STEEPLEJACK

written by

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The year is 1986, just one year after the end of the Miners' Strike. Our story unfolds in the quiet village of Barnburgh, South Yorkshire.

FADE IN:

INT. GANLEY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Ganley's living room, with its wood panelled walls, feels sparse and worn. What little furniture there is, is dilapidated - a coffee table with brown tape holding up one of its legs, a black and white television, and a floral-patterned three-piece sofa suite. Slouched in an armchair is BOBBY (10). Dressed in a black suit, he watches PIP, the family Yorkshire Terrier, sleep. Off-screen, we hear the voices of MARK GANLEY (late 40s) and his mother, GRAN (late 60s).

GRAN (O.S.)
And you know what it's like--

MARK (O.S.)
I don't have time.

GRAN (O.S.)
Well make time then!

MARK (O.S.)
Just bloody leave it will ya.

GRAN (O.S.)
Mark! You can’t keep running away from this conversation.

MARK (O.S.)
Look, I’m already late and I have to see Patrick, there's the flowers, then I--

GRAN (O.S.)
Just stop for a second. You need to talk to the lad and you need to do it now.

MARK (O.S.)
Christ almighty. Just fockin' leave it alright.

GRAN (O.S.)
Don't you bloody dare talk to me like that. I'm not some punching bag that--

MARK (O.S.)
What do you want from me?

GRAN (O.S.)
Look, if you don’t tell him, people will start talking and then he'll--

MARK (O.S.)
Christ! If it's that bloody important, you do it. You're always chatting, gossiping round' village, why don't you put--

GRAN (O.S.)
It's not my mess Mark!

Silence. After a few moments, keys JANGLE.

GRAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oh Mark. Mark!

The front door OPENS and then SLAMS SHUT. Gran enters the living room, picks up two empty plates from the coffee table and leaves the room.

EXT. CHURCH LANE - DAY

Mark’s friends, rough-hewn miners PETER and RONNIE (both 40s), linger near the entrance to the church graveyard. They greet the mourners as they arrive. When they notice PATRICIA (30s) approaching with her young son LEONARD (6), Ronnie steps forward with a solemn look on his face.

RONNIE
Can I help you?

PATRICIA
No.

Patricia attempts to walk past. Ronnie stretches his arm out.

RONNIE
You're not going in there.

PATRICIA
I'll do what I like thank you.

RONNIE
You're not welcome here. Not you, your lad and not your husband.

PATRICIA
I want to pay my respects to my friend.

RONNIE
'Friend'?

PATRICIA
Yes, my friend.

RONNIE
You're a scab. No one here's your friend so why don't you turn around and fock' off home.

PATRICIA
Move.

Patricia attempts to push past Ronnie. He holds out an arm.

PATRICIA (CONT'D)
Don't touch me.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

A group of eighty or so mourners stand around a coffin. Amongst them are Mark, Gran and Bobby. The VICAR (50s) addresses the mourners.

VICAR
For as much as it has pleased our Heavenly Father in His wise providence to take unto Himself our beloved Alice Ganley, we therefore commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for the blessed hope...

Mark turns and walks away from the burial.

INT. THE WORKING MEN'S CLUB - NIGHT

The working men's club is the heartbeat of the village. The atmosphere is unusually somber. Though Saturday nights are typically the only nights women are permitted, tonight men and women sit side by side, mourning together. The venue is thick with smoke and sorrow. It is late, the ties have loosened and the eyes are bloodshot. Mark sits with close friends ARTHUR, FRANK and JACK (all 40s).

JACK
I’m getting hungry.

FRANK
I think there might be a few sandwiches left.

ARTHUR
Barry might have some bits out back.

The men sit quietly, each nursing their beer. Nearby sits ARCHIE (60s), Mark's longtime workmate, referred to professionally as his 'lad'. Archie sits alone, his gaze fixed on the half-empty tankard in his hand. Archie’s voice breaks the stillness, singing softly.

ARCHIE
(singing)
I'll see you in my dreams.
I'll hold you in my dreams.

Archie shuts his eyes and SINGS with more volume. Heads turn towards him. A few others begin to join-in with the song. Soon enough, the entire pub is SINGING ”I'll See You in My Dreams” by Isham Jones.

INT. THE WORKING MEN'S CLUB - RESTROOM - LATER

Mark stands at a trough while another man VOMITS off-screen. Mark is unsteady on his feet. IAN (50s) washes his hands.

IAN
How's your lad coping Mark?

Mark ignores Ian.

IAN (CONT'D)
I know this is a difficult time for you. Listen, after everything you and your family have done, if there's anything I can do for you, you just let me know.

Mark zips up his fly and places his hand on Ian's shoulder.

MARK
Ian... Thank you. You can do me a favour actually.

IAN
Ay?

MARK
You can fock' off.

Mark washes his hands as Ian walks out of the restroom. Mark attempts to pull some towel from the roller but it jams. Frustrated, he pulls harder before punching the contraption.

INT. THE WORKING MEN'S CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Mark emerges from the restroom. Waiting in a black dress is Mark's mistress NICOLE (30s).

NICOLE
Mark.

Mark doesn't respond and attempts to move past her.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
Mark I just wanted--

MARK
Not now.

Mark pushes past Nicole and goes to the bar. Behind the bar is barman, BARRY (60s).

MARK (CONT'D)
Two pints of ale please Barry.

Barry pours the first pint and places it on the bar. Mark picks it up and downs it as he waits for the next.

EXT. PIT COURTYARD - DAY

In a large courtyard, hundreds of bricks lay neatly stacked at the foot of a towering 300ft chimney. Next to Mark's parked Land Rover stands Archie, sipping tea from a flask. A series of wooden ladders are affixed to the side of the chimney. Mark climbs the ladders without safety equipment. Three quarters of the way up he stops, hooks his leg through the ladder and looks out over the countryside. At the top of the chimney is scaffolding with wooden planks creating a platform. Mark pulls himself up onto the platform. A pulley system sees two cables run from the top of the chimney to the ground, each supporting a milk churn.

EXT. CHIMNEY TOP - CONTINUOUS

The cold wind HOWLS as Mark picks up his tools and bashes away at the bricks with a hammer and chisel, placing the loosened bricks in the milk churn.