

Come In,

Stranger,

Out of the Fog

by
Rich Yurman

Aviar Press

© 2005 Rich Yurman © 2005 Publication AviarPress

Come In, Stranger, Out of the Fog is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and international copyright laws. All rights, including the rights of translation into foreign languages, adaptations in motion pictures, television, video, radio, various other electronic media, recitation, public reading, and any other adaptations and are strictly reserved. Performances of any kind require the payment of a royalty. You may display this book for your personal, non-commercial use. But you may not otherwise reproduce or distribute copies of this book or any part thereof in any form (including by email or other electronic means), without the prior written consent of the owner. All inquiries should be directed to AviarPress at www.aviarpress.com.

Ctlg-1714ap

Cover and Book Designed by Jevrah Stone

© 2005 AviarPress

AviarPress 6920 Roosevelt Way NE Seattle Washington,
98115, USA +1.206.214.7664 – fax: +1.440.505.0796

Come In,
Stranger,
Out of the Fog

A Play in One Act

by

Rich Yurman

**Come In,
Stranger,
*Out of the Fog***

by
Rich Yurman

AviarPress

About the Play

A one act play set during London's "killer fog" of Dec. 1962

One set; three characters

Working off the following three news reports:

"London offices emptied early today as a dense fog settled over The City. The thick blanket, which has paralyzed much of Britain, is expected to continue unabated for another several days. The Air Ministry has called today's fog, combining high levels of sulphur dioxide and smoke, the worst since the killer fog of December 1952. Fog belts begin as far south as the Hampshire coast and as far north as the Clyde..."

BBC report, Dec. 4, 1962

"Dangerous and disrupting though it was, the fog gave London a weird beauty. The bulk of the great buildings dissolved into misty outlines."

New York Times, Dec. 6, 1962

"London police reported 106 persons were known to have 'died suddenly' between midnight Monday and Friday morning as a killer fog hovered over the city. The great sulphurous pall was as thick and polluted as the smog that killed at least 4,000 persons exactly 10 years ago."

AP, Dec. 8, 1962

Characters:

Mrs. Rac—widow, late 40s

Mr. Palmston—suburban home owner, mid 40s

Mr. B—quiet, powerfully built, 35 years old

Setting: Living room, lit by kerosene lamp and coal fire in the fireplace; the electricity is out

(Mrs. Rac sits in a rocker knitting and rocking, humming softly to herself. Knock at the street door. She rises, stands in place. Knock is repeated hesitantly. She crosses to door and opens less than half way. Mr. Palmston partially visible, framed by fog.)

Mr. P: I do beg your pardon. Hate to disturb on such an evening—but I've lost my way in this deuced fog.

Mrs. R: *(peering out past him)* Quite thick. *(sniffs the air)* And the odor. Most peculiar.

Mr. P: I've been wandering about in it for close on an hour. I wonder if I mightn't stop in till it lifts. *(Mrs. R. hesitates)* Quite irregular, of course, I realize, but I can't see a thing—been banging about with no idea where...

Mrs. R: Marylebone, number eight Marylebone.

Mr. P: *(astonished)* Really. I'd no idea. A good bit out of my way altogether.

Mrs. R: *(steps aside)* Well, come in then.

(Mr. P. enters. Mrs. R. shuts door. Mr. P. removes hat, hesitates; Mrs. R. points to chair next to planter; Mr. P. deposits hat, begins to unbutton mackintosh.)

Mr. P: I got off at Stanhope, you see. A matter of five streets. Six or seven minute walk. I make it every evening.. Yet I've got completely lost. Some chaps stayed on at the station, hoping to wait it out. But five streets, after all. I thought, surely, I've lived there eight years—as familiar as the palm of my hand.

(Mrs. R. pays little attention to all this, moving about, straightening up, putting her knitting away, etc.) But here I've come completely the wrong way. Marylebone. I can hardly ... do you know, I must have slogged close on a mile and a half, groping about, bumping into things and such...

Mrs. R: As you're staying, do take off your Mac and warm yourself by the fire.

Mr. P: Thanks much. I could do with a bit of heat.

(Mr. P. drops his coat over the back of the chair where he's laid his hat, and crosses to the fire. Stands rubbing his hands over fire.)

Mrs. R: Mr....uh....

Mr. P: Oh, I beg your pardon, dreadfully sorry, should have at once, of course—Palmston, James Palmston.

Mrs. R: Ahhhh, Palmerston.

Mr. P: Not quite—Palmston, after the township not the Baronet.

Mrs. R: Oh. Well, then *(nods toward the fire)* feeling any better?

Mr. P: Yes indeed. It was a devilish time muddling about, not able to see six inches in front of one—finally walked right into a gate, could've been my own—but no, not a bit of it, though I thought I'd come right, after all—but a straight path to the door—mine's a bit curved. Almost to the door, that is. Afraid I may have tramped a bit of your

flower beds. Dreadfully sorry, couldn't see where I was stepping, you know. (*hesitates, clears throat*) At any rate, I thought, "Best get out of this and wait for it to lift." Awfully good of you to put up with me.

(*Mr. P. smiles rather shyly. She gives the slightest smile and nod in return.*)

Mrs. R: Well, Mr. Palmston, as you're here, do sit down. It will be a long wait, I fear. Last evening we had like this—back in '52—why, it's exactly ten years, isn't it?—didn't lift for nearly four days. A good many got lost... and worse... in that one.

(*Mr. P. sits at table as she's indicated. R. sits across from him*)

Mrs. R: (*continuing*) Of course, this doesn't appear quite that bad...at least, so far. But when you're out in it, I suppose. Would you care for some tea?

Mr. P: To tell the truth, I'd like most to ring my wife and let her know what's happened. Forestall any worries, you know.

Mrs. R: Yes, very considerate. But I'm afraid the electric's gone off and I suppose the phone as well. It was a bit lonely sitting here before you came, with not even the telly.

Mr. P: You're by yourself, then, Mrs....

Mrs. R: Rac. Rather an ugly name.

Mr. P: Oh, no, not at all. A trifle unusual, perhaps.

Mrs. R: No, Mr. Palmston, no. You needn't be polite about it. Ugly, downright ugly. Never have liked it. My friends told me, 16 years ago when I married Mr. Rac, "You'll get accustomed to it soon enough, it'll seem perfectly natural, like your own name." Nothing of the sort. Couldn't stand it then. Can't stand it now. Not a bit natural or like my own name. Dead and gone these years, he's been, and I've never got the least bit accustomed to it, never. Martha Rac. Awful, just awful.

Mr. P: (*mumbles*) Well seeing as you feel that way and he's dead, perhaps you could ...

Mrs. R: D'Agraves it was. Martha D'Agraves. Lovely. Not at all like Rac. A bit foreign, exotic. Not some sort of medieval torture device.

Mr. P: (*covering what he views as an unseemly outburst by her*) Well, yes, certainly. At any rate, you're alone now.

Mrs. R: Oh no. Elder sister, Lily, lives with me—ever since Mr. Rac.

Mr. P: Ah!

Mrs. R: Works in The City, as you do, Mr. Palmston. But she'll not be home this night. Whenever it's anything like this, she spends the evening in town.

Mr. P: Quite so. As I should have done if I'd any sense. But you say the phone is out?

Mrs. R: As no one's called in, I suppose with the electric gone...

Mr. P: An altogether different line from the telly, don't you see.

Mrs. R: You're certainly welcome to try it, then. (*she gestures toward the telephone alcove*) I'll get the tea things meanwhile.

Mr. P: Really, I couldn't think of inconveniencing you further. I've imposed myself quite enough already.

Mrs. R. Nonsense. Kettle's been on. Time for my cuppa and I've Lily's things that would go to waste.

Mr. P: Well, if it's all right then, I wouldn't say no.

(Mrs. R. exits right to kitchen; Mr. P. moves to telephone alcove, lifts receiver, rattles carriage, etc. No tone but his attention is caught. Looks more closely, shrugs, replaces receiver, shakes his head. Walks about the room looking it over. Checks the planter, peers through front window at the fog, ends up at the fireplace warming his hands again as Mrs. R. re-enters carrying tea tray with all the necessities.)

Mrs. R: Not working then, is it?

(She sets out tea things on table as they talk.)

Mr. P: It's out all right. Funny thing about that phone, though.

Mrs. R: (*not looking at him*) Hmmm?

Mr. P: No exchange. In the space for your own call exchange, it's blank.

Mrs. R: Yes. Installer never did fill it in. Careless these days, they all are. No idea of doing a thorough job. Not like when we were younger. Doesn't matter a speck which lot's in or what they promise to get there, the country's gone over the edge, that's all. No sense of service left these days.

Mr. P: You are certainly correct on that score, Mrs. Rac. Still, I'd think after ... was it 13 years you said you've been here? ... after such a time....

Mrs. R: Sixteen actually.

Mr. P: Exactly. After such a time, the number should have been pretty well settled.

Mrs. R: Oh, it's settled well enough, just not written in. And we've not had the phone all that long. Mr. Rac, my late, he couldn't abide telephones. Called them shriekies. So we lived without all those years and beyond. Not till Lily, that's my sister ...

Mr. P: So you've indicated.

Mrs. R: Indeed. Not till Lily came to stay, no more than two years ago, did we have it put in. "How can you live without one?" she said. She works, you see. Like you, in the city. So she pays the toll out of her earnings. And as I'm glad to have her here, I let it go, though I've never any call to use it—Mr. Rac was right enough on that account. Get along perfectly well without. Hardly anyone ever rings up at all, and since I can hide it in there (*indicates alcove*), it doesn't bother me, though I'd gotten used to living without what with Mr. Rac, that is....

Mr. P: (*clears throat*) Yes, so you've said.

Mrs. R: *(without responding to his tone)* Won't you sit for tea, Mr. Palmston? Everything's ready and from the look of it, you may be here some time.

Mr. P: Thank you, then, Mrs. Rac. Thank you, kindly. *(he sits, she begins to pour)* And as we are breaking bread together, so to speak, perhaps it would not be improper to suggest that you call me James.

Mrs. R: If you think it right, of course I shall. And you shall call me Martha.

(He nods and smiles slightly; she goes on serving; the look he gives her is out of character, a smile that becomes suggestive, sexual, even a bit dangerous; she, being occupied, does not see it.)

Mrs. R: There, then, James, shall we begin?

(They exchange a friendly look, lift their cups briefly toward each other and begin to eat.)

(The Stage goes dark.)

(Brief Interval)

(Lights come up on same set. Tea is nearly finished, sandwiches half-eaten, some disorder on the table. Mr. P. in a more relaxed, almost sprawling posture, nearly king of the castle sipping his third cup of tea. Mrs. R. is gazing into space.)

Mrs. R: Care for more tea, James?

Mr. P: No thank you, Martha. I'm already afloat. This has been excellent, very congenial.

Mrs. R: Another sip won't hurt. The kettle's been on this while.

Mr. P: Well, in that case....

(Mrs. R. takes up teapot and heads for kitchen. Mr. P. stands as she does and follows her with another look. At her exit, he begins humming to himself; walks around the table, lifts up a rather long, sharp bread knife, hefts it, feels its edge on his thumb; stands holding it casually as she returns with the filled teapot.)

Mrs. R: No trouble at all. We'll just let it steep a few minutes.

(both seat themselves as before; she watches him as he fondles the knife.)

Mr. P: *(holds knife toward her)* Rather a hefty piece, this, just to cut bread, Mrs. Martha.

Mrs. R: Old cutlery's best, Mr. Palmston. Heavy enough to cut beef, sharp enough for soft fruit. That one's been in the house many years.

Mr. P: Has it? Since the departed Mr. Rac, eh?

(He continues to play with the knife; she draws her shawl closer about her.)

Mrs. R: Turning a bit colder, I'd say.

Mr. P: Yes—I appreciate this touch of home warmth against the outside chill.

(He leans across the table toward her)

Mrs. R: *(touching her throat)* Cold air cuts the fog, I believe.

Mr. P: Hmmm, yes. Let us hope that is the case.

Mrs. R: You've grown quiet, Mr. Palmston. *(pause)* Do put that aside. It makes me nervous.

Mr. P: Nervous?

Mrs. R: We are strangers, really.

Mr. P: Dear lady. Do you think I'm some sort of Jack the Ripper? *(laughs easily)* Not my style at all, I assure you.

(He edges closer as she draws back; he places the knife on the table between them, then reaches out and lays his hand upon hers. She begins to draw it away, then relaxes slightly and smiles the faintest of smiles.)

Mrs. R: I'm a lone woman, Mr. Palmston.

Mr. P: So you've indicated.

Mrs. R: A lone woman, James, gets a trifle nervous at times. *(smiles again; lets him go on holding her hand and returns his look with an overtone of complicity)* Perhaps you'd care for a touch of brandy to finish your tea, James.

Mr. P: Ahhhh, that would be nice, indeed....Martha.

Mrs. R: Yes, Mr. Rac liked a spot of brandy after his tea of a foggy evening. I'll just be a moment, then.

(She rises, exits to kitchen. He rises; once again hefts the knife, smiles, puts it down; returns to telephone alcove, lifts the receiver.)

Mr. P: (mutters) Still dead.

(He flicks the cut-off, jiggles it, then notices something; pulls on the cord; lifts it from the floor; it is not attached to anything. Mrs. R. re-enters carrying a tray with decanter and one glass.)

Mr. P: Well, look here, Mrs. Rac. This phone's not even connected to the line.

Mrs. R: *(without surprise)* Come have a touch of brandy, James.

(He moves toward her, holding the phone out, puzzled but turning aggressive)

Mr. P: How this, then? Something rather peculiar here.

Mrs. R: Must have come loose. I shall have to arrange for a repair.

Mr. P: Come loose? Accidentally, do you mean? Not likely. Do you take me for a fool?

Mrs. R: *(casually)* No one calls. Possibly the char-lady did it sweeping out the corners. She was here just day before last. Do relax, James. Here *(pours brandy)* have a sip.

(He studies her, hesitates, places phone on table, accepts the glass)

Mr. P: None for you?

Mrs. R: I don't use spirits, James. These are for guests. Not that we have many—as you can see, the bottle's barely begun.

Mr. P: Quite. Cheers, then.

(He takes a sip, approves, takes more, finishes off the glass; she watches him closely; when she's sure he's imbibed it all, she pulls her shawl closer about her.)

Mrs. R: It's grown chilly of a sudden.

Mr. P: Again. Well, you do seem very sensitive to changes in temperature.

(Mr. P. moves toward her and begins to circle his arm about her shoulders; she pretends not to notice, glances toward window, then turns to him.)

Mrs. R: Would you mind stirring the fire, James? Add a touch more warmth to the room.

Mr. P: *(moving toward fireplace)* Not at all. Glad to. A slight service in return for your hospitality.

(He begins to stir the fire, his back toward the kitchen door, which begins to open very slowly; Mr. B. enters quietly, stands just inside the door looking to Mrs. R.; she nods.)

Mr. P: That should bring it up. *(replaces poker and starts to pick up coal shovel)* I'd best add a bit of coal to keep it going a while so we can stay cozy.

(Mr. B. begins crossing noiselessly toward him. Mr. P. gets the small shovel into the coal, tries to straighten up, staggers slightly.)

Mr. P: Beg your pardon, a bit dizzy. All that walking about

(He half turns toward Mrs. R., clutches at the back of the rocking chair, sees Mr. B. coming toward him.)

Mr. P: What? Martha, who is this?

(The rocker moves under his grasp; he loses his hold and his balance; falls to his knees)

Mr. P: *(bewildered)* The knife, Mrs. Rac? The phone?

Mrs. R: *(flat)* The brandy, Mr. Rac.

(Mr. P.'s eyes widen with terror; he struggles to respond; collapses; silently Mr. B. checks Mr. P. to make sure he's unconscious; then lifts him over his shoulder and carries him off through kitchen door. Mrs. R. very quickly and efficiently clears the table of the tea things and brandy, sets them on the tray, carries it off to kitchen; returns, carries off Mr. P.'s hat and coat; returns, picks up telephone, replaces it in alcove; finally sits at table, hands folded in her lap. Pause. Mr. B. re-enters, wiping his hands on a hand-kerchief; moves to window, stares out.)

Mr. B. Looks like it's lifting.

Mrs. R: Not like the one in '52. Lasted four days that one.

Mr. B. You needn't tell me. I recall it well enough. Must have wandered about for hours. So thick you could see nothing further than the bits of fuzz on your eyeglasses. Bumped straight into the gatepost, feeling about like a blind man.

Mrs. R: Mr. Rac was here then.

Mr. B. I recall that too.

Mrs. R: (*wistfully*) Will he wake soon?

Mr. B. Do you think after all this time—waiting, just waiting—I'd not do it proper?

Mrs. R: All this time's a long time in which to forget, Mr. B.

Mr. B. Not when there's precious little else to think of. Ten years makes for a lot for waiting and thinking, Lily.

Mrs. R: There's always time, Mr. B., always.

(*Mr. B. moves to the outside door; opens it; peers out.*)

Mr. B. Breaking up, I'd say.

Mrs. R: Not likely. Close the door. It gets so draughty. And that smell. (*he closes door*) Rotten eggs, I'd say.

(*The lights flicker on, off, on; stay on.*)

Mr. B. Electric's back

Mrs. R: Switch on the telly, there's a love. It's been so quiet without.

(Mrs. R. takes up her knitting, moves to the rocker; Mr. B. crosses to TV and turns it on.)

Mr. B. Over now, is it?

(She makes a small gesture indicating let's not talk about it)

Mr. B. I shouldn't like to wait another ten years.

(He moves to chair next to planter and sits; she rocks and knits; he stares into space.)

(TV screen flickers to life and a BBC voice begins; after the first few words the lights begin to dim slowly; lights and voice fade gradually out on the last sentence.)

BBC Voice: "London offices emptied early today as a dense fog settled over the city. The thick blanket, which has paralyzed much of Britain, is expected to continue unabated for another several days. The Air Ministry has called today's fog, combining high levels of sulphur dioxide and smoke, the worst since the killer fog of December 1952. Fog belts begin as far south as the Hampshire coast and as far north as the Clyde..."

(Fade all light and sound to black and silence.)

Notes On The Set

Stage left wall 1. telephone alcove downstage; 2. kitchen door upstage

Back wall 1. outside door stage left; 2. window center, planter stage right of window

Stage right wall downstage fireplace with hearth rug and rocking chair in front of it; fire implements and coal scuttle at downstage end

Stage right TV and easy chair on swivel

Stage left dining table with kerosene lamp and three chairs around it

About the Author



Rich Yurman is a poet who has published three books and had his poems appear in numerous literary journals. He worked as resident playwright for the Red Balloon Theater Company in San Francisco in the 1980s and co-authored three of their productions.