

Button

by

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CHARACTERS

PERSON ONE

PERSON TWO

SETTING

An office.

TIME

Lunchtime.

SYNOPSIS

Person One's job is to hit a button every thirty seconds. When Person Two fills in for him for lunch, he asks what would happen if the button isn't pushed. Person One does not know and doesn't want to find out. Person Two questions the point of this task, and in the end, forces Person One not to press the button. They receive a subtly threatening phone call. This puts fear into Person Two, but now Person One has a new sense of rebellion.

LIGHTS UP ON:

(An office. PERSON ONE is sitting at a desk. He wears a bland jumpsuit of some kind. The only items on the desk are a large, red pressable button and an old style rotary phone. He's staring at his watch. After a moment, he hits the button. Then goes back to staring at his watch.)

(PERSON TWO enters. He wears a matching jump suit.)

PERSON TWO

Good afternoon.

(PERSON ONE looks at watch.)

PERSON ONE

Good morning.

PERSON TWO

How are you today?

PERSON ONE

I'm well. Yourself?

PERSON TWO

Good. I'm here to relieve you for lunch.

PERSON ONE

Let's synchronize.

PERSON TWO

OK.

(They both look at their watches for a moment. Then:)

PERSON ONE

T-minus 5, 4, 3, 2...

(PERSON ONE hits the button. PERSON TWO looks at his watch.)

PERSON ONE

We're synced.

(PERSON ONE gets out from behind desk, PERSON TWO takes their place.)

PERSON ONE

I'll return at one o'clock sharp.

(PERSON ONE starts to exit.)

PERSON TWO

Hey!

(PERSON ONE stops.)

PERSON ONE

What?

PERSON TWO

I had the strangest dream last night.

PERSON ONE

(confused)

About me? Was I naked?

PERSON TWO

About the button.

PERSON ONE

(disappointed)

Oh.

(suspicious)

What about the button?

PERSON TWO

I dreamed I forgot to press it.

PERSON ONE

That's a nightmare!

PERSON TWO

But I woke up before anything happened.

PERSON ONE

Thank goodness.

PERSON TWO

Still shook me up.

PERSON ONE

Well, if you hit the button every thirty seconds you'll have nothing to worry about.

PERSON TWO

Yeah...

(PERSON TWO looks at watch, then hits the button. PERSON ONE starts to exit.)

PERSON TWO

What if I don't press it?

(PERSON ONE stops, horrified.)

PERSON ONE
Why wouldn't you press it?

PERSON TWO
Now I'm curious to see what would happen if I didn't.

PERSON ONE
Don't be.

PERSON TWO
Why not?

PERSON ONE
Because not pressing the button is unthinkable.

PERSON TWO
I'm thinking about it.

PERSON ONE
Well, stop.

PERSON TWO
I can't. I mean... doesn't it seem kind of pointless?

PERSON ONE
No. It's a job.

PERSON TWO
But, to hit a button, every thirty seconds... Without seeing any results...

PERSON ONE
I always thought the results were not seeing any results.

PERSON TWO
That's not very fulfilling.

PERSON ONE
Welcome to life.
(looks at watch)
Aren't you going to...?

(PERSON ONE points at the button, as if he's about to hit it himself.)

PERSON TWO
I got this.

(PERSON TWO hits the button. PERSON ONE is only slightly relieved. Seems to be thinking of a reason.)

PERSON ONE

Maybe we're generating power for the office.

PERSON TWO

By pressing a button?

PERSON ONE

You never know. It has to start somewhere.

PERSON TWO

Feels like busy work to me.

PERSON ONE

If you don't like it, maybe you can cover lunches in another department. They're always looking for people in lever pulling.

PERSON TWO

It all feels the same. Pointless. Worse... boring...

PERSON ONE

Jobs aren't supposed to be exciting.

PERSON TWO

It'd be nice to shake things up a bit.

PERSON ONE

Not at my station. I don't want to get in trouble. I have a perfect record as a button pusher.

(PERSON ONE points to his watch, PERSON TWO nonchalantly hits the button.)

PERSON TWO

You think they'd blame you if I'm the one who did it? Or didn't do it?

PERSON ONE

I don't know. And I don't care to find out. It's needlessly rocking the boat. If you're unhappy, just quit, no need to break the system.

PERSON TWO

I don't even know what the system is!

PERSON ONE

Then don't tamper with it.

PERSON TWO

But, just pressing a button, with no explanation... Doesn't that seem weird to you?

PERSON ONE

It's a job. Do it.

PERSON TWO

What if pressing the button is hurting somebody?

PERSON ONE

That's not possible.

PERSON TWO

How can we be sure? Maybe that button is attached to an electric chair that's killing people every thirty seconds.

PERSON ONE

(slightly terrified)

What?

(PERSON ONE looks at the button suspiciously.)

PERSON ONE (CONT'D)

Why would they keep us so far from a prison if that were the case?

PERSON TWO

Plausible deniability. If we're not near the action, we won't feel guilty every time we fry a person.

(PERSON TWO hits the button with an odd glee. PERSON ONE looks at it terrified, wondering if they've just killed somebody. PERSON ONE shakes it off.)

PERSON ONE

That's far-fetched.

PERSON TWO

And pressing a button for no reason isn't?

PERSON ONE

I never really thought about it.

PERSON TWO

Maybe it's time you did. Think about it over lunch.

PERSON ONE

I'll have to get somebody else to cover for me if you're not going to press the button while I'm gone?

PERSON TWO

I'd rather not press it while you're here.

PERSON ONE

Why?

PERSON TWO

I need a witness.

PERSON ONE
I don't want to be involved.

PERSON TWO
You may not have a choice, if I don't hit the button.

PERSON ONE
I'll hit it.

PERSON TWO
Not this time.

(PERSON ONE looks at his watch,
frantic.)

PERSON ONE
There's only a few seconds.

PERSON TWO
We're going to skip this one.

PERSON ONE
We can't.

PERSON TWO
Yes!

PERSON ONE
No! T-Minus 3, 2...

(PERSON ONE reaches out to press the
button. PERSON TWO grabs PERSON ONE's
hand to stop him.)

PERSON ONE (CONT'D)
Let go!

PERSON TWO
No!

PERSON ONE
Break the rules on your own time.

PERSON TWO
You need to witness how pointless this job is.

PERSON ONE
But... my reputation...

PERSON TWO
It's sullied now.

(PERSON ONE looks at his watch, he's horrified for missing the time. PERSON TWO relaxes his grip PERSON ONE.)

PERSON TWO (CONT'D)

We did it.

PERSON ONE

We... did?

(They stare at the button. Suddenly the phone rings, scaring the hell out of them.)

PERSON ONE

I'm not answering that.

PERSON TWO

It's your desk.

PERSON ONE

You're the one who stopped me from pressing the button.

(PERSON TWO reluctantly answers the phone.)

PERSON TWO

(into phone)

Hello... Yes, we didn't press the button... I know... but we...

(PERSON ONE mimes for him not to say anything. While PERSON TWO talks, PERSON ONE stares at his watch.)

PERSON TWO (CONT'D)

(into phone)

We lost track of time during our switch over. Yes, we've synchronized... No, we won't let it happen again.

(PERSON ONE hits the button.)

PERSON TWO (CONT'D)

What do you mean by that?

(looks away, surprised)

They hung up on me.

(PERSON TWO is noticeably shaken.)

PERSON ONE

Who was that?

PERSON TWO

I didn't recognize the voice.

PERSON ONE

Were they mad?

PERSON TWO

They weren't anything. Just said if we miss hitting the button again, there'd be red on our permanent record.

PERSON ONE

Was that a threat?

PERSON TWO

It sounded like one.

PERSON ONE

How could you pull me into the middle of this craziness?

PERSON TWO

I didn't think they'd notice so quickly.

PERSON ONE

We're being watched. Or recorded.

PERSON TWO

Or both.

(PERSON TWO looks around suspiciously, then at his watch. PERSON TWO is almost terrified by the time on it. PERSON TWO hits the button faster than ever.)

PERSON TWO (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to lunch?

PERSON ONE

Not if you're not going to press the button again.

PERSON TWO

After that call... I'm never not pressing the button again.

PERSON ONE

Oh.

PERSON TWO

I'll have to learn to be happy being a corporate slave for the rest of my life.

PERSON ONE

As we all do.

(PERSON ONE turns to leave.)

PERSON TWO

Doing the same thing day in, day out. Day in, day out.

(PERSON TWO sadly hits the button.
PERSON ONE turns back to him.)

PERSON ONE (CONT'D)
Well... maybe there is a way to escape.

PERSON TWO
How?

PERSON ONE
Come to lunch with me.

PERSON ONE
With you? Now?

PERSON ONE
Yes.

PERSON TWO
But... the button?

PERSON ONE
It'll be here when we get back.

PERSON TWO
But... the red on our permanent records?

PERSON ONE
Maybe our records could use some color.

PERSON TWO
(thinks about it)
Yeah... maybe they could.
(beat, looks at watch)
Should we hit it one more time before we leave?

PERSON ONE
No.

(PERSON ONE exits, PERSON TWO quickly
follows, looking back at the button.
The moment they are off stage the phone
rings, and will continue to ring as the
lights slowly fade.)

The End