

# Project: Control

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## A story for learners of English at level C2

“This quarterly report is... unsatisfactory,” droned Nicole’s manager. “There isn’t enough detail. And there are too many numbers on the chart. The font should be bigger. The tables should use our brand colours. And you should duplicate everything at the end.”

“Duplicate it, sir?”

“One copy for me, and another for the Head of Department.”

“But... I don’t need to duplicate everything. You could just print the document twice, sir.”

“We don’t pay you to have clever ideas, Nicole. We pay you to follow instructions.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” she mumbled.

“What was that? I can’t hear you.”

“Sir, I’ve tried so hard. I worked late, and at weekends.”

“That’s irrelevant. At this company, we cannot tolerate poor performance. If you aren’t meeting our standards, then your pay should be lowered. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes, sir.”

Nicole walked back to her desk – down six flights of stairs, along five corridors, and into a large room lit by fluorescent tube lights. There were windows, but they were very small and high up, so she couldn’t see outside.

She gulped down some coffee. She was so exhausted, it didn't seem to have any effect. Over the last few months, her manager had given her more and more work. She'd prepared so many reports, sometimes she forgot what they were about, halfway through.

She hated the job, but the salary was good, and she didn't know what else she would do. Other companies would probably be even worse. If she worked hard here, maybe she'd eventually be promoted.

Her phone vibrated. There was a message.

"DO NOT IGNORE. You don't know me but I know you. You have been brainwashed, Nicole. You don't really want to work for them. Don't believe me? Look in the folder called 'Project: Control'. The password is 'Obedience'."

At first, Nicole wasn't sure what to do. But she searched for the folder on the company network, and found it. She entered the password, and to her surprise, the folder opened.

Inside there were hundreds of files, each with a different employee's name. When Nicole found a file with her name, she took a sharp breath. She opened the file.

"The subject is a thirty-year-old female. Ten milligrams of the drug have been added to her coffee daily for three years. The subject is less creative, more compliant and is accepting more and more work without complaint. Recommendation: increase dosage."

Nicole spat out the coffee. Another message arrived.

"They make the drug on Level B-Six. The code is four two seven eight. There is a bomb under your desk. Take it to the laboratory. There are two buttons; press them at the same time, and hold down for five seconds. Then you'll have ten minutes. You can do it. Everyone's counting on you."

With trembling hands, Nicole felt under her desk. There was something heavy near the back, hidden among the power cables. She looked around. Everyone else was typing quickly, staring at their screens without blinking.

She picked up the device. It was very complicated, with microchips and tangled wires surrounding three red tubes.

This wasn't a joke. The files were real. The bomb was real.

Nicole couldn't believe herself. She wasn't scared. For the first time in years, she felt in control. She felt like she cared about something. She was going to do it.

"Nicole!" shouted her manager.

Nicole raised her head. She had fallen asleep on the manager's desk, in his office. She stood up, feeling confused. She rubbed her eyes and straightened her jacket.

"I have been very lenient with you Nicole, despite your unprofessional attitude, half-hearted effort and continual disregard for this organisation's hierarchy!" the manager seethed. "But this is too much! You're fired!"

A few tears shone on Nicole's cheeks. "Oh..." she said, smiling. "Thank you, sir!"

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## Instructions

- You must have a native level of understanding of English.
  - We write in British English.
  - **Please only fix errors or unnatural phrasing.** If it isn't an error, leave it as it is.
  - Do not split or join sentences. Do not split or join paragraphs.
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- **Please read the *whole* story carefully.**

- Fix specific errors by directly editing the text. Please also add a comment to explain why it was an error and why your change is an improvement.
- For the best experience, ensure you are logged in with a free Google account. This allows us to respond and contact you if necessary.
- If you don't read the whole story (you just fix some specific errors), add your name to the list of Contributors below.
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