

WORKING FOR THE COMPANY by ANDREW SHAKESHAF

CHARACTER LIST

ABS - a woman in her 40s. A farmer.

CHARLIE - A business woman.

VICKY - A scientist.

CAILLIE - Abs' daughter.

The play as it stands lasts about an hour. It is easy to pick and choose scenes to reduce the length. As an all-female play for older students, this is a useful one for GCSE or above as an examination script. Parts are equal and differentiated enough to be challenging and interesting. The play should be performed in a naturalistic style. Andrew Shakeshaft is an award-winning playwright and many of his plays have been professionally performed.

EXTRACT ONE

A spotlight comes up slowly on Abs standing, holding a shotgun, barrel down, at her side. She is shouting out into the distance.

ABS Try it! Next time try it! I'm ready for you ... all of you. Blow you apart spread your brains over the wall! Next time! Next time! [***Her voice softens. Speaking to herself.***] Next time ... next time ... yeh.

Abs freezes. A spotlight comes up on Charlie. She is swinging around on a swivel chair and speaking on a hands-free phone.

CHARLIE What time? Listen, Paul, I need three weeks just to start the computer ... listen, I can get you half of the order now, but the rest is going to have to be on trust. Have we got a deal? I need a 'yes' now ... I've got companies on the other line who'll buy the lot, Paul ... you know I will. Deal? Good.

Charlie freezes. A spotlight comes up on Vicky, standing upstage writing chemical equations on the back wall of the set.

VICKY Okay. Number one is ... PCP ... good. Next ... co-valent bonds, carbon 12? It used to be called acid, yes ... more technical name? No, okay, we'll come back to that one. [***Turning round to face the class.***] Okay, a simpler one: who here has smoked some form of cannabis? ... Almost everyone, good ... next chapter: psychological conditioning ... Tony, could you start reading?

Vicky freezes. The lights fade on all but Abs who checks she is finally alone and then turns and walks upstage. The lights open out and reveal the interior of a cottage with a dining table, two chairs and a chest of drawers on which is a kettle. Caillie's making a cup of tea.

CAILLIE They gone?
ABS Yeh. Think so.
CHARLIE You'd think they'd give up, wouldn't you?
ABS We've got three hundred foot of electric wire out there, and still I need this bloody thing.

She throws the shotgun down next to her. Caillie brings the cups of tea over to the table.

CAILLIE There you go.
ABS Don't want one.
CAILLIE It's a cup of tea.
ABS The caffeine does my head in. Can't see straight after it. You know they've upped it, don't you?
CAILLIE What?
ABS There's three times as much caffeine in one of them than there was five years ago.
CAILLIE Didn't notice.
ABS No. 'Cos you're too busy taking all those other tablets. As soon as it all went legal people stopped buying tea, so they had to give you a reason to, so they made it stronger. Coke's got more sugar in than before and cereals ... you know what?
CAILLIE ***annoyed*** Yes. Every time you tell me this ... every time the gangs try and break into the field I have to listen to your 'nothing's the way it was' speech.
ABS ***carrying on*** Cereals ...
CAILLIE God!
ABS They're not even allowed to call them cereals anymore, you know why? [***Caillie doesn't respond, but mouths Abs' next line along with her.***] Because there's not enough cereal in them. [***Beat.***] 'Morning wake-up biscuits.' Ridiculous!

Pause. Caillie has gone back over to the kettle and is staring out of the window.

CAILLIE They didn't get in, did they?
ABS No. Why?
CAILLIE The light's off.
ABS ***getting up hurriedly*** NO! [***She rushes over to the window.***] Shit! They've cut the power! [***She grabs up the shotgun and goes to run outside with it.***]
CAILLIE I'll call the police.
ABS Don't waste the phone card ... I'll be back in a minute. [***She exits.***]
CAILLIE ***calling after her*** Don't hurt them! [***She realises that Abs hasn't heard.***] Damn!

Caillie sits down at the table and sips at her cup of tea. The lights flicker.

CAILLIE ***thinking out loud*** Oops! Wrong cable fellas! Don't want to cut that one too. Different power supplies for the house and the fence.

There is an electrical crack and the lights go out.

CAILLIE ***sarcastic*** Yipee! Thanks for everything.

Three gun shots are heard outside. The last shot is followed by the scream of a young boy. Pause. A light comes up on Charlie, who is attempting to hail a

taxi whilst shouting into a mobile phone which is clamped to her ear.

CHARLIE I don't want his P.A., I want him. Yes, thank you. [**Taking the phone away.**] Christ! Pay peanuts, get monkeys; pay New Look vouchers, get bimbos ... Terry, how are you? Good. I'm about to ruin your day, we've got another one: little farm outside Gloucester, guy was coming over the fence and the yokel blew his brains out ... yes, he's dead ... People don't tend to function well without brains, Terry, unless they're in your line of work. [**Beat.**] Sorry, Terry, I'm having a bad day. I'm going to go over there, as soon as I can get a taxi. Call you later, bye! [**She hangs up.**]
Taxi!

A taxi whizzes past her. She calls after it, waving her middle finger at it.

CHARLIE You too, mate!

Lights fade out on Charlie and come up on Vicky, who is standing upstage, hugging a cup of coffee and shivering slightly. Charlie enters and stands next to Vicky. She has a black briefcase with her.

CHARLIE Morning, doctor.
VICKY Morning.
CHARLIE They give you a day off school, did they?
VICKY I don't get a choice when you ring, do I?
CHARLIE Good point. What's that?
VICKY Coffee.
CHARLIE Any good?
VICKY Tastes like vomit ... want some? [**She offers Charlie her cup.**]
CHARLIE I'll pass.

EXTRACT TWO

CAILLIE He must have fallen fifty feet.
ABS **stressed** Shut up, would you?
CAILLIE I'm just saying ... How do you know you shot him? If he just got scared by the noise and fell from that far up, he'd be dead anyway.
ABS I don't want to talk about it. [**Beat.**] Do you think?
CAILLIE What?
ABS Do you think I might have missed him, he might have slipped?
CAILLIE Might have done ...

Beat.

ABS **smiling** Thanks, Caillie.
CAILLIE That's all right, mum. We can't give up hope, can we?
ABS Since your dad left ...
CAILLIE He didn't leave, you kicked him out, you were right, and I'm still here for you. [**She pours herself a tea from the kettle.**] D'you want one?
ABS Yeh, why not? Can't feel much worse.

Caillie pours a second one for her mum and hands it over.

CAILLIE There you go.
ABS Thanks.
CAILLIE It happens. I've read about it. The gangs want into the fields and we're allowed to stop them.
ABS Not allowed to kill them though.

CAILLIE Are they sending the police around?
ABS No. One of the company reps is coming up with a ... toxi ... toxic ...?
CAILLIE Toxicologist?
ABS That's it.
CAILLIE What are they sending one of those for?

Abs shrugs and takes a big gulp of tea. She swallows it and exhales deeply, having been hit by the caffeine.

ABS Aww!! God, that's good. You sure you can't taste the difference?
CAILLIE Like you said, I've taken too much other stuff, wouldn't know if this had acid in it. [**Beat.**] Well, might do.

Both of them drink their tea.

ABS They won't arrest me, will they?
CAILLIE No, mum.

Beat.

ABS You sure?

Beat. Caillie looks at Abs.

CAILLIE I don't know.

Lights fade on them. Lights come up on Vicky and Charlie. They are standing outside a field staring out over it through a barb-wire grill.

CHARLIE What do you think?
VICKY **sarcastic** Very nice.
CHARLIE Beautiful, isn't it? Hundred and forty acres of pure hemp. Almost brings a tear to my eye.
VICKY I thought you couldn't cry ... plastic surgery and all.
CHARLIE **ignoring** Ready to go inside?

Charlie goes to leave. Vicky stops her.

VICKY How can you do this?
CHARLIE What?
VICKY This job. Supplying dope to millions, causing schizophrenia, paranoid psychosis ...
CHARLIE Don't play the sympathy card with me, Vicky. I'm a business woman not a bleeding heart. Whatever you teach the kids, this is good business sense.
VICKY And that's your why?
CHARLIE I do it for the money, love. This tummy won't tuck itself in, will it?
VICKY You're sick.
CHARLIE And I'm still prettier than you. Follow me.

Lights fade on them and come up on Caillie standing at the window of the cottage. Abs is sitting at the table with her head in her hands.

ABS How do they look?
CAILLIE Like two women.
ABS Typical.
CAILLIE What?
ABS Why can't they send a bloke? I know how to talk to blokes. Business

women are all lips and attitude. I don't like them.
 CAILLIE You haven't met them yet.
 ABS Doesn't matter.
 CAILLIE Anyway, there's only one business one, the other one's the scientist.
 ABS I wish it was the police.
 CAILLIE Don't talk daft.
 ABS I'm not. At least I knew where I stood when the cops turned up. Slap on wrist, don't do it again ... 'course that was only shooting rabbits.
 CAILLIE Things have changed...
 ABS Everything's changed.
 CAILLIE Doesn't mean it's worse, just different; different people in charge; no police, just companies ... it's not that bad.
 ABS I don't like it.
 CAILLIE They're coming up the path.
 ABS Go and let them in then. Get this over with.
 CAILLIE It's going to be all right.
 ABS Just let them in.

EXTRACT THREE

CAILLIE What are you looking for?
 VICKY Anything really. Anything that proves that the only possible way he could have died was from the gunshot.
 CAILLIE Is that likely?
 VICKY No. Virtually impossible. As Charlie said ...
 CAILLIE Charlie?
 VICKY The suit with the plastic face.

Caillie smiles.

VICKY Anything could have happened to him. Could have just popped a bad tablet - they can stop your heart like ... [***She snaps her fingers.***] ... that.
 CAILLIE I thought they couldn't any more. Not since they were legal.
 VICKY Shouldn't be able to, but each of the separate companies are still experimenting with different cocktails, competing with each other as to who can give the biggest high ... and some of them still have side-effects. Like on a bottle of aspirin, they have to list the side effects? [***Caillie nods.***]
 Well, on the new tabs, one of the side effects is heart arrhythmia.
 CAILLIE What's that?
 VICKY Irregular heartbeat. Could cause a heart attack in extreme cases.
 CAILLIE Is that what happened to him?
 VICKY Can't say for sure ... but as long as I can't rule it out, this becomes DMA, and then your mum's no longer liable for it.
 CAILLIE DMA?
 VICKY Death By Misadventure. Sorry - we get so many of these, we've given them an acronym.

Beat

CAILLIE So she's not going to prison?
 VICKY No.
 CAILLIE But he's dead.
 VICKY I don't like it ... [***She pauses, waiting for Caillie to supply her name.***]
 CAILLIE Caillie.
 VICKY Caillie - but it's the rules. And it's good for you and your mum, isn't it?
 CAILLIE I know.
 VICKY You're just lucky that you're company employees. If you were freelance,

they'd have arrested you first and done tests later.
 CAILLIE Do you work for the company then?
 VICKY Me? No. I used to, but I stopped. Didn't think it was ethical selling that stuff to kids, eighteen or not. I work for the government, but then the government's so indebted to the companies for all their private finance that I've never had a prosecuted death in the ten years I've been doing it.
 CAILLIE How many bodies have you seen?
 VICKY Hundreds. Not all like this either. Some of them are straight cases of murder. This guy was climbing the fence, yeh?
 CAILLIE Yeh. They cut the power.
 VICKY Some of them aren't even near the fence. Just a local feud got out of hand and someone ends up dead, the employee phones it in and the company sweeps it under the carpet, pretending that their crop was at risk.
 CAILLIE God! Does that happen a lot?
 VICKY In a word ... yes, seventy per cent, I'd say - though, of course, scientifically, I can't prove it. You couldn't come and hold this blanket, could you? I need to take a blood sample.

Caillie goes over to the body and holds the sack cloth up....

EXTRACT FOUR

The lights fade on them and up again on the kitchen. Abs re-enters and hands a small notebook to Charlie.

CHARLIE Thank you.
 ABS It's all in there.
 CHARLIE Okay, let's have a look. [***She flicks through the notebook 'umming' and 'aahing' at the figures. Abs hovers nearby.***] This is impressive.
 ABS Thank you.
 CHARLIE It's okay to sit down. [***She smiles and Abs sits.***] If you want to get this over with you can start signing some of those.
 ABS Some of ... ?
 CHARLIE The papers... the top one's the pension, next one's the insurance ... and so on.
 ABS ***hesitating*** I...
 CHARLIE ***tossing Abs a pen*** There you go. Try and press quite hard, otherwise the duplicates won't come out.
 ABS ***looking towards the window*** I'll have to wait for Caillie.
 CHARLIE Why's that?
 ABS She won't let me sign things - not without her reading them.
 CHARLIE That's fine. I'm not going to force you to sign them ... it just saves time if you can do them now. I don't want to have to come back tomorrow.
 ABS ***not thinking*** No. [***Beat.***] I mean ...
 CHARLIE It's okay ... I know you don't want me here ... and I don't want to be here. I just want this to go as smoothly as possible and then I'll leave, okay? Just sign the top one.
 ABS ***looking at the top sheet and reading*** Pension.
 CHARLIE Yep, that's the top one.
 ABS That's the one I've been paying into.
 CHARLIE Every month.
 ABS I'll sign that one.
 CHARLIE Okay.
 ABS Not the others. I'll wait for Caillie.

CHARLIE That's fine. However you want to do it. [**Abs picks up the pen and signs the top sheet.**] That's great. [**She takes the top sheet and looks at the signature.**] And the next one.

ABS No. Not 'til Caillie gets here.

CHARLIE **smiling** No, you don't understand. That's the same document as this one ... it's just the second half of the same thing. They need you to sign both halves.

ABS Oh. Sorry.

CHARLIE It's okay. [**Abs signs the next one. Charlie takes it.**] Thank you.

ABS Now I wait.

CHARLIE That's great. [**Looking through the notebook.**] These figures are incredible ... Couldn't make me a cup of tea, could you? My level's dropping.

ABS Yes. Sorry.

Abs goes over to the kettle and switches it on.

CHARLIE Yes, the pay out on the percentage of this lot is going to be very healthy indeed.

ABS More money?

CHARLIE Absolutely.

ABS I never realised.

CHARLIE That's why the company's here, Mrs Lindley. To make sure you're looked after.

Beat.

ABS Thank you.

CHARLIE Pleasure.

The kettle boils. Charlie continues to flick through the notebook. Caillie enters. She is leaning on Vicky, her legs not quite supporting all her weight. Abs turns round and sees her.

ABS Caillie, you all right, love?

CAILLIE No.

Caillie collapses into a chair.

VICKY **sharp** Charlie!

CHARLIE **looking up** What?

VICKY Can I have a word?

CHARLIE **annoyed** Now?

VICKY **forceful** Yes. Now.

CHARLIE Fine.

Vicky exits, followed by Charlie. Abs stands behind Caillie, unsure what to do.

ABS Should I make you a cup of tea?

CAILLIE No, mum.

Caillie looks up and indicates that Abs should sit down.

ABS What is it, love?

CAILLIE It's Billy.

ABS What is?

CAILLIE Billy Howells, you know? The lad from the pub, blonde hair ...

ABS *smiling*
Billie

I know Billie, love. 'Course I know Billie. [*Beat.*] What's done?

Beat.

CAILLIE He's got himself killed, mum.

ABS *still smiling* He's got himself ... [*Realising.*] Oh. Jesus!

Abs puts her head in her hands. Caillie holds her mother's shoulders. The light fades on them slightly and a second light comes up on Charlie and Vicky who are outside, arguing.

VICKY You can't do this.

CHARLIE I have to do this. The company pays me to do this.

VICKY Can't you at least give them a moment? They knew the kid.

CHARLIE That's not my problem. My problem is the company, and I have to be at a meeting at eight tomorrow morning, so I'm going to get it done tonight, okay?

VICKY You've lost all sense of compassion, haven't you?

CHARLIE I don't get paid for compassion, I don't have time for it. I've done twenty-two DMA's this year. What if I give each one time to come to terms with their loss? Let them stew in their guilt for a little bit longer ...? And all the time I'm wasting the company's time because they tell me I have to get it done that day or *I'm* fired. I don't want to get fired. I get paid ridiculous amounts of money to do a simple job - you get paid virtually nothing to do a difficult one. You work it out.

VICKY *pleading* Charlie?

CHARLIE I'm not listening, Vicky. I'm going inside to finish this off. You coming?

Vicky throws up her hands in despair and follows Charlie into the house. The lights fade out on them and up on the house. Abs is still at the table attempting to steady herself, but still wiping the tears from her eyes. Caillie is reading through the papers whilst leaning against the cupboard near the window. Charlie enters. Vicky enters after a while and stays in the background.

CAILLIE What's this?

CHARLIE That's the official paperwork. Your mother's signed the most important ones, I just need a mark on the rest and I'll be off.

CAILLIE This is her pension.

CHARLIE Yes.

CAILLIE Mum? This is your pension.

ABS I know. I've been paying into that every month.

CAILLIE So why's it being cashed in? You don't want to cash it in, do you, mum?

ABS *confused* I don't know.

CHARLIE Yes, you do, Mrs Lindley ... because it's the only money you've got left now.

ABS But the crop ...?

CHARLIE Belongs to the company and now that you've taken voluntary retirement all proceeds will be split between the company and the new tenant.

CAILLIE What new tenant?

CHARLIE Whoever the company decides should take on the place after you've left.

ABS We're not leaving.

CHARLIE *snapping* You don't own the house, where are you going to live?

ABS Caillie?

CAILLIE *attacking* You can't throw us out.

CHARLIE There's a dead boy in your barn - she shot him. And you get to walk away with sixty thousand and no charges brought. The company is

being exceedingly generous....

EXTRACT from Production Notes and Technical Cues

INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION

This play is a 'what-if?'. ... 'What if' the growing and processing of cannabis was a government operation and thus big business? Posed in an imaginary not-very-distant future, struggling farmers have been given a new lease of life by working for the Company - a government-backed big firm. Their farms are surrounded by high fences, covered in barbed wire, to deter people from breaking in and plundering the crop for their own use. Preventing break-ins is a major headache since the plants are a constant lure, especially for young drug-users.

Against this background, the details of which emerge through the course of the play, Abs, a single woman and farmer, who lives with her daughter Caillie, has shot and inadvertently killed a would-be thief, who tried to climb the fence in the dark. Cue for the 'Company' to move in and smooth the way for her, certifying the death as an accident or from natural causes, so that Abs will not have to face the police or a murder trial. The horrible efficiency of the Company, as represented by Charlie, is the main point of the play, which shows us how big business is cold and ruthless when it comes to protecting its own concerns. As part of the cover-up, Abs and her daughter are being given a lump sum of money to move elsewhere, far away from any potential come-back or trouble. They will lose their home and everything that means something to them to the Company. Effectively, the Company owns them and there is nothing they can do about it.

Or is there? In a twist at the end, and egged on by Vicky, who is a scientist employed occasionally by the Company to 'find' a cause of death other than murder, Abs and her daughter fight back and murder Charlie, with Vicky's help concealing the murder and passing off her body as another accident along with the original young man.

Whether they will get away with this or not is unclear. It seems unlikely that they will, with a Company so big and efficient, but that isn't the point of the play. The points are: to show the ruthlessness of big business; to show how individuals can strike a blow for personal freedom; to pose some 'what-ifs' that are quite believable in a not-too-distant future.

CHARACTERS

ABS is a woman in her forties, a farmer who, having failed to make a go of the family farm and wanting to stay in the place she knows as home, has accepted the government-backed Company offer in order to survive and stay in the house she loves. Not used to the extensive paper-work which she has had to sign she does not understand that in fact she has signed away her rights to her farm along with her personal freedom of choice. The minute something goes wrong - someone gets killed - the Company will move in and take over, calling her lucky to get a golden handshake to be sent away from everything familiar.

Abs is confused by all that has happened to her. She hankers after the past, when everything was simpler, the food was cleaner and additives were kept under control. She is floundering around, aware that things are wrong in this new world, but unable to quite say what, and certainly unable to say what can be done about it.

Though she deteriorates after the murder and becomes rather pathetically dependent on Caillie's strength and clear-thinking to see her through, she is basically a strong character, as is shown by her actions at the beginning of the play. She should be so bewildered and appalled by what she has done, that it has temporarily knocked the stuffing out of her. But there are, and must be, flashes of the strong woman she has

always been - the one who booted her husband out. These serve to add depth to the character.

She should be played with a regional accent if possible. Though set near Gloucester, it would be possible to place this anywhere in the country where there are remote farms away from City life. Changing Gloucester to any region would not impede the play in any way.

CAILLIE is Abs' daughter. She is a strong independent-minded young woman, around 19 or 20, who is not afraid to speak her mind. A chip off the old block, she and Abs are clearly evenly matched at the beginning and used to bouncing arguments off each other. But it is Caillie who steps in and advises her mother later - who shows more awareness of the way things are in this modern world and who won't be conned. Mother and daughter are close and mutually supportive.

Caillie is knocked back by her recognition of the victim. Briefly she becomes a child, wanting comfort - not from her mother, but from the sympathetic Vicky. But she quickly gathers her wits, and it is she who is prepared to carry through the murder of Charlie. She quickly embraces necessity and has the determination to carry it through.

A strong manner of speech, again with a regional accent, I think, but perhaps not so pronounced as her mother's. This would emphasise her relative understanding of the modern world, to contrast with the country accent of her mother, which stands for her attachment to the old ways.

CHARLIE is the business-woman and front person for the Company. It is her job to efficiently sort out any potential problems and to keep the Company's business investments ticking over as smoothly as possible. This also entails making sure there is no slur which can attach to the good name of the Company, by a mistake made by any of its employees. She is a cold, hard woman - more concerned with making money and keeping herself well nipped and tanned, so as to keep her body toned and tanned to as close to perfection as possible. Her money goes towards such selfish ends and she has no sympathy at all with Abs or her daughter. They are just another job to be got through as quickly as possible. Moreover, a pretty boring job; to her, Abs and her daughter are yokels and devoid of any interest.

An unsympathetic character, we have no feeling for her to lament her murder at the end. By murdering her, Caillie, with the support of the others, is killing the Company - or at least as much of it as these 'small' people can stand up to.

Charlie should speak in a quite upper-class voice. As a representative of one of 'them' as opposed to ordinary people, represented by Caillie and Abs, she should speak with a bored, drawling upper-crust voice, which will underline her patronage and further distance her from the farmers. Such a voice is ideal to emphasise her insincerity, too. When dealing with business, her voice is terse and no-nonsense, hard.

VICKY is the scientist who admits that, when she was employed full-time by the Company, she was so inundated with bumph, that she had no idea the extent to which she was tied down to working for them. She has tried to escape the clutches of the Company, having decided that what it does is detrimental to the health of young people. But small print has tied her in: she is unable to free herself entirely from their clutches, and must still jump to their tune when called upon. The murder of Charlie, even if a temporary reprieve, is as much a triumph for the individual in Vicky, as it is for Abs and Caillie. Vicky is as much a reluctant prisoner of the Company's net. Aware of the harm these drugs are doing to people, Vicky has begun to work in a rehabilitation centre - another blow against the system which she now so hates.

Vicky is there as a counterbalance to Charlie. Both are aware of the power and the way of working that is the Company. Charlie has embraced its methods and enthusiastically goes along with them. Vicky has rejected its methods - but from a stance of understanding and research - unlike Abs and Caillie, who reject the Company out of sentiment and human emotional feeling. Vicky possesses feelings too, but these are backed up with the reason of her scientific knowledge.

Vicky should speak quite well. It is clear that she could have risen high in the

Company; she is a capable, knowledgeable scientist - none better, which is why the Company still uses her, despite her attempts to resign.

Alternatively, one could play Vicky as perhaps having a secret agenda which only becomes clear at the end, after her 'rival' Charlie has been disposed of. There are two ways of looking at Vicky, but whichever way you decide on, she must seem to be perfectly sincere when sympathising with Caillie and her mother.

SETTING

The play is done in a naturalistic style. It requires two distinct settings, plus a number of more anonymous ones. I would suggest that the inside of the barn and the kitchen, two quite specific locations, are permanently set on the playing area. In between them needs to be a space, which can stand for neutral ground as well as being the distance between kitchen and barn. The simplest way of doing this would be as follows:

The inside of the cottage kitchen, which can either be simply done by just using the furniture required, or can show, say, part of the kitchen wall with window.

On the other side of the stage, the interior of the barn, again, either just having some strawbales, old sacking etc. to indicate the interior or having some indication of its composition by having a part of the wooden wall visible.

The easiest way is to stick to light to define the areas, relying on furnishings to give more realism to the areas....