

ABIGAIL ADAMS

(5th DRAFT)

by

Mark Shand

Characters

Abigail Adams
Mum
Dad

SCENE 1. EXT. ROOF. NIGHT.

DISTANT CITY TRAFFIC. WIND.

WE HEAR EVERYTHING FROM WHERE MUM AND
DAD ARE STANDING. THEY ARE BOTH CLOSE
AND SHOUTING TO ABIGAIL IN THE DISTANCE.

MUM: Abby. Please. Don't.

DAD: Abby. You're scaring your Mum to death.

MUM: You're very close – the edge – Abby. We're a long way up.
It's dark. It's a gale up here. Abby. Please Abby.

ABIGAIL: (DISTANT) Dad.

DAD: Yes Abigail?

ABIGAIL: Dad, tell Mum it's okay.

MUM: (TO DAD) Okay? I wished I believed her.

DAD: (TO ABBY) She doesn't believe you.

MUM: (TO DAD) Shut up, don't provoke her. (TO ABIGAIL) Abby, if
you step right back away from the edge, we can go back
downstairs to our flat, have a nice cup of tea – strong, how
you like it - and talk things through.

ABIGAIL: But Mum, we've run out of tea. I said we didn't have much left. But you said there was plenty enough and we could wait to the next big shop. I told you.

MUM: (TO DAD) I don't understand. What's she mean? Is she saying she's going to jump because we've run out of tea?

DAD: (CLOSE TO MUM) I think I'm going to faint.

MUM: (TO DAD) Don't you dare.

DAD: (TO MUM) It must be vertigo. I can't-

MUM: (TO DAD) Don't get started on that vertigo business! (TO ABIGAIL) If it's something that Billy McCready said to you at the party... Whatever trouble you're in at school... If you're in trouble with some gangs... If you're pregnant... Or... Or, if it's us... If it's me or your Dad... We can sort it out - together. I were young as well. Nothing you can say can shock me. Your Dad was a teenager once. (TO DAD) Tell her.

DAD: I was a teenager once.

ABIGAIL: I'll only be a second. Dad, will you tell Mum?

DAD: She understands Abigail. (TO MUM) My legs are going.

MUM: (TO DAD) If she jumps it's our fault. I can do nothing but blame myself – and you as well. Is she on drugs?

DAD: Abigail, are you on drugs?

MUM: (TO DAD) Will you shut up with the drugs stuff. That's the last thing you should say to someone on drugs (TO ABIGAIL) Ignore your Dad, Abby. He's gone mental 'cause the police've stopped the lifts.

ABIGAIL: Mum, please don't be mean to Dad. He's trying his best.

MUM: I'm not being mean to your Dad. (TO DAD) What's she talking about?

ABIGAIL: He's a good person. Be kind to him.

MUM: Be kind to him? (TO DAD) What've you been saying to her?

DAD: (TO MUM) I don't know.

ABIGAIL: Blimey, Dad you look terrible.

MUM: Abby, I've seen pictures of people who jump. It's not nice.

ABIGAIL: No you haven't.

DAD / MUM: (SCREAMING) Abigail! / Abby!

SUDDEN, ABSOLUTE SILENCE.

ABIGAIL: Oh bugger. I've fallen off.

ANNOUNCER:

"ABIGAIL ADAMS, BY MARK SHAND."

SCENE 2. OUTSIDE. MORNING.

FADE UP TO: THE CONSTANT HYPNOTIC
RHYTHM OF TRAINERS RUNNING ON
PAVEMENT.

ABIGAIL: (V.O. RUNNING) This morning, before I fell off the top of our tower block, Billy McCready chased me for two miles – for my new red retro Nike trainers, that Dad got off Steve from work, and my cream linen suit, that I started to make, but me Mum finished. (SHOUTING TO BILLY) You stay back Billy McCready! You won't get me or my red retro Nike trainers! (V.O) He chased me all the way from the old gas works and the house that me Mum and Dad used to live in before I was born.

A SWING DOOR CRASHES OPEN.

(SHOUTING TO BILLY) Well maybe you know which block I live in, but you don't know how high up! You won't catch me Billy McCready because I am Abigail Adams and I will kick your ass.

RUNNING UP FLIGHTS OF CONCRETE STAIRS IN
A HOLLOW ECHOING STAIRWELL.

ABIGAIL: (TO HERSELF) We're right near the top, but not quite. There's another 6 floors above us. (GETTING SHORT ON BREATH) It's still a bloody long way up mind.

DAD: (OFF) Abigail, is that you talking to yourself?

ABIGAIL CATCHES UP TO HER DAD.

ABIGAIL: Dad? What you doing out?

DAD: (STARTS CLIMBING THE STAIRS) Your Mum sent me to get some bread from the Spar, and some of that horseradish sauce you like – for your breakfast.

ABIGAIL: But, I make my own.

DAD: I think she reckons it's a bit weird for girls to be making their own horseradish sauce. (STOPPING) Hold on a minute there love, I'm knackered. (GETTING BREATH BACK) Has that Billy McCready been chasing you again?

ABIGAIL: He was after my red retro Nike trainers and my cream linen suit.

DAD: I don't think he was chasing you for what you were wearing.

ABIGAIL: 'Course – why else would he be after me?

DAD: You'll find me dead on these stairs one day.

ABIGAIL: Are the lifts out again?

DAD: Nothing around here works. The lifts, the neighbours giving it at all hours, the drugs and waz down the stairs - it's a bad area.

THEY START UP THE STAIRS AGAIN.

ABIGAIL: I quite like it. I mean there's drug dealers, but if they killed anyone it'd probably be each other and, according to your newspaper, that's a good thing. And at least the council have painted our block yellow to improve everyone's standard of living. And Mum says all we need is a little 'Civic Pride' and a few plants around the place.

THE MUFFLED SOUND OF HAMMER AND DRILL
AS THEY PASS THE FLAT BELOW.

DAD: Your Mum and her 'Civic Pride'. She can't see what's in front of her face. (STOPPING) Like these girls here - that live below us... Always at their DIY. (KNOCKS AT THE DOOR)

ABIGAIL: Don't knock on their door – they might hear you. Besides, I keep telling you, they're not girls they're nurses.

DAD: (SHOUTING AT DOOR) Well, it's against council rules.

THEY START WALKING AGAIN.

ABIGAIL: But it's not the council who have to live here, and anyway it's good to have people from the emergency services close by in case someone cuts themselves or falls off the tower block.

DAD: Mmm...

THE MUFFLED, UNRECOGNISABLE SOUND OF
AN AMATEUR PIANIST PLAYING THE PIANO AND
BELTING OUT 'HALLELUJAH' (BY LEONARD
COHEN).

(STOPPING) ...well whatever you say, they're more use than our next door neighbour here. Nothing but playing his piano at all hours. God knows how he got the thing up here in the first place.

ABIGAIL: What's the point of everybody living together if you can't at least hear them? It makes me feel part of a great big family with people you know, but you never see.

DAD: But the same song? It drives me mad. Give your Mum a knock will you, I've got me hands full.

HAMMERING ON A THICK METAL DOOR.

MUM: (OFF) Who is it?

ABIGAIL: Me and Dad.

MUM: (OFF) Just a second.

BOLTS ARE UNLOCKED.

DAD: You know sometimes, I think I'm not made to live this high up, do you know what I mean? I were all right when we lived by the gas works. But, all the way up them stairs... Your Mum, she's fine. But me... Do you not, you know, get vertigo and stuff?

ABIGAIL: That's what everyone at school says, but I can give myself vertigo standing completely still in a car park - so it makes no difference.

MANY BOLTS BEING UNLOCKED.

Dad?

DAD: Yes Abigail?

ABIGAIL: Where's your bread?

DAD: (SIGHING) Don't tell your Mum – she'll only have a go at me. I'll be back in 20 minutes.

ABIGAIL: Bye.

DOOR OPENS.

MUM: Who you saying 'bye' to?

ABIGAIL: Dad.

MUM: What's he forgotten this time?

ABIGAIL: Bread.

MUM: (SIGHING) Come inside, it's nearly... What's the matter? You're soaked.

ABIGAIL: I've been running.

MUM: Running? Was Billy McCready chasing you again?

ABIGAIL: He was for a bit, but I were mostly testing my trainers.

MUM: Well, don't go wearing them out. You won't be getting a new pair in a hurry.

ABIGAIL: I'm really looking after them.

MUM: And will you stop wearing that suit. What about all those other clothes, that Steve from your Dad's work got you? Girls your age shouldn't be wearing suits.

SCENE 3. FALLING.

A BEAUTIFUL, HEAVENLY TONE.

ABIGAIL: (BEAUTIFULLY) I'm... I'm falling... (SUDDEN SILENCE - SIGHING) Bugger it! My Mum's old diary! I've gone and left it out! I were reading it, and when I finally hit the ground they're gonna do a CSI and think that it was her diary that made me jump. Idiot. It's cause I mostly use the left side of my brain. I never have dreams, I'm messy, and I'm dead forgetful. And I do stupid things - like fall off buildings.

THE SOUND OF MUFFLED POP MUSIC FROM
NEXT DOOR FADES IN.

That's music's coming from the flat on our right. There's a girl who lives there with her Dad – she's about my age. You hardly ever hear her, let alone her music – he must be out. I keep pretending to my Mum that I know what really goes on in there.

MUM: Oh Abby, the stuff in your head---

SCENE 4. INT. FLAT KITCHEN. MORNING.

MUM IS FRYING SOMETHING.

ABIGAIL: ---Honestly, I'm telling the truth. It's a torture chamber where they mangle little children. Sometimes at night I can hear the metal shackles banging against our wall. The kids are tied upside down, so you can't blame them for getting a bit restless.

MUM: Don't talk stupid. Her Dad always seems very nice when I see him on the stairs. (EGGS ARE ADDED TO THE PAN)
After breakfast, we'll go and get you some more Rubber Plants for your bedroom.

ABIGAIL: Thanks Mum, but I don't need any more-

MUM: But your old ones are dying off.

ABIGAIL: Dad says we haven't got room and that the balcony looks like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

MUM: What would he know? Your Dad's never been on a plane, never mind to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

DAD COMES IN THE FRONT DOOR.

MUM: Where you been then?

DAD: Oh, you know...

MUM: You forgot the bread again.

DAD: Abigail, I thought I told you.

ABIGAIL: You always say it's best to tell the truth.

DAD: Don't be cheeky.

PAUSE.

MUM: Abby, how come *you* never listen to pop music?

ABIGAIL: Why? It's just a load of songs about girls.

DAD: You're into your painting pictures now aren't you love? (TO MUM) What we having for breakfast then?

MUM: Egg. (TO ABIGAIL) But Abby, your friends must like it, don't they? They'll have posters on their bedroom walls, won't they? They'll be... Where you off to?

ABIGAIL: The balcony, so I can finish the painting.

ABIGAIL GOES OUT TO THE BALCONY.

DAD: (TO MUM) I don't like them runny.

MUM: (TO DAD) Abby don't like them hard.

DAD: We're fussy. I'm sorry.

MUM: (TO DAD) Go away. You make me nervous when you're looking over my shoulder like that. (CALLING TO ABIGAIL) Abby, shouldn't you be off with your friends? I mean you're spending all hours painting your picture - drinking tea - and with that suit on.

ABIGAIL: (DISTANT) But, you said I had to go to Saskia Taylor's party tonight, and I've got to get the painting done before tomorrow.

DAD: (CALLING TO ABIGAIL) Why tomorrow?

ABIGAIL: It's a present – for your's and Mum's anniversary.

DAD: Our anniversary?

ABIGAIL: You didn't forget?

MUM: No. Course not.

DAD: Course we didn't. Now, give your Mum a hand with the table will you love?

ABIGAIL: Just a minute Dad.

MUM: Now.

ABIGAIL: I'm training my eyes to focus on the horizon. I've got to develop my sense of perspective.

DAD: Now means now.

ABIGAIL: One second - it might be dangerous to suddenly break concentration.

MUM: I'll suddenly-break-concentration you if you don't get yourself over here.

ABIGAIL COMES BACK INSIDE.

ABIGAIL: Gosh, Mum. Whatever.

MUM: Stop saying gosh.

DAD: What you painting love?

ABIGAIL: Don't look! It's meant to be a surprise.

MUM: (TO DAD) It wouldn't be so bad if she behaved like a girl – did girl things. She takes a flask of tea to the cinema for god's sake.

ABIGAIL: I *can* hear you know?

SOUND OF A DOOR BEING OPENED IN THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE.

DAD: Sounds like next door's back - he'll have something to say about that racket.

MUM: (TO DAD) I mean what do Abby's friends think? She's got brown teeth! It's disgusting.

ABIGAIL: So are yours.

THE MUSIC STOPS ABRUPTLY WITH A
SUCCESSION OF LOUD BANGS. THINGS ARE
KNOCKED AROUND NEXT DOOR. SILENCE.

MUM: That's better.

ANOTHER LOUD BANG.

ABIGAIL: What was that?

MUM: Nothing.

SCENE 5. FALLING.

A BEAUTIFUL, HEAVENLY TONE.

ABIGAIL:

(BEAUTIFULLY) I'm... I'm flying. (SUDDEN SILENCE) No I'm not. I'm falling. (SIGHING) I wouldn't be so worried about them finding Mum's old diary, but I know they'll make a big deal out of it. What's wrong with knowing what other people are thinking? I always leave my own diary around for Mum and Dad to read - I even spell check it for them on the computer. (PAUSE) You don't have to write everything in it. Mum left loads out of hers – like Dad's vertigo – which makes it hard for him to use the stairs - and his claustrophobia – which makes it hard to use the lift. Maybe she thought it was embarrassing.

SCENE 6. INT. INSIDE LIFT. AFTERNOON.

MUM: You'll have to wait – or take the stairs.

DAD: If you hadn't gone overboard with those leafy ones-

MUM: Weeping Figs.

DAD: Weeping-whatevers. Maybe I'd be able to fit in as well.

MUM: You can take the stairs.

DAD: Again? But I've got to carry this easel-thing for Abigail.

ABIGAIL: I didn't really want the easel Dad, all I want-

MUM: She doesn't even want it.

DAD: She won't get it either if I have a heart-attack before I get to our floor.

ABBY: I don't mind the stairs. I can-

MUM: She's not taking the stairs, she's taking the Philodendrons.

ABBY: Really it's okay-

DAD: Well how about I take them and you carry some of these Ferns up the stairs? (DOOR STARTS TO CLOSE) Hey. Don't you go closing the door on me. I haven't even-

THE LIFT CLOSES AND STARTS TO GO UP.
MUM AND ABIGAIL STAND IN SILENCE
FOR A MOMENT.

MUM: Abby. Why did you close the doors when me and your Dad were having a conversation?

ABIGAIL: That weren't a conversation. That were you two getting at each other.

MUM: Don't be cheeky. We were just talking about plants. And will you put that flask away. Why didn't you have a cup of tea at the garden centre?

ABIGAIL: No one ever makes it as strong as I like.

MUM: Still you shouldn't be drinking tea in a lift.

ABIGAIL: Why?

MUM: Civic pride.

ABIGAIL: Oh. (PAUSE) Mum. Why did you decide to move from your house by the gas works and live in this tower block?

MUM: What do you mean? Me and your Dad thought it'd be exciting - living up high – somewhere different.

ABIGAIL: No you didn't. I cost too much don't I?

MUM: Living here's a little cheaper that's all.

PING. THE LIFT STOPS. THE DOOR OPENS.

MUM: I'll hold the lift. Leave them outside our door, and we'll go back down and get the rest.

ABIGAIL: (OFF) Is that why you're mad for flowers and your 'Civic Pride'?

MUM: Sometimes you just make the best of what you have.

MUM: Okay?

ABIGAIL: Yeah.

THE DOOR CLOSES AGAIN AND THEY START TO DESCEND.

MUM: You know ten years ago, all people wanted to do was tear these towers down. But now everyone wants to live here. They like being in the centre of town. They like the views. Did you know that?

ABIGAIL: No.

MUM: Yes, well now you do. Civic Pride...

ABIGAIL: Civic Pride? Is that why Dad's always off on them resident meetings?

MUM: They're just his excuse to get tanked up. He couldn't care less. When I first met your Dad his idea of Civic Pride was pissing in Barry Channing's garden instead of his own.

PAUSE. PING. THE LIFT STOPS.

THE DOOR OPENS.

DAD: You took your time.

MUM: You still here? (TO ABIGAIL) Abby, grab the rest of those Ferns. It doesn't look like your Dad's going to lift a finger to help.

DAD: That girl next door's a proper saint. She's just gone right up those stairs, carrying about a week of shopping, without a word of complaint. I bet her Dad's proud. Well, I'm not walking – it's the plants or me. You'll have to decide, because I'm not going to do-

MUM: Oh just take the stupid lift. You lazy lazy man.

MUM STEPS OUT THE LIFT,

AS DAD SQUEEZES IN PAST HER.

DAD: Where you going?

MUM: For a walk. I'm trying to make the place look good with the plants and that, but no. You've not one ounce of Civic Pride have you?

DAD: What you on about?

MUM: Sometimes I think I'm the only one here who gives a damn. (DOOR STARTS TO CLOSE) Hey. Don't close the door halfway through me talking-

THE LIFT DOORS CLOSE AND IT GOES UP.
DAD AND ABIGAIL STAND IN SILENCE FOR A
MOMENT.

DAD: Abby you know you shouldn't keep closing the door when me and your Mum are halfway through talking.

ABIGAIL: Sorry Dad.

PAUSE.

DAD: You want any more brushes - for your painting?

ABIGAIL: I'm not sure if I need-

DAD: I can get you some. From Steve from work.

ABIGAIL: (SURRENDERING) Thanks Dad.

SCENE 7. FALLING. SILENCE.

I'm falling and I should be having my *own* life flashing before my eyes - not my Mum's. It's not fair. Lucky we've got so much in common. Like, I get my taste for tea from her - she was a two bagger when she was young - just like me! Dad thinks I'm addicted, but I just like it - that's all. Me and Mum share the same Extra Strong smokers toothpaste – Mum for her cigarettes – me for my tea. She's the real addict. She doesn't even like it. I think she does it because Dad doesn't want her to.

SCENE 8. INT. THE FLAT. MORNING.

THE TV IS PLAYING AWAY.

DAD: Enjoy your little walk?

MUM: Very much.

DAD: Where you going?

MUM: I'm just taking a cup of tea out for Abby.

DAD: Do you not think I'd like one?

MUM: The kettle hasn't moved.

THE BALCONY DOOR SLIDES OPEN AND THE
SOUND OF THE CITY RUSHES IN.

MUM: How's the painting going Abby?

ABIGAIL: Don't look.

MUM: I won't. Here, I brought you a cup of tea – how you like it.

ABIGAIL: Ta Mum. There's not much left we should get some more.

MUM: There's plenty. We'll just get some more when we do the next big shop.

THE SLIDING SHUT OF THE BALCONY DOOR.
WE'RE OUTSIDE NOW WITH THE CITY SOUNDS,
ABIGAIL AND HER MUM.

Want one?

ABIGAIL: Mum! You shouldn't be offering me cigarettes you're my Mum.

MUM: Saves you stealing them from my handbag.

ABIGAIL: No thankyou. I can get them at school if I want to – which I don't.

AN AWKWARD SILENCE.

MUM: Don't tell your Dad -- will you? About the fags I mean?

ABIGAIL: No.

MUM: You promise?

ABIGAIL: I promise.

MUM: You're a good girl Abby.

ABIGAIL: I am?

THE SOUND OF A LIGHTER.

MUM: You sure you don't want one?

ABIGAIL: Yes. Now, I've got to finish this for tomorrow.

PAUSE.

MUM: You're very good – at the painting.

ABIGAIL: I thought you said you weren't looking.

MUM: I know, I just saw a building – and the sky – you do really good skies.

ABIGAIL: It's meant for a surprise.

MUM: It's very good. Very real. You don't like living here do you?

ABIGAIL: Me? I love it. It's like a great big family with people you know, but you've never-

MUM: I know, so you keep saying, but sometimes I think maybe you're just pretending to be happy. (PAUSE) Abby. Is it because you're alone – you know – the way you are – so – blank?

ABIGAIL: What do you mean?

MUM: Until my brother was born, I was an only-child. I *do* know what it's like.

ABIGAIL: Yes, I know

PAUSE.

MUM: I read somewhere that your teens are meant to be a time of mystery and strength - of secret plans and imaginings.

ABIGAIL: What do you mean?

MUM: I don't know. (PAUSE) You all grow up too quickly these days. (PAUSE) At first it was embarrassing - watching you and your Dad - I'm not as clever as you both - I'll hold my hand up to that one. Sometimes, when I look at us all, I don't think we belong in the same room together. We're like these tower blocks, all different colours, nothing in common. What am I talking about? I'm just being pathetic I guess.

ABIGAIL: It's okay Mum.

MUM: What're you doing?

ABIGAIL: I'm laying my hand on your shoulder.

MUM: I know you are, but why?

ABIGAIL: I'm comforting you mother.

MUM: Well stop it. I'm fine. I don't need comforting – not from my own daughter – besides you're too young to be comforting.

ABIGAIL: Be strong Mum.

MUM: Abby!

WE HEAR ABIGAIL PACKING UP HER PAINTING.

ABIGAIL: I'm going to get my other brushes.

MUM: I know you're making fun of me – me and your Dad - of both of us - but that's okay - we expect it.

ABIGAIL: I'm not making fun of you Mum.

THE DOOR SLIDES OPEN AGAIN WE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE TV.

MUM: Abby?

ABIGAIL: Yes mum?

MUM: Don't make the same mistakes I did.

ABIGAIL: Okay. Bye.

THE DOOR SLIDES SHUT.

THE SOUND OF THE CITY RISES AND FALLS.
THE SOUND OF A LIGHTER. NOW ALONE, MUM
SADLY SIGHES.

THE DOOR SLIDES OPEN AGAIN.

ABIGAIL: Mum?

MUM: Yes, Abby?

ABIGAIL: Mum. Just so I know. What're those mistakes that you made - that I shouldn't make?

MUM: Well... I don't really... I can't... I don't know...

ABIGAIL: If I was you. I'd try writing them down - in a list. Sometimes when I think my head's going to fall off. I write stuff down and I can see things clearer.

MUM: Like a diary?

ABIGAIL: Yeah.

MUM: I used to write a diary – before you were born.

ABIGAIL: Did you?

MUM: Yes. (PAUSE) Abby?

ABIGAIL: Yeah?

MUM: Are you positive you don't want one of these?

ABIGAIL: Mum.

SCENE 9. FALLING. SILENCE.

ABIGAIL:

Now all I've got in my head is the stuff that Mum and Dad did – and it doesn't look like I'm going to live long enough to do any of it myself. Like trapping-off and going on dates.

(PAUSE) For their first date, Mum took Dad to the cinema. All through the film she felt his leg against hers and it made her feel all good. Just being close – just touching. Then, when he stood up to go, she could still feel something - because she'd actually been rubbing up against his seat. She thought he was there, even though he wasn't - which is a bit like he is on a Saturday after a few Stellas.

SCENE 10. EXT. THE BALCONY. EARLY
EVENING.

CITY TRAFFIC. THE TAPPING OF KNUCKLE
AGAINST GLASS. THEN THE SLIDING OPEN OF
THE BALCONY DOOR.

DAD: You're Mum not back yet?

ABIGAIL: No. I thought she was with you.

DAD: Nope, I've been down The Albert. Here, come inside a second.

ABIGAIL: No, Dad. I'm alright. I'm in the middle of my painting.

DAD: Come inside a second. I've got a surprise for you.

ABIGAIL: I know Dad.

DAD: Know what?

ABIGAIL: You're having an affair.

DAD: No, Abigail I'm not having an affair. This is a good surprise. Come in - I can't show you out here – someone might see.

ABIGAIL: Okay.

THE DOOR SLIDES SHUT.
WE'RE INSIDE WITH DAD AND ABIGAIL.

DAD: Now. You've got to promise not to tell your Mum. You promise don't you.

ABIGAIL: I promise.

DAD: There you go. (ABIGAIL DOESN'T RESPOND) It's a telescope – to help you with your 'Sense of Perspective'.

ABIGAIL: (MUSTERING ENTHUSIASM) Wow. You get this from Steve at work?

DAD: No. Yes. Just don't tell your Mum.

ABIGAIL: Thanks Dad. How does it work?

DAD: Well. You need to put it on its stand. Here, we best turn down the lights so no one can see us using it. There. That's better. Right now - just turn that top bit clockwise until everything's in focus.

ABIGAIL: All I can see is a dark blur.

DAD: You've got to point it at something far away. Let's have a go – see that?

ABIGAIL: You can see the kids on the wreck.

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS.

MUM: Abby. I've told you – you've got to lock all the bolts on the door. Give us a hand with these Palms will you? The leaves are going everywhere... What you doing? Messing around in all this dark? Come on, switch these lights on, I can't see where I'm-

ABIGAIL: Mum!

DAD: Turn them back off!

MUM: What you doing with that? Someone'll see you looking at them - the police'll have us as perverts. It's not right to be watching people.

ABIGAIL: But, it's not for watching people – it's for looking at the view. For my painting...

MUM: (TO DAD) Did you manage to 'acquire' this from work as well then?

ABIGAIL: It weren't Dad. I borrowed it from school - from Science.

MUM: (SUSPICIOUSLY) Well, don't go breaking it mind. Those things are made by computers.

DAD: (SPOTTING SOMETHING) Down there... There's the bloke from next door. I don't know where he's been, but he looks well narked.

MUM: They must've lost the footy.

ABIGAIL: Let me have a look.

DAD: He'll be downstairs – you won't see him.

MUM: Come away and stop your snooping.

ABIGAIL: You think he saw us looking at him?

DAD: He couldn't have.

ABIGAIL: He'll be on his way up - to get us.

MUM: Oh, don't say that.

ABIGAIL: He's coming to teach us a lesson.

DAD: Abigail, stop scaring your Mum.

MUM: Will you both come away from the window.

ABIGAIL: He'll be coming up in the lift – getting closer.

DAD: Abigail!

ABIGAIL: Closer and closer.

DAD: Stop being weird.

MUM: Come away from the window.

CURTAINS ARE DRAWN.

ABIGAIL: What're you doing?

MUM: I'm drawing the curtains. That's enough for one night eh?

ABIGAIL: But, what about the telescope? All we were doing was-

MUM: No more eh?

DAD: Your Mum's right. It's not right to be looking at people. TV anyone?

MUM: Why not? Just to relax us.

THE TV IS SWITCHED ON.

ABIGAIL: But they're our neighbours - what about Civic Pride?

MUM: Don't play fancy with me.

THEY SIT DOWN.

THE DOOR OF THE FLAT NEXT DOOR IS OPENED
AND THEN SLAMMED SHUT.

DAD: (WHISPERING) Shh. He's next door.

MUM: (WHISPERING) Switch it off! Switch it off!

DAD: (WHISPERING) Where's the remote?

MUM: (WHISPERING) Get off your arse and do it yourself.

DAD: (WHISPERING) Where've you hidden it?

MUM: (WHISPERING) Stop talking or he'll hear us.

ABIGAIL: Why we whispering?

THERE IS ANOTHER SUCCESSION OF LOUD
BANGS FROM NEXT DOOR. SOMETHING
SMASHES.

What was that?

DAD: It could've been anything.

ABIGAIL: It was next door again.

MUM: It's all going on tonight.

DAD: They'll just be moving furniture or something.

ABIGAIL: I can go and have a quick check. Make sure everything's alright.

DAD: Probably best leave it eh?

ABIGAIL: I'll be dead quick.

MUM: Abby!

ABIGAIL: Mum?

MUM: (LOSING IT) Abby stay here! At least *act like a little girl* for once!

PAUSE.

ABIGAIL: Sorry Mum.

DAD: Now where've you put the remote?

SCENE 11. FALLING. SILENCE.

ABIGAIL:

Mum used to believe in God, but, judging by her old diary, she just seemed to pray to get off with boys. And, when Dad went off with someone called Rebec-whore, she used God to get him back. And it must've really worked because two months later they'd moved into their first house over by the old gasworks. If I believed in god, I wonder what he'd have in store for me? Maybe I'm to be like Jesus, and die for everyone's sins?

MUSIC: FROM NEXT DOOR - 'HALLELUJAH'.

SCENE 12. INT. THE FLAT. EVENING

A TV SET IS ON. WE ARE WITH DAD AND MUM WHO ARE SAT IN THE LIVING ROOM, ABIGAIL IS ON THE BALCONY OUTSIDE. THERE IS SOME HAMMERING COMING FROM DOWNSTAIRS.

ABIGAIL: (OFF. SHOUTING TO SOMEONE) What's it like up there?
What can you see?

MUM: (CLOSE. TO DAD) Who's she shouting to? She'll have the neighbours round.

THE DOWNSTAIRS HAMMERING STOPS.

DAD: Sounds like she's stopped the DIY girls in their tracks. (TO ABIGAIL) Come on in off the balcony. You'll have to be getting ready for Saskia's party.

ABIGAIL: (OFF. SHOUTING) I'm painting a picture for me Mum and Dad's anniversary tomorrow. I'm having trouble with perspectives. I bet you've got some great perspectives up there.

MUM: Stop play-acting Abby. There's no one up there.

ABIGAIL: (OFF. SHOUTING) I can't hear you. Me Mum and Dad keep shouting!

MUM: (TO ABIGAIL) Don't be cheeky. Who do you think you're talking to? (TO DAD) Who does she think she's talking to?

ABIGAIL: (OFF. SHOUTING) Is it... (SEARCHING) Is it spectacular? I've got to go to a stupid party in a bit but, if you stay there, can I come up and show you the painting and see what you think?

DAD: They'll be here to pick you up and you won't be ready.

ABIGAIL STRIDES INTO THE ROOM.

MUM: Where you think you're off to?

ABIGAIL: The roof.

MUM: Don't be stupid, no one can get onto the roof!

ABIGAIL: The girl next door can.

MUM: You're going nowhere.

ABIGAIL: Mum?

MUM: No.

ABIGAIL: Dad?

MUM: Stop trying to play your dad off me. It won't work and he hasn't had enough Stella.

DAD: What?

ABIGAIL: Mum?

MUM: No.

SCENE 13. FALLING. SILENCE

ABIGAIL:

Just like me, my Mum's old diary comes to an end after a big party. It's New Years Eve. Mum's all happy because, at midnight, Dad asks her to marry him. And she's dead chuffed and tells him "that's a relief, because I'm up the duff" and he goes all quite for a bit and says that they won't be able to afford to stay in their house by the gas works – but it doesn't matter because they're all happy and in love and it's a great party! (PAUSE) Mum and Dad keep wanting me to go to parties – even if it is Saskia Taylor's – who I hate. And then they get all angry if I do go and stay too long.

SCENE 14. THE FLAT. LATE AT NIGHT.

THE TV IS TURNED DOWN LOW.

DAD: What time is this?

ABIGAIL: I'm not late am I?

DAD: Don't play dumb Abigail.

A RING PULL ON A CAN OF BEER. A HISS.

ABIGAIL: Has something happened? Next door looks like it's been kicked in.

DAD: Was Billy McCready at the party?

ABIGAIL: Billy McCready drank too much beer and fell asleep in Saskia Taylor's garage.

DAD: So he had nothing to say for himself?

ABIGAIL: He says you both sound quite dark and that I am full of luminous life.

DAD: Right.

ABIGAIL: I better go to bed. (PAUSE) Goodnight Dad.

PAUSE.

DAD: The police've been round.

ABIGAIL: About Steve from work?

DAD: No. Not about Steve from work. Something happened tonight. They wanted to ask you a few questions.

ABIGAIL: What happened?

DAD: They wanted to ask you some questions about the girl next door.

ABIGAIL: Why?

DAD: I told them you were at the party. They could speak to you tomorrow.

ABIGAIL: I can give them a ring now if they want?

DAD: No, I told them *tomorrow*.

ABIGAIL: Is she alright?

DAD: You best get some rest now.

ABIGAIL: Okay. Goodnight Dad.

DAD: Abigail?

ABIGAIL: Yes, Dad?

DAD: It's good to see you out of that big suit.

ABIGAIL: Right Dad.

DAD: And Abigail.

ABIGAIL: Yes Dad?

DAD: You're okay aren't you? You're enjoying yourself? Being young's okay for you?

ABIGAIL: (UNSURE WHERE THIS IS GOING) Yes Dad.

DAD: What I mean is – being a kid and growing up is okay – you're not just trying to avoid the whole thing – you know with the clothes and the tea and everything...

ABIGAIL: You can be young and like tea and red retro Nike trainers and cream linen suits.

DAD: I know. But you've got to be careful – it can all just pass you by – and I don't want you to be unhappy – and I don't want you to blame us.

ABIGAIL: There's nothing to blame you for.

DAD: I was so happy when I was your age – loved it. I lived with my Mum and Dad and, do you know, the thing I most remember was - every Sunday morning – before we'd go off to church and-

ABIGAIL: Even though you don't believe in god?

DAD: Shh. Please. I did then. But before we'd go off to church and all the kids'd be running around and we'd be teasing the baby and-

ABIGAIL: Who was the baby? Was that Aunty Helen?

DAD: No, yes, I can't remember – anyway it's not important – what is important is the memories, the sights, the smells. You've got to appreciate the smells - favorite smells... Every Sunday morning – the *aroma* - do you know what our family house smelt of?

ABIGAIL: Freshly made coffee and newly baked bread.

DAD: For god's sake, how did you know that?

ABIGAIL: You wrote it down on the back of the phone book – I read it this afternoon.

DAD: Oh god, Abigail.

ABIGAIL: It was like a speech.

DAD: I don't know. I just don't know.

ABIGAIL: It's alright Dad. Did Mum tell you to?

DAD: I just found some stuff she'd written...

ABIGAIL: On the front of the leccy bill?

DAD: (DESPONDENT) Abigail.

ABIGAIL: You should get a diary. They're good for letting out what you're feeling. I can get you one for Christmas - if you want?

DAD: You know you shouldn't be reading other people's writing even if it is on the back of the phone book or the leccy bill.

ABIGAIL: I know Dad and I'm truly sorry – but I thought it might be alright 'cause it was me that told her to write it in the first place.

DAD: *You told her to? What do you mean?*

ABIGAIL: To work out her problems. 'Cause it helps your mind be more clearer. It works though doesn't it?

DAD: Your Mum hasn't got problems.

ABIGAIL: But, you saw the leccy bill.

PAUSE.

DAD: It took me all day to write that as well.

ABIGAIL: I know. And it was very (SEARCHING) beautiful.

DAD: No it wasn't. I just want some things to be good, you know?

ABIGAIL: Yeah. I do as well. But Dad.

DAD: Yes?

ABIGAIL: Don't worry so much.

DAD: Alright Abigail.

ABIGAIL: And besides we could never be like that. You know I hate coffee - I only like tea and we get the value priced bread from the Spar.

DAD: I know we do.

PAUSE.

ABIGAIL: Why you talking about smells? Is Mum leaving you?

DAD: No, your Mum's not leaving me.

ABIGAIL: Where is she? I want to speak to her.

DAD: She's asleep.

ABIGAIL: But, its not really late. She won't mind if-

DAD: She saw your painting.

ABIGAIL: But I haven't finished it yet.

DAD: It really upset her.

ABIGAIL: But, I'm only a beginner. I'll get better.

DAD: That's not what upset her. You hadn't finished it, had you?

A KNOCK ON THE BEDROOM DOOR.

What you doing?

ABIGAIL: Mum? Mum, can I come in?

THE BEDROOM DOOR OPENS.

DAD: Abigail.

SCENE 15. INT. FLAT BEDROOM. NIGHT.

A BED SUDDENLY BENDS WITH EXTRA WEIGHT.

MUM: (JUST WAKING) Abby?

ABIGAIL: I just wanted to check you were still here.

MUM: What you doing?

ABIGAIL: I'm climbing into bed with you – to comfort you.

MUM: Don't start on that again.

DAD: I think we should all go to sleep – in our own beds.

ABIGAIL: Didn't you like the painting?

DAD: Let's talk about this tomorrow, eh?

MUM: (TO ABIGAIL) It was just me and your Dad. And our old house by the gas works. You didn't paint yourself in.

ABIGAIL: It's where you used to live - before I was born.

MUM: Why?

ABIGAIL: Because it's for your anniversary tomorrow. It's when you were both happy.

MUM: We're happy now.

ABIGAIL: No, you're not. Come here, give me a hug.

MUM: No.

DAD: Abigail.

MUM: Abby.

ABIGAIL: Yes?

DAD: Abigail, your Mum and I – we've had a talk tonight.

MUM: We've talked stuff through and-

ABIGAIL: You're splitting up?

DAD: No, we're not splitting up.

ABIGAIL: Where have all the plants gone?

DAD: Your Mum threw them out.

ABIGAIL: Why?

MUM: They never made you happy. Please Abby, listen for a minute.

ABIGAIL: Yes they did. They were *aerating*.

MUM: Oh Abby, for all I know *aerating*'s not even a real word. You've always been kind Abby. But, do you know how much that kindness hurts darling? It gets me right in my gut.

ABIGAIL: I don't understand.

MUM: I know you don't.

DAD: We've had a talk and we're both going to go off - just for 2 weeks by ourselves.

MUM: Separately.

ABIGAIL: A holiday?

MUM: Not exactly, but something similar.

ABIGAIL: Where you going?

MUM: Abby. If it's okay, is it alright if we don't say? That's part of the whole thing. We want it to be our own secret adventure. Just for ourselves – so that we can comeback and tell each other about the adventures and see if we want to keep having those adventures – separately – or together. Do you know what I mean?

ABIGAIL: But, I'm too young. You can't leave me, it's illegal. I know I'm in your way, but I won't be for long. I can be grown up. I'm more of an adult than most of the adults I know.

MUM: (STARTING TO CRY) Oh, you've set me off now.

ABIGAIL: Don't cry. Having me should've made you *more* than what you was, but I've just made you *less*. And that makes you sad.

DAD: Come on you two. Let's sleep on it.

ABIGAIL: Dad, me and Mum are having a moment.

DAD: I just think it might be better if-

MUM: -we bury our heads in the sand? That'd suit you just fine wouldn't it?

DAD: That's not what I was going to say.

MUM: Turning your back on everything around you – me – Abigail – that bastard next door – his poor daughter.

ABIGAIL: Mum.

DAD: I never saw *you* lifting a finger – you and your so-called Civic Pride.

ABIGAIL: Dad.

MUM: You're a lazy lazy man.

ABIGAIL: I'm going to finish the painting.

DAD: You think a few plants – and everythings perfect.

THE BEDSPRINGS RELAX AS ABIGAIL GETS OFF.

Where you going Abigail?

MUM: "Keep the curtains drawn" – there's a whole world out there!

DAD: You're the one with the curtains!

MUM: You're a coward.

THE FRONT DOOR IS SLAMMED SHUT.

Where's she going?

DAD: Abigail?!

MUM: (REALISING) Oh god.

SCENE 16. INT. STAIRWELL. NIGHT.

ABIGAIL RUNS UP THE STAIRS.

TAPE IS RIPPED AND TORN.

ABIGAIL: (SHOUTING) Why's there all this police tape at the top of the stairs? (TO HERSELF) It's not going to stop no one – especially not no-one like me.

QUIET, THEN...

SCENE 17. EXT. ROOF. NIGHT.

A STEEL DOOR SWINGS OPEN TO THE OUTSIDE.
AN OPEN SPACE WITH WIND AND AIR.

DISTANT CITY TRAFFIC. WE ARE BACK AT THE
BEGINNING WITH ABIGAIL. MUM AND DAD ARE IN
THE DISTANCE. THE BACKGROUND FADES UP
ON MUM AND DAD PLEADING WITH THEIR
DAUGHTER. IN THE FOREGROUND WE HEAR
ABIGAIL'S THOUGHTS-

ABIGAIL: (V.O) Up here you can properly see the gas works. There's nothing blocking the view. And I can see Mum and Dad's old house. (TO MUM) Mum, please don't be mean to Dad. He's trying his best.

MUM: (DISTANT) I'm not being mean to your Dad.

ABIGAIL: He's a good person. Be kind to him.

MUM: Be kind to him?

ABIGAIL: (V.O.) I can get some proper perspective and I can finish the painting. (TO DAD) Blimey, Dad you look terrible.

MUM: Abby, I've seen pictures of people who jump. It's not nice.

ABIGAIL: No you haven't. (V.O.) Why do they think I'm going to jump?

DAD / MUM: (SCREAMING) Abigail! / Abby!

SCENE 18. FALLING. SILENCE.

ABIGAIL: Mum's diary ends on December the 31st – before they move into the tower block – before I were born – before it all goes wrong. (PAUSE) Anyway, I'm falling and there's not much time and I'm having trouble with the life-flashing-before-my-eyes thing. I know - swearing. I'll think of all the worst words I know - I'll do the whole alphabet. Right here goes - so (ANNOUNCING) 'Starting with 'A' - these are some of the worse words that I have learnt during my entire short life'-

THE SOUND OF A CABLE STRETCHING.

ABIGAIL: Oww.

SUDDENLY: THE CITY AT NIGHT CRASHES IN.

DAD: God Abby.

MUM: (BROKEN) Oh. It's...

DAD: God.

PAUSE.

ABIGAIL: I hurt my hand.

MUM: Where is she?

DAD: She's caught in the safety net. Thankyou god. Thankyou.

MUM: I can't see her?

ABIGAIL: Can you help me out. My legs're caught.

DAD: Here, just below the edge.

MUM: Oh god. (LAUGHING) Please Abigail. Keep absolutely still.

ABIGAIL: I'm scared Mum.

MUM: Don't move – you'll be fine.

ABIGAIL: I don't want to end up dead like the girl next door.

MUM: Dead? (TO DAD) What did you tell her?

DAD: Nothing. I thought she best get some sleep first.

MUM: (TO ABIGAIL) Darling, she's not dead.

ABIGAIL: But, I thought-

MUM: You were making such a carry-on, out on the balcony before you went to the party. Them nurses downstairs saw you both, and had the police round.

DAD: They found her tangled up in this net – just like you.

ABIGAIL: So - I saved her?

DAD: Well...

ABIGAIL: I saved her life?

MUM: I wouldn't get carried away now...

ABIGAIL: I saved her.

SCENE 19. SILENCE.

ABIGAIL: When I was falling I had the entire massive world pulling me back to where it wanted me - gravity's a bit like that.
(PAUSE) I'm not falling anymore. Me and gravity have come to an 'understanding'.

SCENE 20. EXT. ROOF. NIGHT.

FADE UP TO: THE SOUND OF A NET
STRETCHING UNDER WEIGHT.

DAD: (HYPERVENTILATING) Abigail, just keep still and calm down. You're going to hyperventilate.

ABIGAIL: But, it was such an explosion in my head. It all flashed by me in front of my eyes. It was all there, my entire life – a real super nova. I'll never be the same again.

DAD: You've only fallen 6 foot. There's not a lot of life you could fit into 6 foot.

ABIGAIL: But I'm only young and I didn't really do much last year.

MUM: Are you hurt darling? Anything broken?

ABIGAIL: No, I think I'm alright. My leg hurts a bit, but I can still-

MUM AND ABIGAIL SUDDENLY SCREAM.
THE NET STRETCHES AS DAD FALLS INTO IT.

MUM: Oh darling. Are you alright?

DAD: Yeah I think so. I didn't land on you did I?

ABIGAIL: No. But, what're you doing?!

DAD: It's quite comfortable actually – like a hammock.

ABIGAIL: Don't be silly Dad.

DAD: (TO MUM) You can see our old house from here.

MUM: Where?

DAD: By the old gas works.

ABIGAIL: I told you!

MUM: Near the big Asdas?

DAD: Come down and have a look yourself.

ABIGAIL: Mum! What're you doing?! It'll break.

MUM: Don't talk daft. These thing's are built to catch hundreds of people at a go.

ABIGAIL: What're you talking about? No they're not.

ABIGAIL AND DAD SUDDENLY SCREAM.
THE NET STRETCHES AS MUM JUMPS INTO IT.
SOUND OF THE NET SWINGING.

MUM: Oh yeah. I can see it now – right by the old gas works.

ABIGAIL: The net won't hold us all, we're a heavy family.

MUM: God, I hated living there.

ABIGAIL: You what?

MUM: You're right it is quite relaxing. I feel all sleepy...

ABIGAIL: The bolts'll come loose!

DAD: You worry too much Abby.

MUM: You're a good girl Abby.

ABIGAIL: I am?

THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES AS MUSIC
BUILDS OVER THE TOP.

MUM: Look, you can see the old cinema.

DAD: What cinema?

ABIGAIL: Where you both went on your first date.

MUM: How do you know about that?

ABIGAIL: I read it somewhere.

MUM: You what?

DAD: I remember. It's just over by the...

MUM: Scrap yard – with the pink and blue roof...

THE MUFFLED SOUND OF A YOUNG GIRL
THROUGH THE WALL PLAYING THE PIANO AND
SINGING 'HALLELUJAH'. SLOWLY THE SOUND
BECOMES CLEARER – AS IF WE WERE IN THE
SAME ROOM AS HER.

THE END.