

The Report

a ten-minute play

CHARACTERS

Evans

McDonald

Thomson

SET

A modern office with a window, door, table and two chairs; at least one file on the desk. Any additional office paraphernalia (eg filing cabinet, telephone) neutral / anonymous.

The only direction is that the characters should at all times be portrayed naturally.

THOMSON by the window and McDONALD by the door

THOMSON Bring Evans in.

Exit McDONALD. THOMSON sits in the manager's chair and looks through the file on the desk.

EVANS enters with McDONALD

THOMSON (cont) Take a seat.

EVANS sits. McDONALD stands by the door.

THOMSON (cont) You've seen the report?

EVANS Yes.

THOMSON You've seen your name.

EVANS Yes.

THOMSON In several places.

EVANS Yes.

THOMSON Do you have any comment?

EVANS It was dreadful. More than dreadful. Appalling. Heartbreaking.

THOMSON That's all?

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EVANS What more can I say?

THOMSON Do you not accept responsibility?

EVANS Responsibility?

THOMSON Yes.

EVANS Why should I?

THOMSON You were the architect.

EVANS One of the architects.

THOMSON The lead architect.

EVANS It was a collegial effort.

THOMSON Your name came first.

EVANS Yes.

THOMSON It was your signature.

EVANS Yes.

THOMSON Your responsibility.

EVANS The studio's.

THOMSON Ultimately yours. You signed.

EVANS We followed standard procedures. We met all the legal regulations.

THOMSON They failed.

EVANS That wasn't my fault.

THOMSON You signed.

EVANS Yes.

THOMSON People died.

EVANS I know.

THOMSON In pain.

EVANS I know.

THOMSON In agony.

EVANS I know.

THOMSON In a blazing inferno.

EVANS I was there. I heard the screams.

Pause

THOMSON If not you, who was responsible ?

EVANS Construction is complicated. Many organisations, hundreds of people, had input. We followed guidelines. If there was a problem, it should have been identified. We did our bit. Someone else should have drawn attention to it.

THOMSON Their failure doesn't absolve you of responsibility.

EVANS Responsibility should be shared.

THOMSON Then accept your share. Your colleagues. Your studio. You. People died.

EVANS Do you think I don't know? I told you, I heard the screams. People screaming. Screaming, screaming, screaming.

THOMSON What happens now?

EVANS I don't know. I can't think.

THOMSON You cannot do nothing.

EVANS What? I can't think.

THOMSON A response is needed.

EVANS I can't think. *(coughs)* I feel ill.

THOMSON People died.

EVANS I know, I know! *(a paroxysm of coughing)* I can't breathe.

EVANS falls forward on to the desk. McDONALD rushes forward.

THOMSON Get a glass of water.

McDONALD exits. THOMSON comes round the desk and pulls EVANS upright. EVANS begins to recover.

THOMSON (cont) Are you all right?

EVANS Yes.

THOMSON Are you sure?

EVANS stands up

EVANS I just need some air.

THOMSON Open the window.

EVANS walks to the window, visibly recovering. Instead of opening the window:

EVANS Bring McDonald in.

Exit THOMSON. EVANS sits in the manager's chair and looks through the file on the desk.

McDONALD enters with THOMSON

EVANS (cont) Take a seat.

McDONALD sits. THOMSON stands by the door.

EVANS (cont) You've seen the report?

McDONALD Yes.

EVANS You've seen your name.

McDONALD Yes.

EVANS In several places.

McDONALD Yes.

EVANS Do you have any comment?

McDONALD It was dreadful. More than dreadful. Appalling. Heartbreaking.

EVANS That's all?

McDONALD What more can I say?

EVANS Do you not accept responsibility?

McDONALD Responsibility?

EVANS Yes.

McDONALD Why should I?

EVANS You were on the committee.

McDONALD So were others.

EVANS You were chair of the committee.

McDONALD It was voted on.

EVANS As chair you cast the decisive vote.

McDONALD Yes.

EVANS It was your signature.

McDONALD Yes.

EVANS Your responsibility.

McDONALD The Council's.

EVANS Ultimately yours. You signed.

McDONALD We followed standard procedures. We met all the legal regulations.

EVANS They failed.

McDONALD That wasn't my fault.

EVANS You signed.

McDONALD Yes.

EVANS People died.

McDONALD I know.

EVANS In pain.

McDONALD I know.

EVANS In agony.

McDONALD I know.

EVANS In a blazing inferno.

McDONALD I was there. I saw the flames.

Pause

EVANS If not you, who was responsible ?

McDONALD Construction is complicated. Many organisations, hundreds of people, had input. We followed guidelines. If there was a problem, it should have been identified. We did our bit. Someone else should have drawn attention to it.

EVANS Their failure doesn't absolve you of responsibility.

McDONALD Responsibility should be shared.

EVANS Then accept your share. Your committee. The council. You. People died.

McDONALD Do you think I don't know? I told you, I saw the flames. Flames everywhere. Burning. Everywhere burning, burning, burning.

EVANS What happens now?

McDONALD I don't know. I can't think.

EVANS You cannot do nothing.

McDONALD What? I can't think.

EVANS A response is needed.

McDONALD I can't think. *(coughs)* I feel ill.

EVANS People died.

McDONALD I know, I know! *(a paroxysm of coughing)* I can't breathe.

McDONALD falls forward on to the desk. THOMSON rushes forward.

EVANS Get a glass of water.

THOMSON exits. EVANS comes round the desk and pulls McDONALD upright. McDONALD begins to recover.

EVANS (cont) Are you all right?

McDONALD Yes.

EVANS Are you sure?

McDONALD stands up

McDONALD I just need some air.

EVANS Open the window.

McDONALD walks to the window, visibly recovering. Instead of opening the window:

McDONALD Bring Thomson in.

Exit EVANS. McDONALD sits in the manager's chair and looks through the file on the desk.

THOMSON enters with EVANS

McDONALD (cont) Take a seat.

THOMSON sits. EVANS stands by the door.

McDONALD (cont) You've seen the report?

THOMSON Yes.

McDONALD You've seen your name.

THOMSON Yes.

McDONALD In several places.

THOMSON Yes.

McDONALD Do you have any comment?

THOMSON It was dreadful. More than dreadful. Appalling. Heartbreaking.

McDONALD That's all?

THOMSON What more can I say?

McDONALD Do you not accept responsibility?

THOMSON Responsibility?

McDONALD Yes.

THOMSON Why should I?

McDONALD You undertook the safety checks.

THOMSON We worked as a team.

McDONALD You led the team.

THOMSON We followed guidelines.

McDONALD You were team leader.

THOMSON Yes.

McDONALD It was your signature.

THOMSON Yes.

McDONALD Your responsibility.

THOMSON The company's.

McDONALD Ultimately yours. You signed.

THOMSON We followed standard procedures. We met all the legal regulations.

McDONALD They failed.

THOMSON That wasn't my fault.

McDONALD You signed.

THOMSON Yes.

McDONALD People died.

THOMSON I know.

McDONALD In pain.

THOMSON I know.

McDONALD In agony.

THOMSON I know.

THOMSON I was there. I saw the smoke.

Pause

McDONALD If not you, who was responsible ?

THOMSON Construction is complicated. Many organisations, hundreds of people, had input. We followed guidelines. If there was a problem, it should have been identified. We did our bit. Someone else should have drawn attention to it .

McDONALD That doesn't absolve you of responsibility.

THOMSON Responsibility should be shared.

McDONALD Then accept your share. Your team. Your company. You. People died.

THOMSON Do you think I don't know? I told you, I saw the smoke. Like a cloud, a volcano. Everywhere thick, thick smoke.

McDONALD What happens now?

THOMSON I don't know. I can't think.

McDONALD You cannot do nothing.

THOMSON What? I can't think.

McDONALD A response is needed.

THOMSON I can't think. *(coughs)* I feel ill.

McDONALD People died.

THOMSON I know, I know! *(a paroxysm of coughing)* I can't breathe.

THOMSON falls forward on to the desk. EVANS rushes forward.

McDONALD Get a glass of water.

McDONALD comes round the desk to pull THOMSON upright, while EVANS goes to the door, opens and slams it shut again.

EVANS My God.

McDONALD What?

EVANS *(coughs)* The building's on fire.

The scene quickly degenerates into coughing and fear

McDONALD Is it serious?

EVANS It's everywhere. We can't get out.

McDONALD The window.

THOMSON What's happening?

McDONALD There's a fire.

EVANS It won't open.

McDONALD Are you sure?

THOMSON Try again.

EVANS It won't move.

McDONALD Break it!

THOMSON No, the smoke outside. It'll come in.

McDONALD What can we do?

EVANS The advice is to wait.

The stage darkens as the fire takes over. The coughing continues as the three reassure each other.

THOMSON The building is safe.

EVANS The fire will be contained. It's designed that way.

THOMSON The materials are fireproof.

McDONALD Passed all the safety checks.

EVANS At every stage of construction.

THOMSON It's safe.

EVANS We'll be safe.

McDONALD Safe.

THOMSON Safe.

EVANS Safe.

The voices diminish as the blackout becomes complete. Screams are heard.

Light comes up on the scene at the beginning:

THOMSON Bring Evans in.

Exit McDONALD. Thomson takes the manager's seat and looks through the file on the desk.

CURTAIN