

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

The Exam

by Zoé Carroll

The Invigilator

Looking across the sweltering hall, across the straight lines of desks with students' heads bent over their exam papers I notice how, like most teenagers, they all seem to have dressed as if they want to disappear. Shades of grey, black and dark burgundy merge together into a sea of hormones and angst. There is one girl in the second row wearing a bright yellow blouse and I admire her spirit.

I take a deep sigh and set off for another slow, silent walk around the desks in my sector of the exam hall. It is a large church hall, the high ceiling is strung with fairy lights across the highly technical sound and light equipment of the modern house of praise.

As I walk down the rows I am checking that these students have everything they need. Most have diligently packed their transparent pencil cases with their ruler, protractor, set squares, compass, pencil and rubber. I notice one student who is lacking a protractor so I stealthily put one onto his desk. He meets my eye with thankfulness and relief and I smile. I have made some difference to someone by my being here.

I didn't want to be here, but times are tough in education so teaching staff are doing all sorts of extra work. They used to employ independent invigilators for exam season so teaching could go on as normal for everyone else, but now everyone's schedule is messed up and learning is disrupted for everyone. I'd speak to the union if I thought it would make a blind bit of difference.

I catch the eye of another invigilator across the hall and he looks down slightly and nods to the student whose chair he is standing behind. I smile and give him a nod of agreement. We are passing the time playing games.

He had to identify the student who most looked like George Clooney's love child so now I have to find the next Winston Churchill. Only an hour to go.

The Student

I am trying to remain on the calm side of nervous. Today is a big day. I have taken, and failed this exam three times already. Today is my final chance if I am going to be able to prove all the doubters wrong and get into university.

I decided to wear the yellow top that Mum said made me look like a sunflower and set off my tan from the early season sunbathing on the beach. I wanted to be able to walk into that exam hall with my head held high and my confidence brimming. I am going to be a nurse. Since I was twelve this has been my dream.

I failed most of my GCSEs the first time round, at school. I was more interested in spending time with Jamie Fuller and being cool. I was lucky to scrape the grades together to be accepted onto the course I wanted at college, the teacher said my skills in art and drama weren't really going to help me on the Health and Social Care course but I pleaded with her and she made me a deal. I had been a model student in all of my classes and I had diligently attended the Maths lessons for all of us who had fallen below the required standard at school, but the numbers swam in front of my eyes and the formulas might as well have been in Chinese for all the sense they made to me.

I applied to universities and have been accepted to all three on the condition that I get this Maths qualification. So this moment, right here, right now, this is pivotal and I need to get this right.

Six of us from the Maths group have arranged to meet in the Student's Union bar after the exam and I am so looking forward to slurping a chilled cider after this harrowing ordeal. I open the paper and smile. Reading the first few questions I realise that I know how to work out the answers.

Bring it on Maths, I'm going to uni.