

CHARACTERS



STEPHEN

ANGEL

LYLE

CLARK

CLARISSE

RICHARD

TEDDY

CHERYL

Time of Action: The end of the '60s

Place: A diner in southern New Mexico

WHEN YOU COMIN BACK, RED RYDER? was first presented by the Circle Repertory Theatre Company (by arrangement with Elliot Martin) in New York City, in November 1973. It was directed by Kenneth Frankel; the setting was by Bill Stabile; costumes by Penny Davis; and the lighting by Cheryl Thacker.

The Circle Repertory Theatre Company production of *WHEN YOU COMIN BACK, RED RYDER?* was subsequently presented by Elliot Martin at the Eastside Playhouse, in New York City, where it opened officially on December 6, 1973.

ACT I



A diner on the desert in southern New Mexico at the end of the sixties. Stools, booths, a chair or two, a jukebox. On one of the windows: FOSTER'S DINERS—ARIZ., N. MEX., TEX. The lettering has begun to chip away and although the diner is clean, its day has gone. A boy nineteen, STEPHEN/RED sits at the far end of the counter reading a newspaper, his back against the partition, his feet propped on the second stool, the newspaper tabled by his thighs and knees. He is plain looking in an obtrusive way—small, his hair slicked straight back off his forehead. He wears a short sleeve sportshirt open one too many buttons at the top, the sleeves rolled several times toward his shoulders—in the last of the sixties, an unconscious parody in his dress of the mid-fifties. He smokes Raleigh cigarettes and has a tattoo, "Born dead," on his forearm.

The clock behind the counter reads 6:05. Stephen glances irritably at it, then out of the window, then at his own watch.

The jukebox plays. Morning lights come through the windows.

Stephen hears someone coming. He knows the steps. He moves to the jukebox, reaches behind it, and rejects the record that's playing. He takes his stool again and raises the newspaper so that it covers his face. ANGEL enters. She is perhaps several years older than Stephen. She is obese, her white uniform stretched across the rolls of her body. She has a pinched face, short hair framed by a bow made of limp, thick pastel yarn, somewhat prominent front teeth. She wears a wedding band on the ring finger of her right hand. She carries a very small purse.

ANGEL: Good mornin, Stephen.

(Stephen does not look at her, but glances at the clock and makes a strained sucking sound through his teeth—a habit he has throughout—and flips the newspaper back up to his face. Unperturbed, Angel proceeds behind the counter)

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 s'posed to use a glass cup, and if it's to go, you're s'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 . . . Caroline 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 chris-sake, just say so. A person's s'posed 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: (*A beat*) Did you notice what's playin at the films?

STEPHEN: Buncha crap, whudduya think?

ANGEL: (*A beat*) 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: Whudduya, got home 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 Guatemala.

ANGEL: You're gettin 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 *campin*.

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 tattoo 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 bypass 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.

(LYLE STRIKER enters. He is a man in his early sixties. He wears a brace on one leg and uses an aluminum crutch — the type with wrist and forearm supports. In his relationship to Angel there is a distant sexual overtone)

LYLE: Mornin. Mornin.

ANGEL: Good mornin, Lyle.

LYLE: Mornin, Red.

(Stephen stares blankly at Lyle. Lyle to Angel, winking)

Nice to see Red so chipper this mornin. Whatya got stuck in your craw this mornin, Redbird?

(Stephen sucks his teeth, Lyle takes what is evidently his stool. Angel sets a mug of coffee before him and begins to get his breakfast together. She glances meaningfully at Stephen)

ANGEL: How's business, Lyle?

LYLE: All eight rooms full up last night. That's seventeen outta twenty days since the bypass open up. Most of 'em already checked out. Looks like my new sign gonna pay off right handsomely.

STEPHEN: Damn thing's high enough. Ya oughta get yourself some collision insurance in case a coupla airplanes crash into it.

LYLE: Well now, least I don't have billboards strung up and down the highway like dirty underdrawers proclaimin my whereabouts.

STEPHEN: Don't tell me about it.

LYLE: "Steak and eggs our specialty." *(Laughing)* Steak and eggs're ever'body's specialty.

STEPHEN: Yeah, well don't tell me about it. Tell Clark.

LYLE: You tell Clark. I got enough trouble with my gas and oil people.

STEPHEN: Yeah, you got it real tough, Lyle. You lead a real tough life, I'm tellin ya.

LYLE: Well now, if you think it's so easy a life that I lead, Red, I hereby will it to ya for one day and let's see how you like takin care of an eight unit motel and a gas and service station entire by yourself.

STEPHEN: Keep sittin there babblin, Lyle, and you're gonna miss about fifty dollars wortha business from that Cadillac sittin out there for the last half hour waitin for you to quit makin speeches and get off your keister and give 'em some gas.

(Lyle turns his stool, sees that Stephen is telling the truth)

LYLE: Didn't hear 'em pull up.

(Lyle takes a swig of his coffee and hustles up)

STEPHEN: Came right outta room four and drove twenty feet to the premium pump. Been searchin the countryside for somebody to fill that yacht up with about fifty dollars wortha gas.

LYLE: Back shortly. Keep my seat warm. *(Winks at Angel and exits)*

STEPHEN: (*Yelling after him*) Yeah, gonna build a fire under it. (*A beat, to Angel*) Christ, will ya look at that yacht. Looks like the goddamn Queen Mary. Ya wanna bet he clears fifty bucks fillin that tank up?

ANGEL: They don't look like they oughta be stayin at Lyle's, do they?

STEPHEN: What'sa matter, the old Cripple's ain't good enough for ya now that you had your debutante comin out?

ANGEL: Very funny, Stephen.

STEPHEN: Ain't fancy enough for their Cadillac to sit in front a number four of—that what you're sayin?

(*Stephen goes to the window to look toward Lyle's*)

ANGEL: Lyle's isn't exactly the Ramada Inn, ya know.

STEPHEN: Yeah? I'll take it. The Crip don't want it, let him give it to me. He ever mentions to ya he's thinkin about givin it away, you toss my name in the hat as a willin benefice'rary. Christ, I could really do somethin with the layout he's got.

ANGEL: Why don't ya ask Lyle to hire ya on? I bet he would. What do you wanna bet if ya asked him to hire ya on to help out at the station and the motel, he'd hire ya.

STEPHEN: (*Returning to his stool*) I told ya, I'm hitchin outta here. And after this deal I'm through workin for the other guy. The next job I get, it's gonna be workin for Number One here.

ANGEL: Oh yeah? What're ya gonna do?

STEPHEN: Don't you worry about me. Okay?

ANGEL: Yeah, but what're ya gonna do, Stephen?

STEPHEN: What am I gonna do? I'm gonna come drivin up to your door one day in a Chevrolet Corvette Sting Ray convertible the color of money is what I'm gonna do. Then I'm gonna rev up that four-ten engine through my glass-pack mufflers and I'm gonna lay about four hundred feet a rubber down your street. (*A beat. He looks from a distance to her*) Anybody pull a stunt like that on your street one day, you be sure and tell 'em who it was. You tell 'em it was Red Ryder, everybody, drivin a Chevrolet

Corvette Sting Ray convertible the color of money and livin in his own apartment. You be sure and tell 'em.

ANGEL: I'll tell them, Stephen.

STEPHEN: You tell 'em it was Red Ryder and from now on he's workin for Number One.

ANGEL: What kinda work's Number One gonna be *doin* though, Stephen?—

STEPHEN: And I'll tell ya one thing. When I'm ready to go, I'm gonna write a letter to the goddamn *company* tellin 'em what the hell kinda deal I think Clark's givin us out here.

ANGEL: Hey, do me a favor. Never mind the company. Just get Mr. Clark in here when I'm around and tell him off. I'd pay money to see that.

STEPHEN: I ain't gonna waste my time talkin to Clark. He's just runnin a lousy franchise. When I quit, I'm writin a *registered* letter to the *company*. I'm writin a registered letter to ole man Foster hisself.

ANGEL: I'd pay twenty bucks to see ya read off Mr. Clark.

STEPHEN: You ain't got twenty bucks.

ANGEL: (*Sticking out her hand*) You wouldn't care to bet on that, would ya?

STEPHEN: How much money you got? (*Angel sticks her tongue into her cheek and takes a crack at a haughty look*) You probably got three, four thousand stored up. Ya never do a damn thing but come to work, watch television with that ole Cripple out there, and go home to get ready to do the same goddamn thing all over again.

(*He snaps the newspaper up. His remark is true enough to hurt her just visibly. A beat*)

ANGEL: How long you been workin here, Stephen?

STEPHEN: I don't keep track a time.

ANGEL: You know how long I been workin here?

(*Stephen reads his paper*)

Fourteen months. Ya know how many times I asked Mr. Clark for a raise?

(Stephen sucks his teeth, reads his paper)

STEPHEN: Your problem is ya shouldn't ask *him* nothin.

ANGEL: He's the boss, Stephen—

STEPHEN: What ya should do is write a registered letter direct to the company.

ANGEL: What should I tell them?

STEPHEN: Christ, tell 'em you're out here in goddamn New Mexico gettin the royal shaft from Clark and that either they make him cough up that raise or they can do you know what with their lousy job.

ANGEL: I think you're right, Stephen.

STEPHEN: I *know* I'm right.

ANGEL: You should have a raise too. If they think workin the graveyard shift is easy, let 'em try it sometime. Who'd Mr. Clark get if you quit?

STEPHEN: Who? No one, that's who. Ole Clark'd have to work it hisself. *(Laughs)* That'd do my heart good, to see old Clark in here at three A.M. hashin potatoes. I think maybe I'll threaten to quit unless he gives me a raise and see what he says to that.

ANGEL: I'll bet he'll give ya one pretty darn quick, that's what I bet. You should do it, Stephen.

STEPHEN: I just might do it today.

(TOMMY CLARK enters in a big hurry, carrying two plastic bags full of red chile pods)

ANGEL: Good mornin, Mr. Clark.

CLARK: Here's the chile for the enchilada lunch special. Get right on 'em. *(Clark zips into the kitchen area)*

ANGEL: *(To Stephen)* Do it, Stephen.

(Clark dumps the chile, opens the cash register, glances at the drawer, whips it shut, and turns on Stephen)

CLARK: That's a five cent cup ya got your coffee in, Red.

STEPHEN: I was just leavin.

CLARK: Nickels don't grow on trees, boy—leastwise not on one a the ones in the Clark yard.

STEPHEN: Yeah, well—

CLARK: *(To Angel)* Back in about an hour to check the books.

(Stephen has returned to his stool and propped his feet up on the next stool)

Double cut that chile with water. Couldn't get the milder ones. *(To Stephen)* Yore momma let ya stick your feet on her furniture at home, Red?

(Stephen snaps his feet from the stool)

(To Angel) Let's get the Sunday Special sign up. Chop, chop. Be lunch before ya know it. *(Clark glances at Stephen and exits in a hurry)* Back shortly.

(Silence. Angel cannot look immediately at Stephen. Stephen, in pain, slaps his feet back up on the adjacent stool. Angel takes a toothpick from the dispenser and chews on it. After a moment she glances at the clock)

ANGEL: Boy, Mr. Clark was sure in a good mood this mornin, wasn't he? *(A beat)* Isn't your guardian gonna pick ya up this mornin?

STEPHEN: My . . . *what*—?

ANGEL: I don't know. What do you call him? Your stepfather. That's right, you call him your stepfather.

STEPHEN: I call him Ray. I don't call him my stepfather. I call him Ray. Who calls anybody "your stepfather"?

ANGEL: *(Putting up the Sunday Special Enchilada sign)* Well, isn't Ray gonna pick ya up?

STEPHEN: Lemme have one a them toothpicks.

ANGEL: *(Getting the toothpick)* Who's pickin ya up?

STEPHEN: Nobody's pickin me up. Somebody gotta pick me up before you're happy?