her pillows.

FADE TO BLACK:

The BUZZING of a phone goes on way too long.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Saff's open mouth snores into the pillow. The invisible phone continues to vibrate. A frown appears over Saff's closed eyes as she begins to wake up. She flaps her hand behind her to find the phone.

She brings it close and cracks one eyelid just enough to look at the screen.

SAFF

Fuck!

She leaps out of bed, and immediately staggers into a wall - she's in bits. And she's late. She pulls some clothes on and runs out the door.

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

Saff sprints down the pavement as fast as her hungover legs can carry her. Not very.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHES SHOP - DAY

Saff barrels through the door and weaves between the racks of strange and wonderful garments messily zigzagging across the shop floor. Her stylish, Polish boss, ELSIE (65) emerges from behind a row of tacky furs with an arm full of files.

SAFF

Elsie I am so fucking sorry, I don't know what happened--

ELSIE

Hm?

SAFF

My alarm, and then the traffic and whatnot--

ELSIE

Were you late today?

SAFF

Hm?

ELSIE

Weren't you... I thought I saw you come in hours ago?

SAFF

(beat)

Yep. I was talking about something else, I'm talking shit, ignore me.

Saff starts to sidle past Elsie to find something to do.

ELSIE

When was the last time you saw this place busy?

SAFF

Babe there's not that many tasteful people in London.

ELSIE

No one wants this tat, do they?

SAFF

Their loss. It's beautiful.
What's the matter with you?

ELSIE

Beauty doesn't pay the bills.

SAFF

Never heard of Onlyfans?

Elsie strokes Saff's face gently. From Saff's expression we can tell this is unusual.

ELSIE

Sweet girl. I'm getting coffee,
you want?

SAFF

Yeah.

Elsie heads out. Saff breaths a sigh of relief. Tommy's head pops up above a rack.

TOMMY

Sup with that old bitch?

SAFF

(jumping)

Jesus, piss off man, don't do
that!

TOMMY

Stroking your face all friendly
like, she got dementia or sumink?

Tommy walks around to join Saff.

SAFF

Leave her alone. How you feeling?

TOMMY

Ooh-ho-ho. Feeling plenty. Don't
remember much.

SAFF

You're probably the only one.

TOMMY

I'd ask what happened to you but
I reckon I've got an idea.

SAFF

What you talking about?

TOMMY

You went off with Home County,
no? The photo's cute man.

SAFF

Photo?

TOMMY

You not been online today?

Tommy takes out his phone and shows Saff the selfie Lola took, in which Saff is tagged. Tommy slides his thumb and the next picture rolls into view - Saff's painting.

TOMMY (CONT'D) (O.S.)

Yeah I never knew she was your PR
as well as your walk on the mild
side.

Saff looks at the picture, horrified.

INT. FIONNULA'S OFFICE - DAY

Fionnula sits at her desk, head in one hand while the other leafs through a document on her desk, picked from the HAPHAZARD PILE teetering next to her. Her pretty assistant, JORJA (20s) stands to attention at her side.

FIONNULA

These are shit.

JORJA

Absolutely.

FIONNULA

You think so too?

JORJA

W-would you like me to?

FIONNULA

(not listening)

I mean look at this one.

JORJA

Mmm. Yeah. No.

FIONNULA

It's just so frightened of
itself. So timorous.

JORJA

It is, isn't it? Absolutely.

FIONNULA

I thought all English people were
meant to be geniuses, isn't that
what you've always taught us? We
must've looked through the
portfolios of half the bar staff
in North London today and it
feels like sitting through a
fucking primary school panto, all
the little bastards breaking
character to fucking wave at us.

JORJA

Would you like some kimchi?

FIONNULA

Piss off. Go bring me that list
of Victoria's rejects. You never
know, maybe she missed something.

Jorja leaves and Fionnula rubs her tired eyes.

Her phone BUZZES. She looks at it; a message from Seb.

I'M NOT A JOKE. FUCK YOU.

She drops her phone on the table, not much bothered. The
office phone rings. She petulantly slaps the speaker button.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

It's a list, Jorja, words on a
page, check your desk.

JORJA (V.O.)

Ezra's here to see you.

FIONNULA

I'm not in.

JORJA (V.O.)

Right. Ezra! Sorry, no I forgot,
she's not actually in--

FIONNULA

For Christ's sake Jorja!

Ezra saunters in and flops into a seat, legs dangling over an arm.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Hello Ezra.

EZRA

Bloody. Hell. That was misjudged. I feel like someone shoved a fridge in my head through my ear and opened it and all the vegetables have spilled everywhere and they're taking root.

Fionnula says nothing. Ezra notices the pile of portfolios.

EZRA (CONT'D)

What are those?

FIONNULA

Those are nothing.

Jorja returns.

JORJA

Here's the list. This guy, I actually saw an exhibition of his last year. Everyone seemed to like it, but it was in Manchester. I dunno.

FIONNULA

(beat)

Thank you Jorja.

Jorja leaves, pretty pleased with her contribution. Ezra looks from the paper to Fionnula, his face stupid.

EXT. STREET BY THE RIVER - DAY

Saff leans on the fence looking out to the water. She pulls out her phone and dials. She frowns while she waits for an answer.

SAFF

Alright? Listen I need to talk to you.

(beat)

Where's that?

INT. CAFE - DAY

PRETENTIOUS MUSIC burbles in the background as Saff walks into the trendy spot; a fish out of water.

Saff is ready for a fight.

She spots Lola sitting with an UNKNOWN MAN who has his back to her. This disarms her - she hadn't expected company. Lola sees her and waves her over.

LOLA

Look at you out here in enemy camp! Hi! Saff, Harry, Harry, Saff.

The man is revealed as HARRY SHEERSMITH (35). When he speaks, we recognize the voice of the Narrator.

HARRY

Great to meet you, Saff.

SAFF

Alright?

An awkward silence. Saff looks pointedly at Lola, who doesn't get it. Harry still seems comfortable.

SAFF (CONT'D)

So... how do you know each other?

LOLA

Oh, Harry knows everybody.

SAFF

Right. You a writer too?

HARRY

I wish I could. No, I'm just a middleman. Lola though, she's, well, wonderful.

LOLA

Stop.

HARRY

I'm going to find her some more gigs and talk to some of my publishing pals about sitting down with her.

SAFF

Cool. You're like a walking
Linkedin.

HARRY

Right. That's great. Loved your
painting by the way. You've got a
great gift.

Saff gives Lola a dirty look, which she does not pick up on.

HARRY (CONT'D)

If you ever need a hand finding
some representation I'd love to
be of service.

SAFF

(beat)

I'm sure you would.

HARRY

I would. Yeah.

LOLA

That's amazing! Hang on, I'll
send her your number now.

SAFF

(beat)

This is perfect. The two poshest,
whitest people I know in the
poshest, whitest cafe with the
poshest, whitest coffee want a
new pet project from the other
side of town.

LOLA

Saff--

SAFF

You're not pimping out my work for wankers with designer glasses that cost more than their second homes to hang up in their offices to pretend like they're part of the real world. My art has nothing to do with you, mate. I'm sure it's been a long time since you found something you couldn't just take, I'm sure it's been generations since anyone's told you no so let me say this slow so you won't miss it: suck... my... dick.

With that she marches out of the cafe. Lola is frozen with shock. Harry smiles quietly as he watches her go.

INT. FIONNULA'S OFFICE - DAY

Ezra stands over the desk, berating Fionnula.

EZRA

What the bloody hell, Fi? What is this?

FIONNULA

Look, I'm not going to talk to you when you're in this state.

EZRA

You bloody are because - I come in here, and I feel like dick, but I think it's okay, at least Fionnula will be happy because, unless she's been struck with amnesia in the last twelve hours or something, maybe, I don't know - I am a shit hot artist who just sold for thousands at my enormously successful exhibition, making her a tonne of

EZRA (CONT'D)

money and putting me on the fucking map. I am the map, I'm the fucking atlas! And I'm carrying this gallery on my fucking shoulders but no, you're looking for someone else? This isn't enough? What, did my dad dump you or something? Oh yeah, that's right, I know all about that, Fionnula. He didn't decide to take an interest in me after all these years because he has a newfound respect for the power of the fucking aesthetic! Lord knows what you see in the old bastard but if he's binned you don't take it out on me. Don't be like mother! What's happening?!

FIONNULA

Well that was a lot. Let me just decompress a second.

Fionnula closes her eyes and, while Ezra waits, astonished, inhales and exhales deeply, rubbing her temples. It goes on a bit too long.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Right. You're not shit hot, you're just shit. You're a reactionary non-starter with no future in the industry and you'll turn my gallery into a National Trust conservatory if I let you. Oh by the way - you're fucking your dad harder than I ever did.

EZRA

I beg your pardon?

FIONNULA

Don't tell me you thought yesterday was for real. He bought all your pieces. Every one. He bought them back. It's an old move. Get the ball rolling and hope some of the gullible morons that go to places like this take notice and think you're onto something. Your career is artifice, Ezra. And you're a child. And it's time to grow up. Now get out of my office.

Undone by this revelation, Ezra turns and leaves, numb.

Sighing, Fionnula picks up the next folder, but casts it aside after a glance, rubbing her face again.

Her mobile RINGS, and she snatches it grumpily.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Hello?

HARRY (V.O.)

Fionnula, hi.

FIONNULA

Harry.

HARRY (V.O.)

Listen I won't keep you in high suspense. I've got someone on radar who I think you should consider looking at.

FIONNULA

It really is a pity I don't do things because you think I should, isn't it?

HARRY (V.O.)

Great stuff. But you don't want to miss an open goal here. I'm talking a once-in-a-generation type genius, unrepresented, total innovator.

FIONNULA

You can't go six words without spouting some inane, vapid cliché, can you? And why would you tell me about this visionary exactly? What's in it for you?

HARRY (V.O.)

Pushing the zeitgeist is all the reward I need.

FIONNULA

Right.

HARRY (V.O.)

Seriously though, my interests make no difference to you. I have someone, maybe you need someone, I dunno. You want her?

FIONNULA

Send over some visuals and I'll look at them.

HARRY (V.O.)

Don't dawdle, in a minute there's gonna be a line of people longer than your boyfriend's foreskin after this one.

He hangs up.

FIONNULA

Prick.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The next morning. Saff walks down the street with two coffees. She looks up when she hears a HORN BLARING. Beside a stationary van she sees Greg filming the road. She approaches.

POV FROM BELOW:

Saff's head appears beside Greg's, looking down in mild curiosity.

SAFF

Alright?

SAFF (CONT'D)

Why's Rina lying on the road.

GREG

She's exploring time.

SAFF

Yeah?

GREG

Yeah. She reckons that the concept of "late" is a patriarchal tool designed by corporate overlords to keep us subservient to their whims.

SAFF

Sick. I'm off to work, see you later.

EXT. VINTAGE CLOTHES SHOP - DAY

Saff approaches the shop.

A look of outrage as she draws near.

We see boarded windows; a sign reading SOLD.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHES SHOP - DAY

Saff bumps past workers removing racks of clothing as she enters.

SAFF

Elsie!

Elsie appears from the back, phone to her head. Saff walks up to her.

ELSIE

Bollocks.

SAFF

You sold your shop?

ELSIE

Oh yes. Yes I did.

SAFF

How could you, man?

ELSIE

A very nice man came in and told me it would make a super location for a branch of his chain. Access to a vibrant, diverse community, he said. Isn't that nice?

SAFF

What about me?

ELSIE

You'll be fine. They'll be hiring, I'm sure.

SAFF

How long did you have that shop? All those years, they can just be bought, can they? For money?

ELSIE

Don't be a bitch. This is how it works. This is London. It doesn't stop Saff. Not for you, not for me. It devours itself.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Fionnula enters briskly. Jorja straightens up at her desk.

FIONNULA

Morning Jorja.

JORJA

The director was here looking for you. He wants to know if it's worth them coming in to film today?

FIONNULA

Sure, he can interview you.

JORJA

God! No, no. D'you think he'd want to?

Fionnula shrugs as she walks into her office and closes the door.

INT. FIONNULA'S OFFICE - DAY

No sooner has Fionnula plonked herself down at her desk than the phone starts ringing.

FIONNULA

Hello again Jorja.

JORJA (V.O.)

Yanara Urritia on the line.

FIONNULA

Put her through. Hi Yanara, how are you darling? You get my email?

YANARA (V.O.)

I'm worried, Fionnula, very worried.

FIONNULA

Yeah, what about?

YANARA (V.O.)

About you dear. Since when did you email journalists asking if they've heard of such-and-such and who and whatever?

Fionnula's MOBILE RINGS.

FIONNULA

Hang on a second.

YANARA (V.O.)

I hope you're not becoming out of touch, dear, taking punts on anybody with a postcode you don't recognize.

FIONNULA

(answering mobile)

Hello?

EZRA (V.O.)

I would just like to inform you that I'm on my knees as we speak.

FIONNULA

Oh God. What are you doing?

EZRA (V.O.)

I'm begging you. Fionnula.
Please. This is all I have.

FIONNULA

You're pathetic.

EZRA (V.O.)

I know. I am. I can't do
anything, you know. I can't go
out in the world and be a person,
I just can't do it. I need this.

FIONNULA

I'm very busy, Ezra.

EZRA (V.O.)

Yeah I saw. You've got portfolios
stacked higher than Princess X.

HARRY (V.O.)

Google it.

YANARA (V.O.)

Hello?

FIONNULA

Just a second! Goodbye Ezra.

EZRA (V.O.)

Just please tell me one thing.
Why haven't you picked one yet?

FIONNULA

None of your business.

YANARA (V.O.)

Really Fionnula, it's no fun
taking the piss out of you if
you're not paying attention.

EZRA (V.O.)

They're terrible aren't they?
Every single one of them. They're
definitely no better than me
anyway. Are they?

FIONNULA

(beat)

It's like trying to climb a
mountain of dogshit in a harness
made of catshit.

YANARA (V.O.)

Call me when you're less
distracted sweetie, if such a
time arrives.

EZRA (V.O.)

There's nothing better out there
Fi.

FIONNULA (V.O.)

Hang on, Yanara! Can you tell me,
please, has anyone heard of this
girl, you must've asked around.

YANARA (V.O.)

Of course I asked around, you
think I'd call otherwise, are you
crazy?

EZRA (V.O.)

You took a chance on me and it
backfired, why should it be any
different with any of these guys?
At least representing me had some
perks.

FIONNULA

If by perks you mean a middle-
aged man with kidney stones lying
on top of me while the Last Night
of the Proms plays in the
background--

EZRA (V.O.)

No. I mean the perks of having a
reliable buyer. No matter what.
We can up your commission, I
don't care. Take another twenty
per cent, screw it. You know
he'll keep going till he runs
dry. Which he won't.

JORJA (V.O.)

Seb Cunliffe-Lester on line two.

FIONNULA

Fuck off!

YANARA (V.O.)

Excuse me?

FIONNULA

No, Yanara, listen... I'll call you back.

YANARA (V.O.)

I might answer. This was less fun than I thought it would be. It's a little sad to watch your decline.

FIONNULA

Yeah, well doesn't bode well for you if I'm in decline, send my regards to the other parasites.
(presses intercom button)

Shit!

EZRA (V.O.)

It's okay.

FIONNULA

Now I'm begging you. Just shut up for a second.

EZRA (V.O.)

No probs.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Saff wanders away from the shop, somewhat dazed. She looks around. In the distance, she can still see Rina and Greg. She pulls her phone out, and stares at the screen.

INT. FIONNULA'S OFFICE - CONT'D

FIONNULA

Okay. Listen. Are you available to come in? We can have a chat?

EZRA

I don't know. Maybe. Let me check my schedule.

JORJA (V.O.)

Harry Sheersmith on line one.

FIONNULA

Just a sec Ezra. Harry?

HARRY (V.O.)

You've got her. If you want her
you've got her.

FIONNULA

Harry no one's even heard of this
girl!

HARRY (V.O.)

They will. You'll tell them.
You're good at this stuff. Make
them notice her.

FIONNULA

I don't know.

HARRY (V.O.)

You got something better?

FIONNULA

(beat)

Ezra?

EZRA (V.O.)

(confident)

Yes Fi-fi?

FIONNULA

Find a bridge. Jump off it.

She hangs up her mobile before he can respond.

HARRY (V.O.)

In 1975 the painter and performer
Carolee Schneemann took all her
clothes off and read her book to
a live audience.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Car horns BLARE in front of the prone Rina. Greg waves,
jolly.

HARRY (V.O.)

She then painted her body and
pulled a strip of paper from her
vagina. She called this The
Interior Scroll, which she then
read to the assembly.

Saff waves back from her spot down the road. Her phone BUZZES.

HARRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It recounted a conversation with a structuralist filmmaker, whatever that is. The scrolls were stained with coffee, urine and beetroot juice.

Saff reads a text:

YOU'VE GOT THE GIG.
YOUR FRIEND,
HARRY

A small smile plays for a second on Saff's face; then she frowns as she looks up at her friends in the distance. Greg is still waving at her. She hesitates, before she turns and walks away.

HARRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now... are you going to tell me that isn't genius? Because it is. Obviously.

INT. COOL BAR - NIGHT

Harry enters and sits at a table with Hettie Aleppo.

HARRY (V.O.)

Only an idiot would suggest otherwise.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Fionnula stands with her arms crossed watching her workers carrying out any remaining memories of Ezra's residency; sculptures, paintings, photographs. She's not happy with them.

FIONNULA

Jesus Christ boys, I feel like a coach at the Paralympics, without the sense of fulfillment. Shift your arses!

WORKER #1

(lifting heavy ugly
bust)

Sorry, boss. Shit's heavy.

FIONNULA

I want the stench of that
alcoholic Oxbridge twat replaced
with Japanese mountain air before
lunchtime.

WORKER #2

Ooft, hang on George, me back!

FIONNULA

Shake a bloody leg!

(beat)

Sorry about them...

Fionnula turns back to a shocked looking Saff.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Come with me.

INT. FIONNULA'S OFFICE - DAY

They sit either side of the desk.

SAFF

That how you talk to all your
staff? Something I should get
used to?

FIONNULA

No, only the elderly, vulnerable
ones. Seriously though, don't
think of yourself as working for
me, that's a misrepresentation.
We're collaborators, we work with
each other to bring your
beautiful work to the attention
of people that can appreciate it.

SAFF

Alcoholic Oxbridge twats?

FIONNULA

Yeah, my friends. Nothing wrong
with alcoholics. Would you like a
drink by the way?

SAFF
(half a beat)

Sure.

Fionnula reaches for a decanter and pours one glass of whiskey which she gives to Saff.

SAFF (CONT'D)

You not--

FIONNULA

Nah. So listen. Your painting. I just fucking love it.

SAFF

Sure you do.

FIONNULA

Well you're saying it with a really mean, mad look on your face like you don't believe me but it's true. I think a lot more people will love it too if they get a chance to see it. I want to build a show around it, a centerpiece which really defines your particular creative destiny.

SAFF

My particular creative destiny, oh my days. Right, now you listen, yeah? I wanna make something very clear to you right now. Very nice office you've got here - you've got the whiskey, you've got the thing your girl puts the phone calls through there, very nice.

FIONNULA

It's an intercom, thanks.

SAFF

I would not be here if I had anything else to do. This place is a red light district. Window shoppers come pay you so they can feel like a big shot for the night. But it ain't real. Art ain't real as soon as you get cash involved.

FIONNULA

I see.

SAFF

Having said that... I've lost my job, and I need some money so, you know, do what you have to do.

FIONNULA

Alright. Well let me reciprocate your clarity. You ever seen a twenty pound note? You seen who's looking back at you when you're holding one of them? Turner. JMW Turner, you know who that--

SAFF

Yeah I know who that is.

FIONNULA

Good. Art is money. They're the same fucking thing. And we both want it. You might not like it, but there you go. Act disgusted if you want, but you'll enjoy this whole process a lot more if you are honest with yourself and you appreciate this opportunity for what it is. Besides, like you said, you've got nothing else to do.

Fionnula slides a sheet of paper over to Saff.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

I take sixty per cent commission on all sales, newbie rate, non-negotiable, sign it.

For a moment it looks like Saff might get up and leave... but she signs the contract.

Fionnula whisks it away and out of sight.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Let's get to work.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

The pair leave the office and are welcomed by the film crew.

FIONNULA

Saff, crew; crew, meet the exciting new addition to our pantheon of provocateurs!

SAFF

What's this?

The cameraman brings his weapon right up close to Saff as the rest of the production shuffles towards her.

DIRECTOR

Hi, I'm the director. Really looking forward to getting acquainted before your show.

SAFF

What you saying?

FIONNULA

So these guys are here from a streaming platform in the States; they're making a documentary on high end art.

SAFF

Oh Jesus, really?

DIRECTOR

Yeah. It's been uh... s'been tricky. I mean, you know, a great challenge.

FIONNULA

Yes, their background is more, you know, "true crime" stuff. You know, where they give bereaved families false hope their case will get reopened or turn sex predators into charismatic demigods.

DIRECTOR

Ha. Very funny. Gotta love British humour.

FIONNULA

Stop that.

SAFF

Fionnula. Fionnula, I don't want this.

As she talks, Saff repeatedly pushes a boom mic away from her head.

FIONNULA

Ohh, Saff, I wish you'd have said, it's in the contract you signed.

SAFF

I can't, I don't want to do no interviews or nothing like- get the hell away from me man!

Saff slaps the boom mic away, hard. The crew shouts and hollers.

DIRECTOR

Woah, woah!

FIONNULA

Alright, come here, you.

Fionnula leads a puffed up Saff away.

DIRECTOR

Hey, you break it you buy it, lady!

Fionnula and Saff stand alone in the middle of the gallery. Between them we see the workers negotiating the dismantling of a particularly LARGE PAINTING at the far wall.

FIONNULA

Jorja, mimosas please.

JORJA (O.S.)

Yes, Fionnula.

SAFF

Oh now you'll drink?

FIONNULA

They're both for you.

Jorja arrives with two glasses. They each take one. Saff downs hers in a gulp or two.

SAFF

I'm not doing that.

FIONNULA

What's the problem? You want to spend your life being invisible?

SAFF

I'm not reality TV.

FIONNULA

It's an American documentary, what's reality got to do with it? Your painting's great, Saff, but that's the minimal requirement.

SAFF

My paintings "great". That's a word you lot just say innit?

FIONNULA

You can't be seen and not heard. We need people to talk about you. Lots of people, not three hipsters in a cereal bar. You know Tracey Emin, right?

Saff pauses, smiles and lies.

SAFF

No.

FIONNULA

Well neither did anyone else before she got pissed on live TV. Now she's Professor of Drawing at the Royal Academy. You see what I'm saying?

As Fionnula hands Saff the second glass, the workers drop the painting with a CLATTER. Fionnula walks towards them.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Seriously? Are you a 1930's double act? If you've scratched my flooring I swear to God I'll scratch you!

INT. GALLERY - LATER

DOCUMENTARY POV: CU, Saff's face.

In the background we see and hear Fionnula still bollocking the workers.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

What do you think art is?

SAFF

I don't know... painting and
shit.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Okay... and are you excited about
the platform the gallery will
provide you? A springboard for
your career?

SAFF

Sure.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

And what are you working on now?

SAFF

What?

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

The painting that got you your
shot is going to be the
centerpiece for your exhibition.
So what's going to fill these
empty walls?

SAFF

Uhm, I hadn't really--

Fionnula approaches.

FIONNULA

That's an ongoing discussion,
we're not settled on any one
theme or philosophy yet.
Something that will develop the
themes explored in Saff's work up
to this point; isolation,
objectification, race.

SAFF

You what?

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Saff stands in front of a blank canvas. She sits and stares at it. She frowns. She coughs. She clears her throat and stretches her legs, grinds her teeth and scratches her arse, fidgets, fumbles, extends the brush but retracts it before making contact with the page.

She hasn't got a fucking clue.

SHORT CUTS as she flips between various means of procrastination, occasionally returning to the canvas before walking away again.

SAFF

(muttering)

Develop the other fucking themes explored...

MORE SHORT CUTS: Denial, anger, bargaining... she runs the full gamut before settling on a good old fashioned cry.

Phone buzzes. Saff greedily takes the call.

SAFF (CONT'D)

Hello, hi.

LOLA (V.O.)

Hey, how's the painting going?

SAFF

Yeah, good, good. Just about done for the night, I think. You coming round?

LOLA (V.O.)

I can't, I'm visiting my parents.

SAFF

Where are you? I can pick you up.

LOLA

Oh, it's quite far away.

SAFF

Right.

LOLA

(beat)

It's so great you're like a real artist now.

Saff stares at her blank canvas.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Saff sits sleepily in front of her painting. Across from her sits Yanara, awkwardly tapping her pen against her notepad. Silence. Fionnula sits slightly apart from them, glancing at each of them impatiently.

FIONNULA

(to Yanara)

Go ahead.

YANARA

(clears throat)

Art today - one may describe it in part as testing or expanding the preconceived boundaries of how far the artist can intentionally render the merging of themes and mediums in the evermore technologically symbiotic theater of modern life; subject and object laced together in a new link of the DNA chain of art-audience intersynergy, and indeed, split apart once more by the ostensibly arbitrary choices of the originator of the stimuli in question. With that being the case - why did you make it so orange?

A long silence. Saff looks at Yanara like she'd asked her if she ate babies.

SAFF

I'm sorry, the fuck did you just say?

YANARA

(laughs)

You're very forthright, aren't you? That's great.

FIONNULA

Refreshing, right? It's one of the reasons we were drawn to her.

(draws chair nearer)

Saff's a true original, free from the constraints imposed by boring industry jargon. In answer to your question, the complex gradation of hue on display in this piece is marked by an attraction to warmth, to rude health - to life. I don't mean to speak for her--

SAFF

Knock yourself out.

FIONNULA

It's about danger. It's a warning light, and an invitation at the same time, to a more visceral way of living, a rougher, more immediate, more real way to orient yourself in the world of the now, unburdened by the corruption of a more erudite philosophy.

SAFF

Can I go? You look like you've got this.

YANARA

(scribbling)

I'm sure you are very busy, I have just a couple more questions about you, I want to look at your backstory.

SAFF

You mean my life?

YANARA

Sure.

SAFF

I'm not sure what you want me to say.

YANARA

I suppose what I'm getting at -
can you share the difficulties,
the trauma you face in your life
that fuels your creative impulse?

SAFF

I mean, for me--

YANARA

I would imagine that the
discrimination you have
encountered in the past was a
very potent catalyst.

SAFF

The discr--

FIONNULA

I would say that in these
troubled times the question of
race is an ever present in any
artist's work, on some level.
Could be subconscious. Maybe
unconscious.

SAFF

(beat)

Please continue.

YANARA

No, I think that will do for the
moment. Thank you for your time.

INT. GALLERY - MOMENTS LATER

Saff rocks back and forth in her seat, restless.

SAFF

That was bad weren't it?

FIONNULA

It was fine. You did good.

SAFF

I don't think she liked me at
all.

FIONNULA

Trust me, it was good. You'll see
when the article comes out.

SAFF

How can you know that?

FIONNULA

Ever heard of sponsored content?

SAFF

Yeah..?

FIONNULA

I sponsored her. Hungry?

EXT. STREET - DAY

Fionnula and Saff amble along holding two small pita pockets.

SAFF

So you bribed her.

FIONNULA

"Bribed". This isn't the World Cup. I wanted to get you some good press. Good press is just another commodity, a service to be negotiated. Remember, you didn't exist until yesterday. No one knows if you're any good yet. That means we can just tell everyone you are. They appreciate the input, trust me.

(half-beat)

How's the oeuvre coming along?

SAFF

Not amazing. Nothing's really coming. I'm stuck.

FIONNULA

(shrugging)

No biggie. You can use the gallery if you fancy a change of scene.

SAFF

Thought you'd be more bothered.

FIONNULA

Meh. Something will come. Now - are you looking forward to your first big swanky artist's party?

SAFF

Mm. Probably give it a miss.

Fionnula stops in her tracks. Saff turns to look at her.

FIONNULA

You'll fucking what?

SAFF

Got to paint, innit?

FIONNULA

The paintings I can wait for. The interviews I can help with. But the parties are an essential component of your work, Saff. E-fucking-ssential.

SAFF

Are they?

FIONNULA

Jesus, the parties are like the synapses through which information passes. Information is attention, and I need you to grab a lot of it.

SAFF

Networking, man, it's not really my style.

FIONNULA

Your "style"?!?

SAFF

What's it got to do with the work?

FIONNULA

People can't be at galleries
twenty-four-seven. Their feet get
sore, they get thirsty, they
might bump into their spouses.
And when they're not at galleries
they're not looking at your art,
and if they're not looking at
your art, chances are they're not
talking about you. And we need
them to talk about you all the
time. This business is a monster.
It doesn't take weekends. It
doesn't sleep, it doesn't stay
in, it doesn't stop. It only
works if it's always...
happening. Take this pita
pocket--

SAFF

I was gonna ask if you wanted
mine.

FIONNULA

Take this pita pocket. Now cows -
there's no cows in this, but
imagine there is - if the farmer
woke up one day and said "I don't
really fancy killing any cows
today, I don't particularly enjoy
it, it's messy and morally
questionable, I'm not doing it"-
he does that just for one day,
then in forty-eight hours our
pockets would be empty and your
poor vendor there from Libya or
Yemen or wherever would be out of
business. You get it?

SAFF

Nah. That was a really tortured
analogy, I reckon.

FIONNULA

You're fucking going and that's
that.

They resumes walking.

SAFF (O.S.)

Eleven quid. Be out of business
soon anyway...

INT. GALLERY - DAY

DOCUMENTARY POV: the camera shuffles around a corner to get a peak at Saff at work in the middle of the gallery.

All we see is her back as she stands in front of a blank canvas, SWEARING under her breath.

She hears the cameraman COUGH, and turns around.

SAFF

Come on mate, give me some
privacy. Please.

(camera doesn't move)

I said keep walking!

The camera ducks behind the wall. After a moment we sneak around the corner again. Saff starts to turn again, and we retreat.

We turn the corner again, and see a BUCKET OF PAINT flying towards us.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Saff watches as the documentary crew scurries away with yells of protest, before turning back to the canvas.

Nothing is coming to her.

Jorja nearly slips in the puddle of red acrylic as she enters.

JORJA

Whoops! Saff! Saff!

SAFF

Alright?

JORJA

Have you seen it?

SAFF

What?

JORJA

Your article's out.

Jorja comes up to Saff with her phone out. Saff hesitates before peering fearfully at it. Her expression changes as she reads. A smile appears.

JORJA (CONT'D)

She knows what she's doing,
right?

SAFF

I guess she does.

JORJA

What happened here by the way? Is
it a Judy Chicago type thing?

INT. FIONNULA'S OFFICE - DAY

Fionnula leans towards her intercom.

FIONNULA

You write very well. Or at least
you quote very well.

YANARA

Thank you. Make sure and tell
Harry I said thank you too.

FIONNULA

Will do.

YANARA

You're right you know. She is
refreshing.

FIONNULA

That's one word for it.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Saff takes a hearty bite out of a fresh pita pocket. She
seems to enjoy it a lot more now as she walks down the street
with a skip in her step.

FIONNULA (V.O.)

(still talking to
Yanara)

She does the job.

EXT. STREET - DAY

GREG'S CAMERA POV: Saff viewed from a distance in a shaky
handheld shot.

YANARA (V.O.)

It's all any of us can do.

FIONNULA (V.O.)

Yeah.

The camera is turned to see where she's walking from; Fionnula's gallery.

CU on Rina looking confused.

INT. GALLERY - NIGHT

DOCUMENTARY POV: Saff splashes paint all over the canvas; fearless, unhesitating.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Can we take a look?

SAFF

Sure, man, go ahead.

The camera peers at the unfinished work; a mess of colours, much like her other painting.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

(unsure)

What, uhm, what does it represent?

SAFF

Well you know, it builds upon the themes I wrestle with in the first painting. Live fast, don't die and all that. See how I'm grading the, uhm, hues? You look at it and it's like boom! Know what I'm saying? I might prefer this one actually. Fionnula! What d'you think? Better than the first one?

Fionnula comes into shot, all dressed up for the evening.

FIONNULA

Ready to go?

SAFF

Yeah.

Saff and Fionnula start to walk out; Fionnula turns and realises the camera is still following them.

FIONNULA

(sly laugh)

No, no, no. This you don't get to see.

She bats the camera away. The women laugh as they head off.

EXT. GALLERY - NIGHT

Fionnula digs into her pocket as they walk out of the front door. She pulls out a baggie and a key. She takes a hearty sniff of the contents.

FIONNULA

You fancy a bit?

SAFF

(taking the baggie)

Yeah man.

FIONNULA

Okay, just be careful. Don't go psycho on me tonight.

SAFF

(rolling her eyes)

Right, the rich white lady's giving out drug warnings. I've had it before, girl.

FIONNULA

(while Saff sniffs)

Yes but have you ever had rich white people's drugs before?

SAFF

(head jolts up)

Wwwhhoo!

FIONNULA

Right?

(manic scream)

Taxi!!

SERIES OF SHOTS FOLLOW OF SAFF'S FACE WHILE THE BACKGROUND MORPHS/CUTS FROM TAXI SEAT TO STREET TO RESTAURANTS, BARS, CLUBS, PENTHOUSES, FLATS; ANYWHERE LONDON ART PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE SOME FUN TOGETHER. TIME SEEMS TO SPEED UP AND SLOW DOWN IRREGULARLY, AND IT'S HARD TO KNOW HOW MUCH OF IT HAS REALLY PASSED.

SAFF LOOKS INCREASINGLY DISORIENTED AND WIGGED OUT AS WE PROGRESS. THE HANDS OF STRANGERS REACH OUT TOWARDS HER WITH GLASSES OF CHAMPAGNE, MORSELS OF FOOD, DRUGS, AND SOMETIMES JUST TO STROKE HER.

ALL THE WHILE FIONNULA'S DISEMBODIED VOICE RATTLES OUT AT WARP SPEED.

FIONNULA (V.O.)

So these are the rules of the game right? Right?

SAFF (V.O.)

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

FIONNULA

Above all else, if anyone asks you if you know such-and-such, or you're familiar with the work of X, Y or Z, you say yes. Doesn't matter if you are or not, no one's gonna, like, cross-reference the witness, you know? If you don't know someone it means they probably don't know you, and we don't want to give people the impression that you're unknown, it'll make them feel confident around you.

SAFF

Yeah, course, yeah. Yeah.

FIONNULA

Don't worry, nobody knows everyone. Except maybe Harry. Anyway, just say yes and wait to hear what is said about them. If the person you're talking to is important they'll probably say they hate the person they're talking about. If they're not important, they'll say they love

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

them, they're a genius, blah blah
blah, because they might end up
wanting to work with them one
day. If you get the chance you
should try to disagree with an
unimportant person in front of an
important person to make them
look small and ignorant while
giving yourself the appearance of
integrity. You still with me?
Here.

SAFF

(sniffs)

Ohw! Small, ignorant, integrity.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FIONNULA

You know I know this business
inside-fucking-out, yeah?

SAFF

Yeah Fi, I do--

FIONNULA

One thing I've learned. There's
only one force in the world,
Saffy. It's not power. It's not
love and it's not beauty and it's
not the human spirit. It's not
even money. There is only
attention. The rest will follow.

SAFF

I'm mashed up, man.

FIONNULA

Also, last thing - it's a party.
Enjoy yourself.

INT. FLAT - NIGHT

Saff comes out of her revelry in some flat, at some party, at
some late hour of the night.

The party seems to be nearing an end; the few remaining
guests lie scattered across couches and cushions, smoking and
mumbling nonsense.

SAFF

Where the fuck am I?

She stands up, makes to leave, when MILO KROL (50) crosses her path, and she nearly knocks his phone out of his hand.

MILO

Jesus Christ!

SAFF

Sorry.

She tries to get past.

MILO

Stop. Don't move. I know you.
You're Fionnula's new girl,
aren't you. Milo Krol, curator.

He stretches out a hand. Saff shakes it limply, pretty tweaked.

SAFF

I'm familiar with your work.

MILO

How did we end up here, huh?
You're the only real person I've
seen since I've arrived. I can't
turn around without some
obsequious Islingtonian asking
for a leg up in what they have
the good humour to call their
"career". Should've stayed at
Maalik's place.

SAFF

I'm familiar with his work.

MILO

I read about your upcoming show.
The pre-estimates, for a
newcomer, are almost unheard of.

MILO (CONT'D)

You're one to watch.

SAFF

I'm in a documentary.

MILO

Oh good for you! So many eyes on you already. I'll be very interested in seeing how it all plays out. The next big thing, perhaps. Maybe I'll be able to tell people I was there before she broke audience attendance records at the National, when she was just a little girl with a big appetite...

(looking at Saff's
sweaty face)

maybe too big, no?

SAFF

Quality.

MILO

What was that?

SAFF

Quality. Not quantity.

MILO

Cocaine, dear?

SAFF

Audience.

MILO

You're absolutely right. It makes me so glad to hear it! Of course, sophisticated work cannot exist without sophisticated viewing. Or at least agreeable viewing. The Oak Tree.

SAFF

What?

MILO

The Oak Tree. Martin, 1973. A glass of water on a shelf above a page of text in which the artist explains that he has transformed said glass of water into a mighty oak tree. Genius! So insightful. He meant it not metaphorically or ironically, he literally changed the glass of water into a tree without changing any of its contingent properties at all! Such a breakthrough would be impossible without an agreeable and sympathetic audience. They allowed him to do the impossible. His art was made real. Of course, it was all somewhat undermined when it didn't get through Australian customs checks and he had to confess that it wasn't really an oak tree.

SAFF

That is just... total bullshit.

MILO

I like you Saff. Wren will adore you.

SAFF

Who the fuck is Wren?

EZRA (O.S.)

Hasn't Fionnula taught you anything? You never ask "who". Amateurs.

Ezra stands in the open doorway. Clearly drunk.

SAFF

Are you talking to me?

MILO

Well if that isn't just the final nail in this party's bastard coffin. Truly we stand at the last port in the storm if you've washed up here.

EZRA

Saff, isn't it?

SAFF

And you are?

MILO

An anachronism.

EZRA

I'm you in about a month.

He staggers towards her.

SAFF

Sorry. I've had some drugs. Did I do something to piss you off?

EZRA

You know. Stole my life. No big thing.

SAFF

Oh. Sorry.

EZRA

She's sorry. She's sorry, everyone!

SAFF

You alright mate?

EZRA

No. No.

MILO

You replaced him. At the gallery. Everyone agrees an upgrade.

EZRA

Apparently technical skill and formal education are now seen as hindrances in our line of work. What people really want is optic vomit from some girl out in the Styx that a fucking drunk seahorse with multiple sclerosis could recreate.

SAFF

Alright, settle down. Sorry I took your gig, man, but you keep chatting shit and you're gonna get a slap--

EZRA

Ohh I am terrified. Go on then.

MILO

Good God.

EZRA

No really go on. Go on. Plant one on me, fam.

Saff doesn't move.

EZRA (CONT'D)

You're no artist. You're a mule. Hee-haw! You don't even know it yet but these people, your new friends, they look at you and they see a patsy. You'll see. They'll tell you you're this wonderful new undiscovered planet but you are unimaginably tiny in this fucking awful universe you've stumbled into. And when this little donkey has faithfully carried her masters to their next destination, they're gonna tie you to a post and leave you to the jackals. You are nothing more than a cheap trick--

She sticks a solid head into Ezra's face. He falls backwards, nose busted. Everyone gasps, horrified.

A beat, before Milo bursts into laughter and applause.

MILO

Oh bravo! Good show!

Everyone soon joins in.

Ezra crawls away, miserable, blood dripping from his nose.

INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

A drunk middle-aged man laughs idiotically while he crawls around the floor to the amusement of younger, trendier onlookers.

Fionnula steps over him on the phone. She's wired and paranoid, but switched on.

FIONNULA

Jorja? Jorja! Don't you dare yawn at me, we are at Defcon nine over here. Everyone at this party is asking where my hot new artist is and my hot new artist has pissed off! She's not answering my calls so get out of bed and provide me assurance that I'm not just paying you to balls up my coffee order. Come do something!

Hanging up, Fionnula wanders by a gaggle of artists hunched over a table. She stands awkwardly behind them, unsure how to insert herself within their group.

Her phone rings. She answers hastily.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Jorja?

HARRY (V.O.)

That's right, it's me Jorja. I've finally figured out how what the little shapes on my keyboard are and I couldn't wait to tell you.

FIONNULA

What do you want?

HARRY (V.O.)

Christ, look at you. Were you like this in school? Standing around waiting for a dance with one of the cool kids you did the homework for?

FIONNULA

Speaking of schools, you still have your old top hat with your name sewn in?

HARRY

Don't forget the cravat. Would you like to stop pretending you're one of them and join me at the adults' table? Got someone here who wants to meet you.

Fionnula turns to spot Harry and Hettie sat behind a stupidly opulent chaise longue, upon which reclines THE SHEIKH (mid-30s), his belly tightly packed into his traditional clothing.

Harry turns away, smirking, to resume a conversation with a young lady with short blue hair and several piercings. Hettie is, as usual, glued to her phone. Fionnula approaches.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(over shoulder)

Oh, Fionnula, let me introduce His Excellency, Sheikh Maalik bin Hassan Al Ihab. He's an art fan.

MAALIK

Yes, and Brian Epstein was a "fan" of the Beatles.

FIONNULA

Thank you for the invitation. This place is spectacular.

MAALIK

It was very expensive. I am not even staying very long.

FIONNULA

Alright.

(beat)

Congratulations by the way. I read about all the work you're doing to bring contemporary culture to the masses back home.

MAALIK

(chuckles)

The masses. Yes.

(beat)

I was just saying to Harry,

(glances up at

Harry's back)

how eager I was to meet this new artist you have managed to secure. Wasn't I? Harry?

HARRY

What? Yeah.

Maalik appears not to notice Harry's lack of interest in him. Fionnula does.

MAALIK

(beat)

Did you see the man crawling
along the floor earlier doing the
amusing mime with the Dom
Perignon bottle and his rear end?

FIONNULA

I did. Hysterical.

MAALIK

You know who that was?

FIONNULA

Yes. I heard his comeback album
is expected to blow our
collective beans.

MAALIK

I am told he is selling his
Banksy collection. Says he wants
to free up funds to invest in up-
and-coming new talent.

FIONNULA

Good for him.

MAALIK

I think maybe he is just worried
about his current cash flow more
than championing the next
generation. Champagne sodomy
isn't cheap.

FIONNULA

Is it not?

MAALIK

Bad investments I hear. Hence the
album, hence the jumble sale. Art
and money, they are both slippery
assets. Very difficult to know
when you have it, or what to do
with it. They both share a
requirement for trustworthy
people around you. I pride myself
on my capacity to draw such
people to me. Isn't that right,
Ms Aleppo?

HETTIE

(not looking up)

You certainly do.

MAALIK

You know, since I accepted this position as Minister for Culture I have noticed a surge in the acceptance of invitations to the great and good of this wonderful city to join my little get-togethers.

FIONNULA

Well they do hate missing out.

MAALIK

Anyone who's anyone wants to be here.

FIONNULA

Okay.

MAALIK

So what did I do to offend your diamond in the rough?

FIONNULA

Nothing, I'm sure--

MAALIK

Only I would very much like to meet her you see. The idea that the next big thing is out there instead of in here... makes me uncomfortable.

FIONNULA

What can I say? She likes it out there. But she'll come around.

MAALIK

I am told she is very extraordinary.

FIONNULA

Who said that?

HARRY

Both Hettie and I... we see a lot of promise.

Fionnula glances at Hettie, who gives a small, near imperceptible nod.

FIONNULA

Well, she is exactly the new voice we've all been yearning for. She's a one-off. If you'll pardon my candor, she's the tits.

MAALIK

I see.

FIONNULA

Obviously, Your Excellency, you are not the only person, or even the first, to have caught on to the waves Saff is making. If you want her work, the competition will be fierce.

MAALIK

(laughs)

I understand. And this "competition"... are they also backed by the wealth of an entire nation?

FIONNULA

Maybe we'll find out at auction.

MAALIK

In my country, it is considered the highest honour to serve the state. My family has done so for generations. Now it is my turn, and I intend to carry out my duty on the very grandest of scales.

FIONNULA

What were you thinking? Like a raffle or something?

Harry smirks.

MAALIK

A festival. A celebration of art across the world, freed from the perverse controls imposed by Western sequestering and financial centralization. Miss Aleppo has been invaluable in aiding me source the finest pieces to be transported to our holdings.

HETTIE

Not invaluable. We landed on a number in the end.

MAALIK

I believe they should be arriving any day now--

HETTIE

Absolutely.

Fionnula gives Hettie another glance.

MAALIK

I will create a literal oasis in the desert, the new frontier for human creativity and beauty. I will put a flag in the ground. My flag. When people - "real" people - think of my country, they will think of it alongside London, Paris, New York, Tokyo. The next forward thinking, cultural titan.

HARRY

Plus the family has decided it wouldn't hurt "image-wise" to flog some paintings by someone of African heritage - considering all the recent, y'know, blah blah blahs against humanity and slavey such-and-such alleged to have taken place during the development of said festival.

MAALIK

Typical ignorant Englishman. That was mostly Indians.

The same lackey that approached Hettie in the bar appears at the Sheikh's side. The Sheikh nods imperiously at him, and the lackey whispers in his ear.

MAALIK (CONT'D)

(to Fionnula)

There is someone outside who is demanding to see you.

FIONNULA

Demanding?

MAALIK

Quite stridently.

FIONNULA

That might be her. I'll just go let her know about the crude oil Coachella thing.

Fionnula marches away with the Lackey. Maalik turns to Hettie.

MAALIK

I like her.

HETTIE

You did invite her.

MAALIK

Based on the recommendation of a trusted source.

HETTIE

I'm flattered.

MAALIK

Now about the pieces I purchased--

HETTIE

(standing up)

Excuse me I've got to take this.

EXT. HOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

Fionnula steps out of the building and stops on the steps, face falling.

FIONNULA

Oh no, no, no, no.

SEB

Just another party I was never invited to?

He looks tired, tipsy and upset.

FIONNULA

No, no, no.

SEB

If I had a penny for every time you said that to me.

FIONNULA

You shouldn't be here.

SEB

I got an early flight back. I've come straight from the airport.

FIONNULA

No I mean you shouldn't be *here*. You're wasted.

SEB

Alright. Not straight from the airport.

(half a beat)

I want my money back.

FIONNULA

Not a chance.

Seb gets right up in Fionnula's face.

SEB

Four thousand pounds on an eight inch sculpture of a sandstone phallus, complete with a cubic zirconia Prince Albert. And that's just the start. My storage unit looks like a coral reef of cock. And then you let him go anyway because some unseen, omniscient force has decreed he's not worth the price of the plaster of Paris his pricks are painted on.

FIONNULA

Did you practice that?

SEB

Get me my money back, Fi.

FIONNULA

You know that's not going to happen. Did you seriously cut your trip short just to waste your time and spoil my night?

A second passes before Seb's resolve crumbles. He tries to kiss Fionnula and she slaps him.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Never do that again.

Fionnula starts to walk back up the stairs.

SEB

I love you!

FIONNULA

Then don't. Just stop. It's easy.

She shuts the door behind her.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

After much jangling of keys, Saff manages to get her door open.

LOLA (O.S.)

Where have you been?

Lola sits up on Saff's bed, furious. Saff's not in the mood. She lands on the bed and crawls into some covers

SAFF

Come here.

LOLA

Don't you dare. Oh my God, you stink!

Lola turns to sit with her legs over the edge of the bed, back to Saff.

SAFF

(turning into her
pillow)

Fuck off then.

LOLA

I haven't seen you in days.

SAFF

Working.

LOLA

You've been getting trolled.

SAFF

"Trolled". What even are you?

LOLA

I fucking hate this! I hate you when you're like this! Where are you going?

SAFF

(getting up)

Can't be arsed with this bullshit.

LOLA

Go ahead then, go shack up with one of your new friends--

SAFF

Shut up! I'm not cheating on you, you idiot.

LOLA

Oh I'm an idiot?

SAFF

Yeah, you are. I mean if one of us is--

LOLA

What? Go on.

SAFF

(shrugs)

Never did say how you met that dickhead Harry.

LOLA

Oh my God, what are you talking about? Aren't you forgetting something? I like girls if you didn't notice.

SAFF

Yeah, sure you do, love.

LOLA

What's that supposed to mean?

SAFF

Sure you're not just passing through? Like a gap year or something?

Lola SCREAMS childishly. Saff winces at the noise; the night she's had is getting the better of her. She wanders up to Lola.

LOLA

Fuck you! Why don't you just get out of my life! What's happened to you? You're the most horrible, arrogant, conceited--

SAFF

Sh-sh-shh.

LOLA

Get off!

After some resistance, puts her arms around her and holds her tight. Lola sobs quietly into her chest. Saff lies them both back on the bed, spooning, resting her chin on Lola's shoulder.

HARRY (V.O.)

People like to say, don't they, oh that's a Basquiat, that's a this, that's a that. If they can do that it means they're "in on it".

LOLA

I fucking hate you.

SAFF

Stop it. Here, look.

HARRY (V.O.)

Makes them feel sophisticated, to know the artist's name. And to be so learned in this, the most refined of status signifiers, that they are comfortable to identify the picture as the artist, one and the same. A badge of savoir vivre.

Saff reaches out for Lola's phone. She takes a selfie of the pair. Lola tries to stay mad, before fixing her face, then Saff's.

LOLA

There, do it now.

Picture taken, they lie together, Lola placated by the photo of her trophy.

HARRY (V.O.)

And if the picture is the artist, the artist is the picture right? The artist is the badge.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Saff and Fionnula stand side by side, shouting at the workers as they prepare the installations for Saff's exhibition.

SAFF

No not there, there! Come on man!

FIONNULA

Yes and anytime before the year 2040 would be just grand thank you!

SAFF

Are they part of some employment initiative?

FIONNULA

Yeah, them plus Jorja make up my designated quota for fucking invalids.

Saff laughs.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

You cranked these out in a hurry.
Are you confident in them?
There's still time if you don't
feel--

SAFF

Nah. Nah they're perfect. Just
need to make sure we put them in
sequence to have the right effect
on customers.

(beat)

The audience.

FIONNULA

There could be a line out the
door. I can't look at my phone
without reading some article
talking about what a badass you
are.

SAFF

Word travels, dunnit?

FIONNULA

To be fair I think headbutting
your predecessor would make waves
in any line of work. Only
difference is here you don't get
fired.

SAFF

You get gassed up.

FIONNULA

(beat)

Ever thought about changing your
name?

SAFF

Can honestly say it never
occurred to me.

FIONNULA

Might be an idea. Something about
more African-y.

Saff can't quite believe what she is hearing, but is spared
answering by the arrival of the film crew.

DIRECTOR

Are you done with her? We called
dibs.

SAFF

I'm right here.

FIONNULA

(to Director)

Yeah she's all yours.

SAFF

Oi! What's going on?

FIONNULA

I told the crew you'd show them
where you grew up.

SAFF

Why?

FIONNULA

To see how far you've come.

SAFF

Do I have to?

FIONNULA

(sarcastic as hell)

No.

EXT. STREET - DAY

DOCUMENTARY POV: Fionnula trudges moodily through the streets
of her hometown.

DIRECTOR

And how would you describe this
place, Saff? In a word?

SAFF

Nondescript.

DIRECTOR

Uh-huh. Has it changed a lot
since you grew up here, Saff? Are
people more tolerant?

Her only response is to narrow her eyes and turn away.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

What's that there?

The camera turns to focus on a large public building.

SAFF

That's the old community center.
I used to go there.

DIRECTOR

Did you like it?

SAFF

Yeah it was alright you know.
Round the side there, my mate
sprayed up the wall when we was
younger. It was a bit shit but we
thought it was an absolute piece
at the time. A police officer was
walking by, and he chased us.
Caught us obviously. We had to
pay a fine. I didn't do none of
the graffiti but I chipped in
anyway. That's when we became a
collective.

She lets out a small laugh.

DIRECTOR

What's funny?

SAFF

I used to pay to do the thing I'm
getting paid to do. Just makes
you thi--

DIRECTOR

Why do you think the officer
happened to be walking by? Could
it really be a coincidence?

TOMMY (O.S.)

Oh my days.

GREG'S CAMERA POV: Saff and crew turn their heads as Tommy
and Rina approach ahead of Greg.

SAFF

Alright?

TOMMY

What you doing round here?

Saff squints at him, trying to get a handle on the situation.

SAFF

How's things, Rina?

RINA

Pfft! Don't flatter yourself.

SAFF

What?

TOMMY

So what you saying? You doing a spot for Sport Relief or sumthink?

SAFF

Don't start, alright.

DIRECTOR

Do you know each other?

TOMMY

A previous incarnation, yeah.

POV SWITCHES BETWEEN DOCUMENTARY AND GREG CAMERAS: SAFF AND HER FRIENDS EYE EACH OTHER UP, TENSE.

TOMMY

You should go.

SAFF

Yeah? Make me.

RINA

You don't belong here anymore.
You're with them.

SAFF

(aggressive)

What? What? I'm with who? I'm making money and I'm getting noticed, oh big whatever. My work is getting noticed, and whether you admit it or not you would all kill to be seen for a change. Are you seriously gonna be jealous of me right now?

TOMMY

I don't see nothing to be jealous about. You think these people here, you think they're impressed by you? They're just working for the man, same as you. They don't believe in you any more than you do yourself. You're a sellout, bro.

SAFF

Yeah, so's my show, cunt. I'm shining a light on my world, don't think you're more real than me just cause ain't no cameras follow you around. No one else does. I'm real as it comes.

TOMMY

How's Home County?

SAFF

How should I know?

TOMMY

Don't tell me she's binned you.

SAFF

Don't know what you're talking about, I'm not going with her.

TOMMY

(laughing)

Why are you lying, bruv?

Rina pulls out her phone and throws it to Saff. She catches it and looks: the SELFIE of Lola and Saff in bed. Her friends break into laughter,

RINA

You're a trophy wife, innit.

TOMMY

You've been rumbled. Oh my days. That's embarrassing.

Saff stares at the picture, humiliated.

GREG (O.S.)

Saff, I can't help noticing your pupils in that picture. You know just because you're an establishment shill now doesn't mean you have to go somewhere else for your gear-- ow!

Saff throws the phone at Greg's camera, hitting Greg and sending both to the floor. From this angle we see Saff walking away, past the film crew, who are clearly ecstatic to have caught the exchange.

TOMMY

Aw. where you going? You gotta pick her up from Hogwarts or something? Saff!

DIRECTOR

This is fucking fantastic.

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

Ezra rounds off the corner of a block of wood with a SMALL MARKING KNIFE. Both eyes are black and his nose is red and swollen.

He stops as he hears COUGHING from beyond the walls, letting out a snort of frustration. When the noise has stopped he continues his delicate work.

The COUGHING starts up again, making him start, and slice his thumb. He throws the wood to the floor in anger.

We see he is surrounded by the pieces he thought he had sold. He stares at the knife while he sucks his thumb.

EXT. STREET BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

Lola looks nervous as she walks down to meet Saff, who leans on the wall.

LOLA

God, couldn't you have chosen somewhere a bit nicer to meet?

(waggles phone)

I've had 999 locked and loaded since New Cross Gate.

Saff snatches the phone and flings it away.

LOLA

What the fuck did you do that for?

SAFF

Dunno. Artistic temperament, I guess. Those pictures. Delete 'em.

LOLA

What pictures?

SAFF

Them pictures of you on fucking safari. I ain't your trophy. I ain't your ticket to some dizzy notion you've got in your head about credibility, neither. We're done.

LOLA

(beat)

I think you're the most arrogant person I ever met in my life. What exactly is credible about you, Saff? The lovely little articles your boss bribes journalists to write? Getting a gig in a gallery because of who you're sleeping with? Or breaking a guy's nose for the entertainment of some crusty old curator? Is that what you are - entertainment? A distraction? And you think I'm the one who's using you?

SAFF

Just delete the pictures.

Saff starts to walk away.

LOLA

Fuck you! I wish I never helped you in the first place! You've turned into a total fucking bitch!

SAFF

I don't care the least what you think about me. I'm the most interesting person in town. And you read poetry in basements.

Saff starts to walk away. Lola chases after her, grabbing her arm.

LOLA

Please don't do this.

SAFF

Get off me!

Saff shoves Lola away.

SAFF (CONT'D)

You're mad.

Lola shoves her back.

LOLA

I love you!

SAFF

Get away!

More shoves turn into a TUSSLE.

LOLA

You're not leaving me!

SAFF

Oh, fuck off, Home County!

With one last hard push, she sends Lola staggering...

She trips over the wall and out of sight with a splash.

Saff doesn't move for a moment.

Then she shuffles to the wall and peers over the edge.

Nothing but black water.

Saff looks one way, then the other.

She walks down the street, before deciding to walk, then to run again.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Saff moving fast down the pavement, breathing heavy, panicked...

A CAR zooms by, making her leap out of her skin...

She squats down, covering her mouth as she SCREAMS...

She zooms up the STAIRS to her door...

The DOOR is slammed shut behind her. We hear the lock click.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Saff paces around her flat, in the throes of a fully fledged panic attack. A hoarse, primal sobbing pours out of her as she drops to the foot of the bed, cowering, hands in her arms...

She looks up.

Tear tracks linger on her face, but no fresh drops follow as she stares...

Her empty canvas stares back at her.

She walks up to it, grabbing a brush. She seems hesitant, as though considering whether or not it would be wrong...

She attacks the canvas with renewed fervour and focus.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Saff stands back to admire her labour. It doesn't look much different to her first piece.

It seems to have affected her, however. She seems quite peaceful. In fact, she smiles.

EXT. GALLERY - DAY

Exhibition day.

A small QUEUE is already beginning to form out the door. Everyone looks very rich and pleased to be there.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Fionnula stands in the middle of the room like a ringmaster in a PRISTINE WHITE DRESS, her subordinates scurrying around her.

FIONNULA

Jorja. Jorja! W- Hey, you!

One of her workers freezes next to the display of Saff's first painting.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Get away from that!

The worker cautiously reverses and takes a longer route around the painting.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Jorja! More glasses, Jorja! And more booze! This isn't a forum for the fucking Latter Day Saints, go find some Moet!

JORJA (O.S.)

Yes, Fionnula.

FIONNULA

And find that bloody artist of mine too!

SAFF (O.S.)

I'm here, I'm here.

FIONNULA

Thank God! Where have you b--

Fionnula turns around to find Saff holding her new painting out to her.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

What's that?

SAFF

It's the best thing I've ever done. Fionnula, this here is some real art. It's big.

FIONNULA

Yeah it is.

SAFF

Yeah, that too. I want it to be
the central exhibit.

FIONNULA

No.

(turning away)

You, put that down before I
murder your family, take this and
find a place for it.

Another worker approaches to take the painting from Saff.

SAFF

No! You're not listening--

JORJA

(approaches holding
phone)

Fionnula--

FIONNULA

(to Saff)

We have a central exhibit. You
might notice, over there, in the
centre.

(to Jorja)

Not now.

SAFF

This is so much more than what I
did before. I've evolved, I've
grown, this marks my coming of
age, Fi-

FIONNULA

The answer's no.

JORJA

He says it's urgent--

SAFF

This is bullshit! It's my
exhibition and under my
instruction! You know what I've
had to go through to get to this?

FIONNULA

Who says what's urgent?

(to Saff)

It may be under your instruction
but you are under my instruction.
You signed a contract, Saff.
Don't push this, you won't like
what happens.

SAFF

Where's Harry?

FIONNULA

Harry can't help you, nor is he
inclined to.

JORJA

He really is insisting on
speaking to you.

FIONNULA

And fuck you, Harry can't tell me
to do anything. He's a go-between
nothing-merchant with all the
creative spark of a corner shop
Zippo. Jorja--

SAFF

I don't believe this man! You
know you are so full of shit,
acting like you know the first
thing about this stuff! You're
blind! I'm giving you...
Guernica, yeah? And you want to
hide it in the backroom because,
when put on the spot, it's clear
you don't have a clue what
opinion you're supposed have on
it, because really you don't have
any opinions. No insight, no
talent or appreciation, you just
make safe bets and hope you don't
ruffle any feathers--

FIONNULA

The central exhibit is already
decided because the central
exhibit has already been bought.

SAFF

(beat)

What?

Fionnula, cold and angry, walks up to talk in Saff's ear.

FIONNULA

It was bought before you ever walked through my doors. You reckon you've come of age? It's time mammy told you the facts of life. You remember me telling you art is money?

VARIOUS SHOTS OF THE ART FANS CHATTING AND LAUGHING, ENJOYING THEMSELVES.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

I have a client. A big client. A loyal client. That is a precious, precious thing. It's a relationship I work hard to maintain. If there's something he wants, I will do everything in my power to get it for him. The latest thing he wants is, well, a nobody. That's you. Someone he can invest in, for a future pay off. You're a rising star, Saff, no doubt about that. We're counting on it. The reason we can't have this as the main attraction today is because we haven't promoted it. Remember what I told you about attention? It's all on that painting there, that is going to be your Guernica. Lots of people are going to look at it today, but only one person has a chance of owning it. And once everyone knows he has it, he'll keep it, for years if he has to. Don't worry, you'll still get to see it, we'll probably store it in the warehouse here, until you, my friend, are the biggest name in contemporary art. And then, he's going to gift it.

SAFF

Gift it?

WE SEE MILO NODDING ABSENTLY AS SOMEONE TALKS TO HIM, SIPPING HIS CHAMPAGNE.

FIONNULA

You met Milo Krol, didn't you? Like myself he shares a close working partnership with this client. Once the painting's value has shot to the moon, a few million, say - we really do have faith in you - my client will donate it to Milo's museum as a "cultural gift". This is an act of generosity looked upon very favourably by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. The estimate value of the gift can then be deducted from, say... inheritance tax?

BACK TO FIONNULA.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

And just like that my client has a much improved relationship with his two children, which makes him happy, which makes me happy. And you. You're being groomed for greatness, Saff. You're the safe bet. It's an old move. It's what happens.

Before Saff can respond, Fionnula reaches out a hand to Jorja, who awkwardly gives her the phone. Fionnula turns away, before calling over her shoulder.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

Crew's waiting for you in my office. Break a leg.

Saff can't hide her emotions. The worker eases the painting out of her limp hands, and pops it down against the wall.

We follow Fionnula walking away, phone to her ear.

FIONNULA (CONT'D)

You've reached Fionnula Faye.

SEB (V.O.)

Don't hang up.

FIONNULA

Oh you must be joking.

SEB (V.O.)

Just give me one minute, I really, really need to tell you something.

FIONNULA

Okay, day for home truths is it? Seb, it's over, it never began, there is no "it"--

SEB (V.O.)

Are you feeling okay?

FIONNULA

You're asking if I'm feeling okay?

SEB (V.O.)

Seriously, are-

FIONNULA

Look, stop it. You were a distraction. A minor one, that proved less and less amusing in direct correlation to your declining relevance. You do absolutely nothing for me.

SEB (V.O.)

Fionnula, PLEASE--

(breaks off coughing)

Something really bad might be on its way--

FIONNULA

Goodbye, Seb. And stop trying to smoke. You're an old man.

(hangs up)

Jorja!

(Jorja scurries near)

What the hell is wrong with you?

JORJA

You tell me.

FIONNULA

That was Seb. Why would you let that psycho through to me? He stalked me last night.

JORJA

Did he? I thought he was still in
Shanghai.

INT. FIONNULA'S OFFICE - DAY

DOCUMENTARY POV: CU, SAFF'S FACE.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)

(beat)

How are you feeling?

(no answer)

The world sees your work today.

SAFF

Yeah.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)

It must have taken a lot from you
to get here.

SAFF

I guess.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)

What's left?

SAFF

I'm not sure. Maybe nothing.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)

You feel like there's no one left
around you?

SAFF

Around who?

DIRECTOR (V.O.)

(beat)

Okay, I think we've got it.

DOCUMENTARY POV ends as the camera is lowered. The director
ushers the crew out of the door before turning back to Saff.

DIRECTOR

Since we ain't sticking around to
film another boring-ass
exhibition I guess this is
goodbye.

SAFF

Got everything you need?

DIRECTOR

Sure. Everything we're gonna get anyway. Dunno what the boss is gonna think of it.

SAFF

Good luck.

DIRECTOR

(beat)

You know what I'm really curious about? Who would even wanna watch it in the first place? I can't imagine it's the kinda thing that most people would care to look at. All this, it's too far removed from what normal people care about. You guys aren't normal. Seems to me it's the last thing you'd wanna be, too. So really, we've been making a documentary about you that can only be watched by you, and people who wanna be you. Like an instruction manual or something.

Saff almost laughs at this.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Anyway. We've done what we can. Art is horseshit. I mean my God is it dull. Good luck out there, kid.

SAFF

Cheers.

Jorja pokes her head through the door as the Director leaves.

JORJA

They're ready for you.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

APPLAUSE rings out from the gathered spectators as Fionnula, beaming, makes way for Saff by her painting in the middle of the room.

SAFF

Thank you.

Saff looks around; among the faces there she sees Milo, winking at her; Yanara, doodling away in a notepad; Hettie typing on her Blackberry; Fionnula, stock-still.

SAFF (CONT'D)

Uhm... I don't really...

The silence starts to get uncomfortable. Saff looks at the floor.

SAFF (CONT'D)

Words aren't really my forte...

As Saff tries to get some words out, we see TWO BARE FEET slap across the floor from the entrance.

First one head turns to look, then two, then a bunch. MURMURING rises from the audience, and Saff looks up to see...

Ezra, naked, wild-eyed, holding his little carving knife by his side. Everyone is rather taken aback. Unsure if this is part of the show or not, they part to let him through.

EZRA

Impostors.

FIONNULA

Ezra.

EZRA

Look at you all. You're wearing so many masks you can't remember what you used to look like. Duped by swindlers. No. Not duped. You're all willing accomplices. You don't know any better. How could you? You've never seen anything else. Anything earnest or honest. Anything real. What happened to us? We've become stale, inverted, ingrown, inbred sybarites. We've gone on so long we can't even remember if we're doing it ironically or not. There's nowhere else for us to go, so we just rehash and repeat the same old schtick, and

EZRA (CONT'D)

everyone's just too scared to buck the trend. That's why no one can have an honest reaction to anything anymore. How far do we have to go to feel something again? To feel alive?

FIONNULA

Ezra!

EZRA

Maybe, to feel truly alive, the only thing left to do is die...

SAFF

Bloody hell, that's a jump.

FIONNULA

Okay, come on.

EZRA

Stay back!

He wields the knife, keeping everyone at bay.

FIONNULA

Woah, okay. Okay.

EZRA

You will listen. You will LISTEN TO ME--

TOMMY (O.S.)

Right, every cunt shut up and listen, alright?

Ezra is stopped in his tracks as everyone's attention is diverted once more.

Tommy, Rina and Greg run into the gallery.

TOMMY

Right, we've got something to say to all you imposto- Jesus, what's going on here?

They are knocked off their stride when they see Ezra.

FIONNULA

Oh now come on, really!

SAFF

What are you doing here?

TOMMY

We're here to educate you on real expression.

RINA

We're here to fuck shit up.

TOMMY

That's right.

MILO

Oh, yawn. Spare us, please.

GREG

Cram it, Yentob! We're here to fuck shit up.

MILO

Go on then.

They fall silent, and look around, shrugging, at a loss.

GREG

Go on then.

TOMMY

What d'you mean go on, you go on.

GREG

(gesturing camera)

I'm holding this, ain't I?

TOMMY

Well I don't see why I--

Rina walks over to Saff's newest painting, and SMASHES it off the wall. The audience cries out in protest.

EZRA

Hey! What are you all doing? I am in the middle of a performance!

JORJA

Call the police.

SAFF

What did you do that for, man?

TOMMY

It's just art, mate, we don't expect you to understand.

Arguments and general hubbub break out everywhere, as Saff argues with the collective, Ezra with Fionnula; all the while Yanara scribbles notes.

Eventually Ezra presses his knife to his throat, drawing GASPS.

EZRA

Right, right, everyone over here, all eyes on me! Look at me! You are all invited to witness a bold new innovation--

FIONNULA

For Pete's sake.

Fionnula marches up to Ezra and commences wrestling the knife away from him. He flails around like a bratty kid.

EZRA

No, sod off! I'm innovating!

As the pair drop to the floor, everyone observes them quite passively - except Saff, who's eyes are drawn to the door.

TWO POLICE OFFICERS enter.

Saff's shoulders slump. She knows why they're here.

As Fionnula prizes the knife from Ezra's hand, his grip loosens, and the knife springs towards Fionnula, slicing Ezra's ear on the way. BLOOD squirts across her dress as she staggers to her feet.

EZRA (CONT'D)

Oh my bloody Christ, what have you done?

YANARA

That was fast.

While Ezra squeals and hyperventilates, everyone notices the cops. Tommy, Rina and Greg leg it.

OFFICER #1

Anyone care to explain?

FIONNULA

It's fine, he's just an artist.

JORJA

Never mind that. Aren't you going to go after them?

OFFICER #1

What? No.

OFFICER #2

(to Saff)

Can you come with us, miss? We need to ask you a few questions.

YANARA

What about?

OFFICER #2

It would be better to discuss it in private.

SAFF

(beat)

I don't mind. Let them watch. Fuck 'em.

The officers shrug at each other.

OFFICER #2

This is you, isn't it?

The officer pulls out a phone. It shows Saff and Lola in a selfie.

Saff surveys the absurd scene before her. Despite the surrounding mayhem, all eyes are back on her.

SAFF

Bet you're all glad you came.

FADE OUT:

OVER BLACK:

OFFICER #1 (V.O.)

I'm told you've become quite the overnight sensation.

INT. POLICE VAN - DAY

The door is opened, revealing Saff in handcuffs stood next to the officer. She clambers in.

OFFICER #1

Is it true? Your painting. How much did it go for?

Saff doesn't answer as she sits by the caged window.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

Probably rubbish, innit? They always overestimate this stuff in the papers. You'd have to be mad to pay those prices for a picture.

SAFF

(beat)

You really are like lollipop ladies.

The confused officer shuts the door.

INT. POLICE VAN - LATER

Saff bobs up and down as the van rolls down the road. Staring into nothing.

OFFICER #1

Oh, what is this now?

The van slows to a halt.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

Oi! What are you doing, are you daft?

The HORN BEEPS. Curious, Saff looks out the window. Her face breaks into a big smile.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

We see Rina lying in front of the van as the officers continue to remonstrate with her.

At the side of the road, Tommy finishes spraying a picture of Saff onto the wall. He turns to grin and wave.

TOMMY

You're a real one, man! You're
the real one!

INT. POLICE VAN - CONTINUOUS

Saff beams as she returns to her seat. She wipes a happy tear from her cheek with her cuffed hands.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Losing patience, the officers simply drive around the prone Rina, while Tommy shouts obscenities after them.

HARRY (V.O.)

You ever catch a unicorn? I have.
A successful celebrity artist
with underground credibility.
Yeah, I know. I'm good. Sure, the
whole murder manslaughter thing
is a bit distasteful but, you
know, who's tasteful these days?
Politicians, musicians, athletes,
writers, Baldwins, all the people
we admire most are gonna have a
spot of blood on their hands.
What makes you so high and
mighty? Anyway, relax. You
already know there's no happy
ending here.

SERIES OF SHOTS OF A DESERTED LONDON: PARKS, PUBS, BIG CITY BUILDINGS, THE TATE, NATIONAL GALLERY, DULWICH, HAYWARD, STREETS. THE CITY STANDS. LIFELESS. STILL.

HARRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They die. If they stop swimming.
In case you didn't know.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Lights are repeatedly switched on and off, revealing in flashes the big barren spaces once filled with people and art. Only a couple of hastily dropped ladders and buckets remain.

We see Fionnula absently flicking the switch again and again.

EXT. GALLERY - DAY

She shuts the door, and locks it.

HARRY (V.O.)

So I thought it was time for me to move out of the industry. The end of civilization and everything, it's going to be a while before people start caring about what they hang in their hallways again.

She takes one last look at her gallery, unsure when she might see it again. As she turns away, she coughs and splutters, pulling a MASK over her face.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

High heels snapping over the ground towards a door.

HARRY (V.O.)

To be honest, I'm quite glad to be leaving it behind. It was great and everything, but... just some of the most insincere people you will ever meet. I really value sincerity. Don't you, sir?

We see the heels belong to Hettie, who knocks on the door and pokes her head in.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

MR WREN (60s), American, not glamorous, not interesting, sits at his large glass desk looking at his computer screen. He wears the unimaginative, discreet, grey suit that is the mark of the incredibly wealthy.

HETTIE

Mr Wren, the footage has arrived.

MR WREN

Thank you Hettie.

Hettie retreats.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

She marches back the way she came. Her phone buzzes. She briefly glances at it, before letting it ring out.

MR WREN (V.O.)

And thank you, again. This fella's gonna rescue that God awful film my crew cobbled together. Give it bit of *sophistication*.

The ringing of the phone gives way to a VOICEMAIL MESSAGE, which clashes with the words of Mr Wren.

MAALIK (V.O.)

Miss Aleppo? Miss Aleppo? You have stretched my patience too thin. My people have been trying to reach you since the embarrassing debacle at that dirty little gallery. We shall discuss your duplicity in that enterprise another time. Where are my paintings? You gave me guarantees that they would be in my possession by now. You have my money, Miss Aleppo. You have humiliated me and if I do not receive clarity on the situation, I give you my word, you will deeply regret it.

(half-beat)

Hettie, pick up the phone! Talk to me!

Hettie turns her phone off.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Harry grins smugly from the computer screen.

HARRY

Happy to help. As is Greg. He's very excited to become part of your organization.

MR WREN

I think you are someone who could prove very valuable to me. If you are truly eager to work with people of a little more substance the movie business is here waiting for you, Harry.

Harry smiles.

HARRY

You know, that sounds great.

His eyes flit to meet ours.

HARRY (V.O.)

This is a world of sharks.

FADE OUT.