

# Candidate 5

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Advanced Higher English - Drama Script

## Short play: Corruption

*The lights come up to reveal a large work desk downstage right. Beside the desk is a swivel chair with a suit jacket hanging from its back. On the floor below sits an iPhone and a large set of keys which have fallen from its pockets. On the desk there is a top of the range laptop sitting open and sheets of paper surrounding it, including invoices, unopened letters and banks statements scattered carelessly amongst the work space.*

*Upstage left there is a bench and on the ground near it there are several sweet and crisp packets. Centre stage is empty; however, from the wings of centre stage a confused mumbling can be heard, the volume gradually increasing. After several seconds the flood lights change to a single spotlight highlighting the area downstage right only. A tall, slim yet muscular man enters from downstage left, holding his hand over his face and then smoothing over his long brown hair to reveal a concerned expression. After crossing over downstage right the man throws himself down onto the swivel chair with a heavy sigh, his posture relaxed and his head down. The man picks up a small wooden name sign branded "Joe Westwick", staring at it for several seconds before throwing it carelessly to the opposite end of the desk sending several pieces of paper floating towards the ground.*

**Joe:** *(shaking his head)* If my mum could see me now... she wouldn't believe her eyes. Ha! What a failure.

*He leans back, unfastening the silver cufflinks of each shirt sleeve before rolling them up past his elbows and stuffing them into his tight trouser pockets.*

She always wanted me to work in a big fancy place like this and from first glance you would think I'd made her proud... but not if she knew the truth. In school it was different, everything meant something and I knew what I wanted, just not how to get it.

*Floodlights come back up across the whole stage revealing a small boy sitting on the bench upstage left. The boy looks disheartened and sits slumped forwards swinging his legs back and forth resting his head in his hands, humming quietly to himself – out of tune. Joe does not engage with the boy; however, he begins to whistle the same sorrowful song, in tune while checking his emails on the gleaming laptop, frowning intensely.*

It wasn't mum's fault that we didn't have any money back then, I always knew that. It was my dad *(clenching his fists and resting them on the desk)*. If he hadn't left us everything would be different... but she had me, and in the end that's all she needed. After Elly and Clark went separate ways it was me who was left to support the family, well, our family of two. They two were never destined to stay here... *(Laughing spitefully to himself)* No way. They must have got my dad's traits. I used to tell mum I was staying in for lunch every day,

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but me and the boys would always go down town. I'd scrounge the odd 50p coin off them if they were feeling generous but most of the time I just waited until tea, unless I got lucky.

*Meanwhile, upstage left the boy spots a shiny coin lying on the ground below the bench and jumps to his feet, grabbing it as if in competition and glancing around him before savouring the coin in his back pocket. He is suddenly uplifted and begins walking back and forth along the bench; his arms outspread, keeping his balance and humming a more cheerful tune to himself now.*

The boys used to always say they wanted to be footballers and that or nothing. I thought that was strange – I mean, I liked football as much as the next guy but I couldn't imagine doing it for a living. Nah, ever since speakers from big companies and corporations came to school I always wanted to be a businessman. *(His smile fades slowly and he gazes down at the suit he is wearing, shaking his head again)* So anyway, I started thinking tactics when it came to the lunch money situation: I'd save any money I could grab for a week, *(laughing gently and reaching for a shop bought sandwich from the lunch-box in his desk drawer. He unwraps it and takes a bite before going on to speak slowly, with his mouth full)* felt like a year back then... I'd save an save an buy myself three packets of chewing gum the next Monday from the wee corner shop, then I'd sell one bit each for 50p or three for a pound. *(his voice, excitable)* There you had it – for the next week I could get myself a sandwich from the van outside school and on the more successful weeks, a poke of chips on a Friday from right down the town. You'd be surprised at first how one bit of chewy could please my class...

*Joe takes only several more bites of the upmarket sandwich before stuffing it back into the plastic container and tossing it over his shoulder aiming for the bin behind him, and missing. The boy upstage left spots the sandwich on the floor in front of him and pounces on it with glee. He skips off stage stuffing his hungry face without a second glance around him.*

*He soon enters again from centre stage right, along with two other boys his age by each side. They stroll on stage behind the desk and towards upstage left. They are smiling and laughing through mime, their hands filled with food, including sandwiches and sweets, the boy is patted on the back several times from each of his friends as they appear to be congratulating him. The sound of a bell ringing fades in and out again and the three boys run into the wings from upstage left.*

Everybody sussed me out by the end of that term, though. I think they realised that the corner shop could sell them at a more reasonable price. Even though my fortune was up, I waited until the Primary 7 End of Term Service to run home and tell my mum I was going to be a businessman. *(A sad smile creeping over his face)* Run my very own business I said. I'd buy her a car, house, the lot. I remember her kind laugh and the way she didn't say anything

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just grinned and patted my head. By the end of the academy years I couldn't remember that smile.

Speaking of money, the situation didn't really change as I went into the academy. It was then my mum went downhill. *(twisting the end of his silver, lightly striped tie with both hands, his eyes glued to a spot on the floor, he appears in a day dream. Entering upstage left, the boy, looking much older now, can be heard.)*

**Boy:** Maw... *(looking across offstage right with a terrified expression)* maw, you awright? Wake up! Oh ma god! *(Sprinting now heading offstage right, dropping the shopping bags in his hands to the floor)*

**Joe:** I can still see her that day she was passed out, sitting in the same chair as always. Thank god I came back when I did anyway. That's why I got the job at Connor Preedy's dad's place. We needed to get her better and money was the only way. Mind you, being the PA of your best pal's dad is one of the weirdest things, but it's what got me into this place. Well, that, along with the hours of studying for business management and finance classes. The only way they'd take me seriously. I guess I should have listened to them when they said your own business would either make or break you.

*Joe is silent for several minutes on stage as a young woman carrying folders and a coffee enters from downstage right. The woman smiles patiently and between juggling the folders, hands Joe an unopened letter.*

**Lisa:** Mr Westwick, sorry I... this is the letter that you must have forgotten to pick up earlier after the meeting. I noticed it unopened and... *(staring at the logo of the tax company)* I... well it's marked urgent that's all.

**Joe:** *(shaking his head with a forced smile, avoiding eye contact)* Thanks Lisa. No worries, *(with an explanatory gesture towards the cluttered desk and sarcastic yet playful tone)* just another to add to the pile!

*Lisa passes him the coffee cup and he catches her gaze. His smile is more genuine now and his posture relaxes again as he takes a sip. He soon begins to open the letter and study its contents. A teenage boy who looks aged around 17 enters from upstage left. He is carrying two folders and he dumps them on the ground with a clatter before sitting himself down next to them and scanning each page frantically, searching for information. Downstage right Joe violently tears the recently received letter in half, standing up suddenly, his gelled hair falling over his pained face and in one swift motion using both arms he sends all of the loose papers flying away from his desk with a large outcry, scattering the stage. Joe stares at the mess, breathing heavily, his brow greatly creased and his fists again clenched. He looks defeated. The boy upstage left notices a piece of paper (from Joe's desk) which has landed*

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*near his folders. He grabs it with anticipation and after scanning the words quickly, kisses the sheet and cheers to himself.*

**Boy:** *(whispering)* You, piece of paper have saved ma job! Saved ma life! *(Running off stage, upstage right, passing behind Joe, again not acknowledging him)* Mr Preedy! I found it, the paperwork! I kent it was somewhere here, look!

*Floodlights fade out and a spotlight snaps onto Joe, still standing beside his desk downstage right.*

**Joe:** Letters like this, they're ruining this place. Ruining my life. *(Walking back to centre stage and beginning to pace nervously between centre stage right and centre stage left)* I sometimes wish I hadn't even accepted the stupid PA job. I would have been better down the local shop or some crap! *(his face now overcome with guilt and his posture guarded, speaking with a slower pace now)* That's all I deserve. When Preedy offered to help me set this place up I couldn't have been happier, I'll tell you. I'd got used to saving by that time, 20 years old, working my arse off there every night. Not many 20 year olds you'd meet with thousands of pounds saved up for their own business. He always said he liked that, and if Preedy liked it, I must have been something special. That's what mum said... *(his pacing slowing down to a halt, centre stage. In a daydream state again)* before things got even worse anyway. If it wasn't for him this place wouldn't be here the now. Maybe I should be angry: if it wasn't for Preedy I'd never have believed I could keep it afloat. I bet the old boy's turning in his grave watching me now, lying to each and every one of the men and women we interviewed in that wee room across the hall, five years ago past February. *(pointing with his entire left arm, volume increasing and slowly walking forward to downstage centre)* Lying to them. Day in, day out. Lying to everyone. And Lisa, she doesn't realise just how much she's covered for me, in fact she doesn't even know it, at least she acts like she doesn't. When the guys come here looking, she's never questioned why she was to tell them of my "meetings" whenever some visitors show up, looking her up and down, giving her cheek... *(shaking his bowed head, arms swinging restlessly while shifting from one neatly dressed foot to another)* while I cowered away in this office.

*(Staring out into the audience, tears filling his eyes as he speaks and his hands down by his side now, he looks deflated)* Y'see, when my mum got ill, an I mean really ill, when the meds stopped helping, and even the drink I couldn't tear from her hands stopped numbing the pain, I needed the money. Just so she wouldn't leave me. I wasn't ready for that then. If I hadn't been so busy all the time, maybe we could have got the better care sooner... what a crap son and an even worse business man. What kind of guy would steal from his own company? But what kind of man would let his own mother go because he couldn't afford to move her to somewhere more advanced? *(his tone of voice becoming hurt and desperate as the volume increases)* so I took it, I took it all.. and the sad thing is, I actually wanted the

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business to fail, I wanted it out of the picture, probably so I'd feel sorry for myself. But that little voice in my head, the voice still 11, selling chewing gum for 50p, he wouldn't ignore the rumours. Rumours of dodgy business going down in the city. Drugs. Now that's something I'd never touch. Nah. At least not for me... but with a company like this, transporting it for those guys would be easy, and untraceable. It would get good money in and fast. Replace what I'd already taken and that way I could keep up the payments and at least keep everything running. Or, maybe I just wanted the business as a distraction, for when she was gone... *(Pausing for several seconds before wiping his wet cheeks with the back of his hand and slowly strolling back to his desk, landing himself back down on the chair)*

*Opposite the desk of Joe's office there is a small table with a large framed photo. Joe looks toward it as the youngest boy enters the stage again, he picks up the picture and polishes it with the bottom of his thin jumper and smiles ear to ear as he sets it back in place perfectly and with precision. Joe does not react, only sighs heavily. As he begins to speak again he continues to watch the boy as he caresses the photo for a few moments longer.*

*(Whispering in the boy's direction)* Cherish it. Cherish every second.

The plan may have seemed doomed to fail but it worked, for a while at least and I managed to hide it from her. My grandma used to tell me the truth was always better, even if it hurt. But looking in her eyes, I could never tell mum the truth, where it all came from. So I hid it and I kept going back and back until the guys didn't need me anymore, until the profits were back up. And they're up, better than ever. Lise and the guys always congratulate me. But I should have known. Guys like that, they don't go away, *(his face deadly serious as he clicks aimlessly on the mouse attached to the laptop)* not without a fight and not without what they want. They're the type of guys who never have enough. One job turns to two and two turns to six... until you're drowning in it. *(Lifting his hand and loosening his top button of his shirt, swallowing loudly)* The bruises don't hurt as much as what you've done and the pride of the business, it's down the drain. Alongside the rest of the dirty drugs that I got fed up looking at every time I came to *(gesturing quotations with his fingers)* "check for files" in the basement before the next orders went out.

*Lights come back up and there is no spotlight down stage right. A knocking can be heard and the door opens. Joe does not move until Lisa is inside the office when he finally looks at her.*

**Lisa:** *(quickly glancing at the mess, her mouth falling open before snapping her attention back to Joe)* They're back, Mr Westwick. I'm sorry. Shall I say you're... ahh... out again? *(twisting one of her rings on her finger anxiously and looking concerned)* I've called security, they'll be down soon and get rid...

**Joe:** Send them through please Lisa.

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**Lisa:** Mr... I mean Joe, are you..

**Joe:** Yes, thank you Lise. I really must speak with them at some point so it's time to face the beautiful music (*his saddened eyes smiling at her*).

*Lisa does not say anything, only backs away, closing the door, holding her shaking hand to her head piece and mumbling something into it as she scurries off stage. Meanwhile, Joe retrieves his name tag, studies it for a moment and rests it back down in its perfect position next to the laptop which he snaps shut. Slowly and with care he unrolls his sleeves and fishes the cuff links from his pockets, refastening them. He does not attempt to tidy up the paper, or pick up his belongings from the floor. He does, however, gracefully return his suit jacket on his back, smoothing over the front and smiling genuinely now, at a picture on the opposite wall of a young man and an older, frail woman, smiling in front of a shining new building. Returning his gaze into the audience, he does not smile any more, only stares blankly ahead of him. Meanwhile, upstage left, the youngest boy enters upstage left again from the wings. He too faces the audience, itching the back of his neck and then pulling at his T-shirt which appears two sizes too small for him.*

**Joe:** Money, it's everything. But it's nothing all at once. I wish I could have seen that sooner.

*The young boy is grinning mischievously and, retrieving a pound coin from his pocket, he repeatedly and effortlessly flips it metres into the air, catching it every time with a proud, smug expression creeping over his innocent face.*

*Now there is a louder and harsher knocking sound off stage, outside Joe's office, along with heavy footsteps and the lights snap off to a black out.*

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