

## WHEN YOU COMIN' BACK, RED RYDER?

by Mark Medoff

### ACT I

The setting is a diner in the desert in southern New Mexico. The period is the end of the 1960s. This is the opening scene of the play. Stephen Ryder—who prefers the nickname Red—is alone reading a newspaper. It is 6:05 A.M. and he has just finished working the night shift at the all-night diner. He waits impatiently for his replacement, Angel. Stephen is nineteen. In manner and dress he is “an unconscious parody . . . of the midfifties”—slick hair combed straight back, shirt buttons opened half way down his chest, a tattoo that says “Born Dead.” The dialogue begins with Angel’s entrance. She is overweight and unattractive and, as revealed during the play, cares for Stephen. Later in the play this sleepy diner erupts into a scene of senseless violence where each character is forced to confront the hypocrisy of his or her life.

ANGEL: I’m sorry I’m late. My mom and me, our daily fight was a little off schedule today. *Stephen loudly shuffles the paper, sucks his teeth.* I said I’m sorry, Stephen. God. I’m only six minutes late.

STEPHEN: Only six minutes, huh? I got six minutes to just hang around this joint when my shift’s up, right? This is really the kinda dump I’m gonna hang around in my spare time, ain’t it?

ANGEL: Stephen, that’s a paper cup you got your coffee in. *Stephen is entrenched behind his newspaper.*

STEPHEN: Clark can afford it, believe me.

ANGEL: That’s not the point, Stephen.

STEPHEN: Oh no? You’re gonna tell me the point though, right? Hold it—lemme get a pencil.

ANGEL: The point is that if you’re drinkin your coffee here, you’re supposed to use a glass cup, and if it’s to go, you’re sup-

posed to get charged fifteen instead of ten and ya get one of those five cent paper cups to take it with you with. That’s the point, Stephen.

STEPHEN: Yeah, well I’m takin it with me, so where’s the problem? *Stephen has taken the last cigarette from a pack, slipped the coupon into his shirt pocket and crumpled the pack. He basketball shoots it across the service area.*

ANGEL: Stephen. *She retrieves the pack and begins her morning routine: filling salt and pepper shakers, the sugar dispensers, setting out place mats, and cleaning up the mess Stephen evidently leaves for her each morning. Stephen reaches over and underneath the counter and pulls up a half empty carton of Raleighs and slides out a fresh pack. He returns the carton and slaps the new pack down on the counter. What’re ya gonna get with your cigarette coupons, Stephen? Stephen reads his paper, smokes, sips his coffee. Stephen? Stephen lowers the newspaper.*

STEPHEN: How many times I gotta tell ya to don’t call me Stephen.

ANGEL: I don’t like callin ya Red. It’s stupid—callin somebody with brown hair Red.

STEPHEN: It’s my name, ain’t it? I don’t like Stephen. I like Red. When I was a kid I had red hair.

ANGEL: But ya don’t now. Now ya got brown hair.

STEPHEN, *exasperated*: But then I did, and then’s when counts.

ANGEL: Who says then’s when counts?

STEPHEN: The person that’s doin the countin! Namely yours truly! I don’t call you . . . Caroliné or . . . Madge, do I?

ANGEL: Because those aren’t my name. My name’s Angel, so—

STEPHEN: Yeah, well ya don’t look like no angel to me.

ANGEL: I can’t help that, Stephen. At least I was named my name at birth. Nobody asked me if I’d mind bein named Angel, but at least—

STEPHEN: You could change it, couldn’t ya?

ANGEL: What for? To what?

STEPHEN, *thinking a moment, setting her up*: To Mabel.

ANGEL: How come Mabel?

STEPHEN: Yeah . . . Mabel.

ANGEL: How come? You like Mabel?

STEPHEN: I hate Mabel. *Stephen stares at her, sucks his teeth.*

ANGEL: Look, Stephen, if you're in such a big hurry to get outta here, how come you're just sittin around cleaning your teeth?

STEPHEN: Hey, look, I'll be gone in a minute. I mean if it's too much to ask if I have a cigarette and a cup of coffee in peace, for chrissake, just say so. A person's supposed to unwind for two minutes a day, in case you ain't read the latest medical report. If it's too much to ask to just lemme sit here in *peace* for two minutes, then say so. I wouldn't wanna take up a stool somebody was waitin for or anything. *Looking around him:* Christ, will ya look at the waitin line to get on this stool.

ANGEL, *pause*: Did you notice what's playing at the films?

STEPHEN: Buncha crap, whudduya think?

ANGEL, *pause*: I saw ya circle somethin in the gift book the other mornin.

STEPHEN: What *gift* book?

ANGEL: The Raleigh *coupon* gift book.

STEPHEN: Hey—com'ere. *Angel advances close to him. He snatches the pencil from behind her ear and draws a circle on the newspaper.* There. Now I just drew a circle on the newspaper. That mean I'm gonna get me that car?

ANGEL: Come on, Stephen, tell me. What're ya gonna get?

STEPHEN: Christ, whudduyou care what I'm gonna get?

ANGEL: God, Stephen, I'm not the FBI or somebody. What are you so upset about? Just tell me what you're gonna get.

STEPHEN, *mumbling irascibly*: Back pack.

ANGEL: What?

STEPHEN: Whuddya, got homê fries in your ears?

ANGEL: Just that I didn't hear what you said is all.

STEPHEN: *Back. Pack.*

ANGEL: Who's gettin a back pack?

STEPHEN: The guy down the enda the counter. Chingado the Chicano. He's hitchin to Guatamala.

ANGEL: You're getting a back pack? How come?

STEPHEN: Whuddo people usually get a back pack for?

ANGEL: Ya gonna go campin.

STEPHEN: No I ain't gonna go *campin*. I'm gonna go gettin the hell outta this lousy little town is where I'm gonna go *camp-in*.

ANGEL: When? I mean . . . when?

STEPHEN: When? Just as soon as I get somethin taken care of.

ANGEL: When will that be?

STEPHEN: When will that be? When I get it taken care of—when d'ya think. Lemme have a donut.

ANGEL, *getting him a donut*: Where ya gonna go?

STEPHEN: Where am I gonna go? I'm gonna go hitchin that way (*pointing left*) or I'm gonna go hitchin that way (*pointing right*) and when I get to some place that don't still smella Turdville here I'm gonna get me a decent job and I'm gonna make me some bread. *He picks up the donut and bites into it.*

ANGEL: Rye or whole wheat, Stephen?

STEPHEN: This is some donut. I think they glued the crumbs together with Elmer's.

ANGEL: Rye or whole wheat, Stephen?

STEPHEN, *with his mouth full*: Believe me, that ain't funny.

ANGEL: Don't talk with your mouth full.

STEPHEN: Christ, my coffee's cold. How d'ya like that? *He looks at her. She pours him a fresh cup of coffee in a mug. She sets it down by him. He looks at it a minute, then pours the coffee from the mug into his paper cup.* I told ya, I'm leavin in less'n two minutes.

ANGEL: That's right, I forgot.

STEPHEN: Yeah, yeah.

ANGEL: You better let your hair grow and get some different clothes if you're gonna hitch somewhere, Stephen. You're outta style. Nobody's gonna pick up a boy dressed like you with his hair like yours. And with a tattoô on his arm that says "Born Dead." People wear tattoos now that say "Love" and "Peace," Stephen, not "Born Dead."

STEPHEN: Love and peace my Aunt Fanny's butt! And who says I want *them* to pick me, for chrissake? You think I'm dyin for a case a the clap, or what? I got a coupla hundred truck drivers come through here in the middle of the night that said they'd all gimme a ride anytime anywhere they was goin. You think I'm gonna lower myself to ride with those other morons—you're outta your mind.

ANGEL: Two hundred truck drivers? Uh-uh, I'm sorry, I have to call you on that one, Stephen, if it wasn't for Lyle's station and his motel, Lyle'd be our *only* customer.

**STEPHEN:** You know, right? Cause you're here all night while I'm home sacked out on my rear, so you know how many truck drivers still stop in here, now ain't that right?

**ANGEL:** In the three weeks since the by-pass opened, Stephen, you know exactly how many customers you had in the nights? You wanna know exactly how many, Stephen?

**STEPHEN:** No Christ, I don't wanna know how many. I wanna have two minutes of peace to read my damn newspaper—if that's not askin too much! Is that askin too much? If it is, just say the word and I'll get the hell outta here and go to the goddamn cemetery or somewhere.

## 27 WAGONS FULL OF COTTON

by Tennessee Williams

### SCENE 2

The play takes place on the front porch of the residence of Jake and Flora Meighan, situated in a Mississippi cotton-farm region. Jake owns a cotton gin. During the night before this scene takes place, he set fire to the cotton gin of Silva Vicarro ("of the dark Latin looks and nature"). Vicarro had just received an order to process twenty-seven wagons full of cotton. Jake, needing money, set the fire anticipating that Vicarro would be forced to bring the cotton to his mill. Flora, described as "a woman not (just) large but tremendous," knows that Jake started the fire, and has been drilled by Jake the previous night on what to say if questioned about his whereabouts at the time of the fire.

The scene takes place at midday, the day after the fire. Vicarro has just signed a contract with Jake; but, before he goes off to do the ginning, Jake instructs Flora to "keep Mr. Vicarro comfo'table," and refers to "Th' good-neighbor policy . . . you do me a good turn an' I'll do you a good one!" Vicarro bitterly repeats Jake's phrase as the scene begins.

**VICARRO:** The good-neighbor policy! *He sits on the porch steps.*

**FLORA,** *sitting on the swing:* Izzen he out-ray-juss! *She laughs foolishly and puts the purse in her lap. Vicarro stares gloomily across the dancing brilliance of the fields. His lip sticks out like a pouting child's. A rooster crows in the distance.*

**FLORA:** I would'n' dare to expose myself like that.

**VICARRO:** Expose? To what?

**FLORA:** The sun. I take a terrible burn. I'll never forget the burn I took one time. It was on Moon Lake one Sunday before I was married. I never did like t' go fishin' but this young fellow, one of the Peterson boys, insisted that we go fishin'. Well, he didn't catch nothin' but jus' kep' fishin' an' fishin' an' I set there in th' boat with all that hot sun on me. I said, Stay under the willows. But he would'n' lissen to me, an' sure enough I took such an awful burn I had t' sleep on m' stummick th' nex' three nights.

**VICARRO,** *absently:* What did you say? You got sunburned?

**FLORA:** Yes. One time on Moon Lake.

**VICARRO:** That's too bad. You got over it all right?

**FLORA:** Oh, yes. Finally. Yes.

**VICARRO:** That must've been pretty bad.

**FLORA:** I fell in the lake once, too. Also with one of the Peterson boys. On another fishing trip. That was a wild bunch of boys, those Peterson boys. I never went out with 'em but something happened which made me wish I hadn't. One time, sunburned. One time, nearly drowned. One time—poison ivy! Well, lookin' back on it, now, we had a good deal of fun in spite of it, though.

**VICARRO:** The good-neighbor policy, huh? *He slaps his boot with the riding crop. Then he rises from steps.*

**FLORA:** You might as well come up on th' po'ch an' make you'self as comfo'table as you can.

**VICARRO:** Uh-huh.

**FLORA:** I'm not much good at—makin' conversation.

**VICARRO,** *finally noticing her:* Now don't you bother to make conversation for my benefit, Mrs. Meighan. I'm the type that prefers a quiet understanding. *Flora laughs uncertainly.* One thing I always notice about you ladies . . .

**FLORA:** What's that, Mr. Vicarro?