

THE EXAMPLE

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The stage is in blackout.

SFX: There is a very loud crackle then a computerised recorded woman's voice over a loudspeaker speaks; "The 5:50 Eltham train, stopping all stations to Eltham, has been delayed and is now expected to arrive in 10 minutes".

A spotlight comes up to reveal a man and a woman. The man, CHRIS, is dressed professionally in a suit and tie; he's standing up and holding a briefcase. The woman, SAM, is dressed casually and is a lot younger than Chris, possibly a uni student. She's sitting down and writing in a newspaper with a pen. They both look generally impatient and groan or sigh after hearing the announcement; CHRIS checks his watch. The lights fade out.

SFX: There is a very loud crackle then the same woman speaks; "The 5:50 Eltham train, stopping all stations to Eltham, has been delayed and is now expected to arrive in 15 minutes".

A spotlight comes up to reveal CHRIS and SAM.

CHRIS: Oh, c'mon!

SAM looks up at CHRIS and shrugs. The lights fade out.

SFX: There is a loud crackle then the same woman speaks; "The 5:50 Eltham train, stopping all stations to Eltham, has been delayed and is now expected to arrive in 25 minutes".

A spotlight comes up on CHRIS and SAM. CHRIS looks annoyed.

CHRIS: That's it! I'm getting a bus.

CHRIS starts to walk away. SAM looks up from the paper.

SAM: That's exactly what they want you to do.

CHRIS stops.

CHRIS: Sorry?

SAM (jokingly): As soon as you go, the train will come straight away.

CHRIS: You think?

SAM: Absolutely.

CHRIS walks back to where he was standing near SAM.

CHRIS (smiles): And you think they do this on purpose?

SAM: Well, it's not against you personally.

CHRIS: It's not?

SAM: No. See I figure the train's ready, right?

CHRIS: Yeah.

SAM: And they're just waiting for someone on the platform to leave.

CHRIS: Why?

SAM: To make an example of them. See, the second someone leaves they bring in the train and everyone else on the platform thinks; well I'm glad I didn't go.

CHRIS: So that's how they keep us waiting?

SAM: No, that's just a by-product. I think they just get bored.

CHRIS: Well, thanks for saving me from being made an example of. I'm Chris.

SAM: Sam.

SAM starts reading the paper again. CHRIS notices something.

CHRIS: Whoop, there we go.

SAM: What?

CHRIS: Someone just went.

SAM: Well, he's a hero to all of us 'cause now the train will come.

CHRIS: Not right now though, they have to wait until he's far enough away. Then there's no way he can still make the train.

SAM: Now you're getting it.

CHRIS: How long then?

SAM: I reckon about three minutes.

Back to the paper.

CHRIS: You know what? I'm thinking our example guy will be back.

SAM: Why?

CHRIS: He's left his briefcase behind.

A circle of different coloured light (a more intense light) comes up on a briefcase which has been left unattended; it's a few metres away on the other side of SAM from CHRIS. The light stays on until the end of the play.

CHRIS: Do you think I should take it to him?

SAM: Nah, you might miss the train, anyway he'll be back. We'll just keep an eye on it.

CHRIS: And if he doesn't come back?

SAM: Then we'll hand it in.

CHRIS: Aren't we the good Samaritan.

SAM: Hey, I was raised right.

CHRIS paces a bit.

SAM: So, have you been waiting long?

CHRIS: About half an hour, you?

SAM: Forty - five minutes.

CHRIS: Ouch.

SAM: Yeah, the train before this one was cancelled.

CHRIS: Hope you haven't got anything on?

SAM: Nope. Well, not anymore; it was starting about now.

SAM puts the paper in her lap.

SAM: You know, I saw something the other day on one of those crappy current affairs shows that was like this. They put bags and parcels in public areas to show how bad people are at reporting unattended bags and parcels.

CHRIS: You watched a crappy current affairs show?

SAM: No, god no, I just saw an ad for it. Anyway, apparently we are neither alert nor alarmed.

CHRIS: I hate that. I bet heaps of people passed these parcels and...

SAM: Passed the parcel?

CHRIS: Ha ha. Seriously, some people would have looked at these things and seen a possible bomb and probably agonised over it all day. I mean, what are they supposed to do? Call the police every time they see a bag?

SAM plays out a phone call between a concerned citizen and the police.

SAM: “Yeah hi, I’m ringing to report a bag.” “I see, what’s this bag doing?” “Um it’s... it’s doing nothing.” “We’ll be right there.”

CHRIS: And the worst thing is, then they show it on TV, with evil music and a voiceover talking about how irresponsible and unsafe we all are.

SAM: I bet if we left a bag near the offices of one of those shows they wouldn’t notice it at all.

CHRIS: We should do that.

SAM: What?

CHRIS: We should hide a bag near a door to their office and film how long it takes them to notice.

SAM: Yeah, then who’d be irresponsible?

Chris gestures towards the briefcase.

CHRIS: I mean take this guy, our example.

SAM: The man who sacrificed himself so that we could both board a train earlier!

CHRIS: Exactly! So, he's forgotten his briefcase. Should we call the police? I mean it's not like a guy is just gonna drop a bomb and walk away. What if someone sees?

CHRIS acts out holding a case and handing it to someone.

CHRIS: "Excuse me? You forgot this."

SAM: His whole plan ruined by good manners, curses.

CHRIS: 'Curses?'

SAM: I was being an annoyed bomber.

CHRIS: And they'd say 'curses'?

SAM: My annoyed bomber would. My annoyed bomber doesn't swear.

CHRIS: Ok.

SAM goes back to reading her paper. After a while CHRIS looks at the bag.

CHRIS: You'd think he'd be back by now.

SAM gives him a look that says 'You're not suggesting what I think you're suggesting.'

CHRIS: I'm just saying if I was carrying a briefcase...

SAM: Which you are.

CHRIS: ...which I am. I think I'd notice if I was suddenly walking around without it.

SAM: Rubbish. What do you have in your briefcase?

CHRIS: That's a bit personal.

SAM: Is your wallet in there?

CHRIS: No, it's in my pocket?

SAM: Your keys?

CHRIS: No.

SAM: Your phone?

CHRIS: No.

SAM: See. You could get by fine without your briefcase.

CHRIS: Yeah, but it's heavy, I'd notice.

SAM: I'm not listening to this.

Pause.

CHRIS: Maybe we should just tell a train station attendant.

SAM puts down her paper.

SAM: You do that and you're letting bad television win.

CHRIS: You're right, I'm being stupid. I'm just bored.

SAM: Here, I'm done anyway.

SAM gives CHRIS her paper.

CHRIS: Ah, I see you tried the sudoku.

SAM: Yep. Tried, failed, got annoyed then read the comics.

CHRIS: They're pretty easy.

SAM: Are you giving me crap?

CHRIS: No.

SAM: I stopped you from being the example.

CHRIS: You're right, I'm sorry. And I see you drew a beard on the prime minister.

CHRIS starts reading the paper. Sam starts rambling.

SAM: I don't think enough people have beards. Proper beards, not tiny little shaped things that are only there to cover the fact you have no jaw. I'm talking about Westerners of course, elsewhere... great beards.

SAM looks at the case.

SAM (tentatively): What did the guy who forgot the case look like?

CHRIS: I dunno. But you'll be happy to know I think he had a beard.

SAM: Did he look like someone who'd be carrying a briefcase?

CHRIS: In what way.

SAM: Was he wearing a suit?

CHRIS: No. Why?

SAM: Was he? No, never mind.

CHRIS: What?

SAM: Was he... you know?

CHRIS: What? Was he white?

SAM: Don't worry about it. Forget I said anything.

CHRIS looks at the case.

CHRIS: I didn't really see him.

SAM: What?

CHRIS: I didn't see what he looked like but... he wasn't white.

SAM looks at the case again.

SAM: You know what? Screw it! It doesn't change anything.

CHRIS: You know if you're really worried we could hand it in to the station.

SAM laughs nervously.

SAM: I'm not worried... seriously.

CHRIS: Good. You know, what you've done to this paper is a lot more interesting than the paper. Beards, moustaches, tails, the Immigration Minister actually looks better with horns.

As CHRIS is speaking, he walks to the other side of SAM, in between her and the case.

SAM: Did you just do what I think you did?

CHRIS: What?

SAM: You just put yourself in between me and the briefcase.

CHRIS: No I didn't.

SAM: You did!

CHRIS: I'm just walking.

SAM: Wow, and I thought our example guy was a hero.

CHRIS: I'm just walking.

Pause. SAM is getting a bit sacred.

SAM: It's not, you know?

CHRIS: Not what?

SAM: ...it's not a bomb.

CHRIS: I know.

SAM: Do you?

CHRIS: I just met you. You think I'd be standing here if I thought it was a bomb.

SAM: I did give you my newspaper.

CHRIS: Let's just hand it in to the station.

SAM: No.

CHRIS: Why?

SAM: Because I don't believe that someone who isn't white poses any more of a threat to me.

CHRIS: What's stupider, being scared of something? Or not doing anything about it because of what you think it says about you?

SAM: I really didn't follow that question.

CHRIS: Okay I'll put it another way. We can hand in the briefcase and possibly feel a little bit racist.

SAM: Yeah.

CHRIS: Or we can take the high moral ground and possibly get blown up.

SAM (loudly): IT'S NOT A BOMB!

CHRIS looks around nervously. From here on their discussion is more heated.

CHRIS: Hey, shhh. Let's not freak people out.

SAM: It's not.

CHRIS: Okay.

SAM: It just makes me so angry.

CHRIS: What?

SAM: I saw an ad on TV for a show and now I'm turning into a scared, racist freak.

CHRIS: Why don't we just move up the platform away from it.

SAM: No.

CHRIS: Why not?

SAM: We'll get a seat on the train here. There are too many people up that end.

CHRIS: There you go, you said it yourself. Why would anyone blow up the non-crowded end?

SAM: Who are you trying to convince?

CHRIS: I'm just saying we're a stupid target.

SAM: Why are we discussing targets? A guy left his case. That's it!

CHRIS: I'm going to the other end of the platform.

SAM: Fine.

CHRIS: Are you coming?

SAM: No.

CHRIS: You're just going to stay here.

SAM: No, I'm handing in the case.

CHRIS looks at the case warily then looks at SAM.

CHRIS: Why don't we just tell someone else about it.

SAM: Who?

CHRIS: Someone who works here or a policeman.

SAM: No, I have to do this.

CHRIS: No you don't. Let's just go.

SAM walks over to the case.

CHRIS: HEY!

SAM turns around.

CHRIS: Don't.

SAM walks into the circle of more intense light that surrounds the suitcase. She's very afraid but determined.

CHRIS: SAM, DON'T!

SAM reaches for the case.

SFX: There's a very loud crackle (possibly mixed with a train horn).

SAM jumps, so does CHRIS.

SFX: Then a computerised recorded woman's voice over a loudspeaker speaks; "Train arriving platform nine is the 5:50 Eltham train, stopping all stations to Eltham, we apologise for the delay." There's the sound of a train pulling up.

CHRIS walks over to SAM. The spotlight that they'd been standing in earlier goes off leaving them both in the circle of intense light with the briefcase. SAM is breathing hard, they're both obviously distressed.

CHRIS: Let's just get on the train.

SAM nods. The two of them step out of the light and are gone.

SFX: *The recorded woman's voice over a loudspeaker speaks; "Train departing platform nine is the 5:50 Eltham train, stopping all stations to Eltham, Stand clear please. Stand clear." The sound of a train pulling out very loudly getting quieter as it pulls away.*

The noise of the train dies away. The light stays on the briefcase for a few more beats then blackout.