

## TICKING

© by

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## TICKING

Performances or readings of this play may not legally take place before an audience without a licence obtainable on application from:

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- (i) Name and address of applicant
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- (iv) Times and dates of performances

A fee will be charged for this licence which must be paid prior to the first performance otherwise the licence is automatically cancelled and the performance becomes illegal

## TICKING

### CHARACTERS

(Minimum of 6f or 6m or mixed)

- HERA Wild-eyed romantic with rebellious spirit
- NEREUS Tall, quiet, easy-going type who follows the moderate lead
- ARES Tiny quicksilver character who idolizes Hera and loves the stories told
- JOVE Oldest and most respected of the group whose time is coming to an end
- JANUS Establishment figure who believes in the system, whichever system they're in
- EREBUS Jolly barrel of a character
- OTHERS Any number of non-speaking extras may be used for effect

## TICKING

There is a story that goes ... Once upon a time there were two goldfish swimming around their bowl when one turned to the other and said, "Do you think there's a God?" The other replied, "There must be - who else changes the water?"

Those goldfish, like us, have a very one-sided view of life. We isolate ourselves - as individuals, as groups and as nations. This play is an attempt to question such insularity by looking at a situation that we're all afraid of but which could one day happen because of our stupidity

(THE FOLLOWING DETAILS WOULD BE USEFUL AS A FREAMBLE IN ANY PROGRAMME)  
"The play is set in a subterranean living complex sometime in the twenty-second century. There has been a nuclear confrontation in the past and the survivors have passed down the story that the holocaust so blackened the earth that they have to remain underground, afraid to go up, afraid to return to a world that will not support life. This story has been accepted and for years and they have lived underground in their own man-made goldfish bowl within their own confines - until now, that is"

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(The scene is the junction of several underground passages where the lighting is poor and the only discernible feature the occasional air vent high up in the wall. The characters who come on are all dressed alike in drab neck-to-toe uniforms, their faces pale with years of living underground. The houselights dim and we hear the hum of distant generators followed by a signal for the end of a work period... voices approach ... All the characters come on except Erebus. They look lost as though they've never been here before)

Ares Is it this way?

Hera No

Nereus This?

Hera No

Janus Then this?

Hera No, not that way either

Janus Then which way is it, Hera, this quick way of yours?

Hera I ... er...

Ares You've forgotten haven't you ? I knew it -what a laugh - here we are in the middle of nowhere supposed to be taking a short cut and you've got us lost

Hera I haven't

Ares I bet you have! I bet you thought you knew the way and all the time you didn't. What a whizz!

Janus You, Ares, might think its a whizz but some of us don't. I knew I shouldn't have trusted myself with the likes of you

Hera You wouldn't trust yourself with yourself, Janus, let alone anyone else

Nereus What about you Jove? You've been around here longer than any of us. Don't you know the way?

Jove I can't say I've ever been in this section before. It all seems a bit strange to me ... somewhat damp I'd say

Nereus Beginning to feel it in your old bones are you? Never mind we'll soon get you out. Come on then Hera, the joke's over. Which way?

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Hera I've told you, I don't know

Nereus But you must know

Ares You must

Nereus You brought us this way - you said you knew the way

Hera I did

Nereus So which way do we take?

Hera We don't, we're here

Nereus We're not anywhere yet

Hera We are - this is where I was bringing you

Nereus This isn't D Section, this is just some old storage area

Hera Yes

Janus Hera, are you saying you lied about your shortcut?

Hera Yes

Ares For a joke - I think it's a great one

Janus Well I don't

Nereus You must have had a reason Hera? You wouldn't just bring us down here for nothing

Hera I did, I brought you here to show you something

Nereus What is it?

Ares Yes what?

Hera (Looking around the walls) Here - I'm sure it was here

Janus It'll be another of his foolish escapades - a trick or a joke - are you coming Jove? (making as if to leave)

Jove Just a moment

Janus Nereus?

Nereus I'll be with you directly

Janus Well I'm not staying. I've had just about enough of Hera for one day, so if you'll excuse me... (Janus goes of f but comes straight back) It was the left passage wasn't it ?

Hera Who knows Janus? Who knows?

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Janus        Now look here, you who dragged us down here in the first place, you might at least have the decency to point me in the right direction back

Hera         I'll take you back Janus, when and only when I've finished what I came here to do

Ares         What is it Hera?

Nereus      What's this thing you're going to show us?

Ares         Is it a secret? Is it something forbidden?

Hera         It's all of those things

Janus        (Disdainfully) One of your stories?

Hera         Its more than a story

Ares         A picture?

Hera         (Still looking at walls) It's not picture

Ares         A book?

Hera         No, not a book either

Ares         Then what?

Hera         Here, I'm sure it was here - (sees air vent) Ah yes!

Ares         (S)He's found it

Janus        Thank goodness for that, perhaps we can all get back then

Hera         Now then, before I show you, I think you'd all better make yourselves comfortable. This may come as a bit of a surprise to you

Jove         I'll sit down

Nereus      Here, let me help you

Hera         Someone will have to keep an eye out...  
  
(two do so)  
  
Now then...

Ares         I think I'm going to wet myself

Nereus      Be quiet

Hera         When you're quite ready... I brought you here because as I said I had something to show you

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Janus Another of your fool's errands

Hera I must apologise for the subterfuge but there was no other way I could do it... before I show you I need to put one or two things into perspective by asking a couple of simple questions...

Ares It's like being back at school

Hera Now then who should we ask? I know - Janus

Ares Stand up straight Janus

Hera I'll ask you this...

Ares Make it a hard one

Hera Can you tell me Janus - who you are?

Janus I beg your pardon?

Hera Its a simple enough question - who are you?

Janus I don't understand what you mean - you know who I am - I'm Janus

Hera Yes, go on

Janus What do you mean "Go on"? What is there to go on to - I am Janus - what more is there to say?

Hera And is that all?

(They all look at each other and back to Janus)

Janus Oh, I see, of course - I am 1135 Janus of B Division, work section Q

All That's better, etc

Hera Have you finished?

Janus I think so

Hera You've given your full answer? You're quite sure about that?

Janus Well I ....

Ares (S)He didn't miss anything did (s)he ?

Nereus I don't know

Hera Very well - I'll give you five out of ten for that answer. For the rest of the marks I'll ask you a more difficult question. Are you ready?



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(S/he nods)

You've told me who Janus is, now I'll ask you this - who was Janus?

Janus I'm sorry?

Hera (Slowly) Who...was... Janus?

Janus I don't understand

Ares It's a hard one

Janus Would you mind repeating it?

Hera Certainly. Who...was... Janus?

Janus I'm afraid I don't understand - I am Janus - I don't understand "Who was Janus" - Janus was me - I am Janus

Hera And did (s)he have no beginning and no end? What was Janus before (s)he came and after (s)he'd gone ?

Janus You're being silly

Hera I'm not, Janus, believe me I'm not

Janus What do you mean "beginning"? I had the same beginning as all the rest of us. I was born -

Hera Stop there! You admit then that you were born?

Janus Of course I admit it - are you trying to make a fool of me?

Hera But born of who Janus? Born of who?

Janus Born of my mother of course

Ares (S)He's very clever you know

Hera And your father?

Janus My father?

(Murmurs of incomprehension from others)

Hera Yes, who was your father?

Janus My father was the State

Hera So your mother had a child and the father was the State?

Janus That's right

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Hera And you others agree with that

All Yes, why not? (Etc)

Jove I have heard stories....

Hera Go on

love I do not dare

Hera We are all friends

Jove (Nervously looking around) I remember stories I used to hear when I was a child. We used to talk together in the nursery when the lights had gone out - about mothers and (afraid to say it) "fathers" - real fathers and real mothers - such stories we would tell ...

Hera These stories? What were they?

Jove I dare not

Hera Were they of "families"? And "sons"? And "daughters"?

Nereus Hera, I don't know what you're getting at. I think you'd better show us this "thing" and let us get back to work

Janus And if I don't? If I keep you here until you're all in for re-education ?

Nereus That would be silly - futile

Hera Like the work

Janus The work can never be futile

Hera Because it's for the State? Oh Janus, you poor, poor creature you - you creeping, crawling worm of the deep – don't you see what the State has made you into?

Janus The State feeds me and clothes me and keeps me warm. What more do I want of it?

Hera I'll tell you what more you want - freedom, choice, the need to be cold if you want to be cold, naked if you want to be naked and hungry if you want to go without food

Janus And why should I want to go without food?

Hera Because it would prove there was more to Janus than a state-filled automaton ...who wakes on cue and works on - who even has to shit on cue! (gasps from others) Well its true isn't it? Work periods? Leisure periods? Sleep periods and crap periods

Janus You have an alternative, Hera?

Hera I have an alternative

Ares Be careful Hera, they are everywhere

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Hera They're not here

Janus So that's what you brought us here for? Another of your stories of the good years - a message from the past that you're always so willing to hand down. What is it this time? The wind in the trees? The magic of fire?

Hera This is no story

Janus Is it not?

Hera Its not and I'll prove its not

Janus Hera, I've listened to your stories before, about the time people walked the surface of the earth, when things were so good for our forefathers and to be perfectly honest I find them all just a little boring

Hera But this time its different

Janus Why is it different?

Nereus Yes Hera, why? Everyone knows how much you like to spin a yarn

Hera But this isn't a yarn, it's a fact, a fact passed down from those very forefathers that Janus always derides so much

Janus Its you who's living in the past Hera - a past that's dead and forgotten, buried amongst the rubble that was your "good earth". Don't you realise they're gone, those forefathers of yours? Gone up in smoke like everything else that stayed around for the Confrontation

Hera But it was so long ago - how do we know it was the ending?

Janus We know, Hera, as every pupil knows that nothing, repeat nothing, survived the Confrontation. Why do you think our ancestors came down here in the first place? Why do you think we've spent the last God-knows-how long living in this rabbit warren? We came because there was nowhere else to go, because after the Confrontation there was no "good earth" as you like to call it - nothing

Hera Go on

Janus What do you mean "Go on"? There's nothing to go on to - that was it

Hera That was it, was it?

Janus Don't you remember your lessons? Your teachers must have told you

Hera They told me

Janus And still you doubt it?

Hera I doubt it

All (Incredulous) (S)He doubts it ?

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Ares I don't know how (s)he dares

Hera I dare, Ares, because I was born a darer and I shall die a darer. I am the one and only Hera who is and who was - who hasn't been blinded by the lies and the falsification with which you've been blinded but who sees with their own eyes and listens with their own ears. Listen now if you like

(They listen)

What do you hear?

Nereus I can't hear anything

Ares Nor me

Jove I can hear the generators

Hera The generators - and what else?

(They listen)

Nereus Water?

Hera Yes, water. Hear it dripping?

Ares I hear it

Jove So do I now you come to mention it

Nereus I'd not noticed it before

Hera You'd not noticed it until someone pointed it out to you, until someone opened your ears. Don't you ever wonder where it's dripping from? If only I could open your eyes as well

Janus Your eyes are already too widely opened, you see things that just aren't there

Hera I should like to see things - oh such things

Ares The sun?

Hera Yes Ares, the sun. I'm pleased you remembered. It shows you're not all empty laughter

Ares I'm as wise as you

Hera Perhaps wiser, Ares, perhaps wiser

Janus And that's what it is? You've brought us down here to show us a photograph of the sun? That ball in the sky that you rave so much about, so much so that you end up in re-education every other day proclaiming its benefits

Hera Its not a photograph

Janus Then what?

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Nereus (Hearing noise off) Someone's coming

Hera Scatter!

(They secrete themselves round corners... moments of anxiety as footsteps approach)

Erebus Hera? Hera, where are you?

Hera (Jumping out) Erebus!

Erebus I wish you wouldn't do that. You scared the living daylights out of me

Hera What are you doing here?

Erebus What do you mean "what am I doing here"? I'm looking for you. I wanted to find you before they did

Hera They?

Erebus The guardians, they're everywhere looking for you

Hera That's very quick. I didn't think they'd miss us as soon as that

Erebus They've suspended the work session

(Gasps of disbelief from others)

Everyone's been instructed to look for you and there's a rest reward for anyone who finds you

Hera A reward? What do they think I am - a criminal?

Erebus That's what they said. I saw you disappearing down here during rest and I wondered what you were up to

Janus You're not the only one who wonders

Hera Reward eh? They must really want to find me

Nereus (Obviously afraid) What about us?

Erebus They didn't say anything about you, they just said to find Hera. Perhaps they haven't missed you yet

Ares They haven't but they soon will

All (Beginning to move away) That does it, etc

Hera Where are you going?

Nereus I'd have thought that would have been obvious

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Hera But I haven't finished.

Nereus Sorry Hera

Hera You can't go yet

Nereus You heard what was said

Hera I heard and it won't make any difference, don't you see? They'll have checked by now and you'll all be reported missing like me

Ares (S)He's right

Nereus I'm not so sure. Did they do a roll call Erebus?

Erebus No, They just stopped work and said one of our number was missing - our instructions were to find you as soon as possible

Nereus Then there's still a chance

All Yes, if we hurry (etc)

Hera (Sarcastically) "If we hurry." That's right, run on back like scalded beetles

Nereus You'll show us the way Erebus?

Erebus Certainly, but what about you Hera?

Hera What about me?

Erebus Aren't you coming?

Hera I'm not

Erebus But ...?

Hera You run along, I'll be all right

Nereus You can't stay here

Hera I don't intend to

Ares Why don't you come now? We can say we were taking a shortcut and we got lost

Hera In a prohibited area? Come off it. You don't think they'll buy that

Ares At least you can try

Hera I'll take my chances elsewhere

Ares You've got to go back sometime

Nereus Yes, you can't stay here

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Ares        Where will you go? There's nowhere you can go where they wont find you

Hera        Isn't there?

Ares        No. Where could you go?

              (Hera' eyes slowly move upwards)

              Up? Where to? Conditioning?

Hera        Higher

Nereus     There is no higher

Hera        Oh yes there is

              (They all look at each other stunned at what (s)he's saying)

Nereus     You're not serious?

Hera        I am

Nereus     You can't be

Hera        Why not?

Nereus     But how?

Hera        That's what I was going to show you, but if you're all in a such a hurry to get back ...

Nereus     Serious? You're really serious?

Hera        Never been more so

Nereus     But you cant – there's no way - and even if there was...

Hera        There is a way

Nereus     On your own?

Hera        That's not what I originally intended but if that's the way it must be, then so it must be

Nereus     But Hera, its foolishness - even if there was a way there's nothing there even if you make it

Hera        You're sure about that?

Nereus     Of course I'm sure