

The Report

a short play (Zoom version)

CHARACTERS - adult 25 - 60, gender irrelevant

Evans

McDonald

Thomson

SETS

Home office for all three characters.

Ideal but not essential: whiteboard / chart / filing cabinet / files / similar in background.

DRESS

More formal than casual - each character takes their job seriously.

PROP

Each character has a copy of The Report

SCREEN(S)

Initially only Thomson is seen, then McDonald, then Evans.

For the rest of the play all three screens are shown even if the character has blanked it.

THOMSON Right. Let's get started. McDonald?

McDonald's screen becomes active

McDONALD I'm here.

THOMSON You're taking notes.

McDONALD Yes.

THOMSON If you're ready, I'll let Evans in.

Evans' screen becomes active

THOMSON Good morning.

EVANS Morning.

THOMSON We're recording this, but I've asked McDonald to take notes. Any objections?

EVANS No.

THOMSON So let's start. 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 About?

THOMSON About what happened.

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

THOMSON That's all?

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.

THOMSON Take a break. Get a glass of water.

EVANS Thank you.

EVANS gets up and exits. Their screen stays active.

McDONALD Do I have time to . . . ?

THOMSON Yes, go ahead.

McDONALD blanks their screen

THOMSON looks at their watch, then blanks their screen

EVANS enters, sits. There is no indication they were ill

EVANS Right. Let's get started. Thomson?

Thomson's screen becomes active

THOMSON I'm here.

EVANS You're taking notes.

THOMSON Yes.

EVANS If you're ready, I'll let McDonald in.

McDonald's screen becomes active

EVANS Good morning.

McDONALD Morning.

EVANS We're recording this, but I've asked Thomson to take notes. Any objections?

McDONALD No.

EVANS So let's start. 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 planning 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.

EVANS Take a break. Get a glass of water.

McDONALD Thank you.

McDONALD gets up and exits. Their screen stays active.

THOMSON Do I have time to . . . ?

EVANS Yes, go ahead.

THOMSON blanks their screen

EVANS looks at their phone, then blanks their screen

McDONALD enters, sits. There is no indication they were ill

McDONALD Right. Let's get started. Evans?

EVANS' screen becomes active

EVANS I'm here.

McDONALD You're taking notes.

EVANS Yes.

McDONALD If you're ready, I'll let Thomson in.

THOMSON's screen becomes active

McDONALD Good morning.

THOMSON Morning.

McDONALD We're recording this but I've asked Evans to take notes. Any objections?

THOMSON No.

McDONALD So let's start. 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.

McDONALD Take a break. Get a glass of water.

THOMSON gets up and exits. Their screen remains active

EVANS starts coughing

McDONALD Are you all right?

EVANS There's something . . .

McDONALD starts coughing

EVANS I need to see . . .

EVANS gets up and exits. Their screen remains active.

Only McDONALD can be seen, but everyone's coughing can be heard getting worse - all three characters continue coughing during the following dialogue.

THOMSON *(off screen)* My God!

McDONALD What is it?

THOMSON *(reappears on screen)* There's smoke outside. I think there's a fire. I can't get my door open.

McDONALD Dial nine-nine-nine.

McDONALD gets up and exits. Their screen remains active.

EVANS *(off screen)* My God!

THOMSON *(on phone)* Fire! Fire Brigade *(to EVANS)* What is it?

EVANS *(reappears on screen)* There's smoke outside. I think there's a fire. I can't get my door open.

THOMSON *(to EVANS)* Dial nine-nine-nine. *(to phone)* What's taking so long?

McDONALD *(off screen)* My God!

EVANS *(on phone)* Fire! Fire Brigade *(to McDONALD)* What is it?

McDONALD *(reappears on screen)* There's smoke outside. I think there's a fire. I can't get my door open.

EVANS *(to McDONALD)* Dial nine-nine-nine. *(to phone)* What's taking so long?

McDONALD *(on phone)* Fire! Fire Brigade

Everyone is coughing, panicking, not looking at their screens

THOMSON What's taking so long? What's taking so long? What's taking so long?

THOMSON gets up and exits. Their screen goes blank

McDONALD Where are they? Where are they? Where are they?

McDONALD gets up and exits. Their screen goes blank.

EVANS Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!

EVANS gets up and exits. Their screen does not go blank

Eventually . . .

THOMSON'S screen comes alive. They are perfectly composed. EVANS' screen goes blank.

THOMSON Right. Let's get started. McDonald?

McDonald's screen becomes active. They are perfectly composed.

McDONALD I'm here.

THOMSON You're taking notes.

McDONALD Yes.

THOMSON If you're ready, I'll let Evans in.

Evans' screen becomes active. They are perfectly composed.

THOMSON Good morning.

EVANS Morning.

THOMSON We're recording this, but I've asked McDonald to take notes. Any objections?

EVANS No.

THOMSON So let's start. You've seen the report?

EVANS Yes.

All three screens go blank