

GCSE English Language
Paper 1

This extract is from the middle of a novella set in a prison, and each section is told from the perspective of a different prisoner, describing the night there was a break out. This section is told from one of the prisoners who was not asked to be part of the break out.

If anyone tells you that Tom Baker knew what he was doing then they are straight up lying to your face. There simply isn't a word of truth in it. It is a barefaced lie, and a pathetic one at that. We knew Tom Baker sure thought he was clever...he told everybody that'd listen that he was the cleverest fella to ever be locked up in here. But that boy was damn near illiterate. And he was more drunk than sober, and he spent more time in solitary than he did in his own cell. He was too dumb to even know he was dumb. He was a cheap crook who'd steal from his granny, and then tell everybody she'd swindled him. First week in here and he bust both his fists up fighting in the yard. Always fighting, always causing trouble. Well, his big plan was much of the same: nothing but mindless trouble.

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And I didn't want to be part of the break out anyway. If anyone had asked me (and they should have- seeing as I was a damn picklock before I got shut in here), then I would have told them to go on moseying down the corridor and knock on some other sucker's cell, cos I sure as hell wasn't going to miss out on my early release taking a gamble on a damn plan of Tom Baker's. No sir. I been rotting in here since 1933, and it's 1967 now, and I ain't gonna be in here a day longer than I have to. I ain't no chump, and I ain't so desperate to be liked by the likes of Tom Baker that I'm risk my release to help them in their goddamn stupid plan. Do I wanna wake up and not see bars at my window? You bet I do. But I ain't gonna be foolish enough to think I'm gonna do that busting outta here with a fella like Tom Baker.

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See this cell? It's been mine for about three years now. Now, I know that sounds like a long time, but when you been locked up in here as long as I have, it don't seem like no time at all. I've been pushed up and down this whole country ever since that judge banged his gravel and sent me down. I like this one. It suits me just fine. And don't have to have no bunk mate cluttering up the place- got it to myself. See where the sunlight comes in through that window? Like yellow gold being poured into my own room. My bed, my chair, my space: ain't nothing in here that nobody can come in and take. I started sticking up those newspaper clippings around Christmas time; I spotted an advertisement for a cruise in the Daily Herald, and so's I got my scissors and clipped it out and stuck it up. Nows I got a whole load of 'em, and they sure cheer me up, smiling down on me like windows out onto the world- I got California, Barbados, Hawaii, Florida Keys, it is as if I could just reach out and pluck a coconut from one of them trees. They keep me going. Those postcards are my dear friends; they cheer me up after a hard day.

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So why should I risk all the nice things I got, just to break out eighteen months before I'm due to be released anyhow? No sir, I ain't no chump.

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Busting out last night may seem like a good idea now, but they'll be found. Oh trust me, they will be found. And when they do, they won't be coming back to this sweet place after that little escapade. Oh no, no sir. They'll be going to San Quentin. Or down in Mississippi. Or even one up North where they still give ya shock therapy for coughing during dinner. They mighta got out, but they ain't free yet. They'll get so far and then they'll need to go and buy some food and see people, and people will see their faces, and when they see their faces they'll call the sherriff, and then the sheriff is gonna put them back behind bars before you can say 'hey, that's a dumb plan'.

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I heard the whole thing go down. I was actually over in the infirmary when the alarm sounded. Last night I had a spot of grout, I suffer with grout you see, always have done, and when it gets bad I goes on over to the infirmary and the nurse in there- hell of an old girl, nothing to look at (but they never are in here- they do that on purpose), and she is sweet on me, and she lets me take my medicine and have a lay down afterwards. The beds in there are nice and soft...and I was just having a little lay down and thinking about how I could probably swing it so I didn't have to go back to my cell at all, and I was thinking about how I could say 'oh, this pain just won't go away, m'am', and it was just then, just as I was about to set my head down for the night and get some shut eye, that the alarm sounded..

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Shutters clanged, doors boomed, buzzers sounded; everywhere there was yelling- the guards and the prisoners. Pandemonium. Fires were lit, and taps flooded the bathroom, and over in C block some clown knocked out the bars of his bunk and the whole bed collapsed- and on top of his bunkmate underneath! Damn near took his head off!

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Fella in the cell next to me, goes by the name of Blue, well, he can see the fence from his window if he uses a mirror, so he's got his hand stuck out the window holding a little hand mirror, and I'm asking him what he can see and he's yelling back to me:

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"They're up, up the fence! They're shooting but they're still going! They're gonna do it! They're gonna make it!"

And we could hear the 'copter going and the big white beam from the searchlight was on- sweeping back and forth; a pendulum counting down the seconds to their capture- or so I thought...or a swinging axe waiting like an executioner...but it never fell. They got away.

That damn fool, Tom Baker. Stupid, and half drunk and no sense in his goddamn head. I wouldn't have wanted to be a part of it anyway.

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