

ACT I

Scene 1

*Stage is dark. All of a sudden the sound of a piano playing fills the atmosphere. The song is "Gaspard de la nuit" by Maurice Ravel. As the song continues on it intensifies. Then the lights come up and we see a young man, LUKE, focused on his piano playing. His mother KATRINA, who turned on the lights, is looking in at her son from SR. The room where they both are is covered in a sea of dirty clothes, books, used cartons and dirty dishes. Luke plays a few more bars, but soon begins shaking and messes up. He slams his hands down on the piano in frustration.*

LUKE

You know I can only do this in the dark!

KATRINA

It sounded a little better this time. Maybe you-

LUKE

Maybe I should practice some more...with the lights off.

KATRINA

Or on. Eventually...

*Luke begins playing Gaspard again. As opposed to the first time with the lights off, it now sounds very choppy, almost unrecognizable. He stops and starts in several occasions. He then closes the piano with a loud thud. He panics. He grabs a white t-shirt from the floor beside him and begins wiping down the piano, almost caressing it.*

LUKE

Crap is that a dent?

KATRINA

I'm sure it'll be fine.

LUKE

I hope so.

KATRINA

That thing has been through hell and back. I'm sure it can survive a little bruising. You hungry?

(CONTINUED)

LUKE

What's for dinner?

KATRINA

Leftovers.

LUKE

Again? Shouldn't it be called left-leftovers?

KATRINA

Unemployment can only go so far.

LUKE

But I thought dad's check was supposed to come in today.

KATRINA

It did, but it's nothing to jump for joy over.

LUKE

I'm sure it's enough to hold us over. At least until you find another job.

KATRINA

Luke, I can't even think about another job right now. A whole year I waited for this check just fantasizing about what I can do with it. It turns out that fantasy was a nightmare in disguise.

*Luke sits down at the table. Katrina walks offstage and comes back on with some mac and cheese in an old pot, two paper plates and two forks.*

LUKE

It can't be that bad.

KATRINA

Thankfully I was able to budget myself and save. I guess I'm kinda good at that.

LUKE

(looking around)

Yeah, but sometimes being too good at something can be toxic.

KATRINA

How's the mac and cheese?

LUKE

The same as yesterday.

(CONTINUED)

KATRINA

Don't they say pasta tastes better the next day?

LUKE

Yeah, but I think that's referring to spaghetti and ziti. Not sure if mac and cheese would be counted as a real pasta.

KATRINA

Well I think it's delicious. (pause) So, how's school going?

LUKE

Fine I guess.

KATRINA

Care to elaborate? How was the meeting with your college adviser?

LUKE

I guess good.

KATRINA

Good? Did he give you any good options?

LUKE

Some.

KATRINA

You didn't go did you?

LUKE

I was...I had other stuff to do.

KATRINA

Like what? What in the world could be more important than your academic future.

LUKE

I just haven't had the time.

KATRINA

Yeah, that's because you're always playing that piano. Don't get me wrong sweetheart, I love when you play the piano for me. It just fills this house with...with a peace. But hobbies shouldn't be at the top of your to do list. You need to learn how to prioritize. College isn't just gonna fall in your lap or something.

LUKE

If it makes everything so peaceful, why do you hate it so much?

(CONTINUED)

KATRINA

I don't hate it. I just think there needs to be a balance.

LUKE

Do you think I play well?

KATRINA

What?

LUKE

Do you think I'm a good piano player?

KATRINA

I think you're a great piano player, but that's besides the point.

LUKE

My band teacher told me the other day that I have "it".

KATRINA

Is this the same band teacher that got suspended for throwing a music book at a student?

LUKE

(chuckling)

Oh that's right. Henry Klein deserved that. He was a jerk to Mr. Dyer. Never took music seriously.

KATRINA

Well in my opinion, Mr. Dyer took music a little too seriously. I'm surprised the school let him back in after all that.

LUKE

He's a great teacher, mom. Everybody is allowed to make some mistakes, right?

KATRINA

So, are you going to promise me that you will reschedule a meeting with your college adviser?

*Luke looks down at his mac and cheese.*

KATRINA (CONT'D)

I've actually been doing some research myself. There are some great schools that really offer real-world experience in a number of practical areas.

LUKE

You sound like a commercial or something.

(CONTINUED)

KATRINA

It's always good to branch out. Believe me. You don't want to be my age and needing government assistance to stay afloat. You want to have multiple skill sets. Stupid me, I just knew how to be a secretary. I never pushed myself to learn other things.

LUKE

But you were a great secretary.

KATRINA

Yeah, but greatness doesn't always guarantee success.

LUKE

You just got screwed by a bad economy.

KATRINA

You're right. And if I had other skills I would-

LUKE

Fine. I'll meet with the counselor tomorrow.

KATRINA

It's for the best.

LUKE

Yeah. And I guess it doesn't hurt to have back-ups.

KATRINA

Back-ups?

LUKE

Well yeah. Back-ups to piano.

KATRINA

Piano is a nice back-up.

LUKE

No mom. Piano isn't a back-up.

KATRINA

It's a nice hobby that you're good at.

LUKE

And I hope to be great at it someday.

KATRINA

Well with practice I'm sure you can. You're already doing much better with the lights on. I wasn't trying to be nice before. I was telling you the truth.

(CONTINUED)

LUKE

And I need to get better. Fast.

KATRINA

There's no rush. You can't rush perfection.

LUKE

I'm far from perfect.

KATRINA

Exactly. And it's going to take time to get there.

LUKE

How long did it take dad?

*Katrina drops her fork onto her plate.*

LUKE (CONT'D)

What?

KATRINA

This weekend just isn't going to be easy.

LUKE

I wasn't trying to-

KATRINA

I know sweetheart. It's just whenever I think about-

LUKE

He's was taken away from us way too soon.

KATRINA

Yes.

LUKE

Look. I don't want to get you mad or anything.

KATRINA

I'm not mad. I just want what's best for you.

LUKE

I know. Look the reason I asked about dad...I just...I wanna make him proud of me.

KATRINA

I'm sure he would be proud of you. You're in your senior year in high school. You're about to embark on a great journey into college and...

*Katrina lowers her head.*

(CONTINUED)

LUKE

Mom, it's okay.

*Katrina lifts her head and pulls Luke close to her. She gives him a kiss on the forehead.*

KATRINA

You are going to do great things. I just know it. He knew it.

LUKE

I hope so. I have a pretty high standard to meet.

KATRINA

This isn't a competition.

LUKE

I guess.

KATRINA

Your father would be proud of anything you did. As long as you were able to be a good husband and father one day. You know that, right?

LUKE

Anything?

KATRINA

Anything.

LUKE

Even if I failed at it?

KATRINA

What's with all this negative talk? You just need to apply yourself.

LUKE

Right.

*Katrina gets up from the table. She walks over to the piano and pulls out the piano bench.*

LUKE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

KATRINA

Come.

*Luke walks over to the piano and sits down.*

LUKE

Now what?

KATRINA

Start playing.

LUKE

What? Why?

KATRINA

This piano has gotten us through a lot. Let this remind you that everything's going to be okay.

*Luke begins playing the song from earlier. It doesn't sound very good.*

LUKE

Can you-

KATRINA

No. Try closing your eyes.

LUKE

What?

KATRINA

Baby steps.

*Luke closes his eyes. He starts playing again. Choppy at first, then it starts sounding better. Meanwhile, Katrina stacks all the dirty dishes and moves them to one side of the dining room table. A smile appears on her face as she listens to Luke play. She picks up all the dirty dishes and walks into the kitchen O.S. Luke hears, opens his eyes and is so focused on that, that he stops playing. Katrina comes back in.*

KATRINA (CONT'D)

Everything okay? You sounded great.

LUKE

No. Everything's fine.

*Luke closes his eyes again and begins playing. Katrina begins wiping down the table with a cloth. She stops for a moment and notices what she is doing.*

LUKE (CONT'D)

You know mom, I'm really glad you asked me to play.

(CONTINUED)

KATRINA

Me too.

LUKE

(stops playing and opens eyes)

I've actually been wanting to tell you something for a few weeks now. I just didn't know how to or what you would say.

KATRINA

Okay.

LUKE

Mom, I got an audition for Juilliard.

*Silence.*

KATRINA

You...what?

LUKE

I got an audition.

KATRINA

Wait, what? That makes no sense. When...when did this happen?

LUKE

About a month ago.

KATRINA

A month ago? When were you planning on telling me this?

LUKE

I don't know mom. I just wanted to make sure it was the right time and today felt like-

KATRINA

When's the audition?

LUKE

Next week.

KATRINA

I can't believe you would keep something like that from me.

LUKE

Mom, why are you getting like this? I thought you would be happy for me. You already said that I'm a great piano player.

(CONTINUED)

KATRINA

I thought you were over this. I thought you were finally realizing that a hobby-

LUKE

It's not some phase.

KATRINA

But you agreed to see the counselor.

LUKE

I know I need options. I agreed to see him. But piano is one of them.

KATRINA

Sometimes I don't feel like the parent. Household decisions made without my input.

LUKE

Would there have been any thought involved?

KATRINA

Well as your mother, I don't know why that would be a problem.

LUKE

I paid for the application myself. You didn't have to shell out a dime. I know we're going through financial troubles.

KATRINA

You don't know the half of it.

LUKE

That's why I didn't ask you for money.

KATRINA

How are you getting there?

LUKE

I'm gonna take the bus. It's actually really cheap.

KATRINA

All the way up to New York?

LUKE

Yeah. It's only a few hours.

KATRINA

And where will you stay? Hotels aren't cheap.