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The tip of the iceberg

de
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traducción de
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(fragmento en inglés)

Characters

Sophie Cave

Charles Ash

Angela Blesserton

James Hall

Alex Smith

Charlie Lewis

SCENE ONE

(An office. SOPHIE is by the window, smoking. Enter ASH.)

ASH

Smoking is not allowed in the building.

SOPHIE

(hurriedly extinguishes cigarette, waving smoke away with her hand): I know. Sorry.

ASH

The regulations are strict.

SOPHIE

I'm sorry. I couldn't help it. I just can't give up. I've tried five or six times but I always go back.

ASH

Lack of willpower?

SOPHIE

Totally. But only with nicotine. I'm Sophie Cave.

ASH

We were expecting you. Charles Ash. We spoke yesterday.

SOPHIE

Pleased to meet you. Head Office talks about you a lot. We're very pleased with the plant's productivity in recent years. Very pleased.

ASH

But...?

SOPHIE

But?

ASH

There's always a 'but'.

SOPHIE

Well. Suddenly all this crops up and we're concerned. We've heard about cases like this before now in France, Japan... but, here? To be honest, we're not used to this. It must be proving very difficult for you.

ASH
No. Why?

(Silence.)

SOPHIE
I've set up a few interviews with those most closely involved. I'd like to handle the matter discreetly.

ASH
Discreetly? The entire plant knows you're here. You're the main topic of conversation since yesterday. Some people think you're from the police. *(He laughs.)*

SOPHIE
What? I'd rather have done all this quietly.

ASH
It's difficult with so much fuss.

SOPHIE
How do you explain what's happened?

ASH
(shrugs his shoulders): A run of bad luck?

SOPHIE
(surprised): Bad luck!

ASH
The crisis, problems at home, depression...what do I know? Who knows what goes through a man's mind to get to that point?

SOPHIE
Yes, but we're not talking about one man. Shall we sit down? *(ASH gestures towards a chair. SOPHIE consults some papers.)* Mark Ward, age 39. Engineer. Married. His wife was expecting a baby which, if I'm not wrong, she's lost. He'd been working for eight months on the Iceberg project.

ASH
That little bastard's still causing us trouble.

SOPHIE
Sorry?

ASH
The Iceberg. There's some reliability issue with the prototype. The engineers haven't found the problem yet. The project's weeks behind track. But we'll meet the deadlines. Definitely.

SOPHIE

On October 27th he threw himself off the roof of this building.

ASH

It was dreadful. Yes.

SOPHIE

Several employees who witnessed it needed psychological support.

ASH

The company took on board those costs.

SOPHIE

One of those who needed that support was Andrew Wise, computer programmer, age 44. Married. Three children. Team member since September on the new Argus project.

ASH

An exclusive design. Definitely top of the range.

SOPHIE

Wise was found dead in the lake.

(ASH is silent.)

SOPHIE

That was on January 24th. On February 16th Edward Ross, Technical Director on the new Osiris, took his life in the toilets, hanging himself with his own belt. He was 37, married and, according to what's written here, was going to be promoted in a few months. *(Pause.)* This isn't a run of bad luck. What's going on?

ASH

What?

SOPHIE

Why do people kill themselves in this plant?

ASH

People do not kill themselves 'in this plant'.

SOPHIE

No?

ASH

No. People kill themselves. In this plant and everywhere else in the world.

SOPHIE

Edward Ross left a letter.

ASH
I know.

SOPHIE
Head Office doesn't like the company to be in the news unless it's because the share price has shot up.

ASH
Journalists. So eager for a headline and a couple of columns they'll talk about a 'wave of suicides' and rubbish like that.

SOPHIE
There have been three cases in five months.

ASH
So? Do you know the suicide rate in this country? 25.9% per year for every 100,000 people. Only the Finns can beat us. Suicide is the main cause of death amongst 30-60 year olds, higher than car crashes. We've had three cases. We're at about 25% per 100,000, 0.9% below average.

SOPHIE
If I'm not mistaken, last year there were two failed attempts.

ASH
Then we'd be talking about five cases in two years. Even further below average.

SOPHIE
I see you've done your homework.

ASH
I did it because in the last four weeks I've had to waste huge amounts of time answering stupid questions.

SOPHIE
Like mine.

ASH
I didn't say that.

(Silence.)

SOPHIE
Does it bother you I'm a woman?

ASH
What?

SOPHIE

Does it bother you that Head Office sent a woman to prepare a report?

ASH

Nonsense. Of course not.

SOPHIE

That's good.

ASH

What bothers me is Head Office questioning our work while we're slogging our guts out to keep up production levels that beat the rest of the country. What are they bloody doing in the other factories? Why aren't they breaking their necks like us? If their production levels matched ours things would be very different. Why aren't you investigating them as well?

SOPHIE

They haven't had any suicides.

ASH

No initiative even with that. I know where this is leading. You think that because the pace here is tough an epidemic has broken out in the plant. Don't go there. None of the three killed themselves because of work.

SOPHIE

How can you be sure?

ASH

I know.

SOPHIE

And Edward Ross's letter?

ASH

What about it? Ross was neurotic himself? In the Algarve with a lover. That's a reason to kill yourself; not having to work eight or ten hours more a week.

SOPHIE

It's not just about working eight or ten hours more.

ASH

So what's it about?

SOPHIE

Can't you see? The plant has a problem with its employees.

ASH

If production drops and profits slide, then you'll start sacking people. That's the real issue for employees. Ask them. Nobody wants to lose their job.

SOPHIE

I'm going to say this very clearly. We don't want any more suicides in the business.

ASH

Then avoid them if you know how. The world is full of suicides. A million a year. Three thousand every day. While you and I have this conversation fifty people will have killed themselves. And you come here to investigate us as if we were a death camp just because we've had three incidents.

SOPHIE

And two failed attempts.

ASH

Rubbish! Those deaths have nothing to do with working in this plant. Or very little. Speak to people. Have all the interviews you want. That's what you're here for, I suppose. But don't lay the blame for their deaths at my door. And now, I'm sorry, but I have to get ready for an important meeting. *(SOPHIE lights a cigarette.)* Smoking is not allowed.

SOPHIE

I know that!

(ASH leaves. SOPHIE smokes.)