

Ted and Walter

A play in two acts from stimulus|response and ChatGTP

Characters

TED – Tense, analytical, impatient.

WALTER – Calm, lyrical, amused by futility.

Setting

A bare gray stage. A single plastic chair sits off-center. In the distance, a leafless tree. A faint hum, like a machine idling. The atmosphere is empty, theatrical, and slightly unreal.

ACT I

(The stage is still. TED sits hunched on the chair. WALTER stands nearby, studying the floor as if it hides a secret. Long silence.)

TED:

Still no sign.

WALTER:

(softly)

There's always a sign.

Only some signs aren't for us.

(Pause. TED scratches his arm, restless.)

TED:

It's late.

WALTER:

Is it?

TED:

Feels late. Feels like things have gone too far.

WALTER:

Too far? (smiles faintly)

They have always gone too far.

That's how they charm us.

TED:

Charm. (snorts)

I'm not charmed. I want it over.

WALTER:

(tilts head)

And yet you wait.

(Pause.)

TED:

You think it's coming?

WALTER:

If it isn't, then this is all there is.

And that would be unbearable.

(A cough from the darkness. Both freeze.)

TED:

What was that?

WALTER:

Interference.

TED:

It sounded like... someone else.

WALTER:

Someone else? (laughs lightly)

Don't be absurd.

TED:

I know what I heard.

(Another cough, sharper. TED stiffens.)

TED:

See! There!

Don't tell me I imagined it.

WALTER:

(quietly, almost to himself)

"Even the most perfect reproduction lacks one element: its presence in time and space."

(looks up)

Perhaps this is that element.

TED:

What are you mumbling?

WALTER:

Nothing. Just a thought that came and will never return.

(A sudden burst of laughter. TED flinches. WALTER smiles.)

TED:

They're mocking us.

WALTER:

Maybe they adore us.

TED:

I don't want adoration. I want it finished.

(leans forward)

We've waited long enough.

WALTER:

(smiling)

You cannot measure waiting.

It is like light—

it reaches you after the fact.

(Silence. The hum swells faintly. WALTER kneels to touch the floor. TED mutters.)

TED:

If it doesn't come soon, I swear I'll tear it all down.

WALTER:

(cheerfully)

You've said that before.

(Another burst of laughter—louder this time. Lights flicker once, then steady. Curtain.)

ACT II

(Same stage. Lighting colder now, faint blue. The chair remains where it was. The hum is deeper, vibrating the silence. TED sits forward, elbows on knees. WALTER paces in slow circles. Pause.)

TED:

Time drags when it has nowhere to go.

WALTER:

Perhaps time has already gone.

Perhaps we're the only ones left.

(TED exhales hard, rubbing his face.)

TED:

If that were true, it would be better.

What remains now is worse than absence.

WALTER:

Worse than absence?

That's a good title for a book.

TED:

It's the system, Walter.

You think it pauses because you've paused.

But it moves on,

churning its gears in silence,

tightening its grip while you marvel at ghosts.

WALTER:

(smiles faintly)

You speak of the system as if it had a soul.

Perhaps you're the poet, not I.

TED:

It doesn't need a soul.

It needs only momentum.

And momentum is blind.

(A burst of laughter from the dark. Both freeze. WALTER glances toward the sound with theatrical grace. TED stiffens.)

TED:

There it is again.

WALTER:

Applause next, I think.

TED:

Why would anyone laugh at this?

WALTER:

Because they know something we do not.

TED:

Or because they've been trained to.

(Pause. Another cough. Both turn outward.)

WALTER:

Maybe they're waiting, too.

TED:

For what?

WALTER:

For us to do something.

Anything.

TED:

Then they'll be waiting forever.

WALTER:

How reassuring.

(A single sharp clap—echoing. TED jerks to his feet.)

TED:

This is a farce.

We wait for what will not come.

We know this.

And still—

(he stops, fists clenched)

And still we wait.

Why?

WALTER:

Because the waiting is all that's left.

TED:

Not for me.

*The system cannot be reformed.
It devours.
It strips what is human
until even desire tastes like metal.*

WALTER:

*And yet your words—
still human.
Isn't that something?*

TED:

*Words are nothing.
Words are the leash.*

(Laughter crashes in, too loud, too sudden. TED grips the chair as if to throw it. WALTER chuckles softly.)

WALTER:

*You give them a good show.
Perhaps they'll keep us on.*

TED:

We're not performers.

WALTER:

Then why do they clap?

(Long pause. WALTER studies his fingernails. TED stands still, fists clenched. On the back wall: faint "Loading..." flickers once, then fades. Suddenly—a lush, romantic film scoreswells into the silence: sweeping strings, tender piano, absurdly grand for the empty stage. TED freezes for a second, then erupts.)

TED:

*You think this is waiting?
This is not waiting.
This is a cage!
A polished cage,
painted in light,
draped in illusions of choice.*

(he strides toward the tree, voice rising with the music)

*We traded the real for replicas,
and now we kneel before ghosts—
glorious, shimmering ghosts—
while the system gnaws the bones of our freedom!*

(he slams the chair forward; the music swells triumphantly)

And you—
you call this theater?
You call this meaning?
It is rot, Walter.
Rot in velvet gloves!

(The music peaks... then cuts dead mid-chord. Abrupt silence. TED stands frozen. WALTER looks at him calmly.)

WALTER:
Feeling better?

(TED straightens his jacket, as if nothing happened. TED sits. Pause.)

TED:
If it doesn't come soon, I will leave.

WALTER:
Then why don't you?

(TED walks two steps, halts. Turns. Two steps the other way. Stops.)

WALTER:
Well?

TED:
There is no way out.

WALTER:
Ah. Then we stay.

*(A roar of laughter now, mechanical and deafening. Both cover their ears.
"Loading..." pulses again)*

TED:
(yelling)
What do they want from us?!

WALTER:
(amid the chaos, serene)
A good ending.

(Sudden blackout. Silence. A single spotlight on the empty chair. The leafless tree is dimly visible in the dark. Curtain.)

