

THE TICK OF THE CLOCK

By Ron Dune

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CHARACTERS

DON:	(M) always late
MISS BROWN:	(F) over-bearing boss
JO:	(F) semi-tough with feelings
DILLAN:	(M) Don's charming best friend
STREET VENDOR:	(M/F) mysterious
10-25 STREET PEOPLE:	(M/F) walkers

SETTING

An empty stage

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AT RISE: A busy street. STREET PEOPLE are walking briskly in all directions on their way to work and about the day's business. There could be optional busy street music or SFX. When THEY exit , THEY turn around and walk the other way so the street remains busy. DON enters from SL carrying a file folder and papers. HE tries to go with the flow of people but HE gets pushed and bumped. Eventually HE is knocked to the ground and his papers fly everywhere. Eventually the people thin out until Don is left alone on stage. HE gathers up the contents of his folder, picks himself up and looks at his wrist. There's nothing there.

DON: Great, I forgot my watch again.

(DON hurries off SR. DILLAN enters from SL. DON enters again SR. THEY meet CL.)

DILLAN: Don, where have you been?

DON: I slept in.

DILLAN: Again? Brown has been looking for you. She's on the warpath.

DON: What should I do?

DILLAN: How about going to bed earlier? Whatever you do, don't tell her you were sleeping.

(BROWN and JO enter from SR. DON and DILLAN freeze, hoping BROWN won't see them.)

BROWN:...have those McConnell papers delivered to our office on 42nd street, put the Penski file in the outgoing mail, and make sure the triplicates of the Davenport document are sent to personnel.

JO: Right away, Miss Brown.

(JO starts off SR. BROWN sees DON.)

BROWN: Wait a minute, Jo. Why don't you head down to personnel first and bring me back some termination paperwork. I may need it.

JO: Certainly.

(JO changes directions and heads off SL. As SHE passes DON, SHE gives him a "What is wrong with you?" look.)

THE TICK OF THE CLOCK – Page 4

BROWN: Didn't I ask for the Cincinnati report to be on my desk this morning?

DILLAN: Just taking it there now, Miss Brown.

(DILLAN exits off SR. BROWN just stands there looking at DON who feels uncomfortable and tries to leave SL)

BROWN: Just one minute, Mr. Hault.

(DON stops and turns toward her.)

DON: Yes, Miss Brown?

BROWN: You're late...again.

DON: Yes. I'm sorry. There were so many people on the street and my papers went flying.

BROWN: What did I tell you about being late?

DON: Please, Miss Brown, I really need this job.

BROWN: You will never make it in the business world, Hault.

DON: Miss Brown, if you could just give me one more chance.

BROWN: Is it because I'm a woman? You think that because I'm a woman, I'm not strong, that I'm a pushover?

DON: Oh, no, Miss Brown, I don't think that at...

BROWN: This is a dog eat dog world, Hault. You've got to be tough. You must be able to stand on your own two feet. You need drive and determination. You've got to push, push, push. We do not accept excuses in the business world. Either you get the job done and on time or you don't. That's it! There's nothing else. Whether you were late because you got in an accident or you were at your grandmother's funeral or you got food poisoning or you just slept in, it's all the same result. You were late, and the job isn't getting done.

DON: I can explain.

BROWN: Are you listening to me? I don't want an explanation. I want you to be here on time. I want you to be responsible. I want you to stop thinking that the rules apply to everyone but you. I want you to stop thinking that you're special, that you're an exception, because you're not! I know exactly how you think. You think that you are exempt from following the rules. You think to yourself, "I can be late because I'm tired. I can be late because the taxi made a wrong turn. I can be late because there was a spider on the door. I can be late because I have a hang nail!" And you think you're the only one who's tired. You're the only one who got in the wrong cab. You're the only one who's afraid of an insect. You're the only one who needs a manicure!

(JO enters from SL with papers on a clipboard.)

THE TICK OF THE CLOCK – Page 5

BROWN: Let me tell you the reality of your situation, Hault. There are only two real reasons for being late. One, you think you're better than everyone else so you don't have to be on time, or, two, you're simply not responsible enough to be on time.

JO: *(handing BROWN the paper on the clip board)* Here you are, Miss Brown.

BROWN: *(taking the board and writing on the paper)* Thank you.

(JO exits SR.)

BROWN: I don't like either of those reasons, Mr. Hault. And you've demonstrated quite thoroughly that you are incapable of changing your behavior.

DON: Miss Brown, please...

BROWN: *(pulling the paper from the clipboard)* Donald Hault, you're fired. *(hands him the paper)*

(BROWN exits SR. DON stands and looks at the paper. HE wads it up and then goes to toss it, but instead puts it in his pocket. Dejected, HE exits SL. After a beat, the STREET PEOPLE enter walking briskly in all directions. JO enters from CR and walks in the midst of them. SHE stops down CS and waits. SHE looks around. The STREET PEOPLE are passing behind and in front of her. SHE waits impatiently. DON enters from up SL. HE walks slowly around the stage with his head down. Every once in a while HE is bumped by the STREET PEOPLE. HE just ignores them. When HE is almost to JO, the STREET PEOPLE start to exit. When HE reaches her, the STREET PEOPLE are all gone.)

DON: Hi, Jo.

JO: Don't "Hi, Jo" me! I thought you were gonna meet me for lunch today.

DON: Right, here I am.

JO: You're late! I have to be back at the office now.

DON: Oh, come on, Jo. Gimme a break.

JO: That's all I ever give you, Don. You always say we're gonna do something and then it never happens. I'm sick of it. It's like you just don't want to spend time with me.

DON: I do...it's just that...

JO: If you did you would.

DON: Jo, I just got fired.

JO: I know. I processed the paperwork.

DON: What you must think of me.

THE TICK OF THE CLOCK – Page 6

JO: Well, quiet frankly, I don't see that Miss Brown had any other choice.

DON: Great, I thought, if anyone would understand, it would be you.

JO: I'm tired of it too, Don. I'm tired of waiting for you, tired of feeling like you've got something more important to do than to be with me. I'm tired of being second fiddle.

DON: I'm sorry. It's just that I...

JO: And I'm tired of excuses.

(DON lowers his head.)

I gotta get back.

(SHE starts off LR but HE grabs her hand.)

DON: Can't you stay a little longer?

JO: You want me to get fired too?

DON: Can I call you later.

JO: I'm not gonna sit by the phone anymore waiting for a call that never comes.

DON: Jo, please...

JO: Miss Brown was right about the two reasons for not being on time. But I would add a third one: you just don't care. Goodbye, Don.

(JO breaks away and exits SR. DON stands dejected. After a beat, the STREET PEOPLE return and walk the stage. DILLAN enters from SR and walks with the STREET PEOPLE, who continue walking during their conversation.)

DILLAN: Hey, Don! I heard the news. Tough break.

DON: Yeah.

DILLAN: I heard that wench slammed you pretty hard.

DON: Who'd you hear that from?

DILLAN: The whole office is talking about it.

DON: Great.

DILLAN: Well, don't worry about it. You'll get another job.

DON: This was the third job I got fired from this year.

DILLAN: Ouch! Well, the year's not over yet. Why don't you go for four?

DON: Very funny. Hey, you wanna get a drink or something?

DILLAN: I can't. I've got a date tonight, and I don't want to be late.

DON: Good idea.

DILLAN: See ya, buddy.

DON: Yeah, see ya.

THE TICK OF THE CLOCK – Page 7

(DILLAN exits SL. The STREET PEOPLE continue walking. DON sits down on the lip of the stage. STREET VENDOR enters from up SL carrying a vending box strapped around his neck and shoulders. HE moves slowly amongst the STREET PEOPLE, trying unsuccessfully to sell them things. HE has matches, glue, cleaning fluid, etc. The STREET PEOPLE are in too much of a hurry to stop and deal with him. As HE gets farther downstage, the STREET PEOPLE exit, a few at a time until THEY are all gone and the STREET VENDOR and DON are alone. The STREET VENDOR stands a few feet right and up of DON.)

STREET VENDOR: Everyone is always in such a hurry.

DON: *(Looking up and noticing the STREET VENDOR for the first time.)*
You're telling me.

STREET VENDOR: It's hard for a simple salesman like myself to make it anymore.

DON: Join the club.

STREET VENDOR: Oh, are you a salesman?

DON: No, it's just hard for me to make it too.

STREET VENDOR: Bad day?

DON: You could say that.

STREET VENDOR: Well, perhaps I have something you need.

(DON just looks at HIM.)

Or perhaps not. Well, good day. *(Starts to leave.)*

DON: Wait a minute. *(Stands up.)* You'll never sell anything like that.

STREET VENDOR: Like what?

DON: Like that...walking away.

STREET VENDOR: Well, you seemed like you weren't interested, like you don't need anything.

DON: You gotta make me interested. You gotta sell me something I don't need.

STREET VENDOR: That's not really my style.

DON: Well, you'll never make it in this world.

STREET VENDOR: Perhaps.

DON: Well, let me see what you've got. Give me the pitch.

STREET VENDOR: Well, I've got matches.

(HE takes out the things and shows them as HE describes them. DON shakes his head.)

THE TICK OF THE CLOCK – Page 8

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