

And Clouds Made of Bones

A play in one act

By

William Orem

AND CLOUDS MADE OF BONES was originally produced by Firehouse Theatre, at Boston Theater Marathon XII, with Jeney Richards and Dan Krstyen.

CHARACTERS

ADAM: Thirty-one. Clean, successful seeming, with that “young lawyer” look. A cynical stance toward events and a tendency to drive himself too hard are, so far, the only visible manifestation of the high price he has paid to endure his life. Republican as a defensive gesture; he does not like other people, and in the poor he sees a frightening image of what he fears he might actually be. He is one of the many Washingtonians whose financial and social status mask a profound personal struggle.

ELSIE: Thirties. Large-breasted; sexual, but with dignity—a physical, female presence; somewhat maternal; and smart—she has the kind of compassion that is born of natural intelligence. If Adam is to be saved, it will only be through her.

TIME & PLACE

ADAM and **ELSIE**’s Georgetown condo. Friday evening, winter. Expensive décor: couch, chair, front door, closet. A kitchen space is visible. At center one of those Nakashima coffee tables, if possible, made from a polished tree trunk. Otherwise, a small potted tree off to the side. Next to the couch, a box of books.

The feel is urban professional, the sort of sudden, uncreated affluence that is faintly embarrassing in the young, even to its recipients.

At Rise:

ADAM and ELSIE enter by the front door, throwing down car keys, scarves and the like in the manner of people returning home after a celebratory dinner. As ELSIE speaks she goes into the kitchen and fixes them both drinks. ADAM takes off his coat and hangs it.

ADAM:

Could you believe that guy? Trying to cut in front of me like that? The hell did he think he was?

ELSIE:

I saw the bill when I was walking to the ladies' room. Do you realize Lewis just spent as much on your "welcome" dinner as some people spend on rent?

ADAM

(Pleased with himself):

Places like that you aren't supposed to see the bill. That's the whole idea. They close off the room, special wait-staff, special dishes. The food just magically appears.

ELSIE:

The firm must be offensively rich.

ADAM:

What's offensive about being rich? Rich is what this city runs on.

America is so schizophrenic about money. Everybody is trying to get more of it, but God help you if you actually succeed. Suddenly you're a criminal.

ELSIE:

(Coming out with drinks.)

To Lewis and Dracoff's newest partner.

ADAM:

General partner. I'm going to be office lackey for a while.

ELSIE:

At six figures, you can lackey. (They drink.) Hey.

ADAM:

Hey.

ELSIE:

I'm really proud.

ADAM:

Lawyers and lobbyists—God knows DC needs more of ‘em.

(Drinks.)

Do you think he liked me?

ELSIE:

Lewis? He seemed like a pleasant older man. Very paternal.

ADAM:

He liked your cleavage, that was obvious. Still, maybe I can use that.

(They sit. ADAM removes HIS shoes, pushes aside the box of books to stretch out on the couch with HIS head in ELSIE’s lap.)

ELSIE

(About the box):

What’s this?

ADAM:

What? Stuff from my folks’ house. I was going to pitch it.

(ELSIE takes a large family Bible from the box.)

ELSIE:

Hey, it’s one of those old Bibles.

ADAM:

Yeah, it’s from my family.

(Returning to HIS thoughts.) Could you believe that guy? Thought he could just cut in front of me. Black guy, too.

ELSIE:

It’s enormous. Did your family actually read out of this?

ADAM:

Oh, sure. My father used to make us each recite a passage before dinner. He was no bleeding heart, either. If you messed up a line, your plate would just get cold until you had it right.

ELSIE:

(Reading):

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day . . .

ADAM

(Relaxing again):

Mmm . . . I always loved this part.

ELSIE:

Because your name was Adam?

ADAM:

Yeah, because I was Adam. (Laughs.) It seemed special, like it was my story.

ELSIE:

You must have been so cute. Little Adam.

ADAM:

I always imagined that some day I would meet Eve. You know, my Eve.

ELSIE:

Too bad you met “Elsie” instead.

ADAM:

Adam and Elsie. It’s not quite right, is it? But I suppose you could have been . . . what? Harriet.

ELSIE
(amused):

Adam and Margueritte.

ADAM:

Adam and Susie Wong. Adam and Tyrone.

ELSIE
(reads):

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day . . .

ADAM:

. . . and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

ELSIE
(Impressed.):

You *do* know this.

ADAM:

God was walking in the garden. I always loved that.

Was there ever a time when God walked around in the garden, and you could walk next to him . . . or even point to him, and say, there he is, there goes God? Or you could hear him? Like, that’s the sound of God walking by, those are his feet?

How different everything would be, you know, if God were only . . . walking in the garden.

(Beat. ADAM has grown sad. Then HIS anger returns. HE stands.)

Could you believe that guy? Fucker. I should have driven his ass off the road.

ELSIE:

Adam . . . I found the razors.

(Pause. ADAM is stopped.)

ADAM:

Razors?

ELSIE:

In the bathroom . . . there were razors pushed behind the sink, in a little space . . . between the sink and the wall.

ADAM:

I don't know how . . . Jesus . . . they must have been there already.

ELSIE

(Not knowing how to say this):

It's okay. I wanted to say . . . just that I saw them there.

(Pause.)

ADAM:

I didn't . . .

ELSIE:

It's okay. I don't want to make a big deal . . . this is an important night for you. We don't have to talk about this.

(Pause. ADAM goes to the kitchen and pours HIMSELF another drink, a gesture ELSIE, unseen, responds to as if SHE wants to stop HIM but doesn't dare.)

ADAM:

I made it, okay. I made it to fucking Lewis and Dracoff, they finally gave me the green light, you think it's easy . . .

ELSIE:

I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm really excited, for us both. (Taking HIS glass.)
Come on.

ADAM
(Pulling back HIS glass):

What?

ELSIE:
Please don't drink any more.

ADAM:
Didn't we just walk in the door twenty seconds ago and you gave this to me? Is there a problem here?

ELSIE:
It's okay, honey, it's okay. I just . . .

ADAM:
I don't know why you'd even say something like . . .

ELSIE:
It's okay. I know you've been under pressure for a while, with your father, and then the interviews. It's just . . . if you're going to start doing that again, I need to know.

ADAM:
General partner, real estate law, in this goddamned city it's the only way anybody can . . . they tell you when you're a kid you can grow up to be anything you want, but we all know that's a lie, it's DC and you can be a lawyer or you can be homeless, those are your choices, okay?

ELSIE:
It's okay . . .

ADAM:
No, it's not okay, it's not okay, because I do the work, *I* do all the goddamned work to make this thing fly, *I* get the job, okay, I put up with George Lewis basically raping my wife with his eyes and some dumb jackass driving me off the road and then as soon as we get home you come at me with this, with this crazy, of all people, I guess . . .

(Beat.)

I guess . . .

(Significant beat. All of this attempt at distraction breaks down.)

It was how I always did it when I was a boy. I hid the razors behind the sink.

(Beat.)

ADAM (Cont'd)

It was the same . . . it was the same with the cuts. Hiding them.

(Pause.)

Inside my legs. Between my toes. Places he wouldn't look. You'd be surprised how easy it is to hide.

Even when you get older.

Hey, guys are supposed to be all beat up anyway, right? Just say you were playing some touch football, got a cut, nobody asks. It's funny, right?

That always works.

(Pause. HE drains HIS glass. ELSIE watches in pain.)

ELSIE:

Adam . . .

ADAM:

I'm not using them, Elsie. I guess it was just habit, just some old . . . just habit or something. Or maybe I got scared. The funeral, and then right away it's interviews, Christ, four separate interviews with Mr. Lewis himself, this . . . it's pressure, a lot of pressure. So I put some razors back there, to feel safe. So fine, I did that. So fine. But I'm not doing anything else.

ELSIE:

Adam, there was blood underneath the toilet seat.

ADAM:

What? No there wasn't.

ELSIE:

Just a little bit, but I know what blood looks like, okay?

(Pause.)

ADAM:

Elsie . . .

ELSIE

(Stronger now):

Look, you don't know what it's like being a woman. Every time I have my period I have to check after I sit down to make sure the damned seat is clean. You get used to looking underneath for that little dribble, and guys don't do that and . . . there was some blood

there, like someone had been sitting on the toilet and maybe, I don't know, maybe cutting
...

ADAM:

Elsie . . . hey, honey . . .

ELSIE:

I just need to know, okay, baby? Are we going back to that? I just need to know. Please tell me.

ADAM:

I told you, everything is . . . look I cut my finger, all right? I scraped it on the cabinet edge in the kitchen, okay I admit I lied about it, but it was an accident, and I didn't want you to think . . .

ELSIE:

How bad is it, honey?

ADAM:

There isn't any . . .

ELSIE:

Just tell me that. Just tell me how bad it is . . . inside you.

(Beat.)

The truth, honey. Just the truth.

(Significant beat.)

ADAM:

The truth.

(Pause.)

The truth.

(Significant pause. There is no more deception possible for HIM.)

The truth, Elsie, is that if I could cut away every piece of skin, and every muscle, and every tendon everywhere on my body, so nothing was left but the bones, I would do that.

The truth is that if I could cut the flesh off the whole world . . . everyone and everything in the entire world . . . I would do that, too.

A world made of bones.

I can see it sometimes, you know. In my head.

A world made of bones.

Bone trees, with long thigh bones dangling from their branches . . . clouds made of bones, and houses made of bones . . . with chimneys built out of arm bones, and bone smoke coming out the top, little knuckles and finger bones, like a child's drawing . . . and all the fields and flowers turned into bone fields . . . long, thin, finger bones coming up from the earth, and a wind that smells like bones.

If you saw it from space it wouldn't even be blue. It would be a gray, hard shell. Like a dried turtle shell, with nothing living inside it any more.

Nothing at all.

ELSIE

(Starting to come forward):

Oh Adam . . .

(ADAM flinches away, raising a hand, subtly but noticeably, in the manner of one who has been beaten.)

ADAM:

Don't . . .

(Significant beat. ADAM lowers HIS hand.)

Look at me, Elsie.

I'm a limited partner at Lewis and Dracoff. I live in a top-end condominium in Georgetown with my beautiful wife, on a leafy side-street right next to senators and diplomats, in one of the most expensive and sought-after places in the world. They're probably already drawing up plans to have me make full partner by forty.

This is me, Elsie. I'm thirty-one years old. I'm a real estate lawyer. I make more money than probably any three people in my graduating class.

And I keep waiting, and waiting, and waiting to die.

(Pause. ADAM drops HIS glass. Pause. ADAM bends slowly to the floor, perhaps to pick it up. Pause. Instead HE gets into fetal position, facing the house.

Pause.

ELSIE comes forward and curls around HIM on the floor.)

ELSIE:

"But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. And while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.'"

(Pause. SHE envelops him physically.)

Eve was flesh. Eve was blood kept safe, inside. Her body covered up his rib and

gave it warmth. She covered up the world for him, and made it soft. With living flesh around his skeleton he didn't have to be alone.

Listen, darling, listen. Listen.

Do you hear them? Do you hear?

(They listen. Beat.)

Footsteps, darling. In the garden. In the cool of day.

—BLACKOUT—