

CHARITY, ROSE
A Ten-Minute Play

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CHARACTERS

Red Cloud	Navaho, retired, 73
Rose	Bar owner, widow, 58
Mike	Ex-marine, traveling, 34

SETTING

A dive bar on the outskirts of Tucson.
The present.

A dive bar on the outskirts of Tucson. Early afternoon. Rose cuts limes behind the bar, a towel over her shoulder. Mike drinks beer at a table, plotting a course on a map. Red Cloud, either drunk or hung over, enters and goes to the bar. Mike is aware of him, but keeps to his task.

RED CLOUD

Rose. (She doesn't answer, doesn't even look at him.) Rose.

ROSE

That's my name, Rain Cloud. Don't wear it out.

RED CLOUD

I'll have a bourbon.

ROSE

Oh, a bourbon. The good stuff?

RED CLOUD

Any stuff. Any stuff will be fine. No ice. Neat.

ROSE

Any bourbon neat.

RED CLOUD

That would be fine.

ROSE

And how you gonna pay for that neat bourbon?

Red Cloud pats and searches his pockets.
Comes up empty.

RED CLOUD

I'm good for it.

ROSE

Rain Cloud, the last time you were good for a drink, horses had toes.

Red Cloud laughs. She doesn't.

RED CLOUD

I need a drink, Rose. Please. I'm asking you.

ROSE

I know you're asking me. And I'm answering: Show me the money.

RED CLOUD

You don't understand. After today, I won't bug you no more. This is it, Rose. Today. I've decided.

ROSE

What makes today so special?

RED CLOUD

I can't go on like this. Too many ghosts. Too much pain. I'm in so much pain, I can't remember what it was that caused the pain. I'm in pain from my heart out, Rose. And that's it, I'm through.

Mike is interested now.

ROSE

You don't say. How ya gonna do it?

RED CLOUD

I'm going to start with a drink.

ROSE

No you ain't.

MIKE

I'll buy him one.

Red Cloud notices Mike for the first time.

ROSE

I don't want to tell you your business, mister, but --

MIKE

Don't worry about me. Give him a bourbon.

She pours.

RED CLOUD

Thanks, mister.

Red Cloud downs the shot, and holds the glass up to Mike, who nods. Rose pours another and busies herself behind the bar. Red Cloud takes the shot to Mike's table.

MIKE
You serious?

RED CLOUD
I am.

MIKE
Why?

ROSE
Didn't you hear him? He don't know why.

RED CLOUD
It's complicated. My wife left me.

ROSE
Twenty years ago. Or was it thirty?

MIKE
(To Red Cloud.) Have a seat. (To Rose.) Another beer? (Red Cloud sits.) Your wife left.

RED CLOUD
After my son died.

MIKE
Of?

RED CLOUD
Car accident. Twenty. He'd got his life together. Had a wife and kid. Delivered uniforms. Had an early route. Ice on the road. Black ice.

MIKE
I'm sorry for your loss.

RED CLOUD
Where are you from?

MIKE
It's complicated. (Red Cloud laughs.) Most recently, Afghanistan.

RED CLOUD
Oh. (He raises his glass.) You have the thanks of a grateful nation. (He downs the bourbon.)

MIKE

Thank you. I'm from Tennessee originally. Just traveling around now. You heard of the lost generation?

RED CLOUD

(Snorts.) You're lookin' at him.

MIKE

I'm thinking of going south now. Mexico, South America. I was never much of a traveler, but once you've been someplace like Afghanistan, or just being in the military, you know, the rest of it seems tame. (Rose brings a beer to the table.) Thank you. And another for ...

RED CLOUD

Pete Red Cloud. Everybody calls me Red Cloud.

ROSE

Not me. I call him Rain Cloud. Ain't that right?

MIKE

Good to meet you, Red Cloud. I'm Mike.

They shake hands.

ROSE

Okay, Mike? There's something you should know about our friend here. He don't need any more drinks.

MIKE

Given the circumstances.

ROSE

The circumstances --

MIKE

Please, Rose?

ROSE

Okay. Your funeral. (She goes.)

RED CLOUD

(Pause.) I was molested as a child.

MIKE

Wow.

RED CLOUD

And my father beat me. Regularly. He'd line us up, all four kids, in the "family room," take off his belt, and wham, wham, wham. All of us. Sitting ducks. One time I was last in line, and I started crying before he got to me. And he turned, his face all sweaty and red, and said, "Don't worry, you'll get yours."

MIKE

Bastard.

RED CLOUD

He loved us. He was a loving man, too.

Rose returns and thuds the bottle on the table.

ROSE

Let me ask you something, Rain Cloud. You think you're the only one's had a tough life? Everybody has. (To fill Mike in.) I had two husbands die on me. One from a brain tumor, one from a heart attack. Am I about to slit my throat? No.

RED CLOUD

How come you never talk about Ralph or Bobby, Rose?

ROSE

'Cause I'm no crybaby!

She storms away.

RED CLOUD

She's a good woman. Big heart. Maybe it will break if she remembers too much.

MIKE

Do you have a place to live?

RED CLOUD

Yeah, I got a home. And social security. I'm a veteran too, you know. I've still got shrapnel in my spine. Hurts like a son of a bitch. I had two wives before the last one who left me. The first wife slept with her boss, then my boss, then some guy in Sweden, and then my brother. That last one hurt.

MIKE

The second wife?

RED CLOUD

Caught me fooling around with my third wife. I have a daughter too.

MIKE

Isn't she worth living for?

RED CLOUD

Can't stand me. Lives right up there in Phoenix. Big house. Three kids. She got a restraining order on me. She don't like me using her pool. (Pause.) You married?

MIKE

I'm gay.

RED CLOUD

I'm sorry.

MIKE

No, it's okay.

RED CLOUD

I didn't ask, but you told. (Pause.) You ever feel like killing yourself?

MIKE

Not because of that.

RED CLOUD

No, I know.

MIKE

(Thinks.) You know what they say about being over there. Any theater ... of war, I mean. If you're there long enough, and see what you see, and sit there and wait. It gets to you. It gets to you that you might have to kill someone, maybe someone who wasn't a threat but acted in a threatening manner. Or you think about who of your friends might be killed. Or you yourself. It's the thinking about it that's the worst part.

RED CLOUD

What I'm saying.

MIKE

But I don't see myself doing something like that. I mean, you never know. Things could change. Right now? I'm traveling.

RED CLOUD

Good luck.

MIKE

Thank you.

RED CLOUD

Me? I'm killing myself. Today.

MIKE

You won't reconsider?

RED CLOUD

This feeling I have. This pain. Right here. (Points to his chest.) It's too big. It's like a heart attack, but the damn thing won't kill me off. Life is too hard. Not for everyone. But for me it is.

Rose has heard enough. She reaches under the bar and brings a large Bowie knife to the table. She slams it down in front of Red Cloud.

MIKE

(Startled.) What the hell?

ROSE

I'm tired of it, Rain Cloud. I'm tired of hearing about your pain. You're a drunk, a god damned whining drunk. God don't like whiners.

RED CLOUD

I don't believe in god.

ROSE

Then what's stopping you? Huh? You only got this one life, and it sucks, right? (Pushing the knife closer.) So go ahead.

RED CLOUD

You don't expect me to stab myself. I'd get half way in and be in too much pain to finish.

ROSE

That's the way them Japanese fellas do it.

MIKE

Please take this away.

Rose picks up the knife. Goes back to the bar.

ROSE

Okay. Too chicken to use a knife? How about this? I keep this here for emergencies. (She brings a revolver to the table and slams it down.) It's loaded and ready to go, old man. Quick and painless.

MIKE

Rose, we should be trying to encourage this man, not --

ROSE

I am encouraging him! Come on, Rain Cloud. Put yourself out of your misery.

RED CLOUD

I'm not using a gun, either. (To Mike.) My mother used a gun. What a mess. She put a sheet over her head, like that would keep things tidy. I found her. In the pantry. My father wanted to keep the cans of baked beans and pumpkin filling even though they were splattered with her blood. (To Rose.) No, I won't use a gun.

ROSE

(Almost pouncing on Red Cloud.) Then how ya gonna do it, Rain Cloud?! How! Tell me!

RED CLOUD

(Calmly.) I'm going to hang myself. There's a bare beam in my garage. I've already put the step stool underneath it. I just came here for a drink first. And then I'm going to find some rope.

Rose goes behind the bar and exits into the back room.

MIKE

Do I need to call the police?

RED CLOUD

Police won't come. Not in time.

Rose returns with a length of rope. She slams it on the table. Red Cloud stares at it a while. He reaches out and pushes it back toward her.

I don't need your charity, Rose. I'll find my own rope.

ROSE

You'll take my booze for free, but you won't take my rope?

RED CLOUD

(Thinks.) Good point. Okay, I'll take it. Thank you. (He takes the rope.) One last drink. (He pours it and drinks.) Thanks, Mike. I like you. Not in that way, of course.

MIKE

I know.

Red Cloud stands, steadies himself on the table. Mike stands.

RED CLOUD

Nice meeting you. (They shake hands.) Drink a margarita for me.

MIKE

I will.

RED CLOUD

Thanks for the rope, Rose.

ROSE

Yeah.

He totters toward the door without looking back. Just as he's about to exit, Rose says ...

See you tomorrow, Rain Cloud.

Red Cloud waves the hand holding the rope, still not looking back. He is gone. Rose and Mike stand in silence.

MIKE

Tomorrow?

ROSE

You owe me for two beers and the bourbon. (He glares at her.) Twenty bucks.

MIKE

That's about the coldest thing I've ever heard anyone say.

ROSE

What, twenty bucks?

She laughs, pours bourbon into Red Cloud's glass and clinks it against Mike's beer glass. She drinks and wipes her mouth.

ROSE (cont'd)

Let me tell you something. Everything he said is true. He's had a horrible life. I've known him since I was a kid. A horrible life. And every day, since I owned this place, he comes in here and says, "Rose, today is the day. I've had enough. The pain I feel is the suffocating black stuff of the cosmos, Rose, and I'm not going to take it anymore."

MIKE

What?

ROSE

"Today is the day I kill myself, Rose." (Laughs heartlessly.)

MIKE

Every day?

ROSE

I tried to warn you. He ain't gonna kill himself.

Disgusted, Mike drops some bills on the table. He folds his maps, walks to the door. She starts to clear.

MIKE

(Turning) What if he did it, Rose? People do all the time.

ROSE

Then he should! Either you put up with it and shut up -- like me -- or you put an end to it. But don't just flap your gums about it. Misery may love company, but the company (pointing at herself) don't love misery all that much.

MIKE

So that's your advice? Hold it all in and keep everyone out?

ROSE

Or you can run away. Go to Mexico. That's an option.

MIKE

(Brought up short.) I'm ... not --

ROSE

Adios, Mike.

They stare at each other. He exits. She stops clearing, sits and pours another drink. Fade.

End of Play