

AUDITION

A play in 10 minutes

Characters: RAY-RAY, a prisoner on death row. He's a young man dressed in a prison uniform.

FATHER MIKE, a prison chaplain. He's an older man wearing a clerical collar.

Setting: Inside a death row prison cell, which can be represented simply by a cot and a chair.

At Rise: RAY-RAY is seated on the cot. FATHER MIKE is seated next to him in the chair holding a Bible. Their heads are both bowed in prayer.

FATHER MIKE

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Amen.

RAY-RAY

(after a pause, his head still bowed)
What time is it, Father?

FATHER MIKE

(checking his watch, equally quiet)
5:50.

RAY-RAY

Ten minutes left.

FATHER MIKE

Yes. Ten minutes.

(pause, then in a more normal tone)
So, any last items you'd like to check off from your bucket list?

RAY-RAY

(yanking his head up and looking at FATHER MIKE in disbelief)

Are you crazy? I have 10 minutes left to live and you're talking about a bucket list.

(looking and gesturing at his surroundings)

What do you expect me to do here, in a prison cell, in 10 minutes?

FATHER MIKE

Actually about nine and a half minutes now. But take some advice from me, son. I've ministered to many people at the end of their lives. And here's what I've always seen. People don't look back at their lives and regret what they've done. They regret what they *didn't* do.

RAY-RAY

(dryly)

Yeah, like I regret that I killed that dude.

FATHER MIKE

Yes, true, there is that, but--

RAY-RAY

Actually, I really regret that I didn't wipe my DNA off that gun. So maybe you're right, Father. I actually do regret what I *didn't* do. Stupid. How could I have been so stupid? I could have just thrown that gun in the--

FATHER MIKE

Yes, right, OK. But my point is -- my point is -- why waste the time you have left? Whether it's nine years or nine minutes now. Isn't it better to do something, anything, than to just sit here passively waiting for the end? Isn't there something you want to do for the last time, or something you've never done but always wanted to?

RAY-RAY

(at a loss, again looking around the cell)

Something I've always wanted to do? Here?

FATHER MIKE

Some lifelong ambition?

RAY-RAY

(after a pause)

It's stupid. This is stupid.

FATHER MIKE

No. Tell me.

RAY-RAY

(angrily)

I've always wanted to try out for "American Idol." Happy now? I guess should check that off my bucket list in the next eight minutes, huh, Father Mike?

FATHER MIKE

Really? You can sing? Tell me about it.

RAY-RAY

(a pause, then defensively)

Yeah. I was...I was good. Or at least I thought I was. What did I know? But I actually nearly did try out once. There was an announcement in the news. Open auditions for "American Idol" at an auditorium in Kansas City. I drove all day to get there and I camped overnight in the line to make sure I got a chance. My big break, right? Even though we were just singing for some assistant to the assistant producer. But when they called my name, I chickened out. I turned and ran away. What an ass. I'm still an idiot to even think about it.

FATHER MIKE

What do you mean?

RAY-RAY

I mean it was a one in a million shot. But I still beat myself up over not trying. I always wondered how my life would have been different if I managed to go through with it. Not that I would've gotten on the show. But that was my dream, you know? And I didn't even have the guts to try. I would watch the show. But every time I saw it, I remembered being a coward.

(beat)

Nothing I can do about it now, though. In the next seven minutes, right?

FATHER MIKE

Yes, there is.

RAY-RAY

What do you mean?

FATHER MIKE

Why not try now?

RAY-RAY

Try now?

FATHER MIKE

Sing now. Sing here. Make this your chance.

RAY-RAY

What do you mean? You've got to be kidding.

FATHER MIKE

I'm not. Ray-Ray, you're going to die in a few minutes. Show yourself you're not afraid to sing. You can still do it. Just close your eyes. Imagine you're there, giving an audition.

RAY-RAY

(incredulous)

What? No.

FATHER MIKE

Yes. What's stage fright compared to this? If you can sing now, you can sing anywhere, anyplace. Prove to yourself you can audition. Close your eyes and imagine you're there.

RAY-RAY

It's stupid.

FATHER MIKE

It's not. It's your last chance to sing. Your last chance to do anything. Why not do what you've always wanted to do? What do you have to lose? You can do this. Don't be scared. Close your eyes.

(After a pause, RAY-RAY closes his eyes.)

FATHER MIKE

(cont.)

OK. Good. Now. You're about to go in to audition before the judges. You have a piece of paper with a number pinned on your shirt. You've been waiting all day. Watching one person after another go ahead of you. Finally, it's your turn. They call your name. Your hands get sweaty and your heart starts to pound. You're led into the room. It's full of cameras and everyone's looking at you. It's hot. And there they are, the judges sitting at a table, holding their pens, with those big red, plastic Coca-Cola cups in front of them. Simon, Paula and, and...who was the third one?

RAY-RAY

I like Steven Tyler.

FATHER MIKE

OK. Simon, Paula and Steven Tyler. You're standing there all alone, and the cameras are going, and they start asking you questions.

(in a higher pitched voice as Paula)

Come in. Stand right there. Try to relax. Take a deep breath. What's your name?

RAY-RAY

(standing up)

I'm Ray-Ray.

FATHER MIKE

(in Simon's English accent)

OK, Ray-Ray. Tell us a bit about yourself. What's with the outfit?

RAY-RAY

I...I'm in prison. I killed someone.

FATHER MIKE

(in Simon's English accent)

All right. That'll attract the votes. So what else would you like to tell us about why you're here?

RAY-RAY

I guess...I guess I've been waiting my whole life for this moment.

FATHER MIKE

(imitating Steven Tyler's gravelly voice)

OK, man. Then go for it. Show us what you got.

(RAY-RAY takes a deep breath. He pauses. Then he begins to slowly sing "The Streets of Laredo." It's little more than a nervous, breathless, hesitant whisper at first.)

RAY-RAY

"As I walked out in the streets of Laredo, as I walked out in Laredo one day, I spied a poor cowboy, all wrapped in white linen, all wrapped in white linen and cold as the clay..."

FATHER MIKE

(in his Paula Abdul voice)

It's OK, Ray-Ray. Relax. Just breathe and let it out of your body.

RAY-RAY

(his voice gradually growing)

"... 'I see by your outfit, that you are a cowboy.' These words he did say as I slowly passed by, 'Come sit down beside me and hear my sad story, for I'm shot in the chest, and today I must die'..."

(RAY-RAY sings slowly, his eyes still closed, his voice is high and clear but full of emotion and sadness.)

RAY-RAY

(cont.)

"... 'Twas once in the saddle I used to go dashing, 'twas once in the saddle I used to go gay, first down to Rosie's, and then to the card-house, got shot in the chest, and I'm dying today'..."

FATHER MIKE

(in his own voice)

That's it, Ray-Ray. You're doing it.

RAY-RAY

"... 'Oh, beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly, and play the dead march as you carry me along. To the green valley, there lay the sod o'er me, for I'm a young cowboy and I know I've done wrong...'..."

FATHER MIKE

(whispering in his own voice while RAY-RAY is singing)

Can you see them, Ray-Ray? See what they're doing. They're listening to you. Steven Tyler has got that head bob thing going. Paula looks like she's about to cry. Even Simon is digging it.

RAY-RAY

"... 'Get six jolly cowboys to carry my coffin, get six pretty maidens to bear up my pall. Put bunches of roses all over my coffin, roses to deaden the clods as they fall'..."

(RAY-RAY'S voice gets hoarse with emotion as he reaches the final verse.)

RAY-RAY

(cont.)

"...We beat the drum slowly and played the fife lowly and bitterly wept as we bore him along. Down in the green valley, we laid the sod o'er him. He was a young cowboy and he had done wrong."

(RAY-RAY stops and drops his head.)

FATHER MIKE

(a pause, then as Paula Abdul)

Oh, Ray-Ray, that was just great. I knew you could do it. I vote yes. Simon?

(as Simon Cowell)

Well, that was a surprise. I thought you were terrible at first. But you saved it in the end.

(reluctantly)

I say yes too.

(as Steven Tyler)

Me too. You did it, man. Next stop Hollywood. It's your big chance. Congratulations. You're moving up and on.

(as himself)

Then they give you that piece of paper. It's your golden ticket. Your ticket to the next step. Someone opens the door into the other room. Everyone is waiting for you there, Ray-Ray. Your friends, your family. All your relatives. Your grandparents. Everyone who has ever loved you is there. They'll be so happy to see you, happy to see you've got that golden ticket, that you're going to be a star. It's time to go. They're calling your name again. Are you ready?

RAY-RAY

(RAY-RAY opens his eyes. He and FATHER MIKE look at each other for a moment.)

Yes. Yes, I'm ready to go. Let's do it.

(They walk off stage together. Play ends.)