

RED HERRING by Debbie Croysdale

EXT. DAY - WOODLAND Open roof corvette, Candice painted on one door trundles along a track halting as trees get thicker.

NATASHA 28 Nubile, vein, classical actress, designer gear.

TIM 30 Wannabe entrepreneur, jolly, jeans, long hair.

NATASHA

Admit it Tim you're just no good at all this outdoor macho stuff, just look at us? We're lost and stuck.

TIM

You crave instant gratification always but a game is all about the journey. Hey let's take a selfie to laugh about all this when we're 63.

He gets out mobile, she turns away, arms across her chest.

TIM

Smile? For God's sake lighten up will you Tash? It won't cost you.

TASH

Stop it. I'm tired, hungry and bored, can't we just turn back?

TIM

One of me then, promised the guys. Insta's down, at least they'll have a laugh on email, hey can't get that either! Can you check router?

She turns and grabs the portable wi fi router off back seat.

NATASHA

The light isn't flashing.

TIM

So turn darn thing back on.

NATASHA

I'm trying idiot but it's bust.

TIM

No it's brand new, loads of juice.

NATASHA

Credit you mean, why speak like some nineteen seventies hippy? My Grandad says things like his Rolls Royce runs out of juice and ...

TIM

(cuts in)

Well word is back in fashion now and I need juice to power my NFT'S, move around bitcoin and host stuff.

NATASHA

Er? Like you actually have money? I preferred it when you were just a geek, at least that stuff was real.

TIM

My universe exists alright, it's the funds that can disappear as untraceable into the ether. When we win this I'll kick start my own business and avoid tax for real.

NATASHA

And a mansion while we screw the state by remote servers? Wannabe!

TIM

And trying to become an A lister?

NATASHA

Shakespeare was always my goal, I'm proud I made The Globe Theatre and since when did I even try to become a celebrity?

TIM

How can Sat Nav get it so wrong? Look screen's darn gone blank now.

NATASHA

Boys toys. Let's find the others?

TIM

Not here yet, I dragged you out of bed to study the competition before they get in character so I can play them on a personal level too.

There's a loud explosion in the distance. A man's laughter is heard as another screams in agony. Natasha hugs Tim in shock.

TIM

Must be a mine or something nearby.

NATASHA

And what's there to mine in woods?

TIM

A farmer maybe blew up a badgers run, country life's different, folk scream when their happy. As a boy it got tribal, war cries jumping off cliffs into waterfalls and....

NATASHA

(cuts in)

Well your Neanderthal act failed fast this time. Luxury break with an intellectual twist you said.

TIM

Penny dropped, we're not first on the scene, reckon back at Gill's farm another contestant switched the signpost in opposite direction.

NATASHA

No, no, no, I'm not going back to fields of angry bulls and cow dung.

TIM

We won't stop there, just carry on in opposite direction we left off. We good to go Candice? Roll baby.

Tim turns the car and starts driving.

TIM

We've an ordinance survey map in the glove compartment so with any luck we'll be there by lunchtime.

NATASHA

But we need know where we are first to use that map as in you are here? Where's the hand drawn one you downloaded specially for this?

TIM

My pocket but reckon organizers are testing us deliberately, detour's a red herring to solve for extra points so let's go win ten grand.

DAY. INT - LODGE DINING ROOM flock walls, mahogany furniture.

JOYCE 45 Ruthless newspaper reporter, trouser suit.

BARRY 36 Timid, obese, dentist, glasses, casual gear.

KADY 27 Afro Caribbean, Bo Ho, extrovert, fashion designer.

SAUL 30 Pro golfer, city suit, indulgent hedonist.

ANGELA 25 Tan, gushing newbie writer, briefcase, mini dress.

EOIN 40 Seedy divorced publisher, horse gambling addict.

BARRY

Should be eight couples but we're only three, shall we use our real names since the game hasn't begun?

KADY

Kady and this is my husband Saul.

JOYCE

Barry. Joyce.

EOIN

Eoin and my other half Angela. So what your saying isn't scripted?

JOYCE

No they give each contestant a sealed envelope to open together after our big welcome speech.

EOIN

And where is our host? It can't be that ghastly waiter who brought in tea and cakes.

KADY

Saw more of them in the grounds, we missed our power walk today so parked up for a wander. Did you see their farm? About half a mile away?

The rest shake their heads.

EOIN

How do you know they belong here?

SAUL

All in fancy dress but exactly as what I'm unsure, we were too far away but all seemed a bit medieval.

ANGELA

So where's our secret celebrity?

JOYCE

Maybe a guest appearance later unless it's postponed cos some of the other players are a no show. Rude of them, we made the effort.

KADY

But gives us more of a chance?

JOYCE

My tenth mystery this and first time it's gone over a day. Whoever decided a weekend's improvisation has tent pole artistic vision and I'm going to savour every moment.

ANGELA

My very first and dead excited, no pun intended. Gonna do a write up, maybe podcast too but defo a blog.

EOIN

After this we're having a dirty Monday and Tuesday alone so save your multi tasking till midweek.

ANGELA

If this goes viral we'll be famous.

BARRY

Will we see victim's body tonight?

JOYCE

Doubt it, we've not been told the story line or split into teams yet.

ANGELA

Defo an Agatha Christie feel, some of this cool shit is real vintage.

EOIN

Not a fan of 40's decor, hoped for more of a Tarantino style set. Sex, drugs, rock and roll motherfuckers. And sod this tea we need alcohol.

Eoin bangs on the table and calls for the waiter.

EXT. EV - RAPESEED FIELD NEAR SMALL COPSE, DISTANT COTTAGE
Natasha and Tim on narrow path, car abandoned on lane behind.

NATASHA

Lunchtime you said, half three now,
I'd divorce you if we were married.

TIM

Your feet ache cos you're wearing
inappropriate shoes and that dress
has more holes in it than Dad's
fishing net. Go naked instead why
don't you? Be not much difference.

NATASHA

But we're not supposed to be out in
the bloody outback are we? Should
be tucked up in our executive room,
expresso machine and rain shower.
And I'm missing the photo line up
and after all that effort I made.

TIM

You call putting on make up in my
rear mirror actual physical effort?

NATASHA

Not my fault I'd hardly chance to
get ready at home or pack properly.

TIM

And not my fault those folk who
cancelled late had time to plan
already but we needed a head start.

NATASHA

Why did they bail out last minute?

TIM

Who cares? It gave me opportunity
to submit a screenplay and take
their place if it won and it did.

NATASHA

But you don't write dickhead?

TIM

Ophelia meets Lucifer?

NATASHA

What? You had no right to use it or
even to look in my private things.

TIM

It was just lying around begging to be used and you only got a consider for all of your paid pitches?

NATASHA

Cheapskate you didn't even buy a ticket for these two nights away?

TIM

Best things in life are free, come here and I'll remind you of that.

NATASHA

Get off me Tim, not out here.

He pulls her into the long grass, she struggles but succumbs.

EXT. DAY - BINOCULAR lenses watch Tim and Tash make out.

EXT. DAY - CATTLE FIELD A naked couple are shoved out of a van and begin to run as a herd of bulls opposite pursue them.

TOM 20's Stocky build, ginger hair, extremely angry.

JANE 20's Nimble, dark hair, trembling, crying.

Tom suddenly stands still waving his arms. The cattle begin to surround him and stop following Jane. Jane looks back.

TOM

Come and get it?

JANE

(Crying)

Tom no we can both make it.

TOM

We won't Jane. Head for the woods.

JANE

What? Alone with those men?

TOM

They won't follow you with these big bastards still here. You only have a small window of hope so go. I said fuck off now and fast Jane.

JANE

No, I can't leave you Tom.

TOM

Now might be the time to tell you I
slept with Karen on your hen night
so go and find a man with calibre?

She ambles through a gap in the barbed wire fence, it cuts her flesh, she heads towards woodland. Tom stands very still, the bulls also slow down their pace whilst closing in. The alpha grinds it's hooves, Tom rushes forward grabbing it's horns before it has chance to charge. Bull spins him around menacingly but he manages to keep his feet on the ground. A second bull charges piercing Tom's guts but he won't go down. A gun fires from van window, the excited cattle stampede Tom.

EXT. DAY - FIELD Tash lies in Tim's arms then bolts upright.

NATASHA

Yikes, heard a gun shot. Jeans on
now Tim and we're out of here.

TIM

Supposed to say you heard cannons.

NATASHA

This won't go in my spotlight C.V.

TIM

It's sixteen hundred hours so hope
we're not disqualified, I'll get
directions from that cottage. Stay
in Candice if you feel too tired.

NATASHA

Alone? No. It's creepy out here.

TIM

Suit yourself.

Suddenly dogs are heard barking from a distance.

NATASHA

What if they're guard dogs?

TIM

Guarding what? The rapeseed?
They're just for use on the land,
to control sheep and keep pests or
vermin away and all that stuff.

NATASHA

Come on back to the car?

TIM

Why? Candice is all out but maybe
they've got spare to fill her with.

She trips over a concealed wire on the ground falling flat on
her face then stays sat down on grass nursing a hurt ankle.

NATASHA

Go ahead and get that petrol soon?

TIM

Those bloody shoes, are you hurt?

NATASHA

What does it look like?

TIM

I'll be back soon, here, I'll leave
you our last bottle of water.

DAY. INT - DESK WITH OPEN LAP TOP SCREEN SPLIT INTO 4 ROOMS.
THE HOOK - THE REVEAL - THE REACTION - THE CLIMAX
Back of man's hand presses cursor key over "The Reveal."

EXT. FIELD - Tim walking. Natasha still sat where she fell.
Tim sees four Rottweilers race towards him in the distance.

TIM

(Shouting)

Run to Candice, I won't make it.

She turns to see the pack of dogs so takes off her shoes to
limp quickly back to the car. He heads for a lake by willow
trees and wades in up to his waist. Dogs reach shoreline. Tim
picks up a large stone holding it menacingly up in the air.

TIM

Want your skulls smashing?

Natasha sits in car and winds the roof down, shuts windows
and bangs the horn repeatedly to try to scare off the dogs.

NATASHA

(Screaming)

You bastards get away from him.

She winds down the driver's seat window.

NATASHA

Tim you need to get in much deeper.

TIM
 (Shouting)
 Shout louder will you? I can't hear
 you above all this growling.

NATASHA
 (Shouting)
 Cover your body completely, the
 smell of fear excites them more.

TIM
 (To himself)
 Yikes, frigging cold, would freeze
 the balls off a brass monkey.

He wades in up to his neck, dogs foam at the mouth eyeballing
 him. Suddenly the dogs separate to circle every side of lake.

NATASHA
 (Hysterical)
 No. No. No. What the fuck now?

TIM
 (Shouting)
 In the boot, get out my kit but be
 careful and I'll talk you through
 it. You have to hot wire Candice.

NATASHA
 (Screaming loudly)
 Do I look like a gangster?

TIM
 (Laughing)
 Yaaahooo! I feel like a kid again.
 Glad you go out with a bad boy now?

Tim jumps up and down in the water and barks back at dogs.

NATASHA
 (Whispers to herself)
 Fine skill set you got Tim. Right
 now popcorn and a movie would be
 luxury. Sorry Bobby I dumped you.

INT. DAY - CONSERVATORY The group sit, two more enter.

CHARLENE 34 Denim clad, crop hair, eco geek, illustrator.

SALLY 45 Chubby, aging clubber, supermarket cashier.

SALLY
 We missed lunch when's supper?

BARRY

Soon I hope. I thought the other V.I.P'S had bailed but here you are, ambiguity is unprofessional of the company in charge of all this.

SALLY

But my Charly checked them out?

CHARLENE

Legit. I look after her, she even fell for a scam about her gas bill and we're late cos she picked up a hitch hiker going fishing. But when he got out to pee I threw out his tackle and hit the pedal, we need win this and he may be an opponent.

JOYCE

Producers recommended me for participating in their repertory companies in the past for this new sponsored publicity promotion.

EOIN

Displaying an item of food or gear in a film and zooming in on it is called product placement isn't it?

JOYCE

Yes but in this case a brand gets it's exposure via local press releases and adverts. I did a mystery sponsored by Koala Gummies.

ANGELA

I won a short story competition didn't I Eoin? Called Love Bites about two seriously horny vampires.

EOIN

My star intern soon you'll be writing us five star scripts.

KADY

Saul won a pro golf tournament and I've a designer runway collection.

SAUL

At least we weren't screwed by some extortionate entry fee and donating what we feel the experience worth.

BARRY

Joyce got a freebie cos she writes for a main newspaper but if nobody pays it doesn't make sense. What does Empowerment Enterprises gain?

ANGELA

Our talented and uber cool selves!

BARRY

But to what end?

KADY

They're championing some social theme embracing diversity, all here for different reasons aren't we?

BARRY

Our sponsors seem to have their fingers in a lot of pies but what do they specialize in exactly?

CHARLENE

Reckon a global agent whose clients want people like us for corporate branding to appeal to the masses.

JOYCE

My brother always over analyses. Will do you good to get away from molars, root canals and invisalign.

KADY

Oh I thought you were married.

BARRY

God no, Joyce is my older sister but hush hush, couples only here.

EOIN

So what is your line of work Sally?

SALLY

I work at supermarket check out.

KADY

You must be employer of the year?

SALLY

No and I never won anything before.

CHARLENE

Hey? You won me over babes.

EV. INT - CAR On Natasha's lap screwdriver, plyers, hammer.

NATASHA
(shouting)
Screwdriver's useless as a key.
Turned ignition, it doesn't work.

TIM
(to himself)
Candice is pre 90's should be easy.

NATASHA
(to herself)
Why are those dogs so rabid?

TIM
(shouting)
I'll get hyperthermia soon. Please?
Release screws top and bottom of
wheel then pry off cylinder panel.
Be two red power wires, cut, strip
both ends and then twist together.

NATASHA
(crying)
No way, I can't possibly do that.

TIM
(shouting)
Jealous of my 1985 collectors hot
chick aren't you? So now go smash
her up, it's your only chance Tash?

One dog runs to the car and pounds against door. Quickly she screws out wheel and breaks cylinder with hammer. Trembling she cut wires with plyers and tries to peel off PVC coating.

Dog jumps onto hood glaring through windscreen. She breaks false nails picking the wire clean and joins copper threads. Suddenly she's thrown bolt upright and falls back onto the seat. Winded and in shock she forces a few deep breaths.

NATASHA
(To herself)
You can do this girl.

She stares down at her burnt palm and tries again, car revs.

INT. EV - DINING ROOM Group having coffee after dinner.

BARRY

Finance is taking over the arts.
Theatre should be pure action and
dialogue but everything's gone
hybrid, my patients call me old
fashioned for reading paperbacks.
Books for God's sake. What's next?

EOIN

Hey! Maybe even my own dick will
one day become an avatar, imagine
seeing yourself have sex in virtual
3D reality through a darn headset?

Tim bursts through the door holding Natasha in his arms.

SAUL

My God whatever happened to you?

TIM

We got lost and our car broke down
then we got chased by mad dogs but
I used to be a boy racer amongst
other things so here comes Johnny.

JOYCE

We've just started everybody. Your
completely soaked young man so I
feel some Titanic theme coming on?

SAUL

Off course! The game! Dumb me, you
two sure had me going there. No
Joyce we've a Halloween theme,
check her skimpy sorority dress?

ANGELA

Ace woman in jeopardy routine but
isn't here comes Johnny in *Scream*?

KADY

We need pen and paper to write down
all our ideas, as proof of concept?

NATASHA

No. We're not the actors. Well I am
one actually but not for this show,
we're here to solve the murder too.

TIM

And I'm just a fan of scary movies.

Tim puts Natasha down in a spare dining chair and swigs the water jug on the table and passes it to Natasha to drink.

SALLY

So you really are hurt? Poor thing.
We need the first aid box. Can you
walk at all on that puffy ankle?

NATASHA

Don't think so. Can someone please
call me a doctor?

KADY

What happened to your hands?

NATASHA

Me verses the laws of nature, an
ancient corvette and electricity.
My next role should be wonder woman
and I'd darn well deserve it.

TIM

You're a star Tash.

NATASHA

You finally give me a role call.

ANGELA

My mobile is still dead.

EOIN

I'm going out to find a signal.

Eoin leaves.

BARRY

We're not up mountains or down
quarries.

CHARLENE

Can it be a rural mast serves here?

TIM

Routers out too, we need land line.

JOYCE

They'll have one at reception.

EXT. EV - GARDEN Eoin can't get a signal so ventures further out trying to find an exit in perimeter fence but he's hit on the back of the head by a spade and falls flat on his face.

INT. EV - HALLWAY BY RECEPTION Joyce talks to receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST 38 Courteous, amiable, black uniform, gold tie.

RECEPTIONIST

You know it needs look real being a legendary mastermind yourself?

JOYCE

Is that my profile? I'm so proud.

RECEPTIONIST

My colleague is a trained nurse, he'll attend to the lady's ankle once we've got her upstairs.

JOYCE

Super!

INT. EV - DINING ROOM Tim and Tash are eating left overs.

JOYCE

Panic off but spoiler alert ahead. Signal is turned off on purpose but service resumes after a coach drops off our main group of entertainers.

BARRY

But why aren't they here now?

JOYCE

Alone with no communication is part of the story line. I'm so bursting with adrenalin already, I can feel this is going to be best ride ever.

NATASHA

And what about me?

Two men suddenly burst into the room with a stretcher.

SILUS 34 Burly ape, scar, spade hands, hooded monk's outfit.

ANDREW 50 Expressionless, black suit & tie, shiny bald head.

BARRY

Seems cavalry's finally arrived.

ANDREW

We've come to take the injured lady upstairs where a medic is waiting.

(TO TIM)

And there are fresh clothes for you Sir laid out already on the bed.

4 more people burst into the room.

ELDERLY WOMAN Beak nose, mutton dressed as lamb, fine jewels.

YOUNG WOMAN Cowgirl attire, pony tail, constant grin.

YOUNG MAN Farmhand trench coat, boots, glum serious glare.

MIDDLE AGED MAN Distinguished, silver hair, suit, cravat.

The young woman hands each couple a bunch of notes.

MIDDLE AGED MAN

Study your individual itinerary's tonight while you all settle in.

NATASHA

I haven't missed anything then?

ELDERLY WOMAN

Call it respite before the storm.

NATASHA

Cool. So when's publicity line up?

YOUNG MAN

They'll wait for special effects.

NATASHA

You mean VFX like in film?

ELDERLY WOMAN

No much more cutting edge.

TIM

(TO YOUNG WOMAN)

Hi Tim and Tash, what's your name?

YOUNG MAN

She doesn't talk. Mute.

CHARLENE

So? Rest of the evening we can just chill and mingle like it's normal?

ANDREW

The bar next door will serve
complimentary drinks till eleven.

(TO NATASHA)

We'll bring yours upstairs Ma'am, a
menu is in the mini fridge, call
room service when you have chosen.

ANGELA

And the celebrity is?

OLD WOMAN

We added a bonus prize for who
guesses their identity first after
arriving unannounced in disguise.

JOYCE

It just gets better.

BARRY

And was that our welcome speech?

INT. EV - GUEST ROOM Natasha's ankle is bandaged, she sits in
armchair resting it up on a stool. Tim drinks wine by window.

TIM

Come on I'll give you a massage?

NATASHA

No, I need to crash and burn
straight after this beer.

TIM

Should you be drinking that?

NATASHA

I didn't take the pain killer they
gave me and you've got some serious
making up to do tomorrow.

TIM

Why wait, I'll wake you in a few
hours. All's well that ends well?

NATASHA

No time for that, we've rehearsals
remember? Here's our agenda newbie
ghost writer so tell me who I am in
the morning and show me the ropes.

She throws both of their murder mystery notes towards him.

INT. EV - GUEST ROOM Natasha sleeps as Tim reads itinerary, door knocks, Tim gets up and opens it.

ANGELA

I can't find Eoin anywhere, staff don't know either, he's been gone for hours, have you two seen him?

TIM

No sorry, not left our room.

ANGELA

Unlike him to turn down free booze.

TIM

Maybe he's clearing his head ready for the game tomorrow?

ANGELA

No he's not the fresh air type. Something's off, maybe his wife found out so coward's run home but I'll kill him if he's ghosting me.

TIM

She'd have to communicate first and we've still got no signal remember? Come back in an hour if he doesn't turn up and I'll help you to look?

INT. EV - GUEST ROOM Sally and Charlene are in bed reading.

SALLY

I'm Miss Ada Thorpe a headmistress here to assess the stables go give her rich pupils riding lessons.

CHARLENE

I'm Lucy a rural doctor's assistant here for a medical seminar.

SALLY

Charley can we swop, I don't fancy playing teacher in the morning?

CHARLENE

Okay cos I don't wanna partner up with any of those stuffed dummies.

SALLY

Some are okay though Charley. Angela is very down to earth.

CHARLENE

Fancy her?

SALLY

Can't I talk about another woman
without you becoming suspicious?
Wonder what the detective is like?
A Miss Marple type or a Marlowe?

CHARLENE

Behind the times you are my Sal.
It's a John Wick or a Enola Holmes.

INT. EV - GUEST ROOM Joyce lies alone in four poster bed.
Barry is curled up in chair in bed socks and dressing gown.

JOYCE

For God's sake Barry climb in, it's
a King bed, big enough for us both?

BARRY

But we needed a twin room.

JOYCE

Scared I'll get back at you for our
camping trips, the spider remember?
I got all the blame as usual for
waking other tents up, their little
boy wonder you were.

BARRY

I was jealous of those kids who
went on package deals in the sun
and brought back naff sombreros but
looking back we were so happy then.

JOYCE

Are you saying you're not now?

BARRY

Our parents were less than our ages
now and I so wish they had lived so
I could have made them proud. My
success would have meant something.

JOYCE

You haven't answered my question?
Well? Barry? Are you happy?

Barry falls asleep in the arm chair and begins to snore.

JOYCE

Baby brother will you ever find
what it is you really need?

INT. DAY - DINING ROOM 8AM BREAKFAST Andrew sits head of table as food is served by a waiter and the mute young woman.

ANDREW

Introductions! I am Lord Grey an impoverished aristocrat forced to rent out my lodges. Property rich and cash poor, grateful am I for hunters, fishermen and staycations.

CHARLENE

Should be fisher people. Why say man when a woman can equally cast a net or throw a hook in the water?

KADY

Why drag woke issues into this?

CHARLENE

And why be silenced?

KADY

This is meant to be a relaxing break away from work and enforced political correctness and isn't it you who is silencing us?

CHARLENE

My duty as headmistress is to point out grammatical errors albeit it's longer legal to wrap your knuckles.

JOYCE

I am Berlinah Beacock a widowed historian who has come here to take part in a Roman archaeological dig.

KADY

Samantha Trent, single, private detective working on a divorce case and following a cheating husband.

BARRY

Wait a minute? Angela and Eoin? We can't start without them surely?

NATASHA

Hello I'm the new maid here.