

THE GOOD WORK

**25-minute drama for 2 women
and a camera**

by Annie Bilton

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CHARACTERS:

LYNETTE 28, tall, slim, pretty brunette

SANDEE 22, short, cute figure, blond

These physical types are based on the real-life soldiers who inspired this play, but the women could be any race or coloring. More important that they are neither stereotypes nor representatives.

AN ARMY CELL. THE WOMEN ARE SEATED SIDE BY SIDE, STARING AT A CAMERA. BOTH ARE HIGH. LYNETTE HOLDS THE REMOTE.

LYNETTE Testing testing. (PAUSE) Say something.

SANDEE My tongue's froze up. Blaaaah. (STICKS OUT TONGUE AT CAMERA)

LYNETTE (HITS STOP ON THE REMOTE) Sandee! Don't you want them to know?

SANDEE The tale of two little turds got flushed down the toilet?

LYNETTE And can the crude, will you.

SANDEE Who gives a flyin' fuck about us!

LYNETTE If the whole of America sees us on tv - the real us - they'll-

SANDEE They won't stop holding their noses long enough to listen.

LYNETTE I want them to know the truth.

SANDEE What if they search Chris at the exit?

LYNETTE Won't happen.

SANDEE Ooh - waddy bribe the guards with? (WAGGLES HER TITS)

LYNETTE She got this in (INDICATING CAMERA) didn't she? Lot of the guys don't think it's fair, what's been done to us. We got friends here.

SANDEE Fuck. What good's it gonna do?

LYNETTE Then get your face out of the frame and go sulk on your cot for the next six years.

SANDEE Another hit first (SHE PULLS OUT A JOINT)

LYNETTE No! Janice said 30 minutes max. Then shift change and Big Bertha's on.

SANDEE Friggin' mean dyke bitch. (PAUSE) Oops, sorry.

LYNETTE Think of the headlines: Condemned MPs Blow the Whistle -

SANDEE You're fuckin nuts! Blowin' the whistle on the US army? I'm outa-

LYNETTE Okay okay - just what we know. What we saw. What it was like.

SANDEE No head doctor crap. No fuckin' whinin'.

LYNETTE No fucking at all - please Sandee!

SANDEE Quacks just wanna pump you full of drugs so you can't remember nothin'.

LYNETTE You don't have to listen to yourself screaming in your sleep.

SANDEE I'll get over it.

LYNETTE Yeah. Whatever. Ready?

SANDEE Shit. I guess. Fire. (LYNETTE HITS RECORD ON THE REMOTE)

LYNETTE First we'll introduce ourselves. Though you may know us as Privates First Class -

SANDEE Last names withheld to protect the guilty.

LYNETTE Sandee's always kidding around. I'm Lynette -

SANDEE So I must be Sandee.

LYNETTE She's from Michigan and I'm from Ohio -

SANDEE Small town girls.

LYNETTE And now sharing a cell because -

SANDEE But don't worry Mom. She lays a freakin' hand on me, I'll punch her lights out.

LYNETTE (HITS THE STOP ON THE REMOTE) For christ's sake!

SANDEE Lighten up Linnie! Ok - I'll be nice. Give them my wide engaging smile. (LYNETTE MAKES A DERISORY NOISE) The Detroit Free Press said it so it's gotta be true. (LEERS)

LYNETTE Cute. (SHE PRESSES RECORD) We may not sound as educated as some, but that's why we joined the Reserves. To further our education.

SANDEE I wanted to do phys-ed. To teach kids. Disadvantaged kids.

LYNETTE And I was an honor student at High School so -

SANDEE Bet your Mom's peeled that bumper sticker off!

LYNETTE See what I mean? Anyway, I wanted to get into Law Enforcement, like my Dad.

SANDEE (HITS STOP ON THE REMOTE) You never told me your dad's a fuckin' cop!

LYNETTE You want to, like, do this or not? (SANDEE GIVES HER A LOOK, HITS RECORD) My father is in the Homicide Division. Or he was, until recently. Anyway, when he brought home photos of crime scenes -

SANDEE With dead bodies in them?

LYNETTE He'd lay them out on the kitchen table and -

SANDEE At dinner time?

LYNETTE We'd analyze them. Look for clues. My sisters and me, we loved it. So I like, wanted to go to College and study. Sandee?

SANDEE I never seen a dead body before I got deployed.

LYNETTE And it is different when you've seen them alive. Like, sitting at the same table in the mess tent.

SANDEE Two of ours, their Humvee got blown to f-... bits.

LYNETTE One was from Sandee's home town.

SANDEE Freakin ragheads.

LYNETTE We're not racists, it's not an insult, it's just the way everybody talks.

SANDEE Haj. Raghead. Camel jockey. Don't mean nothin', does it?

LYNETTE In boot camp, just before we deployed. Our commander gave a speech. Said it was thanks to us they got freedom now. But we got to make sure the good team wins. So, like, then he says -

SANDEE (MIMICKING THE C.O.) "Let's get out there and burn some ragheads."

LYNETTE All the officers, noncoms too, they all laughed.

SANDEE It was a joke.

LYNETTE But we weren't laughing in the photos. Not really.

SANDEE (HITTING STOP) Yes we were, you dumbass.

LYNETTE (HITTING RECORD) It was all misrepresented.

SANDEE Those media bastards twist everythin. (LYNETTE KICKS HER) What?

LYNETTE People jumped to the wrong conclusions.

SANDEE To make the Military Police look bad.

LYNETTE We were proud to be serving our country.

SANDEE Like our President said, you gotta support your troops.

LYNETTE You make them look bad, that gives America a bad name.

SANDEE Yeah. Gives aid and....and....whatsit to the enemy.

LYNETTE Succour.

SANDEE You and me both. (LYNETTE GIVES HER A LOOK) What?

LYNETTE Looked at one way, we can see you might find the pictures shocking. Us, like, smiling. But it wasn't we thought it was funny.

SANDEE The guys, they're always watchin' you.

LYNETTE You couldn't act soft.

SANDEE Waitin' for you to turn girly, start bawling.

LYNETTE So you, like, joke around too. Prove you're as tough as they are.

SANDEE Like they like to think they are.

LYNETTE No special treatment because you're female. We're lucky to get to do these jobs now, women couldn't before.

SANDEE All buddies together. Apart from the assholes.

LYNETTE (A LOOK FROM HER) So you gotta join in, stick together -

SANDEE No one rats on their buddies.

LYNETTE But what you saw, that's not the whole story. Like Private Conran testified. He only put the dog leash round the detainee's shoulders to assist him out of the cell.

SANDEE The only way to get the freakin guys out.

LYNETTE But the leash slipped, ended up round his neck, and -

SANDEE Click! (MIMES TAKING PICTURE)

LYNETTE Private Conran asked me to film it, so we could show it to the new recruits. As a training video.

SANDEE Couldn't call that cruel. Not compared to nine eleven. What terrorists done to innocent Americans.

LYNETTE And that detainee, naked and everything, standing on the box, with those wires.

SANDEE We never did electric shocks. That's freaking cruel, like those collars they put on dogs.

LYNETTE We only attached those things....to his....things, because they told us to. They said, it softens them up.

SANDEE And he had a hood on.

LYNETTE They all had hoods on. That way they weren't humiliated by the pictures.

SANDEE We never beat nobody.

LYNETTE And all injuries got prompt medical treatment.

SANDEE I seen it done. That MP private, he stitched them up as good as any medic.

LYNETTE The reason they were naked, you couldn't trust them with any clothes, it wasn't safe. They'd find a way to kill themselves.

SANDEE And us. Turn your back on the frea -

LYNETTE Their culture's different. Religion. They don't have the same values.

SANDEE Screaming innocence one minute and (DEMONSTRATES EXPLOSION) the next.

LYNETTE Which is why they had to be shackled to the ceiling. A danger to themselves and others. Military Intelligence -

SANDEE MI's orders, not from our C.O.

LYNETTE It made sense when they explained it. Like, if their hands were in front , they could use the cuffs as a weapon.

SANDEE So they had to be like this. (DEMONSTRATES ARMS HIGH UP BEHIND BACK)

LYNETTE Or cuffed to the lowest bar of the cell door. But then they'd, like, get their hands out into the corridor -

SANDEE Creepy, like they was trying to grab your boot -

LYNETTE But no one ever jumped on their hands. Not on our watch. (SANDEE STARTS LAUGHING. LYNETTE HITS STOP) What now?

SANDEE That photo of you, standing next to that pile of naked hairy-assed ragheads, and you smilin', smilin', like you was on your summer vacation.

LYNETTE They told me a joke then took the picture, it wasn't fair. Everything's funny to you isn't it?

SANDEE You gotta laugh. If you don't laugh, what you gonna do?

LYNETTE And your freakin this and freakin that -

SANDEE I'm not saying fuckin', am I? What's fuckin' wrong with freakin'?

LYNETTE You turn them off with all the bad language.

SANDEE That why you talkin' like the fuckin queen of England?

LYNETTE They won't even listen, they'll think you're guilty as charged.

SANDEE I'm takin' a break. Smoke time!

LYNETTE No! We only got ten more minutes and then we'd better be packed up and tucked up.

SANDEE Keep your pants on.

LYNETTE You wanna finish this or what?

SANDEE Let's tell them it wasn't us and the undies. Wouldn't catch me putting my undies on a camel-jockey's head.

LYNETTE You mention the undies and I'll.... Mom would have a fit. We gotta help them to understand.

SANDEE You think anyone who hasn't been there is gonna fuckin understand?

LYNETTE (GIVES HER A LOOK. HITS RECORD, HITS STOP AGAIN) Now I've fucking forgotten where we were.

SANDEE Not stomping on their (MIMICKING LYNETTE) "fucking" fingers.

LYNETTE (HITS RECORD) Far as we know those things only happened in cell blocks 1A and 1B.

SANDEE Where the sick f - the worst ones - were kept.

LYNETTE And the cells weren't all that bad. We lived in them too, to keep out of harm's way.

SANDEE That's why the C.O. ordered it.

LYNETTE So those detainees were in the safest place in the whole prison.

SANDEE See, couple of times a week, the terrorists would fire mortars into the prison.

LYNETTE So the less valuable detainees were put in tents all around the buildings. And we were down in the cells.

SANDEE So it was the terrorists' own freakin buddies that mostly took the hits. Don't give a rat's ass about their buddies.

LYNETTE We were safe in the cells but after a while...Sometimes, one of our own guys, he'd start picking a fight. For no reason. It's the pressure.

SANDEE Goin' stir crazy inside, or getting blown to bits outside.

LYNETTE Nobody talks about being afraid. You can't.

SANDEE Just follow orders.

LYNETTE It was the Military Intelligence guys, and the CIA guys, and those civilian interrogators -

SANDEE Give me the creeps -

LYNETTE All of them, hey they all acted like they were, like, in charge. Like we were supposed to take orders from them.

SANDEE Nobody told us different.

LYNETTE They'd say what a great job we were doing, how we were helping the war on terrorism.

SANDEE Said the prisoners were breaking real easy after we stressed them up a bit.

LYNETTE So they were getting all this, like, important information in the interrogations. Names of other terrorists, stuff like that.

SANDEE People who hate us because we're free.

LYNETTE Enemies of the new free Iraq.

SANDEE Told us we were real patriots.

LYNETTE Once I came on watch and they were bringing in one of those important terrorists, from the playing cards.

SANDEE Ace in the hole, we called him.

LYNETTE We all felt real good that day. Winning the war for democracy.

SANDEE They put my picture up in Wal-Mart back home. Wal-Mart's wall of honor.

LYNETTE So we knew we were doing the right thing. But then it all got turned round.

SANDEE Pointin' the finger at us.

LYNETTE But everybody knew.

SANDEE MP officers, everyone.

LYNETTE We didn't know it was going to all blow up, hit the headlines. (SANDEE DOES THE EXPLOSION AGAIN) We didn't know it wasn't alright.

SANDEE You do what your buddies do, don't you, you stick by your buddies. That's what's freakin great about the Army. You're with the good guys.

LYNETTE Though some of them went too far with the pictures -

SANDEE Those freakin screensavers!

LYNETTE Another thing I didn't like, them bringing the dogs in.

SANDEE Over there they don't look after dogs. All beat-up and scrawny-lookin. Cruel.

LYNETTE It's a different culture, against their religion to touch them.

SANDEE Not human to treat dogs like that. Tell them about that time, with the the dogs.

LYNETTE (HITS STOP) No!

SANDEE You don't, I will. (REACHES FOR THE REMOTE)

LYNETTE (SLAPS HER HAND AWAY, PRESSES START) Sometimes they'd bring in dogs, the detainees weren't used to them, so it helped soften them up. (PAUSE) For interrogation. (PAUSE)

SANDEE This one time -

LYNETTE The handlers signaled to us to be quiet. (PAUSE)

SANDEE Four of the -

LYNETTE Four prisoners were cuffed outside their cells, in the corridor.

SANDEE The extremists, that's what the interrogators said...Lynette?

LYNETTE They only had those hoods on, and when it went quiet, you could see them tense up, listening.

SANDEE Then the handlers, real quiet, took the dogs over, two dogs, real well trained, beautiful shepherds. They let them sniff this prisoner all over. That's all you could hear. (SHE SNIFFS)

LYNETTE When he realized, he screamed, tried to pull his hands out, to cover himself. Blood running all down his wrists.

SANDEE Even the other one, the one who'd mouthed off, with the big beard. Got the shit scared right out of him.

LYNETTE The dog must have thought the detainee was going to attack us.

SANDEE Dogs know. They know when someone wants to hurt you. They got this sixth sense.

LYNETTE Next thing we knew, the dog was on him.

SANDEE Not fair to give dogs a bad name.

LYNETTE It got hold of his leg -

SANDEE They let them run loose on the streets. Nobody gives a...nobody cares.

LYNETTE I still thought it wasn't justified. I told the sergeant after.

SANDEE But it wasn't official. In writing.

LYNETTE So it didn't count at my trial.

SANDEE Sure ain't heard of no leash laws in I-raq.

LYNETTE (HITS STOP) Will you shut up about the dogs!

SANDEE The story gets out so what do they do? They shoot the fuckin dog, for doin its duty. You call that fair?

LYNETTE No more about the dogs alright!

SANDEE They should'a shot the handler. He's the one fucked up.

LYNETTE Look, only a couple of minutes left, let's just say what we got to say and.... (SANDEE HITS RECORD) So those photographs really didn't give a fair picture, did they Sandee?

SANDEE We was always thinkin' about what was happening to our guys.

LYNETTE Then it didn't seem, like, such a big deal.

SANDEE Our buddies, blown to bits, shipped home crazy, or with bits missing. Or in freakin plastic bags, like garbage.

LYNETTE (HITTING STOP) Why do you have to remind them about that picture?

SANDEE Huh?

LYNETTE You posing with that body in the bag.

SANDEE What's a dead raghead care if you take his picture? He's fuckin dead.

LYNETTE You believe the interrogators when they said it was an accident? In the shower?

SANDEE Oh sure. And it'll never ever ever happen again.

LYNETTE Ha ha ha.

SANDEE Not now there's signs up everywhere: no photographs.

LYNETTE (HITTING RECORD) I'm sorry, but we do get upset , knowing what our troops are going through. And their families. But don't believe all those stories. For one, we never starved detainees, we never deliberately starved them.

SANDEE Should give them Army rations, that'd be torture for real.

LYNETTE When the only thing you have to look forward to is mealtimes -

SANDEE And it's the same filthy rat chow day after day.

LYNETTE Not the army's fault, it's the civilian contractors. But you gotta understand, it's the frustration, builds up and up, squeezing you. So you can imagine how we felt when they said we'd be, like, home for Thanksgiving.

SANDEE Hoo-eee!

LYNETTE Chris, my partner, was planning a big party -

SANDEE My mom too. In the trailer.

LYNETTE She made a banner.

SANDEE My sister was comin', from Detroit.

LYNETTE Welcome home, my hero, Lynette.

SANDEE Then the freakin orders came. Redeployed!

LYNETTE She's saving it for later. (PAUSE)

SANDEE Shit hit the fan then.

LYNETTE Things got a lot worse, didn't they Sandee.

SANDEE You look at those...the detainees, and you think, it's your freakin fault I'm here. In this freakin hell hole.

LYNETTE Doesn't sound very heroic, ok, but by then all we wanted was to get out of there. In one piece.

SANDEE Jessica Lynch. She's my hero.

LYNETTE Bullet wounds, stab wounds, both legs broken, but she kept fighting them off. Fighting to the death the papers said.

SANDEE Got her own website. [www dot Jessica Lynch dot com](http://www.dot.JessicaLynch.com).

LYNETTE No way!

SANDEE No shit.

LYNETTE No way that story was made up.

SANDEE She can sleep good at night.

LYNETTE Her conscience gotta be clear as crystal. (PAUSE)

SANDEE I'd like to be a sports hero, somethin' like that.

LYNETTE Got six years instead. For doing our duty.

SANDEE You get orders to do something, you do it.

LYNETTE Dad was in the front row when I graduated. Dress uniform! Smiling all over his face.

SANDEE Proud of his little Linnie.

LYNETTE And when I joined the Reserves, he used to tease me, gonna save the world from evil Lynn? (PAUSE)

SANDEE After a while, out there, you think, what's the big deal? So freakin what?

LYNETTE Got used to it. Even the screaming.

SANDEE You can't let it get to you.

LYNETTE Then at my trial, they bring up all this sh- stuff about the Geneva Convention.

SANDEE Nobody never told us about no freakin Geneva Convention.

LYNETTE They're not prisoners of war, they told us that. So normal rules don't apply.

SANDEE We always followed Army regs.

LYNETTE But then after the photos -

SANDEE They go and change the rules on you.

LYNETTE You think that's fair?

SANDEE Brandedtszzzzz (MIMES BRANDING FOREHEAD)

LYNETTE We're just ordinary people.

SANDEE Nothin' special.

LYNETTE The people back home, they believed in us.

SANDEE Protecting America. Doing the good work.

LYNETTE For you. What you sent us out there to do.

SANDEE (MIMES BRANDING AGAIN) Sizzle sizzle.

LYNETTE What would you have done? (PAUSE) Sandee's Mom, if you're out there, let her know where you moved to.

SANDEE No - shit - turn it off -

LYNETTE It breaks her up when the letters come back. Please.

SANDEE Okay! You, Lynette's dad she so freakin' admires, if you haven't got the guts to visit, you can write can't you?

LYNETTE Sandee don't -

SANDEE I'm saying please too. Yeah, even Sandee says please.

LYNETTE I'm so sorry Dad, truly I am. It's just out there, you're like, in this nightmare. You taught me not to be scared, but sometimes....it's always behind you ready to jump out.

SANDEE Boo!

LYNETTE But I'm real sorry I let you down.

SANDEE We did the good work.

LYNETTE Mum, remember how you cried when I got deployed?

SANDEE Nights are the worst.

LYNETTE I'll never forget that dress you made me. For my first communion. Shining white. Dad, remember how you said I looked like your own little angel?

SANDEE I try to sleep with my eyes open. So I can't see it.

LYNETTE The church looked lovely. Candles. All the flowers. Everyone dressed up.

SANDEE Close my eyes and its always the same freakin movie.

LYNETTE We all filed up to kneel at the altar rail.

SANDEE Replayin' and replayin' and replayin'.

LYNETTE When the bishop gave me the wafer, then the wine, I was so excited I couldn't breathe.

SANDEE So freakin hot you can't breathe. July midday. On the street. Dust up your nose, in your eyes. Men standin' in the rubble, just starin'.

LYNETTE But I didn't mess up, he blessed me, I said my prayer, got up.

SANDEE This little kid, can't be more than six, he runs up and throws this little rock at the Humvee.

LYNETTE When I got back to our pew, Dad had tears in his eyes.

SANDEE And our driver, he goes nuts, tears the antenna off and goes after him.

LYNETTE Never seen Dad cry before.

SANDEE Beats the shit out of that little kid with the antenna.

LYNETTE My little sister, she was only six.

SANDEE I want to tell him: stop. But nobody says nothin'.

LYNETTE She says in, like, this real loud whisper, Linnie, what does Jesus' blood taste like?

SANDEE The next week, we come on duty early on the Sunday. And there's blood all up the shower walls.

LYNETTE I went every week to confession. Dad liked that, he was a good cop, straight as an arrow. (PAUSE) Makes me laugh now, the kid things I confessed to.

SANDEE This dead man, he's in a bag, under the urinals.

LYNETTE Father forgive me -

SANDEE Blood all over his head. Dripped into the bag from his ears.

LYNETTE For I have sinned.

SANDEE Only, why did they tape his eyes shut? (PAUSE)

LYNETTE Dad, I just wanted to do my duty, and get home.

SANDEE (LOOKS ROUND THE CELL) Home sweet home.

LYNETTE And now there are always, like these flash photos going off inside my head.

SANDEE Back home, the people in the trailer next door, they used to have a shepherd. Seemed big as a horse to me. But real gentle. He'd let me do anything.

LYNETTE You don't want to close your eyes.

SANDEE He was chasin' this squirrel across the road. I saw the truck go over him. Bastard driver didn't even stop.

LYNETTE First it's completely white, this big hole in the prisoner's leg, then suddenly, the blood's pouring out.

SANDEE And there's just this....red....mess in the road. Beautiful black fur all wet, all messed. Lump of meat.

LYNETTE The dog's bringing it back to the handler. Holding this, like, lump of meat in its mouth.

SANDEE Mum couldn't get me to stop crying.

LYNETTE Doesn't look like it's anything to do with a man.

SANDEE I was eleven when the blood first came. I thought I was bleedin' to death.

LYNETTE Drops it at the handler's feet. Puddle of blood on the floor. Trails of blood.

SANDEE Mom took me to K-Mart. To ladieswear. Let me choose two pair of white panties. Grown up lady's panties, white ones, with lace here and here.

LYNETTE I didn't know there was so much blood in one person.

SANDEE Pure, shining white.

LYNETTE They say blood gets spilled in war. Like, an accident. Nobody's fault.

SANDEE She said, you're a woman now. You can be a mother too. (LAUGHS)

LYNETTE Blood doesn't spill. It gushes. Fountains. Rivers.

SANDEE Good blood, bad blood,.

LYNETTE Our blood. Their blood.

SANDEE All the same.

LYNETTE No blood on their hands, that's what they all think.

SANDEE But everything's stained. (PAUSE) Can we rewind and start over?

LYNETTE If only.

SANDEE HITS STOP.

END OF PLAY

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SINCERE THANKS

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