

EXAMINATION

by

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EXAMINATION

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A fee will be charged for this licence which must be paid prior to the first performance otherwise the licence is automatically cancelled and the performance becomes illegal

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CHARACTERS

Mr Wilson	Invigilator in exam
Mrs Kirby	Second invigilator
Students	Any number who may be either of upper school or college age
Julie Gregson	Student who comes in late
Miss Benjamin	Head of school or college
Police Officer 1	Male
Police officer 2	Female

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(The scene is an examination room in a school or a college. Two teachers/lecturers are setting out writing paper on the desks. Offstage we hear the murmur of nervous students waiting to sit the exam)

Mrs Kirby I think that's the lot

Mr Wilson Have you done all this row?

Mrs K Yes

Mr Wilson You sure you've not missed any?

Mrs K Absolutely certain

Mr W Right then, what's the time?

Mrs K Five minutes to - should we let them in do you think?

Mr W I make it six minutes to - we'll give them just one more minute

Mrs K Couldn't we just open the doors now?

Mr W We could but it'll only give them more time to fidget - we ought to be precise. I think perhaps one final check

(They walk round making sure that all the writing paper is ready on the desks)

Mr W (Checking his watch) Right then - it's now exactly five to. You may now open the doors.

(Mrs Kirby goes to the doors and opens them to let In the students who come in talking to each other)

Mr W I will remind you that this is an examination

(The voices subside)

(Seeing a youth with a bag) No bags or briefcases are allowed in the room young man

(The youth realises he's brought it in by mistake and apologetically takes it out. There are two seats vacant and the students point to them and discuss which of their friends is missing. Then after everyone has been in a while a girl comes in later than the rest. For some reason she is not nervous like the others but neither is she at ease)

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Mr W You're late young lady. You're very lucky, another minute and the doors would have been closed on you ... now then, when you are quite ready (the voices subside) ... the rules of the examination are as follows : we will come around with the question papers and put them face down onto the desk - you must not look at them until you are told to do so - when I tell you, you may turn over your papers, after which time you will be allowed two minutes reading time - at the end of that time I will give you the signal to begin writing you will then be given reminders of the time every half hour and also ten minutes before the end... are there any questions ?

1st girl What if we need some more paper?

Mrs K If you need more paper you must put your hand up and we'll come round to you.

Mr W No-one must get out of their seats unless it's to leave the room and that is only once you've finished - when you've left you may not return - is that clear ? ... We shall now come around with the question papers - and remember, you must leave them face down until you're told to turn them over

(The two of them go round putting the question papers onto the desks and return to the front)

Mr W Right then - has everyone got writing paper? Anyone not got a question paper? The time is now two minutes to - you may now turn over your papers and begin reading

(They all turn them over - there are a few groans from those who haven't learnt the appropriate work)

Mr W (After a while looking at his watch) You may now begin writing

(Some begin to write feverishly while others aren't sure where to start ... Mr K and Mrs K walk round the aisles keeping an eye on everyone. After a few minutes the girl who came in late quietly stands up in her place)

Mr W Yes? What do you want?

(She doesn't reply)

Mr W Is there something you want?

(Still no response)

Mrs K Has she got paper? I'm sure I put paper on that desk

(They both approach her)

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- Mr W Yes - what is it?
- (No reply)
- I said "What do you want?" Are you deaf?
- Mrs K Perhaps she isn't feeling well. Are you all right? You're not going to pass out on us are you? Do you want to go outside for a minute?
- Mr W (To Mrs K) No-one is allowed to leave the room while the exam's in progress
- Mrs K But if she isn't well ...
- Mr W Are you feeling unwell? Is that it?
- (No response)
- Mrs K Would you like me to take you outside for some fresh air?
- Mr W You can't just stand there, for heavens sake, there's an examination going on
- (By now heads are beginning to turn to look at the distraction)
- Mr W What's the matter? Can't you do the questions?
- (Still no response)
- Mr W I asked you a question
- Mrs K She's written something on her paper
- Mr W What does it say?
- Mrs K It says - (shocked) It says "This has to stop!"
- Mr W What? What has to stop? Oh! I see now - you're making some sort of a protest are you? One of those? (The rest begin to murmur) Get on with your work the rest of you ... so you've decided you're not going to take part in the examination have you?
- (No response)
- Very well ... on your own head be it - if you wish to put your whole future in jeopardy that is entirely up to you but don't think you're going to spoil the chances of other people – Out!
- (No response)

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Do you hear me - I said 'Outside'

(The girl doesn't move)

I am not going to repeat myself - if you don't wish to take part in this exam that's completely up to you - you've made your point, now please leave the room

Gregson (Quietly but firmly) No

Mr W What do you mean "no"? I am telling you to leave this room

(No reply)

Mrs K Should I fetch the principal?

Mr W (To Mrs K) There's no need for that (To the girl) I'm warning you Miss - er (doesn't know her name and turns to someone nearby for inspiration)

Boy 1 It's Julie Gregson

Mr W I'm warning you Miss Gregson - I do not appreciate dumb insolence - If you don't leave this room at once I'm going to have to physically throw you out

Gregson Really?

(Mr W is hesitant - he's not much of a one for physical violence)

Mr W You are interfering with the chances of everyone else here

Gregson Am I?

Mr W You can't just stand there for heavens sake

Gregson Can't I?

Mr W If you want to spoil your paper in some sort of selfish protest that's up to you but these people have their own future to think about even if you aren't you bothered about yours

Mrs K (Persuasively) Julie, nobody likes taking exams but we all have to do them at some stage

Gregson Do we

Mrs K Yes, we've all done then in our time so why don't you just knuckle down and do your best?

Gregson No

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- Mr W I beg your pardon?
- Gregson They don't want anything of us - of me – they don't want to know what we think about anything do they? What we believe? All they want is the predetermined answer, the set replies - and if we give them the things they're looking for, churn out the stock phrases like parrots, they reward us with a pat on the back, the bonus of the good mark
- Mr W Correct - so either you get on with your paper or you do us the favour of leaving the room
- Gregson But they don't really want to know what we think about things, how we think things should be
- Mrs K You are putting the others off
- Gregson That's up to them
- Mr W You are distracting everyone
- Gregson You're the one who's doing the distracting,
- Mrs K I think I am going to get the principal
- Gregson Get her, why don't you
(Mrs K goes out)
- Mr W You think you' re some sort of heroine do you?
- Gregson No
- Mr W I've seen your sort before, searching for attention, knocking the system all the time but you've got nothing constructive to replace it with
- Gregson Somebody' s got to make a stand, to speak out - everyone has to make a stand sometime in their lives and this is my time - these exams - this system - it's all wrong and its got to stop ...you don't know what its like, you've no idea of the hell that you put people through
- Girl 1 Can't you just throw her out, sir
- Mr W See? You see what you're doing to the other students?
- Gregson Sheep - that's all they are, conformist sheep
- Mr W It takes a lot of hard work to do well at exams

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- Gregson And it takes courage to stand up for what you believe in, to make a stand and speak out (She turns to the others) Look at you - just look - all with your heads down working away in neat little rows just like they want you to do - going through the motions – can't you see that's what they want, for you to fit in with their system, their rules? ... Learn this and answer that - they hold out the carrot - we'll reward you well, we'll give you an "A" in this, a "B minus" in that - and what do you do? You comply, you follow like meek little lambs, you work and you study and you worry yourself silly about the results - but at the end of the day who is it who's in charge? Who's setting the ground rules? Who's pulling the strings? Them - the big anonymous "then"
- Mr W What're you saying? Are you saying there's no place in education for exams?
- Gregson There's a place, a small place but why do we have to go through with all this? You really don't understand how people suffer do you? - The pain and the worry you put them through - and for what? At the end of the day what do they prove, these exams? What do they tell you about anybody?
- Boy 2 They tell you who's done the work
- Gregson (Rounding on him) Do they? Do they really? Or who's best at memorising things? Who's good at last minute swatting. Isn't that more like it?
- (Murmurs of agreement)
- Girl 2 I don't mind exams
- Gregson No, because you know you're good at last minute learning, you can do all your enjoying yourself early in the year then flog your guts out for the last three weeks
- Girl 3 She's right
- Gregson Course I'm right, I've been there, I've done it
- Boy 3 So what're you going to do for qualifications?
- Girl 4 Yeah – what're you going to tell them when you go for a job?
- Gregson I'll tell them the truth - that I didn't want to do their exams, that I didn't want to fit into the system - that I had more in me than being one of the flock
- Mr W This is just an excuse for not doing the work
- Girl 5 Its not sir, she's done it. She's not daft, that's what I cant understand

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- Mr W You're prepared to jeopardise your whole future are you?
- Gregson Sometimes something happens that makes you stop and think, makes you take stock and ask yourself "Why are you doing this? What's the relevance?" That's what's happened to me and when it happens you, you've either got to swallow your pride and get on with them or make a stand for what you believe in, follow your own conscience - that's what I'm doing - something that you aren't
- Mr W I beg your pardon?
- Gregson You probably don't remember but you told us earlier in the year that you preferred continual assessment
- Mr W What if I do?
- Gregson So what are doing here supervising this?
- Mr W We all have to take our turns
- Gregson Let me get this straight, you don't actually believe in exams but you're quite prepared to supervise one?
- Mr W It isn't as easy as that
- Gregson Isn't it? What's the problem then?
- Mr W You often have to do things in life that you don't believe in
- Gregson Why?
- Mr W What do you mean "Why?" Because that's the way it is, because in this case the government insists on it.
- Gregson The government - so you do everything the government says do you?
- Mr W Listen - if I tell my boss that I don't want anything to do with exams what's she going to do? She's got instructions that this is the way it's going to be
- Gregson So she does what she's told
- Mr W Correct
- Gregson Because if she doesn't they get rid of her
- Mr W Yes
- Gregson And you do what you're told because if you don't toe the line -

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- Mr W The same will happen to me - and the plain reality of life is that I happen to have a mortgage, a wife and two kids to support, all right?
- Gregson Now lets get this straight, the boss doesn't believe in them but she has instructions from the top, you don't believe in them but you have instructions from her - so just what the hell are we doing them for?
- Mr W So that you can be assessed by future employers