

# **The Minimum Requirement**

By

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## **Characters**

Abiola, Nigerian, twenty-four

Natasha, English, twenty-five

Dee, English, twenty-five

Ms Minchin, English, thirty-eight

Woman in Immigration Office\*

Taxi-woman\*

Veronika\*

Dolores\*

\* For the purposes of casting, it is recommended that these roles be played by the actors playing Natasha, Dee and Ms Minchin.

## **Time and Setting**

Present day. 2016. Various locations around London.

## **Writer's Notes**

A slash ( / ) after a word denotes an interruption by another character.

An ellipsis (...) denotes a trailing off, or a break in dialogue.

A *Pause* denotes a longer break or silence.

‘Until now, settlement has been a virtually automatic consequence of five years’ residence in the UK as a skilled worker. Those who have settled have tended to be less well paid and lower-skilled than those who have not... So in future, we will exercise control to ensure that only the brightest and best remain permanently.’

Home Secretary, Mrs Theresa May, writing on the introduction of the £35,000  
Minimum Pay Requirement for non-EU Migrants. February 2012.

## Scene One

*Afternoon. Department of UK Visas and Immigration. A cubicle office.*

Woman        You're fastidious.

Abiola        Sorry?

Woman        Your form. The detail. It's fastidious. Impressive.

Abiola        Thank you.

Woman        You're an assistant at ...

Abiola        Slaughter & May?

Woman        The butcher?

Abiola        The law firm.

Woman        That was a joke.

Abiola        Oh, right. / Sorry.

Woman        I read your form. I know where you work. ... Why did you initially  
seek residence in the United Kingdom?

Abiola        To pursue my ambition of becoming a / solicitor.

Woman        Yes, but ... off the record, why did you really come?

Abiola        To study. To live in London.

Woman        So it was London, not the UK generally?

Abiola        Yes.

Woman        Cheaper places you can go.

Abiola        I wanted to come since I was a kid; I did A levels at school so it was a /  
natural progression.

Woman        Harry Potter?

Abiola            Sorry?

Woman            We get a lot that want to come here because of Harry Potter. Like they expect the letters only get sent to English kids? And maybe they'll get in as a mature student? To the school.

Abiola            Right ... Is there any other questions or information you need?

Woman            Did you not have Harry Potter? In Nigeria?

Abiola            No, we do. It's very popular. ... I brought some written references for your records.

Woman            References?

Abiola            Someone told me you like to see ... testimonials of character? I have some from my boss, work / colleagues.

Woman            No family in the United Kingdom?

Abiola            No.

Woman            No UK-born relatives living abroad?

Abiola            My grandfather was born here.

Woman            And where is he?

Abiola            He's dead.

Woman            Right ... And your parents are ...

Abiola            Alive and well. My father is an accountant and my mother is a nurse.

Woman            They're not in Nigeria, they're in ...

Abiola            Spain. They have residency there. They moved after I finished school.

Woman            Your savings have increased since last year. Quite a tidy sum?

Abiola            Is that ... a problem?

Woman            Have you any immediate plans you wish to inform us about in relation to this money?

Abiola           What do / you?

Woman           Are other members of your family planning on visiting the UK in the coming months? Or perhaps you have plans yourself? Travel? Investment?

Abiola           Why do you need / to?

Woman           If you could answer the question, please?

Abiola           It's to cover my fees. I hope to start my training as a solicitor next September.

Woman           Right. ... Well done.

Abiola           Thank you.

Woman           Well, Ms ... Ab-/ay.

Abiola           Abiola. Or Abi, if you prefer.

Woman           Yes. Well, Ms. ... Okonkwo, I'm sorry to inform you that your application has been declined.

Abiola           What?

Woman           You have 30 days to appeal the decision, after which point your visa will be revoked and you will no longer be legally able to claim residency within the United Kingdom.

Abiola           Have I done something wrong? Is there something wrong with my form?

Woman           No. You're form is impressively detailed.

Abiola           I've been here for five years? I was told I would qualify for residency - that it was routine?

Woman           Yes, but you fall below the minimum pay requirement, meaning it is no longer routine.

Abiola            The minimum. I don't fall below the / minimum?

Woman           It increased as of April 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

Abiola            To what?

Woman           £35,000 per annum. At £24,000, you are well below the minimum.

Abiola            No one said anything about an / increase.

Woman           (*Produces a bound ledger.*) Section 45, Paragraph 3. Any non-EU migrants resident in the United Kingdom for a period of five years must surpass the minimum pay requirement of £35,000 to stay in the country. Black and white. In the planning since 2012. As I said, it's not all doom and gloom - you can appeal the decision.

Abiola            What does that involve?

Woman           You should know that ... off the record, the appeal process is both highly expensive and largely unsuccessful. In cases such as yourself, a Tier 2 migrant with your level of income, it's highly unlikely the appeal would be / successful.

Abiola            But ... this is my home.

Woman           According to your passport, your home is Nigeria. Not the United Kingdom. Appeal is your only option, I'm afraid ... unless your pay bracket increases significantly in the next 30 days.

Abiola            Can't I just get another Visa? For a year? It doesn't have to / residency.

Woman           We can no longer grant Visas to individuals earning less than the minimum pay requirement. You have 30 days.

Abiola            What if I refuse to leave?

Woman           Then you will be deported.

Abiola            Deported.

Woman        If you have any further questions on the appeal, there are some informational leaflets in the waiting room. Is there anything else I can help you with?

Abiola        There must be something else, something else that will / allow me to stay.

Woman        I'm afraid that's all I can do for today. Good luck in your future endeavours, Ms. ... Next.

*Abiola doesn't move.*



## Scene Two

*That night. A cocktail bar in Mayfair. Smooth jazz plays in the background.*

Natasha        I mean - shit! ... You're fucking with me? Say you're ...

*Abiola gives her a look.*

Natasha        What are you going to do?

Abiola          Appeal. I've 30 days to appeal before.

Natasha        You're deported? ... Sorry.

Abiola          Yeah. Before that.

Natasha        It doesn't make any / sense!

Abiola          It's to cut down on numbers of people who aren't ...

Natasha        What?

Abiola          The logic is ... if you aren't earning a high wage after five years, you  
aren't an asset ... to the state.

Natasha        If that's the case, most of the people we know / aren't assets!

Abiola          I'm non-EU. It's different for me.

Natasha        Oh. ... Well. You'll get a solicitor and you'll appeal.

Abiola          If I had gotten the traineeship, none of this would have happened.

Natasha        We can't go back to that.

Abiola          I would be over the requirement. I would have gotten residency.

Natasha        You know how subjective those interviews can be. They said they  
liked you, didn't they?

Abiola            They said they liked my eagerness.

Natasha        Exactly.

Abiola            What?

Natasha        You're too polite. Eager means polite. That's probably what happened today /

Abiola            You're saying it's my fault?

Natasha        Of course, not. Just. When you go in strong and confident – people don't say no. For this appeal, that's what you need to do. Go in, take what's rightfully yours.

Abiola            I did a good interview, Nat. I had the grades.

Natasha        We've put that behind us, Abs. No one likes a moaner.

Abiola            It could've been different. That's all.

Natasha        You'll get your traineeship. Eventually. Course you will. Right now. We need to focus on keeping you in the country, ok?

Abiola            Ok.

Natasha        And after that ... Maybe we can see if Ms Minchin help you get one?

Abiola            She has no control over trainee offers.

Natasha        She said she could put in a good word for you?

Abiola            That's a good word.

Natasha        We both know you've dirt on her. Spill a little and it'll be a very good word.

Abiola            I can't do that /

Natasha        Abs! This is what I mean. You want a traineeship, a pay increase – go get it. How do you think Minchin made partner in the first place?

Women her age aren't that high up without some ... dodgy dealing. ...

I've said it since Uni – you're too nice to people.

Abiola I'm not.

Natasha Please. You were like a walking talking notes dispenser – catching people up on lectures, doing Dee's essay when she had the sniffles /

Abiola She had laryngitis.

Natasha That's her throat. She could research and write an essay.

Abiola I was trying to help.

Natasha No more of it. People think they can walk over you, Abi. Like that cubicle woman. She probably saw you and said – she'll take it. She'll take the decision /

Abiola It wasn't like that /

Natasha Well, you won't take it next. You're fighting this. Yes?

Abiola Yes.

Natasha Good.

Abiola (*Pause.*) How is work?

Natasha We don't have to talk about / that.

Abiola No. Please. ... A change of subject would be good. Has your boss eased up at all?

Natasha No. Unfortunately. Throws me the worst files – full of paperwork. Then I kill myself, perfecting them, and he tells me it's all wrong. It's a routine, at this point.

Abiola I'm / sorry.

Natasha He's a sadist.

Abiola Well. Chris said his workload has increased too, if / that's any.

Natasha Ohmygod! Poor Chris! How has he taken this news?

Abiola I haven't told anyone but you and Dee.

Natasha Aw, thank you! That is so sweet that you just told us? Chris will be crushed when you tell him.

Abiola No point worrying him / over.

Natasha I mean, Dee aside ... I'm quite chuffed by that, Abs. Really.

Abiola Strange to believe it's five years now.

Natasha What is?

Abiola Since Uni. Since the three of us met / first.

Natasha NO! It hasn't? We started in ...

Abiola September 2011. Nearly five / years.

Natasha Christ. Now that's a depressing thought. Five years and I'm still not qualified.

Abiola Almost. September.

Natasha And then what?

Abiola You'll get a / contract.

Natasha I think if someone had properly explained to me back then after five years of cramming, I would still be a student ... I would have given up? It's genuinely not worth the effort – I mean, yes, there's the money, but like ...

Abiola When you see your name on that register. When you can properly work and represent clients, go to court and bring about actual change for / people.

Natasha How we even passed that first year. Well, me and Dee. You, Ms / Star Pupil.

Abiola No.

Abiola When you see finally get to represent people and go to court, you won't feel / like that.

Natasha How we passed first year. Well, me and Dee. You, Ms Star Pupil, / on the other hand.

Abiola No...?

Natasha You did tell them you went to Uni here, didn't you?

Abiola It was on my form.

Natasha What about your obsession with Richard Curtis films? Cultural interests – that's something?

Abiola We talked about Harry Potter?

Natasha Right ... That's ... You know what I'm going to do? I'm sorting the solicitor for you.

Abiola You don't have to / do that.

Natasha Please. My parents' guy will do a deal on the price. Guaranteed.

Abiola Yeah?

Natasha Jefferson's a family friend. I'll call him tomorrow.

Abiola If you're sure, that would be great! Thanks, Nat!

*Dee enters.*

Dee I'm so sorry! (*Hugs Abiola.*) How are you?

Natasha Hi Dee.

Dee Hi. You ok?

Abiola Fine. Shocked but.

Dee           Have you eaten? You can't forget / to.

Abiola       Nat and I ate before this.

Dee           So. Christ ... What's the plan? Is there a plan?

Natasha     Appeal.

Dee           Appeal. ... Have you spoken to anyone yet? Are you getting someone  
from work?

Abiola       Natasha's asking her parents about theirs for me.

Dee           Right. I'm so sorry this ... I don't even know what to ...

Natasha     No, I'm sorry, Dee. ... Had I known you were still coming, I would  
have got you something?

Dee           Got delayed at work and then the train stopped – something about the  
doors not / opening.

Natasha     Oh no ...

Abiola       It's fine.

Dee           It's bizarre, this ... you and this ... I remember reading about it ages  
ago. I can't believe it's actually law.

Abiola       You knew?

Natasha     Could have mentioned it?

Dee           I heard it was in discussion, I didn't know it was – I would have said /  
otherwise!

Natasha     Fucking typical, isn't it? You're not even a proper immigrant and this  
happens? All the people that get in scot-free and you have to deal with  
this.

Dee           Nat. What's a proper immigrant?

Natasha     You know what I mean Dee.

Dee                No. Tell / me?

Natasha        She's an asset, not a drain.

Dee                Who are the drains / then?

Abiola           She didn't mean anything / by it.

Natasha        You think she should get deported? Is that what you're saying?

Dee                No, just / that.

Natasha        'Cause that's pretty fucking insensitive considering the day our Abs  
                         had.

Abiola           Moving on! Please!

*Pause.*

Dee                Appeal, that's the plan?

Abiola           Yes.

Dee                What are you appealing?

Natasha        The decision, obviously.

Dee                Doesn't there need to have been ... a mistake in the application or...?

Natasha        Jefferson will come up with something. There's always some loophole.

Dee                And you think he can win it?

Natasha        Of course he can!

Dee                Abiola?

Abiola           It's only just been implemented, and I'm going back to education so...

Natasha        You know, Abs, I think Chris should be told. I really really do.

Abiola           There's no point stressing him out.

Dee                If he runs, he's doesn't deserve you.

Natasha        He won't run. He's a gentleman.

Dee             Because he's well off?

Abiola          Because he's a nice guy, Dee.

Natasha        Exactly.

Dee             Right ...

*Pause. They drink.*

Natasha        Anything wild ... or exciting with you, Dee?

Dee             Not particularly ...

Abiola          She's been promoted.

Dee             Abiola.

Natasha        Well done! What are you now?

Dee             Head of Digital Marketing.

Natasha        Congrats.

Abiola          Why don't you ever tell people about it?

Dee             I'm going to quit soon.

Abiola          You can't quit!

Dee             I'll get something else.

Natasha        It's usually good to build up a profile in a job before leaving. Climb  
the ladder and all that.

Dee             Feels like ... ages since you were out with us last, Natasha?

Natasha        Work's so hectic!

Dee             Those big nights out must be exhausting.

Natasha        I like to make an impression.



Dee            Well ... it's good of you to find time for us too. In your busy schedule.

Natasha      I always have time for my Uni friends. And ... you know, I'm always  
on time for my Uni friends too. Like, when I say, see you for dinner at  
seven, I'm actually there.

Dee            I got held up at work.

Natasha      Well, at least you're here now.

Dee            Abiola, do you want a drink?

Abiola        No / thanks.

Natasha      Vodka and tonic for me, Dee.

*Natasha hands Dee her glass; Dee leaves with it. Abiola gives her a look.*

Natasha      Oh, come on! Just quit her job? 'Cause she'll automatically get  
another!

Abiola        She doesn't like the company.

Natasha      No one likes their fucking company, Abs. And then it's all this  
judgement on top of / it all.

Abiola        Nat. The interviewer. Earlier. Kept saying 'off the record' to me.  
Could there be something in that? Her behaving improperly?

Natasha      That's for Jefferson to worry about, not / you.

Abiola        But, you think appeal is the right option?

Natasha      Is there another option?

Abiola        No. I don't think / so.

Natasha      Decision made.

Abiola           Right. You're right. I mean. They're not ironbound these new laws,  
surely.

Natasha        Once they review your application, they'll see you're not ... I've  
studied this kind of thing. You'll be routine.

Abiola           Thanks, Nat.

Natasha        It's weeding out the weak, that's all it is. (*She raises her glass.*) No  
more worrying, ok?

Abiola           Ok. To the appeal!

*They empty their glasses.*

### Scene Three

Abiola    9.30am. The phone goes non-stop the moment I sit down. Sixty-two emails since yesterday. Four fax messages. Nothing too out of the ordinary. Start at the top, the most urgent, work my way down. Glance up. It's 10 o'clock and no sign of her. I cancel her 10.15 and 10.30. I reschedule. I wonder how Mum and Dad are. Against my better judgement, my fingers hover out their number on the dial. Ms Minchin would kill me. Pull my hand away. Keep typing. Keep answering the phone. Keep working.

Feel my knees shaking under the desk. My eyes water. ... Tell myself to *get it together*. That it would mortifying for someone to walk in and ... Google Appeals. Google Minimum Pay Requirement. Google Success Stories. There are none. ... Tell myself I'll be the first. Make my way through the emails. Answer the phones. Make a to-do list. Decide it's just a hiccup. That it's a mistake. That they've confused me with someone else. That appeal is the way forward and that Natasha's guy will fix everything. That I'll still be here in a month. That I will start my course in September. That in the long run, this will become a funny story to tell my work colleagues... That everything is going to be.

I'm meant to fade away. I know that. Pack up, no fuss. Smile and say, *Thank you for the opportunity*. After years of early mornings. Late nights. Shitty jobs, shittier apartments. Of constantly fighting and pushing to get to now ... to the point where I'm about to become who I want to be. ... They

think they can push me out? That I don't matter. That I won't fight. ... I tell myself ... prove them wrong.

## Scene Four

*Morning. Abiola's workplace. Abiola waits at her desk for her moment. Ms Minchin enters.*

Abiola            Ms Minchin?

Ms Minchin    Yes, I'm late. Did you tell my 10.30?

*Ms Minchin takes off her coat; Abiola takes it from her and hangs it up.*

Abiola            I've rescheduled to tomorrow / morning.

Ms Minchin    Good. When's the / next?

Abiola            *(Hands her a coffee flask.)* Fifteen minutes. Third floor conference room.

Ms Minchin    I'll go down.

Abiola            Before you do, can I have a word? It won't take long.

Ms Minchin    Go on.

Abiola            I had my interview at Immigration yesterday. In regards to my visa.

Ms Minchin    I gave you that letter?

Abiola            Yes. It was perfect... It's just. As it happens ... I was declined. My visa / was.

Ms Minchin    Declined?

Abiola            My right to remain. Wasn't approved.

Ms Minchin    Weren't you expecting residency by now?

Abiola Yes. But seemingly the rules have changed. I'm appealing the decision, of course. With the Tribunal.

Ms Minchin Who's representing you?

Abiola Marcus Jefferson? My friend recommended him.

Ms Minchin Matthews would be your man. Genius in Immigration Law.

Abiola I think he's out of my price range.

Ms Minchin Maybe the company can do something for you. I'll call him.

Abiola There's no / need.

Ms Minchin I insist. He'll give you a good recommendation, at the very least.

Abiola I just wanted to keep you informed.

Ms Minchin How long do you have? Before they ...

Abiola 30 days.

Ms Minchin On what grounds were you declined?

Abiola I was ... below the minimum pay requirement.

Ms Minchin That has come into law already, has it?

Abiola Yes? It has...

Ms Minchin These things can always be overturned; I wouldn't worry. *Goes to leave. Pause.*) Though. If all doesn't... In the highly unlikely case, it doesn't go to plan, you remember it's four weeks for giving notice, yes? So, it's probably best to let HR know immediately. They may wish to put out a call for a replacement – a contingency plan.

Abiola I am appealing?

Ms Minchin Of course. I mean as a precaution. To ensure there's a replacement in place if things do go sour. You'll do that today?

Abiola Of course.

Ms Minchin Can you have the Willis' case file on my desk when I get back?

Shouldn't be more than an hour.

*Ms Minchin exits. Abiola steadies herself; she takes out her phone.*

Abiola Hi, Mum? Hi. Yeah. It's Abiola. Yes, sorry, I know it's early in the ... where are you going? Oh, that sounds. No, it's nothing major. I had a spare minute and I wanted to. ... How's Dad doing? Is he feeling ...? Good. Good. ... That must be normal enough, I imagine. The fatigue, at this stage of his ... Work's really good. I sent off my application for the. ... Yes, for the practising course last week, so I'll start next September. ... Well no, it was nothing. I just. Ok ... maybe there's. It's a... What it is ... is that ... I ... that my. ... Well, I've met someone. Yeah, I know, it's. ... That's the one. Chris. He's a trainee in the firm. He's great. You'd like him. He's ... yes he is white, Mum. I don't care about ... He's very respectable. ... Thanks. ... No, nothing else. Nothing. Oh, ok. ... What time do you finish at? ... I'll call you then. Tell you more about. Ya. Say hi to Dad. Enjoy Pilates. Love you. Bye.  
*(Hangs up.)*

## Scene Five

*Afternoon. The British Museum. Abiola moves between the cabinets, reading the notes and admiring the artefacts.*

Dee            You think they would turn on the air-con once in a while ... it's  
                  sweltering. And how is there not a limit to how many people they can  
                  fit in here?

Abiola            It's a Saturday? What did you expect?

Dee For tourists to wear deodorant. The smell in that last room was ... ugh.

Abiola Stop complaining, and focus on what's in front of you.

Dee                    Mummified bodies. Lovely.

Abiola      It's one of the best Egyptian displays in the world.

Dee Even more so than the place itself, I imagine?

Abiola            You must be the tiniest bit impressed?

Dee      Seen it all before, haven't I? Every school tour ended up here.

Abiola                      Philistine.

Dee                      Culture Snob.

*They move through the exhibition.*

Dee                    You never said how your Dad was?

Abiola            Better. He's on new medicine.

Dee                      When's the next trip back?

Abiola            When the flights get cheaper.



Dee           The trick is ... to book the flights far in advance. That's how you get /  
good prices.

Abiola       Thanks, Yoda.

Dee           A holiday would be good for you.

Abiola       I was on holiday a few months ago.

Dee           It's not a holiday if Ms Minchin goes away and you work from home  
and do dictation.

Abiola       Well... if I did take some time off, I'd be happier in London than in  
Spain.

Dee           You don't miss it at all?

Abiola       It's a holiday home.

Dee           What about your actual home?

Dee           You must know someone in the whole of Lagos?

Abiola       *(Pause.)* This is why I love London.

Dee           Its collection of dead people?

Abiola       Would take me years to see everything: the museums, the galleries ...  
You know I've never been to the Tate? Either of them. In five years ...  
Would you go?

Dee           To the Tate?

Abiola       Next weekend. Why not?

Dee           You buy lunch and I'll go. ... You never want to live anywhere else?

Abiola       Lagos is no London, Dee.

Dee           No. But, there's Berlin. Paris. Budapest. Egypt ... itself? What the  
British Museum has left of it. ... What's stopping us?

Abiola       Border Control?

Dee I'd like to see Lagos.

Abiola Nothing to see.

Dee Must be someone worth meeting, at least.

Abiola I went to an international school. The game-plan is to get out.  
Everyone I grew up with is spread across the globe.

*They move along the exhibit. Abiola peers into a cabinet, absorbed. Dee tracks back, grimacing.*

Abiola Are you free Monday?

Dee I said I'd go to the Tate Saturday, didn't I?

Abiola No ... I've written some notes for the appeal. I could cook us some  
dinner and ... you could test me?

Dee Test you?

Abiola It's important you answer in precisely the right way, no hesitation ...  
sorry, I know it's a bit sad.

Dee Chris can't help you?

Abiola Please, Dee?

Dee Not a good sign when you're afraid to tell him /

Abiola I'm not afraid!

Dee Then what's the issue?

Abiola I'll tell him when it's all over with ... Monday? Please?

Dee Fine. You feeling ok about it all?

Abiola Jefferson says we've a good chance so...

Dee What kind of deal did she get you?

Abiola I still have to pay him, Dee.

Dee           A few weeks rent? A few months?

Abiola       I've taken out a loan.

Dee           What?

Abiola       These things aren't cheap, Dee.

Dee           What did your parents say?

Abiola       They've enough on their plate, without me...

Dee           You still haven't told them!

Abiola       I'll tell them when / I have to.

Dee           Slaughters should have defended you. You're an employee.

Abiola       They're Magic Circle, they wouldn't waste time representing me ...

Dee           I'm sorry ... Magic Circle?

Abiola       They're the five biggest firms in London? Slaughters is one.

Dee           How much is Natasha's Magic Circle costing you?

Abiola       He's not actually Magic Circle ... but he's really well respected. Lucky  
to get him, after waiting so long for Slaughters.

Dee           How much money do you need? I'll lend you some.

Abiola       You're embarrassing / me.

Dee           Let me help!

Abiola       I can look after myself. Leave it.

Dee           But Natasha's help you take?

*Abiola moves to another display. Pause.*

Dee           London isn't your only option.

Abiola       It's the best / option.

Dee           There's nicer, more hospitable countries to / live in.

Abiola Well, once I get my traineeship ... people will be a hell of a lot more hospitable towards me.

Dee You still won't make enough with that – even *if* that happens.

Abiola Then, I'll get another job?

Dee You're working around the clock as / it is!

Abiola You're right ... it is too crowded in here.

Dee What?

Abiola We should go. I need to meet Chris / anyway.

Dee You're not meeting him / for hours.

Abiola Well, I have some jobs to do before then / so.

Dee Don't go / off.

Abiola I'll see you Monday, ok?

Dee Abiola, I'm leaving.

Abiola No, I'm leaving. You stay as long as / you like.

Dee I'm leaving London.

Abiola (*Pause.*) To go where?

Dee Decided to finally go travelling. Europe. South-East Asia.

Abiola That's why you're giving up your job?

Dee I mightn't have that many more opportunities to travel / like this.

Abiola To go to fucking Europe? It's right there, Dee.

Dee No one knows what's coming next. I'll never be able to go as cheaply, I know that. I'm telling you, in case you want to come.

Abiola Go ... voluntarily?

Dee You always said you wanted to travel?

Abiola Hang on ... so I'm clear. I'm fighting for my right to stay and work ... and you're ... throwing away your job to ... go backpacking?

Dee I don't have to like it, just 'cause I grew up / here.

Abiola If you grew up where I did ... you wouldn't be so quick to downgrade here like / you do.

Dee And if you'd open your eyes and see how vapid our 9 to 9 inward-fucking-looking lives are, you'd not hold on / to it so much.

Abiola If I leave now, I won't get back in.

Dee Is that the worst thing in the world?

Abiola Can't believe you are bringing this up here.

Dee Well, it's impossible to get you alone anywhere else.

Abiola I'm not apologising for having a life.

Dee How about for not having an opinion? If you're not bowing down to Ms Minchin, you're paying homage to Chris or Natasha. You're like their little pup.

**Abiola How can I travel across Europe, Dee? I'm not an EU citizen, am I?**

**Dee This is our chance to explore, take stock of what's out there, before it tightens up and shuts us out!**

**Abiola That's your problem, Dee. You think the world, that Europe's closing up and we need to go see it before we've to pay a fee, fill in some paperwork? That's everyone else's world, already, Dee. Once I leave here ... that's all I'll see. Gates. Borders.**

**Dee You can get holiday Visas.**

**Abiola It's not that simple for me!**

**Dee But staying in a place that wants to kick you out is? Why not come and at least try and see what else is out there?**

**Abiola Because this is where my life is! ... Winning that appeal is my only option. Not travelling. Not home. That and only that.**

Dee                    You're still below the minimum pay, Abiola. Nothing's changed.

*Abiola storms out.*

## Scene Six

*Morning. Abiola closes the door of the taxi.*

Abiola            Taylor House. Roseberry Avenue, please.

Taxi             Taylor House ... what is it?

Abiola            The Immigration Tribunal.

Taxi             Ah. Yes.

*The taxi starts its journey. Abiola takes flash-cards from her bag and silently tests herself.*

Taxi             Terrible day out there.

Abiola            Yes.

Taxi             *(Pause.)* On your way to work?

Abiola            Yes. I'm a trainee solicitor.

Taxi             Well done.

Abiola            Thank you.

Taxi             You a Londoner then?

Abiola            Kind of.

Taxi             Kind of?

Abiola            I was educated here, but my parents are from Nigeria.

Taxi             Where they took those girls?

Abiola            I'm sorry?

Taxi             'Bring Back our Girls'? Boko Haram?

Abiola            They're not from that part of Nigeria.

Taxi             They ever find those girls?

Abiola           No, unfortunately. Not all of them.

Taxi             Scary world out there.

*Abiola reviews her cards.*

Taxi             You're a student then? A 'trainee's

Abiola           Yes.

Taxi             University?

Abiola           King's College?

Taxi-woman    That's not cheap.

Abiola           No.

Taxi             Nothing's cheap anymore. 'Cept for conversation?

Abiola           Suppose.

Taxi-woman    What would we do if it wasn't? Only thing keeping us going, place like this...

Abiola           Expensive to live in a city, alright.

Taxi-woman    Expensive to be alive.... My daughter is doing her A levels. Wants to do Social Work. Heard her talk about King's.

Abiola           It's a brilliant Uni – I loved it.

Taxi             She's going to work for a year first. Save up. ... Not easy get work. Very little going, so we'll see. ... What kind of things do they do in the Tribunals then?

Abiola           Appeals mostly. For people whose Visa's are rejected.



Taxi Will yours get it?

Abiola Sorry?

Taxi Your ... client.

Abiola Yes. Hopefully. The rejection was a mistake.

Taxi They'll question them, then?

Abiola Yes. It's a formal hearing. Judges, solicitors ... she'll be questioned about her history, how long she's been here. Then there'll be a break for them to make a decision. That's it.

Taxi Good chances?

Abiola Yes. We hope.

*Pause.*

Taxi How many do they let in?

Abiola Sorry?

Taxi Is there a figure or a quota for how many?

Abiola It's case-by-case.

Taxi So there's no figure?

Abiola I've never come across one, no.

Taxi Interesting that.

Abiola Is it?

Taxi Just ... whether they want people to know how many they let in. Or how many they don't. You would imagine they have to say no to a certain number, these days? Lot of bad feeling out there...

*Pause.*

Abiola        She's a very hard-working person. Our client.

Taxi         I don't doubt it. Only.

Abiola        What?

Taxi         They said they were cutting down.

Abiola        So?

Taxi         Everything going on in the world, sense we need to look after our own.  
From the ground up.

Abiola        She's one person?

Taxi         They add up, fast. ... I'm sure your girl is very nice but ... you've to  
ask yourself how much they would do for us, if we were in their  
country, don't you? ... Now. We turn this corner up here, we'll be on  
Roseberry Avenue. You have your bag ready?

Abiola        They wouldn't have a figure ...

Taxi         That'll be £8.40 when you're ready. Be careful getting out on that side  
of the road. Them cyclists. ... Good luck today. Hope your girl wins.

Abiola        Thank you.

Taxi         Change and your receipt. Watch that bag now.

Abiola        Sorry?

Taxi         You don't know who or what you would meet in there.

Abiola        Thanks.

*The taxi drives off.*

## Scene Seven

Abiola        It was a Wednesday. A Wednesday morning around ten. I was due to start at King's on the Monday and I had two suitcases, one big, one small. I can see myself getting into Victoria, stepping onto the platform. Border Control, the Visas ... that was a blur, but Victoria ... . I was fucking terrified. As you'd expect. First time getting a plane on my own, never mind moving to a new continent on my own. Nineteen. The big move!... Victoria Station. Remember thinking: this place has stood here for a hundred and fifty years. And now, I was part of its history. One of the thousands, millions of people, who had struggled, progressed, after wars, blitzes, strikes ... I had arrived. I'd gotten away and made it to London. The beginning of a new life. ...

## Scene Eight

*Morning. Abiola's workplace. The phone rings. Abiola enters in, coffee in hand. She kicks off her shoes, throws down the coffee and her bag onto the table and answers the phone.*

Abiola        Hello, Ms Minchin's office. Yes. ... No. Unfortunately, she won't be available until later this afternoon...

*Veronika, the cleaner, enters with the Hoover.*

Abiola        Sorry, what did you...? I'm sorry, the line is ... can I call you back?  
Yes, I'll check that for you before I. ... Thank you. ... *(To Veronika)*  
Do you know what time it is?

Veronika     I am almost finished.

Abiola        You're supposed to be gone by 8.15? It's nearly 9.

Veronika     Elena was / sick.

Abiola        Who?

Veronika     I am her replacement. It took longer for me to travel here.

Abiola        Who are you?

Veronika     Veronika. I Hoover and then / I am finished.

Abiola        Have you done in there?

Veronika     Yes.

Abiola        Leave the rest. My boss will be in any minute.

*Veronika nods. She empties Abiola's bin.*

Abiola           Where are you from?  
Veronika        Sorry?  
Abiola           Where were you born?  
Veronika        Slovakia.... Is there anything else I can do?  
Abiola           It's too late for anything else, isn't it, Veronika?

*Veronika nods and goes to leave.*

Abiola           How long have you been here? ... In the UK? How long?  
Veronika        Six years years.  
Abiola           And you have residency, I suppose? Permission to remain?  
Veronika        I will empty this.  
Abiola           University?  
Veronika        No.  
Abiola           That's fucking ... typical, isn't it? You clean ... and yet, / you have.  
Veronika        I'm sorry.  
Abiola           Excuse me?  
Veronika        I'm sorry for / being late.  
Abiola           The cleaning is supposed to be finished by 8.15am. This happens again  
                    and I'll make a complaint? Understand?

*Veronika nods. Abiola walks past her into Ms Minchin's office. Veronika stands, nervous. She puts Abiola's shoes together neatly, and hangs her jacket on the back of the chair. She exits quickly. Abiola re-enters and sits at her desk, struggling to hold herself together. Pause. She notices the shoes and jacket.*

Abiola           Shit ... Shit! ... Veronika? ... (*Goes to the door.*) Veronika...!

*Ms Minchin enters.*

Ms Minchin   What in God's name are you doing?

Abiola           Was there a woman with a Hoover? On the corridor?

Ms Minchin   A cleaner? Abi, are you saying you were screeching down the corridor  
because of a cleaner?

Abiola           I didn't think anyone would be in yet.

*Ms Minchin stares at Abiola's feet; Abiola puts her heels on.*

Ms Minchin   Have you left your brain at home this morning, Abiola?

Abiola           We had a misunderstanding. I wanted to / apologise.

Ms Minchin   Abiola, what time is it?

Abiola           A little after nine.

Ms Minchin   And what time do you start work?

Abiola           Nine.

Ms Minchin   Exactly. What's happening with Collins?

Abiola           Collins?

Ms Minchin   Luke Collins. You were to set up a meeting with him?

Abiola           You never mentioned / a meeting?

Ms Minchin   I emailed you the details yesterday afternoon.

Abiola           I was out yesterday.

Ms Minchin You take an entire day off, and now you tell me you haven't even bothered to arrange a meeting, which I specifically requested you to?

Abiola I'll do it right away.

Ms Minchin It's no good right away. I needed it done yesterday!

Abiola I'm sorry. I ... I wasn't at my / desk.

Ms Minchin I want a meeting by 11am.

Abiola Of course.

Ms Minchin And I need the files of the Smith, Tate and Evans case, and any correspondence we have relating to July 5<sup>th</sup> 2006 from the Matthews file. Immediately. When you've done, reschedule any afternoon meetings.

Abiola All of them?

Ms Minchin I've a board meeting from 2pm.

Abiola Ms Minchin, would it be possible for me to have a word / with you?

Ms Minchin The files, Abi.

Abiola I wonder if you've heard anything regarding traineeship contacts? I'm on the waiting list for a place and you mentioned you could check if there had been any updates and / I really.

Ms Minchin Are you seriously asking me this now?

Abiola If I don't get a pay increase, I won't be able to continue working here, / living here.

Ms Minchin You also won't be able to continue working here if I don't get the files of the Smith, Tate and Evans case in the next / five minutes.

Abiola Ms Minchin ... I lost the appeal.

Ms Minchin When was your appeal?

Abiola Yesterday. That's why I was out?

Ms Minchin Well, I can't be expected to remember those sort of details.

Abiola But, see, if I could prove I had a contract with a firm ... as a trainee, I would have far more chance of having the decision overturned. You said you could ask before? And mention that I'm a good worker?

Ms Minchin Recommend you?

Abiola I got a first in my degree. I've been at the firm for two years, I know the clients, how the firm operates. A word from you could make all the difference.

Ms Minchin It's completely unprofessional for you to ask that of me.

Abiola You said it wouldn't / be a problem?

Ms Minchin Those who've had conditional offers will not have received their undergraduate results. If they fail to get the grades, then they will consult the waiting list. There's nothing I or anyone else in this firm can do to speed up that process. It'll be July at the earliest.

Abiola I won't be here in July.

Ms Minchin That's hardly the firm's fault? I think it best if I consider this you handing in your notice.

Abiola My notice?

Ms Minchin Your interest lies in qualifying as a solicitor, not in being my assistant.

Abiola I can do / both.

Ms Minchin I need someone who is one hundred percent focused and available. Not only are you no longer that person, apparently, you aren't legally allowed work in the country. When do you leave?

Abiola Few weeks. Four. ... Three.



Ms Minchin    Then I do need a replacement, regardless of your aspirations in this firm. When you're finished getting me those files, Abiola, confirm your situation with HR.

Abiola        You lied about your receipts.

Ms Minchin    What?

Abiola        Your tax return and your expense report from last year. The last two years. You inflated your expenses. I could tell someone.

Ms Minchin    Is that supposed to be some sort of threat?

Abiola        I have proof. Emails. Copies of the actual receipts and invoices. I could submit them to HR. As junior partner, you are held accountable for them, for honest presenting your finances.

Ms Minchin    Collect your things, Abi. I'll notify HR, on your behalf.

Abiola        If you help me, I wouldn't need to tell / anyone.

Ms Minchin    Do not be here when I get back. And do not contact this office again.

*Ms Minchin exits.*

## Scene Nine

*Afternoon. Abiola waits. Natasha bundles in with shopping bags.*

Natasha      I'm so sorry!

Abiola        You're fine.

Natasha      It's not. It's been ... ohmygod. Twenty-five minutes. I'm so sorry. I was in Zara and there was a stain on this top and then they had to get another from the storeroom and the queue – it took forever. Did you get my message, at least?

Abiola        I did, yeah.

Natasha      Good.

Abiola        Do you have it there? The top?

Natasha      Yes. Oh ... it's nothing too special but. *(She takes a blouse out of her bag.)* It's nice, isn't it? The frills? Very rooftop garden.

Abiola        It's lovely.

Natasha      They have gorgeous stuff in there. Ohmygod. Could have bought the shop. Oh, and you were on your own as well. I hate waiting on my own. You poor thing.

Abiola        No harm done.

Natasha      I love the lights. You always know the best spots.

Abiola        I've ordered. Eggs Ben. It shouldn't be long now.

Natasha      You're the best. Feels like we've not seen each other in / ages.

Abiola        Yeah. It / does.

Natasha      How's work?

Abiola I handed in my notice.

Natasha Shit. Sorry.

Abiola It's / alright.

Natasha What's the plan then? Is there a...?

Abiola I'm going to go stay with my parents. It's why I wanted... I thought maybe we could ... go on a weekend away. Last hoorah?

Natasha Where do you want to go?

Abiola Always wanted to see Edinburgh.

Natasha Edinburgh's beautiful. When.

Abiola I'm going two weeks on Tuesday, so before / that.

Natasha That's really short notice.

Abiola I know.

Natasha You know how busy everything is for me, right now? I can't guarantee anything.

Abiola No. Course. I just thought ...

Natasha You do want to stay, right?

Abiola Obviously.

Natasha I've ... had an idea. If you're interested. It's fucking insane but.

Abiola Go on.

Natasha Well, you're being deported ...

Abiola I'll be gone before that happens.

Natasha Because you're not a citizen. But if you married a British citizen, you would be fine, right? I mean, as a spouse you would have legal rights to stay?

Abiola Chris and I ... we're not together?

Natasha Since when?

Abiola Since I told him and he said that ... since I told him, essentially.

Natasha I'm sorry love. But actually... for the purposes of ... I know a guy. An English guy. George Hornsfield? He's at Slaughters too. Only, he's taken a year out, so he's a bit broke right now. But he's English.

Abiola Right.

Natasha And then I was thinking of this girl I know that sneaked into the States illegally, and what she did was she married this friend of hers who was American to get a green card, which she did and after three years they got divorced and they were both no worse off.

Abiola Ok...

Natasha What happened was she got the green card and he got ten grand? And ... well, you need a visa. This guy needs the money so...

Abiola I can't get married!

Natasha You're not religious?

Abiola No, not overly / but.

Natasha You want to stay?

Abiola Well, yes, but marriage is a massive step /

Natasha It's not a sex thing. It's a piece of paper. You get an apartment together - be a better living situation than what you currently have - and then ... couple of years down the line, you file for divorce. It would be a transaction.

Abiola You're serious?

Natasha You need a visa. He needs money. Match made in heaven.

Abiola           My savings is for my training!

Natasha        If you're deported, you can't become a solicitor, can you? But if you  
                  were married ... you could save up and in two or three years, you  
                  would have enough to start again. ... If you're interested, he said to  
                  call him.

Abiola           You said it to him?!

Natasha        Like ... I mentioned it off-hand. He seemed game enough.

Abiola           Christ ...

Natasha        All I'm saying, you want to pursue it, I've got his number.

Abiola           Thanks ... for thinking of me, I guess.

Natasha        Aren't I always? This is so nice, Abs. We need to do this more ... This  
                  is just what I need. I have literally not left my desk in a week.

Abiola           Yeah?

Natasha        My workload is horrendous.

Abiola           Weren't you at the Shard for dinner?

Natasha        On Wednesday? You had photos up from it?

Natasha        Oh. Post-work treat.

Abiola           Looked great ... I've always wanted to go / there.

Natasha        Sorry, love. Next time.

Abiola           Did you get my text that morning about Minchin? You never got back  
                  to me?

Natasha        Probably buried under a pile of papers at the time.

Abiola           And, after the appeal, you never ... I wondered was everything / ok?

Natasha        Christ, Abs. I don't wait by the phone. It's always about you.

Abiola           I know.

Natasha I'm not saying this in a bitchy way. but ... it's been a bit intense, this whole thing.

Abiola What?

Natasha All this, Immigration stuff ... You know how manic work is for me? And of course, I'm so worried and so sad about what's happened ... but I need some space too, you know?

Abiola Right...

Natasha Not space space. Just breathing time where I'm not worrying, you know? I mean, even the thing with Jefferson. I set him up for you and then you didn't even call him under you were sure Slaughters wouldn't represent you?

Abiola It was just because Ms Minchin said ... I didn't mean / to be so rude.

Natasha All I'm saying is ... I've to look after myself too? No one else is going to, so I have to focus on myself sometimes, Abs. And as regards ... I was going to invite you that night. It wasn't a space thing only I didn't want you to feel awkward? And then Miranda pointed / out.

Abiola Miranda? What's she to do with it?

Natasha She had some new friends from work with her? You know she just started that new job in Corporate? And she wanted to make a super good impression and I said – oh, I should call Abiola. It's been ages since I saw her last. But then she pointed out that you might feel awkward saying, oh ya, I'm being deported to all the trainees and her new work colleagues? So then, I thought. Oh God, that's going to be super difficult for you. And you don't deserve that stress. And if I brought you and put you through that, I would be a really bad friend

actually. For not protecting you? So ... I just thought it was easier not invite you.

Abiola        Right.

Natasha      It was a shit night anyway. Best thing that came out of it was the selfies.

Abiola        Right.

Natasha      We'll do our own night at the Shard. Fancy as you like, before you go.  
If not Edinburgh, that. Deal?

Abiola        Sounds good.

Natasha      Good. Seriously? Where are our coffees? And our Eggs Ben? They better be good after this wait, that's all I'm saying.

Abiola        What was that guy's name? George ...?

*Natasha leans in.*

## Scene Ten

*Evening. Abiola's bedroom. There is loud booming music heard from the flat upstairs.*

*Abiola and Natasha drink champagne. Natasha puts a Bride-To-Be sash and a tiara on Abiola, and raises her glass.*

Natasha        To the future Mrs Abi Okonkwo Hornsfield. Cheers!

Abiola         Cheers!

Natasha        Christ. Abi Hornsfield. That's a mouthful.

Abiola         I'm not changing it!

Natasha        What are they even playing up there? Can you not complain?

Abiola         Who to?

Natasha        Thank God you're moving. ... I mean, sharing a bathroom with four people, Abs? Seriously.

*Abiola applies make-up.*

Natasha        Where are you living again?

Abiola         Kidbrooke.

Natasha        Where?

Abiola         Kidbrooke. It's on the DLR... very up and coming.

Natasha        Lovely. ... Better than this dump, I hope.

Abiola         Fifteen minutes to work from here. It's golden.

Natasha        There's better places close to your work.

Abiola         When you start paying rent, you won't say that.



Natasha        Well ... tonight, it's only the best. To a new beginning!

*She raises her glass they drink. A knock on the door.*

Abiola        It's probably for one of my flat mates.

*Another knock. Abiola goes to investigate. Natasha surveys the room, with distain.*

*Abiola returns, holding the tiara; Dee follows.*

Dee        Natasha.

Natasha    Dee! Champagne?

Dee        No thanks.

Abiola       You didn't need to come all the way here.

Dee        You weren't answering your phone.

Natasha    We call that a hint, Dee.

Abiola       I've had a lot on.

Dee        Wedding prep?

*Pause.*

Natasha    Yes, actually. Her hen's tonight. Isn't it, Abs?

Dee        You can't marry someone for a Visa.

Abiola       How do you even know about it?

Dee        Please Nat's half the people from Uni told.

Natasha    I do not!

Dee           The whole thing's insane.

Natasha      It's practical.

Abiola        Natasha, do you mind if we have a minute ...

Natasha      Sorry?

Abiola        Two minutes.

Natasha      In the way, am I?

Abiola        Don't be like / that.

Natasha      I won't stay where I'm not wanted. I'll be in the kitchen, if you need  
me.

*Natasha strides out.*

Dee           I'm sorry about the appeal. I shouldn't have said ... at the / museum.

Abiola        You were right. I didn't have a case? Told me then and there.

Dee           Who?

Abiola        Usually, there's a waiting time of a couple of weeks, but Jefferson  
knew the judge's aide so ...

Dee           People go to jail for this sort of thing, Abiola.

Abiola        Not in England.

Dee           Woman facing deportation suddenly marries British man and becomes  
citizen.

Abiola        I don't automatically become a citizen. It's a two-year / process.

Dee           Exactly. You aren't even guaranteed citizenship. You'll lose your  
money and get / kicked out.

Abiola        I won't let that happen.

Dee            Everyone knows about it. Every person coming to this ridiculous hen.  
Every mutual friend – all it takes is for one of them to report you to the  
police and you'll be fucked.

Abiola        That won't happen. Even if someone did, there's no proof /

Dee            You don't think the police will be suspicious when they see £10,000  
going from your account to his?

Abiola        I won't transfer it in one go. I'm not stupid.

Dee            Neither are the Home Office!

Abiola        Both George and Natasha know what they are doing – they've /  
studied this.

Dee            It's you they'll go after, / not her.

Abiola        If you've nothing new to add, I think you should go.

Dee            Judith Ngozi.

Abiola        What?

Dee            You remember her? Sociology?

Abiola        Vaguely. I dunno.

Dee            She knew someone you went to school with. She was from Lagos.

Abiola        What does that / matter?

Dee            You avoided her for three years. Deliberately walked the other way  
when you saw her.

Abiola        No, I / didn't.

Dee            Do you have a single friend from home here? No.

Abiola        I didn't move here to make links with / home.

Dee            It's telling, that's all. You're embarrassed. Of where you're from. I get  
it.

Abiola I'm not embarrassed!

Dee Then why were you such a bitch to her? To anyone you ever meet that might know you? That might have some tiny knowledge of where you're from?

Abiola I'm not ... of that place.

Dee There's nothing wrong with being from there.

Abiola I've no interest in it.

Dee My parents moved into an area full of expats. Kept up the traditions of home, of community /

Abiola Good for them.

Dee It helps the homesickness. That's what they say. Makes it easier. Homier. How do you not miss any of it? Why do you hate it?

Abiola I wanted to leave. I wasn't forced. That's the / difference.

Dee And 'Abi'. How fucking prosaic is that?

Abiola It's my name.

Dee You're ashamed. That's why you shortened it. The same reason you're selling yourself to this George.

Abiola It's for a Visa.

Dee You don't think he'll use it against you. Want more money for the secret? Something else, even?

Abiola Stop exaggerating!

Dee It's selling your name.

Abiola I'm not changing it!

Dee Your word, your savings – your future – you're mugging yourself. It's fuckin' illegal, / immoral.

Abiola            I'm not listening to this.

*Abiola gathers her things.*

Dee              Tell me ... where is it your future father-in-law works, again?

Abiola           Same place all of us work.

Dee              And does he have any ... trainees?

Abiola           Partners don't take / on trainees.

Dee              You sure?

Abiola           I don't know him personally, do I?

Dee              He's Natasha's boss.

Abiola           Right.

Dee              You haven't wondered why she's so eager to help George out of his  
little financial fix?

Abiola           Oh ya, 'cause marrying off his son would impress him.

Dee              No ... but I'm sure George singing her praises would.

*Natasha appears.*

Natasha        Abs, if we want to be at the Shard for eight, we need to go.

Dee              How's work Nat?

Natasha        Delightful. You? Unemployed yet?

Dee              How much debt is it George has racked up, by the way?

Natasha        Sorry?

Dee                Word going round is it's £12,000, but seeing as you and him are such buddies, thought I'd check with you?

Natasha        Everyone loses out occasionally.

Dee                Let's hope he doesn't dip into that joint account, Abiola.

Abiola            That's just for show.

Dee                But, it needs to be in use, right? That's the big hole with the Americans. People keep their bank accounts separate – proves it's a fix.

Abiola            This isn't America – they won't be looking for those kinds of irregularities.

Dee                You'll be a poster girl for spousal / fraud!

Abiola            What do you propose then? Go back to Nigeria? Where I know no one? Or go to Spain ...? Get a holiday visa and sleep on my parents / couch?

Dee                Is that such a horrific prospect?

Abiola            I can't!

Dee                You won't!

Abiola            No – I can't! They got residency because they paid a shit load for a house there. That's how it works in Spain.

Natasha        Really?

Abiola            It doesn't extend to children. It's here or nothing.

Dee                Or Nigeria. ... Or some other country maybe, if you bothered to research your options.

Abiola            Where? ... America? Australia? I wasn't born in Paddington Dee – my passport doesn't get smiles and how do you dos like yours does.

Dee            You haven't looked into your options, not / properly.

Abiola        Well, when you're off on your pathetic travels, why don't you do that for me? Not like you will have anything else to do, or any friends to talk to? What? Other ... than me, who would go with you? Who would put up with you for longer than five fucking minutes? No one. That's why you're so desperate for me to come with you. 'Cause you've no one else, Dee.

Dee            (*Pause.*) Don't come crying to me when he robs you blind.

*Dee leaves. Abiola takes a drink and sits.*

Natasha      Happy backpacking!

Abiola        His Dad is your boss?

Natasha      Ya? I thought you knew?

Abiola        You've never even hinted that?

Natasha      Isn't that what makes it so attractive? You want a traineeship – this is your ticket.

Abiola        We've checked the Visa requirements? There's nothing we've missed.

Natasha      It's all taken care of, / Abs.

Abiola        The flat, the account, the photos - there's absolutely nothing else we need for / my Visa?

Natasha      No.

Abiola        How many people know? The full details – who else, outside the / girls?

Natasha       Listen to yourself? No one is going to say anything. This is all Dee trying to scare you.

Abiola        They wouldn't say? Why would they / say?

Natasha       Everyone is on your side, Abs. This marriage is going to open so many doors for you. You won't know yourself, after it. I promise.

*Natasha raises her glass; Abiola does the same. They drink.*

.



## Scene Eleven

Abiola        There was a butcher on our street. Growing up. Mr Femi. Whatever his second name was. This big wobbly belly and an even bigger smile. ...

The Van from the slaughterhouse would come on Monday. It's a smell you don't forget. I would walk past and see Femi carrying the parcels of meat wrapped in white paper inside. See him placing them on the counter or in the fridge, depending on what they were. By the time I got home, in the afternoon, the new meat would be hung up around the shop and in the windows. He never kept much in the fridges; preferred to sell what he could when he could. Financially, not the best business plan but ... worked for Femi. ... After closing, he would carry a bucket outside. Not always, but sometimes. The fat from the new meat. He'd give some to his own dog, and then, if there had been a lot, to the dog next door. This mangy, sickly-looking thing that belonged to the Dada's. The fat would be ravished. Ripped apart and wolfed down. And Mr Femi would go back inside with his bucket and close up. ... Not good enough for the counter. For the market. The fat. That was the logic. ... That's what it's like. In a way. Being cut off. ... Cast off. Disposable.

*Pause.*

I pretend. People don't really think like that. What you read on-line. In the papers. If they actually knew you, they wouldn't. ... That the fact I'm part of the cull is ... a mistake.

And I know it's not the end. I'm not an idiot. There'll be more interviews, more hearings .... I'm fully aware it's ... a risk. But there comes a point. A point where you have to ask. ... Why follow the rules, when the rules are designed to get rid of you? You can't. ... Because, you know eventually, they'll see what you're capable of and acknowledge you've remade yourself in order to stay. That you want to contribute and be valuable and be ... worth keeping? And you know that once they see all of that, it'll be a different conversation? And this crazy thing that gets you to that point is something you absolutely must do. To enable that conversation, that realisation. And even if it's ... even though it sounds ... or makes you feel ... It's your only choice.

*She smiles a forced smile.*

## Scene Twelve

*Afternoon. Westminster Register Office. Abiola sits in the waiting area; she wears a white dress. Dolores sits beside her. A bouquet of flowers lies between them.*

Speaker        Number 131.

*Dolores looks at her slip of paper. Pause.*

Dolores        What number are you?

Abiola         134.

Dolores        133. Next door neighbours!

Abiola         Yes.

*Pause.*

Dolores        It's a lovely dress.

Abiola         Oh ... thank you.

Dolores        Have you been waiting long?

Abiola         Half an hour?

Dolores        Same. From London, are you?

Abiola         No ... unfortunately. I just live here.

Dolores        Oh. You're accent. I thought.

Abiola         Nigeria, originally. I've lived in London the last five years.

Dolores        Where in Nigeria? I had an aunt lived there.

Abiola            Lagos. Where was / she?  
Dolores          Jos? She was a nun, she had a mission.  
Abiola            Oh... nice.  
Dolores          Beautiful people. Great warmth. That's what she always said. ...  
                     Dolores.  
Abiola            Abi.  
Dolores          Short for Abigail?  
Abiola            Abiola.  
Dolores          Much nicer.

*They shake hands. Pause.*

Dolores          My husband died.  
Abiola            I'm so sorry!  
Dolores          I'm here to collect the certificate. Some sort of mix up ...  
Abiola            I'm sorry.  
Dolores          Who is the lucky man?  
Abiola            He's ... over there. In the suit, purple tie?  
Dolores          He's very handsome. ... Who's that woman hanging out of him?  
Abiola            That's my friend, Natasha. That's her boyfriend with them. They're  
                     acting as our witnesses.  
Dolores          There's a lot of Nigerians in London.  
Abiola            I suppose.  
Dolores          No one with you today? You've no family here, then?  
Abiola            No.

Dolores        That's hard. ... You wouldn't like to stand with your fiancée?

Abiola        I needed a bit of space ...

Dolores        Nerves? ... Big day.

Abiola        Yes.

Dolores        You love each other?

Abiola        Yes...

Dolores        Trust each other?

Abiola        Yes...

Dolores        It's nothing to do with ... the wedding night itself, / is it?

Abiola        No. No. That's ... not an issue. No.

Dolores        Be honest. That's the secret. My James and I were married forty-two  
years – that's how.

Abiola        Forty-two?

Dolores        Forty-two.

*Pause.*

Speaker       Number 132.

Abiola        You're next.

Dolores        However long that will be. ... You don't have an engagement ring?

Abiola        No ... not yet. The price, you know.

Dolores        What they must be now. James and I were saving for months, back  
when. Both of us working, long hours, day in, day out, putting all our  
money aside for the priest and the reception and the dress ... When I  
think about how much we put away in one day ... my God. ... But

then. I suppose. When I think of it ... you don't forget the Big Day, do you?

Abiola        Suppose not.

Dolores       I always remember James at the top of the aisle. Me, afraid he would turn on his heels and run off ... But when I got close to him, he reached out and took my hand, gave it little a squeeze, you know? Wasn't so nervous after that.

Abiola        It was worth it then? All that work for ...

Dolores       Oh. It was. That day. It's easy work hard for something you want. And really, you don't remember why you were complaining when it happens, do you? No ... The little squeeze of the hand, funny that always sticks with - oh, it's all right dear, tears are all right.

Abiola        Sorry ... I don't know why I ...

Dolores       Ok to have a little cry on days like this. Dry your eyes now. There now.

Abiola        Thanks. Sorry...

Speaker       Number 133.

Dolores       Oh ... That'll be me. Finally. Are you alright?

Abiola        Yes. Sorry.

Dolores       The very best wishes to you and your ... what's his name?

Abiola        George.

Dolores       You and your George. A lifetime of ... happiness to you both. ... Chin up now.

Abiola        Yes. Thank you.

*Dolores exits slowly. Abiola watches her go. Natasha approaches her.*

Natasha       Who was that old bat?

Abiola         Dolores. She was getting a death certificate.

Natasha       You're so funny the way you strike up conversation with such people. I  
                     thought we could take the photos now.

Abiola         Photos?

Natasha       Need some of you and George, holding hands. Kissing – make it look  
                     real.

Abiola         I don't feel comfortable with kissing ...

Natasha       Don't be a prude. He's going to be your husband! Come on.

Abiola         I need a / minute.

Natasha       Oh, Abi, you've squashed your flowers!

Abiola         What?

Natasha       You have to hold them up properly to keep them fresh. Like this. Not  
                     have them thrown around any old way.

*Natasha models how to hold the bouquet.*

Natasha       Make sure your left hand is on top, so we can see the ring as well, ok?

Abiola         I don't have a ring?

Natasha       He'll give you one in there.

Abiola         He doesn't speak to me, Nat...

Natasha       Wants to give you space.

Abiola         I know nothing about him. Bar his name, that he gambles.

Natasha       We don't need to say that so / loud.

Abiola            You remember graduation? Us all dressed up, and we bought that champagne, the three of us? remember?

Natasha        Ya. So?

Abiola            We were going to be. We were going to take over ...

Natasha        We were drunk.

Abiola            We were excited, ambitious.

Natasha        Naïve. Look, you're nervous, I get that.

Abiola            You and I were going to work together.

Natasha        We do work / together.

Abiola            I had the grades! I did what they asked me to do.

Natasha        Those interviews are subjective, you know that.

Abiola            I worked so long to get here, Nat.

Natasha        Come on, we'll get some air. You'll feel better, ok?

Abiola            I can't. This whole thing. ... I can't.

Natasha        Abs.

Abiola            I'm sorry. I'm not doing it.

Natasha        I used up a whole holiday day for this? We can't / reschedule.

Abiola            This is a bit bigger than a holiday day!

Natasha        Ok. How about we do the photos after? Will that help?

Abiola            No!

Natasha        Darling ... now, you're being a tad ungrateful, especially considering the huge favour George is doing for you.

Abiola            Doing me ...? I'm the one bailing him out, saving his precious reputation!

Natasha        Keep your voice down.



Abiola            He's making money off me!

Natasha        You know who his father is, Abs?

Abiola            Yes. You've told me a thousand times!

Natasha        Having him on side is going to get you an in at / Slaughters.

Abiola            He won't know about me, about any of this!

Natasha        I can put in a good word for you, can't I?

Abiola            Yes, you, the family go-between.

Natasha        How fucking dare - this has all been to help you!

Abiola            Please. I'm not an idiot.

*Abiola gathers her things.*

Speaker        Number 134.

Natasha        It's too late to back out now.

Abiola            I won't ever be free of it. It'll follow me. Haunt / me.

Natasha        You promised George. He's ... he's counting on this money.

Abiola            He'll have to find another way of getting it then.

Natasha        No one will have anything to do with you, you get that? Chris, the girls  
at work, the people from Uni. Even if you manage to stay, you'll have  
no one. That what you want? Abs? ... I need you to do this. For me?  
Abs? ... Abi?!

Abiola            Abiola.

*Abiola hands her the bouquet and exits.*

### Scene Thirteen

*Morning. Primrose Hill.*

Dee           Wow.

Abiola       Yeah.

Dee           And then she ...

Abiola       Shouted. A lot. ... She's not speaking to me now.

Dee           I wouldn't be.

Abiola       I'm sorry for ... at the flat. For being ...

Dee           A self-serving, pompous bitch?

Abiola       Among other things, yeah.

Dee           Well, I suppose you almost married that slob ... You were obvious  
temporarily insane.

Abiola       Don't think I would have done it. Married him.

Dee           You fancied Chris tight-arse Traffors. You're capable of anything.

Abiola       He wasn't a tight-arse.

Dee           That night in O'Neill's, I bought a round, you bought a round ... even  
Natasha, oh-I-forgot-my-wallet, bought one ... and him?

Abiola       We're not together anymore, Dee.

Dee           Whose choice was that?

*Pause.*

Abiola       I had a meeting at Slaughters this morning.

Dee Oh?

Abiola They've offered me a training contract.

Dee What? That's fantastic! That's ...Does this mean you can / stay?

Abiola Because I'll be in education ... it seems they can defer the / pay requirement.

Dee Congratulations! I told you, something would come up, something would ... Why aren't you jumping up and down celebrating!?

Abiola I'm not going to accept.

Dee You have to accept.

Abiola It's an offer. I can turn it down.

Dee But this has been the game plan for ... well, ever.

Abiola It's not enough. The offer. It's not...

Dee I don't ...

Abiola Minchin pulled some strings to get me in /

Dee Too right – you've been her slave the last two years.

Abiola Because I ... said she lied about her expenses to the company.

Dee You didn't?

Abiola And I said I had proof.

Dee Did you?

Abiola No ... but I knew she inflated the numbers, and that it would get her into trouble so ...

Dee So the fear ... that you might tell ...

Abiola Hello traineeship.

Dee Not going to lie ... didn't think you had that in you.

Abiola I can't take it. Under those circumstances. It's not right.

Dee            You said yourself – you should have got one before now. You had better grades than Natasha, better volunteer experience /

Abiola        Ya, and why didn't I get one? Why do I have to put up with all this minimum requirement crap? ... I'm not British, Dee.

Dee            It's really not as glamorous as you think.

Abiola        Not African. Or European ... I'm just this person, with a London accent. ... Who's to say, if I took the traineeship, jumped through all the hoops, they wouldn't up the requirement or ... find some other way to kick me out?

Dee            It's too good an opportunity to turn down.

Abiola        I don't want it this way. It's not how I want to do things. ... I want like to feel I've a link to somewhere, that it's some sort of home to me. I don't get that here anymore.

Dee            When do you have to make a decision about the offer?

Abiola        The decision's made. ... But, you should be happy to hear, I have booked a flight.

Dee            To the folks? I'm impressed.

Abiola        Thank you.

Dee            But you can't stay?

Abiola        No ... Need to splash half a million on a house to get residency there.

Dee            That's mental.

Abiola        That's property law. (*Pause.*) I knew about the requirement. Before the interview.

Dee            Why didn't you say?

Abiola        I hoped ... when they met me. Heard how much I wanted to stay and  
my plans that ... well. ... It doesn't matter, does it?

Dee            No ... Offer still stands. Could smuggle you across the continent?

Abiola        Or you could stay. You could fight.

Dee            Fight what?

Abiola        This. The requirement. I dunno. The housing crisis. Brexit. You could  
not run away.

Dee            I'm not running away.

Abiola        Sorry, you're holidaying.

Dee            You're telling me you wouldn't do it, if you could?

Abiola        You spend all your time ... putting this city, this country down ... you  
don't do anything to change it.

Dee            What the hell am I going to do? Storm Westminster? Hold parliament  
to ransom?

Abiola        You're the social media expert, you tell me? ... Change's gotta start  
somewhere, Dee. Usually it's not from a lounge chair.

Dee            Maybe...

*Abiola stands. She extends her hand to pull Dee up.*

Dee            Why?

Abiola        Still need to go to the Tate.

Dee            Do that tomorrow. Let's sit a while.

Abiola        I'll be gone in a week. I don't have time to faff. Come on, I'll race ya.

Dee            Abiola ...

Abiola        Yeah?

Dee            Where'll you go? ... Really? After you ...

Abiola        Depends where'll have me, I guess.

Dee            Ya, but. Actually? ... Where will you go?

*Abiola can't answer.*

## Scene Fourteen

Abiola        It was a Wednesday. A Wednesday morning around ten. I was due to start at King's on the Monday and I had two suitcases, one big, one small. I can see myself getting into Victoria, stepping onto the platform. Border Control, the Visas ... that was a blur, but Victoria ... . I was fucking terrified. As you'd expect. First time getting a plane on my own, never mind moving to a new continent on my own. Nineteen. The big move!... Victoria Station. Remember thinking: this place has stood here for a hundred and fifty years. And now, I was part of its history. One of the thousands, millions of people, who had struggled, progressed, after wars, blitzes, strikes ... I had arrived. I'd gotten away and made it to London. The beginning of a new life. ... I was brimming, that's what I was. Brimming with fear and excitement and worry and ... expectation. Ready for Uni. Ready for a new country, a new continent. Standing in middle of the station, lost and confused, but thinking: you can be anyone. No more barriers. No more loopholes. This is your beginning. Your chance. ... Your new home.

*Abiola stares into the audience, defiant. End.*