

CLOSING TIME

By Carl L. Williams

Copyright © MMXXI by Carl L. Williams, All rights reserved.
ISBN: 978-1-61588-499-5

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Heuer Publishing LLC. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Heuer Publishing LLC. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this Work must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this Work. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the Work. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this Work is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: ***Produced by special arrangement with Heuer Publishing LLC.***

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Heuer Publishing LLC.

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC
P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011

CLOSING TIME

By Carl L. Williams

SYNOPSIS: A wanderer returns to his hometown, drawn by the memory of tragic events from years before. He discovers he isn't guilty of the crime he thought he had committed in revenge, but the discovery forces him to choose between finishing his retribution or seeking a new beginning.

DURATION: 17 minutes.

SETTING: Small-town diner.

TIME: Present.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 2 male)

RICK GARNER (m) A wanderer returning home. *(87 lines)*

JENNY DALE (f) Owner of a small-town diner. *(56 lines)*

RHONDA VAUGHN (f) Sister of Rick's deceased lover. *(31 lines)*

HOWIE MERCER (m) A man remorseful of his evil past. *(21 lines)*

SCENES

Scene 1 Night. Closing time at the diner.

Scene 2 Early the next morning.

SET: Tables with chairs. One door to the outside, one door to the back.

PROPS

- Ball cap
- Jacket
- Diner items (napkin holders, salt & pepper shakers, etc.)
- 2 beer bottles
- A belt.

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

CLOSING TIME premiered at The Old Opera House Theatre Company's New Voice Play Festival in Charles Town, WV. The play was directed by Liam Potter, with the following cast:

JENNY DALE..... Sandra DeRocha
RHONDA VAUGHN..... Kaitlyn Dykes
HOWIE MERCER Bruce Olson
RICK GARNER John-Michael Rolnick

DO NOT COPY

SCENE 1

AT START: *RICK, in a jacket with a cap in his hand, enters and stops in a spotlight with the rest of the stage dark, then looks out at the audience.*

RICK: *(Grim recollection.)* The greatest moment of my life was when I shot Howie Mercer. *(Pause, puts on his cap.)* The worst moment, years later, was when I found out I hadn't killed him.

Lights up as RICK turns up the collar of his jacket and walks into a small diner, where JENNY sits at a table, finishing one of two beers.

JENNY: Sorry, but it's closing time. My fault. Should've locked the door by now. Kitchen help's already left.

RICK: I got here later than I planned.

JENNY: Hate to turn away a customer, but I gotta close sometime.

RICK: The diner must be yours now.

JENNY: It's mine, all right. Bought it four years ago. Took me long enough, but the owner finally retired.

RICK: Old man Dupree.

JENNY: *(Surprised he knows.)* That's right.

RICK: It's been a long time, Jenny.

JENNY: Do I know you?

RICK: Have I changed that much? *(Takes off his cap.)*

JENNY: Rick! Rick Garner!

RICK: Didn't mean to shock you.

JENNY: Shocked is right, but I'm thrilled to see you. You know I am. It's just that none of us knew what happened to you. It was like you disappeared completely.

RICK: That's pretty much what I tried to do.

JENNY: Well, I'll be. Rick Garner, back in town. Can I get you something? I can open the kitchen.

RICK: Just a beer, Jenny, if you've got a spare.

JENNY: Got one right here. I was gonna go wild and have a second one tonight, but I'd rather give it to you. *(Hands him the other beer from the table.)*

RICK: That's how you finish off your day?

JENNY: Better with a beer than with some no-account looking for a late-night tickle.

RICK: You're not with Tim anymore?

JENNY: Not in years. He moved to Cincinnati to live off his sister. But what in the world have you been up to? Where you been?

RICK: On the move a lot. Did some trucking. Independent, non-union stuff.

JENNY: For a long time after you left, people tried to figure out where you'd gotten off to.

RICK: Yeah, I imagine they did.

JENNY: How come you took off like that?

RICK: Why do you think? The business with Howie.

JENNY: Nobody blamed you for that.

RICK: Nobody who knew him, maybe.

JENNY: You should've stayed.

RICK: Couldn't take the chance. I wasn't sure about coming back even now. Thought I'd come in late and take a look around.

JENNY: You gonna see Rhonda?

RICK: *(Pause.)* Probably not.

JENNY: You should.

RICK: No point in it.

JENNY: So what brings you back?

RICK: You'll think I'm a sap when I tell you.

JENNY: No, I won't. Or if I do, I won't say so.

RICK: It's the anniversary. *(Gets a blank look.)* Of Pauline's death. I think about it every year. I think about her every day. This year, though, it was like something pulling on me, drawing me back. I went out to the cemetery tonight. Stood beside her grave. Read her name on the stone. I don't know what I was expecting. There was nothing there. I loved her so much, Jenny.

JENNY: And she loved you.

RICK: I never understood why she did what she did. She didn't have to—*(Can't finish it.)* We could've faced everything together and gotten through it somehow.

JENNY: Yes, I believe you could've. But I guess she didn't think so. It's a small town, Rick. Everybody knew.

RICK: But it wasn't her fault!

JENNY: Of course not.

RICK: It was Howie's. Everybody knew what he did, all right, but there was no proof. His word against hers. She just fell apart.

JENNY: Rick... Rick, don't go tearing yourself up all over again. It's way in the past now.

RICK: I tried to tell her it wouldn't make any difference to me, that nothing would change between us. She could hardly look at me. All she did was cry.

JENNY: There was nothing more you could've done. Rhonda tried, too... everything she knew, and nobody's closer than sisters, at least not the two of them. Last I heard, she was still putting flowers on the grave.

RICK: I saw the flowers and wondered. Then I realized. Who else but Rhonda?

JENNY: You really ought to see her. You know... *(Hesitates.)* ...you know she always cared about you.

RICK: I know.

JENNY: Almost as much as Pauline did.

RICK: I know, Jenny. But Pauline was the one I loved.

JENNY: I've heard tell that a body can love more than one person in his lifetime.

RICK: Maybe some can. I'm not that lucky.

JENNY: Or maybe you don't want to be.

RICK: What does that mean?

JENNY: You can't hold on to someone who's gone. You gotta reach out to those who are still here. And who knows? If you do that, you just might find someone else to hold on to.

RICK: Rhonda never married?

JENNY: Never did.

RICK: Well... it wouldn't work out anyway. I'm leaving while it's still dark. *(Rises to leave.)*

JENNY: Going where?

RICK: Where no one knows who I am.

JENNY: Sounds like a lonely place to be.

RICK: I can't stay where I can be found... where people know what I did.

JENNY: Are you sorry you did it?

RICK: No. I'm not.

JENNY: I wasn't sorry, either. Nobody around here was. Matter of fact, it gave folks a lot of satisfaction to see Howie limping his way around town.

RICK: (*Stunned.*) What do you mean? What are you talking about? I shot him! I killed him!

JENNY: Killed him? Why, no. You crippled him up pretty good, but he pulled through. You didn't know that? (*Concern as she watches his face.*) Rick? Rick, what are you thinking?

RICK: I won't be leaving town after all. Not yet.

END OF SCENE 1

DO NOT COPY

SCENE 2

AT START: *The diner early the next morning. JENNY stands looking out the front door, worried. RICK enters from the back, sleepy, without the jacket and cap.*

JENNY: Morning, Rick. How'd you sleep?

RICK: Not very well.

JENNY: Sorry that old couch isn't more comfortable.

RICK: It wasn't that. How could I sleep when... *(Pause.)*

JENNY: I don't know what you're thinking about doing, but maybe it'd be better if you left town the way you planned.

RICK: How can I leave now? It's not finished.

JENNY: But it is, Rick. Unless you start it up again.

RICK: Pauline's dead and Howie isn't. That's all I've been thinking about. All night long. Pauline's dead and Howie isn't.

JENNY: You don't... you don't have a gun, do you?

RICK: No. I haven't owned a gun since... well, since I thought I'd killed him with it.

JENNY: That must've been a hard thing to live with all these years, believing you took another man's life.

RICK: I made Howie pay for what he did. Or at least I tried. *(Looks around.)* You're not open for breakfast yet?

JENNY: *(Checks her watch.)* I will be soon. That doesn't leave much time.

RICK: Much time for what?

JENNY: *(Looks toward door.)* Here she is.

RICK: Who?

RHONDA enters.

RHONDA: Hello, Rick.

RICK: Rhonda. *(To JENNY.)* You called her.

JENNY: I didn't know what else to do.

RHONDA: I'm glad she did. It's awfully good to see you again. Are you all right?

RICK: I can't say that I am, not after hearing about Howie.

RHONDA: Jenny told me. I'm worried about you, Rick. I've been worried about you ever since you left, but now more than ever. Worried what you're going to do.

RICK: I'm going to do what I thought I'd already done.

JENNY: (*Nervous, glances toward the front door.*) Rhonda, it won't be long till... till the diner opens. I'll go to the kitchen and help Frances with her biscuits while you two keep on talking. (*Exits quickly.*)

RICK: There's no use talking. I don't care if the law gets me this time. I'm tired of running anyway.

RHONDA: Rick, the law hasn't been looking for you. There's no warrant out for you. There never was.

RICK: How can that be?

RHONDA: You remember Sheriff Mitchell?

RICK: He's still sheriff?

RHONDA: No, he's retired now. But after he knew Howie was going to live, you know what he told him about filing charges against you? He said just like it had been Pauline's word against Howie's, it would be Howie's word against yours. And as far as he could tell, you had shot him in self-defense.

RICK: How'd he figure self-defense?

RHONDA: Didn't Howie pick up a hatchet when he saw you coming? He said he did.

RICK: Yeah, but...

RHONDA: So who's to say he didn't come at you with the hatchet and you were just defending yourself?

RICK: Sheriff Mitchell didn't really believe that?

RHONDA: Of course not. Nobody did. And nobody cared. They all knew what Howie was and what he had done.

RICK: I just... I don't know what to think.

RHONDA: It's over, Rick. Let it stay over.

RICK: Pauline's still dead and Howie's still living. It isn't fair.

RHONDA: Believe it or not, Howie's not the same as he was.

RICK: Crippled up, Jenny said.

RHONDA: That's not what I meant. He came to me a few months after it all happened. He said he'd been drinking the night he... that night with Pauline. He said he knew being drunk was no excuse, but he was sorry and—

RICK: Sorry!

RHONDA: —and he wanted me to know it.

RICK: He killed Pauline.

RHONDA: He hurt her in a way no man should ever hurt a woman, but Pauline... Pauline killed herself. As painful as that is for both of us to accept, it was Pauline who took her own life.

RICK: Because of what Howie did.

RHONDA: Yes. One tragedy after another. And if you do anything more now, that'll be one more terrible tragedy. I'm asking you not to do it.

RICK: She was your sister.

RHONDA: Her life is over. Yours isn't. And Howie's life isn't worth your own. *(Looks toward the front door.)* It's time for the diner to open. You have a decision to make, Rick, and you have to make it fast. Jenny's got a regular customer who's always the first one in. He'll be walking through that door any second now. And when he does, just remember... you can still have a life here, if you want it. Or you can throw it away in a fit of hate and revenge.

RICK: *(Realizes who's coming.)* Do you mean...? Are you telling me he's going to...

HOWIE, limping, enters and moves toward a table without paying much attention.

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

CLOSING TIME

By Carl L. Williams

For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script, please
contact us at:

Heuer Publishing LLC

P.O. Box 248 • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-800-950-7529 • Fax (319) 368-8011

WWW.HEUERPUB.COM