NOTES AND LETTERS

PRODUCTION DRAFT:
Underscore Theatre Company 2020

Book, Music, and Lyrics
by
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As of 25 March, 2020
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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

JOE LOULA: (early 30s) Optimistic, someone who works hard but doesn’t always know what he wants. Bohemian (Czech) just arrived in Chicago from Czesky Krumlov. Bari-tenor.

CHARLIE WILLIAMS: (early-mid 30s) Owner of Williams’ Custom Pianos, charming with a deep love and knowledge of pianos. No business sense whatsoever. Baritone. Must play piano.

NORA DUCHEK: (late 20s/early 30s) Headstrong, sarcastic, career-driven woman with a deep sense of loyalty to her best friend Olivia, her boyfriend, Charlie, and his business (a piano shop), which she wants to help him run. Strong jazz chops Alto/Mezzo (G3-E5).

OLIVIA KOUPEK: (early 30s) Witty, smart, dedicated. Composer and piano teacher. Moved from Prague to the US when she was 14. Always works too much and lets work come between her and her relationships. Mezzo. Must play piano.

TIME: 1916-1918
PLACE: CHICAGO, ILLINIOS. Interior and exterior/street of Williams’ Custom Pianos, a small shop on Washington Street. Has as many pianos as it is possible for the production team to find; pianos are in all states of disrepair, with at least two being playable. (Four in a perfect world, but budget/space constraints are a thing).

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PERFORMANCE NOTES:
There are several moments where characters play piano
during the show, especially Olivia and Charlie.

SYNOPSIS:
Notes and Letters follows Joe’s journey from war-torn
Prague to Williams Piano Shop in Chicago 1917. He quickly
befriends the owner Charlie, his girlfriend Nora, and
composer Olivia. The foursome become inseparable—until WWI
hits the US. Businesses, relationships, and lives are put
to the test. Based on a true story and set to a jazz-
contemporary score, four young people struggle to make
choices amid complete chaos.
Scene 1
(Lights up on a Chicago street, mid-morning. JOE LOULA enters, confusedly attempting to read his map as CHARLIE, OLIVIA, and NORA whiz about the stage, knowing exactly where they are going)

1.01. (Prologue)

JOE
EV’RY MAN AROUND HERE, HE JUST

ALL
GOES AND HE GOES, AND HE GOES,

JOE
THEY’VE ALL GOT THEIR PLANS, AND SO THEY

ALL
GO AND THEY GO, AND THEY GO,

JOE
THEY ALL KNOW WHICH WAY THEY’RE HEADED
AND THEY KNOW WHICH WAY TO TURN
THAT IS SOMETHING I HAVE GOT TO LEARN

(During the previous, JOE is looking around and knocks into NORA who whizzes past with OLIVIA close behind)

NORA
Hey, watch where you’re going!

JOE
Sorry, I-

(NORA and OLIVIA don’t notice JOE and continue their conversation)

NORA
Olivia, did you grab our mail?

OLIVIA
Yep: Letter for you from University of Chicago Business School:

NORA
(grabbing the letter) Too small- another rejection, no doubt.
OLIVIA
Let’s see, letter to me! -from dad. Nope. (She throws the letter over her shoulder). And, a bill. (hands to NORA) For both of us.

NORA
They keep sending us those. You’ll pay me your half by Thursday?

OLIVIA
You know I will. Done working today?

NORA
Yep. Want to grab a bite and head to Charlie’s?

OLIVIA
Where else would we go? Have to grab a paper first –

(JOE continues singing while OLIVIA and NORA get a newspaper. CHARLIE also enters, also to grab a paper.)

JOE
NOSES IN THEIR PAPERS, THEY JUST

ALL
GO AND THEY GO, AND THEY GO,

JOE
THEY’VE ALL GOT A RHYTHM, AND THEY

ALL
GO AND THEY GO, AND THEY GO,

JOE
TO WRITE THEIR BRAND NEW STORIES
AND TO SING THEIR BRAND NEW SONGS,
THE MUSIC IS DIFF’RENT,
BUT I’D LIKE TO SING ALONG

(All open their papers to read:)

ALL
December 16, 1916.

CHARLIE
‘Peace Offer Met Coldly: End Far Off’

OLIVIA
‘Duke Ellington to begin residency at the Green Mill!’
NORA
'Small Shops Continue to Close as Wilson’s action upsets market'

JOE
'Williams Custom Pianos Seeks Experienced Carpenter for Immediate Hire'

(OLIVIA, NORA, and CHARLIE are moving quickly as JOE sings, much less sure of where he is going)

ALL:
GOES AND HE GOES AND HE GOES!

1.02 (Something Happening—Full Cast)

JOE
GOT OFF THE TRAIN AND I WAS DIZZY
TRYING TO TAKE IN THE VIEW FROM BOTH SIDES
GOT OFF THE TRAIN AND IT HIT ME,
THIS IS NO LONGER A DREAM IN THE SKIES,
HELLO, I AM JOE,
IT’S NICE TO MEET YOU CHICAGO,

(JOE tries to say the ‘hello’ to NORA, but she has already passed him)

OH, THERE’S SOMETHING HAPPENING,
IT COULD BE VERY, EXTRAORDINARY
LIKE I’VE NEVER SEEN
LOOKING AROUND AT ALL OF THE FACES
IN THIS NEW PLACE THAT I’VE NEVER BEEN
WILL I FLY OR WILL I FALL?
CAUSE RIGHT NOW I DON’T REALLY KNOW WHERE I´M GOING AT ALL

THIS PLACE IS SO MUCH BIGGER THAN ME
BUILDINGS RISE TALLER THAN I CAN SEE
MAIN STREET’S BIGGER THAN MY WHOLE TOWN
BUT I’M NOT SCARED
I FEEL FREE
NO MORE WAR, NO MORE WOE
NOT HERE, NOT IN CHICAGO

‘CAUSE THERE’S SOMETHING HAPPENING
IT COULD BE VERY EXTRAORDINARY,
LIKE WE’VE NEVER SEEN
IT’S A BRAND NEW DAY
THE SLATE’S WIPED CLEAN-

(OLIVIA and NORA start to head off. OLIVIA sees that JOE has dropped a letter; she picks it up and hands it to him)

OLIVIA
Hey, you! You dropped this.

JOE
Oh, thanks. –Actually, do you think you could help me find-

(OLIVIA has already walked back to NORA.)

Thanks.

(JOE opens the letter)

‘Darling Joe,
I hope you’ve been able to carry this letter with you to America. I already miss you terribly. Write me as soon as you can; though I don’t know what will happen to our mail under the new regime. Come back to Prague soon so we can finally be married. Be careful. All my love, your Margie.’

(JOE puts the letter away.)

I WILL GET YOU EVERYTHING YOU’VE WANTED
I’LL SAVE UP EVERY DAY FOR THE YEAR
WHEN THE WAR IS OVER, I’LL COME HOME
IT’S PLANNED OUT FOR YOU AND I,
MARGIE, MY DEAR,
HAVE NO FEAR,
I’LL MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN

(JOE continues to try and make sense of his map as CHARLIE finally spots NORA and OLIVIA just before they head offstage)

CHARLIE
Morning ladies!

HAVEN’T YOU SEEN THE HEADLINES,
THINGS AIN’T PRETTY
PEOPLE BEEN FIGHTING ALL OVER THE WORLD

OLIVIA/NORA
TENSIONS ARE RISING IN THE CITY
GUNS ARE ALL LOADED, FISTS ARE ALL CURLED,

CHARLIE

BUT I OPEN MY SHOP
THE SAME AS ALWAYS
WELCOME TO WILLIAMS’ PIANOS TODAY
WE’VE GOT EVERY SORT,
EVERY SHAPE, EVERY SIZE
COME MAKE SOME MUSIC,
COME FIND YOUR WAY,

JOE

WHAT WILL I FIND?

OLIVIA/NORA

LOVE OR DESTRUCTION?

JOE/CHARLIE

WHAT WILL I FIND?

NORA/OLIVIA

FAITH OR CORRUPTION?

NORA/CHARLIE/OLIVIA/JOE

WANDERING BLIND
ALL OF MANKIND
WHAT WILL WE FIND?

SO MANY QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS,
THAT’S THE WAY THAT IT GOES,

SO WE GO, AND WE GO, AND WE GO,
SEARCHING HIGH, SEARCHING LOW,
SO WE GO AND WE GO, AND WE GO,
AND WE GO, AND WE GO,

LET’S MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN,
SOMETHING VERY EXTRAORDINARY

JOE/CHARLIE

LIKE THEY’VE NEVER SEEN

OLIVIA/NORA/CHARLIE/JOE

WE’RE COMING OF AGE WHILE THE WHOLE WORLD IS CHANGING
REARRANGING, EVERYTHING GREEN
WILL I FLY OR STAY AROUND,
AND WILL I EVER FIND MY GROUND?
(OLIVIA and NORA exit immediately, while CHARLIE sticks around. JOE is turning around in circles holding his newspaper, and keeps looking back at the ad he has circled. He clearly is lost. As he attempts to make his way offstage, he runs straight into JOE, who has his nose in the paper, mail and newspapers go flying.)

CHARLIE
Hey there, watch where you’re going!

(JOE scrambling to pick up all of the papers)

JOE
Sorry! Uh- here- here’s your paper!

(JOE hands him a messy pile of mail/newspaper)

CHARLIE
No worries- though we might want to swap papers, seems you’ve marked this one up for yourself.

JOE
Oh- right.

(They swap papers)

CHARLIE
(reading) ‘Berlin says enemy losses reach 400,000,’?? There, that’s my paper. The Trib’s real cheerful these days, huh?

JOE
I, wouldn’t know. I’ve only been here a week.

CHARLIE
Ah, welcome to Chicago, then! The streets always smell like a meatpacking house, and the Tribune always has something nasty to say. You’ll love it here!

(JOE is distracted, looking back at his paper and the street signs)

Do you need help finding your way?

JOE
Um, no, I’m fine – thanks.

(Begins to head offstage)
CHARLIE
Where are you headed?

JOE
(Stopping) Williams’ Piano & Organ Shop?

CHARLIE walks back to JOE and turns him to face the opposite direction.)

CHARLIE
I just so happen to be headed there myself. What brings you to Williams’?

JOE
I, saw their want ad in the paper, for a carpenter, and I haven’t been able to find anything for a full week, so I was starting to get a little desperate, and- (realizes he’s been rambling). Oh. I mean, thanks for the help. Bye. (starts heading off again)

CHARLIE
Hold up a second! - Hi. (extends a hand) Name’s Charlie Williams.

JOE
As in-

CHARLIE
-The owner? That’d be me.

JOE
Oh, I’m sorry, I, uh-

CHARLIE
-Don’t worry about it, uh-

JOE
(finally shakes CHARLIE’S hand.) Joe. Joe Loula.

CHARLIE
So- You’re a carpenter?

JOE
(Nods) At my uncle’s shop back home. I’ve never built a piano before though. Just furniture.
CHARLIE
A piano *is* furniture – beautiful-sounding furniture. Each one has their own...personality, if you will. Come on, I’ll show you the store, where the back room is. It’s not much, but it has everything we need. We actually have a lot of orders right now, so I’ll have to give you the fast-track to the art of piano carpentry, but I’m sure you’ll have no problem –

JOE:
–Charlie? Are– am I hired?

CHARLIE
Well, yeah.

JOE
Just like that?

CHARLIE
Well, you’re the only person to answer my ad in two weeks, and you seem fairly on your rocker. It’s like I said, I’ve got orders to fill, so I’m a little desperate myself.

(They have made it to the door of the shop. There is a well worn wooden sign that reads ‘Williams and Son- Custom Built Pianos’)

1.01A- *(Something Happening Tag)*-JOE

CHARLIE
Well- you want the job or not?

(CHARLIE goes in, leaving the door ajar, JOE pauses)

JOE
I’LL MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN
SOMETHING VERY EXTRAORDINARY,
LIKE THEY’VE NEVER SEEN...

(JOE follows Charlie inside; lights up on the piano shop. There are three finished pianos: One is up against the back wall, one faces the audience in the center, and the last faces stage left, where the door to the shop and the cashier’s counter are located. The register is rusty. There is a bell on top of the door, which rings when Joe enters. Around the rest of the shop there are various benches and stools, as well as pianos in obvious need of
repair. Manuscript paper and pencils sit on the piano that faces stage left, and lamps are balanced on available surfaces. The place is cluttered but not messy. Charlie turns on the lights. Joe stands just inside the doorway, looking around in awe.)

JOE:
So, this is the shop.

CHARLIE:
That it is!

JOE:
Wow.

CHARLIE:
I told you it’s not much, but-

JOE:
-No, it’s- (he can’t find the English word). Wow.

(He finally walks further into the shop, peeking around as CHARLIE continues to open up the shop while they talk.)

CHARLIE:
You’re from out of town then- Where from?

JOE:
Pretty far away.

CHARLIE
Glenwood City?

JOE
A little further.

CHARLIE
Glenwood City, California?

JOE
Bohemia. Czesky Krumlov (pronounced chess-key kroom-luf), west of Prague.

CHARLIE:
So, a little further than California.

JOE:
A little. Have you always lived in Chicago?
CHARLIE:
Nah, I’m from the grand town of Phillips, Wisconsin. It’s tiny; we all say: ‘Phillips: Where everyone knows what you had for lunch before you’ve finished your breakfast’

JOE:
(Laughs) I know exactly what you mean.

CHARLIE:
So. How does a fella from Czesky Krumlov (he absolutely butchers the pronunciation) end up all the way in Chicago?

JOE:
Well. I guess the short version is (launches into what is clearly NOT the short version): our family farmland all got taken a few months ago, when they invaded Bohemia. We couldn’t make enough money off it after that, with all the taxes. I tried to work at my uncle’s furniture shop, but he wasn’t making much money either. My family saved up for a whole year to get enough money for my ticket here, so I can make enough money to send back to them, and to Margaret—

CHARLIE
-Margaret?

JOE
We’re, uh, supposed to be engaged. But that can’t happen until I pay her dad the dowry—

(JOE is cut off by the doorbell ringing as NORA and OLIVIA burst in the door. OLIVIA carries a sheaf of music paper, and NORA has the day’s Chicago Tribune. Both are surprised to see JOE)

NORA:
Good morning, Charlie!

CHARLIE:
Morning, ladies. This is Joe, my new carpenter; Joe this is—

OLIVIA:
-I’m Olivia, nice to meet you. This is Nora.

NORA:
Nora Duchek, hi.
JOE:
(to Olivia) Uh- hi. Is there, any paperwork I need to fill out that you have, or..?

NORA
Hah! You think we’re Charlie’s damn secretaries or something? Please, we have real jobs.

CHARLIE
Hey! Working for me would be a real job. I should make you do something for me for all the time you both spend here.

JOE
I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to assume- what do you- do then?

OLIVIA:
I’m a composer, and Nora’s a cocktail waitress at the Green Mill.

JOE:
Oh, neat.

CHARLIE:
They both practically live here, though.

NORA:
Hey! If you didn’t have us hanging around, this place would be empty some days.

CHARLIE:
Excuse me, but when did you leave last night?

NORA:
Around 3? Hey, it’s your fault!

OLIVIA:
How is it his fault?

NORA:
I was trying to help sort receipts in the back, but I kept getting distracted by-

- Nora -

OLIVIA:
-Save it. (To CHARLIE) And Charlie, it’s a good thing you found someone, because your ad in the Tribune has two mistakes— you accidentally wrote $13 instead of $31 a month. (She shows him on the ad)

CHARLIE:
(to JOE) You were going to take this job for $13 an month?

JOE:
Desperate, remember?

NORA:
(To CHARLIE) Let you boss me around? I don’t know if I’d do that for $50.

CHARLIE:
Well, maybe I’d think twice about hiring the likes of you; Unpredictable, loose cannon that you are—

OLIVIA:
-Oh, stop bickering. (To Joe) Welcome to the three of us. Don’t worry, you’ll catch on.

JOE:
Looking forward to it.

(NORA starts to notice JOE’s interest in OLIVIA, and begins to lead CHARLIE towards the back room)

NORA:
Say, Charlie, I’ve been meaning to ask you about one of the pianos in the back— I think the A5 is out of tune. Come check it out with me?

CHARLIE
It can’t be, I just tuned them all up last week!

NORA
Well, you need to tune this one again!

CHARLIE
I have perfect pitch— which piano was it?

NORA
The one allllll the way in the back. Come on!

(She starts dragging CHARLIE to the back room door)
Oh, Olivia- why don’t you and Joe get acquainted- er, get him acquainted with the shop.

(NORA and CHARLIE exit. Moment of awkward silence as Joe and Olivia realize they are alone)

JOE:
So, uh, you can play these?

OLIVIA:
Yep. It’s kind of my job. I teach lessons, too. Do you play?

JOE:
No, I’ve, um,...I’ve never even heard one before.

OLIVIA:
What?!? What rock did you crawl out from under?

JOE:
Bohemia.

OLIVIA:
Ohhhhh.

JOE
(nods). I don’t know much of anything about- any of this. Just got here last week.

OLIVIA
Well, I’d never know. Your English is great. How do you like Chicago - are you getting used to the cable cars?

JOE:
How do they move without a horse?!

OLIVIA:
(Laughing) That’s exactly what- what my dad said once. (beat) Would you like to hear it?

JOE:
The cable car? I can already hear it from in here.

OLIVIA
The piano!

JOE
Oh. Really?- I mean, yes.
(Olivia sits down at a piano; Joe moves to lean over the top of it, facing her)

OLIVIA:
I think I remember a song you’re going to know.

(JOE listens as OLIVIA begins to play.)

1.03. (Redbird, Bluebird)- JOE/OLIVIA ***(DEMO 1)

OLIVIA:
ONE BRIGHT REDBIRD FLEW ON INTO TOWN
HE SAID, “I’VE COME, I’VE COME TO SETTLE DOWN.
IF I SHOULD FIND MY BLUEBIRD FULL OF SONG,
MY LOVE, I’LL STAY MY WHOLE LIFE LONG,

(Joe cuts her off abruptly and takes over the singing. OLIVIA, startled, manages to keep playing.)

JOE:
BECAUSE I HAVE FLOWN THE WHOLE WORLD OVER
LOOKING FOR THE FINEST CLOVER
FOR MY LOVE THE BLUEBIRD ROVER,
OH, I WOULD FLY THE WHOLE WORLD OVER-

(JOE pauses, nervous. He misses the entrance to the next verse. OLIVIA vamps)

OLIVIA
C’mon, keep going!

JOE:
I, uh-. I don’t-

OLIVIA:
Do you know the second verse?

(JOE is still unsure, but OLIVIA counts him in, and he continues)

JOE:
THE BLUEBIRD HEARD THE REDBIRD’S CRY,
BUT BLUSHED TO ANSWER, MUCH TOO SHY,
SHE FLEW UP TO A BRANCH ABOVE HIS HEAD
AND SANG TO HIM A MELODY INSTEAD
AND SANG TO HIM A MELODY INSTEAD

Your turn.

OLIVIA:
LA LA LA, LA LA
LA, LA, LA, LA
LA, LA LA LA, LA

JOE/OLIVIA:
I HAVE FLOWN THE WHOLE WORLD OVER,
LOOKING FOR THE FINEST CLOVER,
FOR MY LOVE THE BLUEBIRD ROVER,
OH, I WOULD FLY THE WHOLE WORLD OVER

JOE:
THE REDBIRD HEARD THE BLUEBIRD’S MELODY,
AND CAME UP TO HER BRANCH UPON THE TREE,
HE SAID “YOUR SONG’S WHAT I’VE BEEN LOOKING FOR,
MY LOVE IS ALL FOR YOU FOREVER MORE

JOE/OLIVIA:
LA LA LA, LA LA
LA, LA, LA, LA
LA, LA LA,
LA LA LA, LA
OH, I HAVE FLOWN THE WHOLE WORLD OVER
OH, I HAVE FLOWN THE WHOLE WORLD OVER

JOE:
I love that song!

OLIVIA:
Me too. I haven’t heard it like that before.

JOE
How do you know that song? I’ve only ever heard it back home—

OLIVIA
-Bohemia?

JOE
-Yes! Are you from—?

OLIVIA
-It’s been so long for me, I got here when I was fourteen. But yes, my family all live in Prague. Except my father, he was— (she stops herself mid-sentence)
JOE
He was what?

OLIVIA
(Nervous now, trying to backtrack) Um, he was-

(A crash from the back room interrupts the conversation, and NORA and CHARLIE come back out from the workshop. OLIVIA jumps up from the piano bench, relieved for the distraction)

OLIVIA
What’s happening back there?

CHARLIE
Oh, nothing, just...fumbling around. We-

NORA
We, knocked over the lamp.

(Nora’s lipstick might be a little smudged.)

JOE
Did you fix it?

NORA
The lamp?

OLIVIA
The piano.

NORA
What piano?

OLIVIA
The one you said was out of tune?

NORA
Oh, that one. Yep.

OLIVIA
I didn’t hear it. How did you fix it without playing it?

NORA
Charlie, don’t you think it’s time you showed Joe the back room?
CHARLIE
Yes, Joe, why don’t I show you the back room? That’s where we do the dirty work.

JOE
And you want to show me??

CHARLIE
Oh, just come on and see the work space!

JOE
All right. (to Olivia) I’ll talk to you later, hopefully. It was nice to meet you, Olivia. And you too,.. (He can’t remember her name)

NORA
Nora.

JOE
Right. Sorry- Nora.

OLIVIA
Nice to meet you too.

(JOE and CHARLIE exit through the work door, leaving NORA and OLIVIA, who is still sitting at the piano. NORA runs and sits down at the bench with OLIVIA)

NORA
So when’s the wedding?

OLIVIA
When’s yours? You can’t make fun of me, when you’re making out with Charlie on the worktable!

NORA
We were not!

OLIVIA
You’ve got lipstick on your chin.

(Nora hastily swipes it away)

NORA
Ok, so we’re having fun! Joe had google-eyes as soon as you walked in the door, it was like I wasn’t even there.
OLIVIA
He did not.

NORA
Well then, what was that little duet you just sang? Something about lovebirds?

OLIVIA
You heard that?

NORA
If you heard me necking, I definitely heard you singing. Quite the singer, he could be a full-time crooner if he wanted to. You two could have a nice life; get married, sing songs, you’d support each other-

OLIVIA
-No, no no no no. First of all, I don’t need any ‘support;’ I pay my rent just fine on my own. Second of all, he just got a job here. Third of all, it was just an old song, it didn’t mean anything!

NORA
Nothing’s ever just a song, and you know that. What, is there something wrong with him?

OLIVIA
No.

NORA
Exactly!

OLIVIA
Not exactly! I just don’t know what’s wrong with him yet.

NORA
Why not have some fun, instead of looking for things to go wrong? We could all go on double dates!

OLIVIA
So now you’re admitting that you and Charlie are seeing each other?
We are not talking about me right now, this is about you and your dried-up love life. You need to relax—you know, you don’t have to control everything!

OLIVIA

Yes I do.

(NORA shakes her head)

1.04. (Let Up a Little)—NORA/OLIVIA

NORA
YOU COULD SPEND YOUR TIME
FRETTING OVER EVERY DIME
OR YOU COULD LET UP A LITTLE
YOU COULD MOAN AND CRY,
WONDER IF AND WONDER WHY
OR YOU COULD LET UP A LITTLE
PLEASE LET UP A LITTLE

PLEASE DON’T BE SO UPTIGHT
BLOW YOUR DOUGH ON A BIG CUP OF JOE TONIGHT
JUST SWALLOW YOUR PRIDE
AND LET UP A LITTLE

OLIVIA
Now wait a minute, you’re telling me to be less uptight? You?

NORA
What? I’m not uptight.

OLIVIA
Oh, really? Who is the one who’s constantly skipping breaks, taking extra shifts, AND helping Charlie here?

NORA
I’m a hard worker!

OLIVIA
You’re obsessed!

YOU COULD WASTE AWAY,
NEVER LEARNING HOW TO PLAY
OR YOU COULD LET UP A LITTLE
YOU COULD LEAVE IT ALONE
NEVER TURNING OVER THE STONE
OR YOU COULD LET UP A LITTLE

WHO CARES IF IT’S WRONG OR RIGHT?
TAKE YOURSELF OFF THE SHELF,
AND STEP INTO THE LIGHT
GO SEE THE SIGHTS
AND LET UP A LITTLE

NORA
I COULD SAY THE THE SAME ABOUT YOU MY FRIEND,
THE POT’S CALLING THE KETTLE BLACK NOW,
SO IF I’VE GOT SOME WORKING TO DO MY DEAR,
WHAT ABOUT YOU?

OLIVIA
WHO KNOWS WHAT HE’LL DO

NORA
WHO CARES WHAT HE’LL SAY

BOTH
JUST TAKE IT AND RUN,
AIM FOR THE SUN,
COME WHAT MAY

LET UP
GIVE IT A SHOT
GIVE IT EVERYTHING YOU’VE GOT
WHO CARES IF IT’S WRONG OR RIGHT,
DON’T WORRY ABOUT TONIGHT,
PLEASE SWALLOW YOUR PRIDE,
AND LET UP A LITTLE

(End of scene.)

1.03A– Let Up Playoff

Scene 2

(A week later, end of the work day. Afternoon lights hit the street windows. OLIVIA is in the front when JOE walks out from the back room.)
JOE
Hi! How did the lessons go today?

OLIVIA
They were all right. Sam is doing really well- he’s passing his older sister, which has got her mad. How’s the piano building coming?

JOE
Pretty well. It’s been quite a week, but I think I’m getting the hang of it.

OLIVIA
Good.

(moment of awkward silence before JOE tries to continue)

JOE
Um, who’s the letter for?

OLIVIA
What? Oh, it’s for my family- my mom and sisters, back home.

JOE
They don’t live here too?

OLIVIA
What?

JOE
Oh, I just thought before that- never mind, it’s stupid, I’m stupid-

OLIVIA
Did you think I still lived with my parents?

JOE
No.

OLIVIA
Yes, you did.

JOE
I didn’t think-
It’s very clear that you keep forgetting to think. First I work for Charlie, and now I live with my parents?

JOE
(Surrendering and babbling) I just meant, that I assumed, I mean, usually everybody either lives with their parents or their husband. At home, it’s, um, what’s -expected? But I’m learning that I need to stop underestimating you.

OLIVIA
Well, you’ve got one thing right.

JOE
Somehow, I have a feeling I’m in for a learning curve. You keep surprising me.

OLIVIA
Does it surprise you that I actually live with Nora?

JOE
(Laughing) Not at all. She’s the most outspoken woman I’ve ever met besides you.

OLIVIA
Nora’s worth her talk, too. You won’t find a better businesswoman in Chicago; she’s desperate to go to business school, but no university will let a woman into the program.

JOE
Looks like you’re not the only one being underestimated.

OLIVIA
Second thing you’ve gotten right today.

JOE
I’m learning from a smart woman.

(short pause)

OLIVIA
I’ve got to go send this letter (blindly grabs for the letter, grabs some music instead) - you have anything you need to put in the mail? I’ll take it for you.

JOE
No thanks, I have to finish my letter for Margie yet-

OLIVIA
Who’s Margie?

JOE
Margie’s my- cousin. (Surprises himself with the lie.) Yeah. My cousin.

OLIVIA
Oh. You guys must be really close.

JOE
In a way. It’s not the same though, since I’ve been here.

OLIVIA
How do you mean?

JOE
I think I’m (searches) -different, and she’s, the same as before.

OLIVIA
Well, I like the Chicago Joe we’ve got now.

JOE
You do?

OLIVIA
Oh, look at the time, I’ve got to send this letter-

(she holds up the sheet music and realizes she didn’t grab the letter. JOE holds up the letter, and hands it to OLIVIA; she takes it sheepishly.)

-before post goes out. Where were you off to?

JOE
Hm? -Oh, right- Charlie and me are going to get drinks at the Mill with a few of his friends. We’re drowning our sorrows, if you will- we got two orders cancelled today. Don’t know why, either.

OLIVIA
Oh. I’m sorry.

JOE
Do...do you want to come?

OLIVIA
Oh- um - no.

JOE

No?

OLIVIA
I mean, I’ve got to send this letter.

JOE
Right. Okay. See you tomorrow then?

OLIVIA
I, might not be in; I have my lessons, and I have to finish this song sooner or later, so...

JOE
-Right, got it. I’ll just, um, see you around. Sometime.

(JOE exits the shop.)

OLIVIA
(muttering to herself) God! Nice job, Olivia.

(OLIVIA huffs onto a bench just as CHARLIE walks in from the back.)

CHARLIE
Hey! Didn’t know you were still here. (pause) Are you ok?

OLIVIA
Yeah, I’m fine. You should, uh, go catch up with Joe, he already left for the Mill - he said he was meeting you there?

CHARLIE
Yeah, do you want to come with? Nora’s working, so free drinks!

OLIVIA
I already told Joe I couldn’t.

CHARLIE
What else have you got to do on a Tuesday night?

OLIVIA
I have to get this letter in the mail.

CHARLIE
(Sarcastic) Oh, that’ll take all night! Don’t let me keep you.

OLIVIA

Charlie!

CHARLIE

C’mon, what’s got you all knotted up so tight?

OLIVIA

Nothing particular. Just me.

CHARLIE

What do you mean?

1.05. (Isn’t It Funny)—OLIVIA

You know, when you get in your own way? And you know you’re doing it, and why you’re doing it, but you can’t figure out how to stop?

CHARLIE

(thinks for a minute) No. That’s a funny thought, though.

OLIVIA

ISN’T IT FUNNY
HOW PEOPLE TRAVEL SO FAR
HOW THEY HOP ON A DREAM
OR RIDE A STAR
ISN’T IT FUNNY,
THEY DROP EVERYTHING ON A DIME
THEY DON’T WASTE TIME

ISN’T IT STRANGE MY FATHER WAS THAT WAY, TOO
ONE DAY, HE SANG
‘I’M GOING AWAY’
ON SOME ODDBALL DAY IN JUNE,
SAID HE’D GO TO CHICAGO, MAKE A NEW LIFE
AND THAT I WOULD FOLLOW SOON
ALONE I ONE SPRING AFTERNOON,
AND ISN’T IT FUNNY, I KNOCKED AT THE DOOR,
BEHIND IT?: A WOMAN I’D NEVER SEEN BEFORE

IT’S FUNNY AND STRANGE,
HOW FAST PEOPLE GO,
HOW QUICK THINGS CHANGE

CHARLIE
Well, it’s not what I’d call ‘funny.’

(OLIVIA is exasperated, but CHARLIE forces her into a hug)

I remember- we met that day! Don’t get me wrong- it wasn’t a good day. But maybe you could think about, I don’t know, letting up just a little bit?

OLIVIA
You sound like Nora.

CHARLIE
She’s a smart girl, that one.

OLIVIA
I don’t know. There’s so much work to do, so much music to write, so much-

CHARLIE
-‘So much music to write’?! How are you going to write anything worthwhile if you never do anything worthwhile to write about?

OLIVIA
(She’s stumped) I. Um, -

CHARLIE
Just talk to Joe! Where’s the harm?

OLIVIA
‘CAUSE ISN’T IT FUNNY
HOW FAST YOU FORGET?
MOVE ON FROM THE HURT
AND PLACE A NEW BET
ON A BOY FROM SCHOOL,
MADE ME FEEL A FOOL,
HOW QUICK HE GOT ME ON A DATE
IT FELT GOOD, IT FELT FUNNY- LIKE FATE

AND ISN’T IT FUNNY
HOW FAST WE FALL?
NO DOUBT, NO FEAR AT ALL
JUST WHEN YOU THINK HE MIGHT PROPOSE,
ISN’T IT FUNNY HOW FAST HE GOES?

IT’S FUNNY AND STRANGE,
HOW FAST PEOPLE GO,
HOW QUICK THINGS CHANGE?
ISN’T IT FUNNY
HOW FAST YOU CAN PUT UP A WALL
TO MAKE SURE NO ONE GETS IN AT ALL
BUT ISN’T IT STRANGE
AT THE FIRST CHANGE
THERE’S A CRACK IN THE WALL
YOU HAVE CAREFULLY ARRANGED

YOU’RE OUT OF MONEY
TO PLACE A NEW BET
BUT ISN’T IT FUNNY,
YOU WANT TO FORGET?

CHARLIE
Post office is on my way. Come on.

(He picks up her bag and she takes his arm, and they leave the store).

(Blackout.)
1.05A—Funny Playoff
Scene 3

(Lights up on the shop, afternoon. Charlie and Nora are alone. They are looking inside one of the pianos in the shop)

NORA
So, this hammer hits this string, and it resonates all the way down to here. When you let go of the key, the damper on the top comes back down and stops the sound.

CHARLIE
Unless you have the soft pedal up..

NORA
Yes, but you haven’t installed that on this one yet; it’s usually one of the last things you put on.

CHARLIE
You got it.

NORA
See, I know how this works just as well as you do!

CHARLIE
You’ve learned your way around pretty well, I’ll give you that.

NORA
So—why not make me your partner.

CHARLIE
You are my partner, Nora—(moving towards her)

NORA
I mean business partner!

CHARLIE
You’re still thinking about that?

NOR
Do you not trust me?

CHARLIE
Of course I do—

NORA
—I’m smart, right?
CHARLIE
Yes-

NORA
I know how to build a piano.

CHARLIE
Yes, but-

NORA
And I definitely know how to bookkeep better than you do.

CHARLIE
Now that’s not fair-

(Nora is already walking over to the account book)

NORA
Let’s check your bookkeeping skills, then- (starts to flip through the book, but CHARLIE snatches it away from her). What?

CHARLIE
That’s private business information.

NORA
And I want to be a part of the business! What’re you hiding in there?

CHARLIE
Nothing!

NORA
Is the shop in trouble?

CHARLIE
No. (Definitely a lie) Joe and I are so busy building, so many orders, you know-

NORA
Sounds like you could use some help...

CHARLIE
But then you and I have to be all business-y with each other. Can’t we just have fun?
NOR
Not if you lose the shop, we can’t. And I want to work! The Green Mill is great and all, but I’d much rather work here.

CHARLIE
But you shouldn’t have to work at all!

NORA
You’re not listening at all, are you? - I want to work, Charlie! I-

CHARLIE
And, don’t you think Olivia would tease us even more if we started working together?

NORA
Who cares? And anyway, she’s had blinders on the past couple days, all she sees is Joe.

CHARLIE
Really?

NORA
She’s been singing that bird song all week, ever since he got here. She’s in denial though.

CHARLIE
She’s got a lot on her mind.

NORA
Well as much as I’d love to keep gossiping about our friends, I’ve got work.

CHARLIE
Aw come on, just stay a little bit longer?

NORA
We’ve both got work. I was late yesterday; can’t do two days in a row! I’ll get fired. So until I get that business proposal from you, I’ve got to run.

(She heads out the door, and CHARLIE watches her go.)

(End scene.)
Scene 4
(Morning. JOE enters the shop, opening a letter from Margie. He opens it and reads).

JOE

“My fiancée,
I miss you terribly. Please write back to me, your family and I are worried about you. Tell me what you are doing in America. Do you have a job? Did you find a furniture store, like you planned? I hope you are building something wonderful there. I wish with all my heart I could come to see you, but my family needs me at home. The people I love are on opposite sides of the earth, and it tears my heart. I hope to hear from you soon. Love, your Margie”

1.06. (Two Girls)-JOE.

MARGIE, OH, MARGIE,
IT’S A COMFORT TO SAY
BUT IT FEELS LIKE BETRAYING HER
SAYING, ‘MY MARGIE’
OH, MARGIE, OH MARGIE,
YOU WANT ME TO WRITE WHAT I’VE DONE
BUT WHAT I’VE DONE
IS FALL IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE

AM I? AM I FALLING IN LOVE?
SOME SAY I’M LUCKY
I’D TELL THEM ‘SORT OF’
‘CAUSE LOVE MAKES YOU STUPID
MY PLANS ALL UNFURL
IF I FALL IN LOVE WITH

TWO GIRLS,
ON OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE WORLD
BOTH BEAUTIFUL, SMART, THEY CAN TEAR YOU APART
AND I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO
BUT THESE TWO GIRLS
DESERVE MORE THAN HALF OF ME
ANY GUY WOULD FEEL SO LUCKY
TO HAVE TWO GIRLS
ANY GUY BUT ME.

FROM DAY ONE, WE KNEW HOW IT WOULD BE
SINCE THE BEGINNING IT WAS MARGIE AND ME
PAIRED UP TOGETHER,
AND I NEVER THOUGHT TO ASK WHY
IT WAS US, NEVER QUESTIONED IT ALL, UNTIL I GOT HERE, AND I STARTED TO FALL, INTO— SOMETHING. FEELS LIKE GUILT, AND THE DAYS GO BY

I LEFT A GIRL WITH A BRAVE AND ENCHANTING SMILE BUT THEN I MET A BLUEBIRD WHO SANG A SONG I HADN’T HEARD IN A WHILE

OH DEAR GOD, WHAT DO I DO? CAN’T TELL CHARLIE— HE’LL KILL ME. MY JOB’LL BE THROUGH MAKE A CHOICE ONE OR THE OTHER WHAT WOULD I WANT TO TELL MY MOTHER

NOT THAT I’VE FALLEN FOR TWO GIRLS ON OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE WORLD BOTH BEAUTIFUL, SMART THEY CAN TEAR YOU APART AND I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO ‘CAUSE THIS ONE GIRL HAS TAKEN HOLD OF ME ANY GUY SHOULD FEEL SO LUCKY

‘CAUSE IT’S NOT JUST THE GIRL, IT’S THE LIFE I’D BE LEAVING BEHIND, WHO WOULD I BE TO DO SOMETHING SO UNKIND?

IT’S TWO GIRLS, AND TWO VERY DIFFERENT WORLDS, ONE IS ALL SET, A SAFE, EASY BET, ONE’S A TWIST OF FATE, BUT THESE TWO WORLDS, CAN’T BOTH BE FOR ME, NO ONE IS SO LUCKY, TO HAVE TWO GIRLS

TWO GIRLS ON OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE WORLD

DON’T KNOW THERE ARE TWO GIRLS ON OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE WORLD
MAYBE,
I’LL JUST WAIT AND SEE
’CAUSE ANY GUY WOULD FEEL SO LUCKY,
ANY GUY BUT ME, TO HAVE-

(CHARLIE enters abruptly and cuts JOE off)

CHARLIE
-Hey Joe! Heard something about a girl. Care to share?

JOE
You waste no time, do you?

CHARLIE
Got a business to run! So it is a girl. Who’s got you all bent out of shape?

JOE
C’mon, Charlie-

CHARLIE
-No, it can’t be me, though I am flattered.

JOE
Dear God.

CHARLIE
I don’t think this is a God thing, either. So, not God, not me...Not Nora either- you’re too smart to try anything with your boss’s girl. You haven’t left this shop since you got into town, so unless that overseas gal is still waiting for you, which I doubt, since you’ve been here over a month already, it’s got to be Olivia!

JOE
Um-

CHARLIE
And, I’ve hit it! Joe and Olivia. Two little songbirds.

JOE
Will you let off? I’ve got to start working.

(JOE gets up and starts towards the back room)
CHARLIE
Just be careful with that one, there’s a lot happening in that big brain of hers.

JOE
(turning back to CHARLIE) What do you mean?

CHARLIE
Piqued your interest, have I?

JOE
...No.

CHARLIE
All right. Off to work you go then.

JOE
I couldn’t get Olivia to look at me, even if I wanted to.

CHARLIE
Aha! I see the problem. You’ve fallen for an independent woman, and a stubborn, Czech one, at that. Some women come along who don’t need you or anyone or anything, and that’s what makes them so damned attractive.

JOE
Is that the gist for you with Nora?

CHARLIE
What do you mean?

JOE
She’s got you wrapped around her finger.

CHARLIE
She does no-

JOE
-I may be Czech, but I’m not stupid.

CHARLIE
Um—Back to your problem. I’m afraid there’s nothing you can do.

JOE
Gee, thanks for all your help!
CHARLIE

It’s true!

1.07. (Independent Woman Blues)–CHARLIE/JOE

YOU’VE GOT THE ‘I’M IN LOVE WITH AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN BLUES’
AND NO GUY WOULD WANT TO FILL YOUR SHOES,
IT’S A LOSING RACE, AT HER FRENETIC PACE,
BUT YOU TROT BEHIND ANYWAY,
CAUSE YOU’VE GOT THE ‘IN LOVE WITH AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN BLUES’

JOE

You’re insane!

CHARLIE

I’m afraid you are. The prognosis is grim. It’s irreversible, incurable, and untreatable. You, sir, are a lost cause.

JOE

Well, then you are too, I’m sure.

CHARLIE

What??

JOE

Nora! – She seems pretty independent to me.

CHARLIE

She wants a piece of the business, wants to help me run this place, you know.

JOE

Why doesn’t she?

CHARLIE

I won’t let her.

JOE

Why not? She’s smart.

CHARLIE

I just, she and I, going into business together? It’d be a lot of work; there’s a lot to do here at Williams that I’ve been putting off. Lots of things to fix up.
JOE
Great things to tell your newest employee! (CHARLIE looks worried) Don’t worry—desperate, remember? It sounds like you could use her help.

JOE
YOU’VE GOT THE ‘IN LOVE WITH AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN’ BLUES,
AND THERE’S NOTHING THAT YOU CAN DO,
CAUSE IF SHE STAYS, THEN THE THRILL GOES AWAY, SO YOU WILL STAY
IN LOVE WITH THIS INDEPENDENT WOMAN BLUES

JOE/CHARLIE
WHEN THEY COME AROUND, WE GO A FALLIN’
BUT THEN THE’RE ALWAYS BUSY WHEN WE COME CALLIN’
BUT HER VICIOUS AMBITION I WOULD NOT ERASE
THAT’S WHAT GOT ME GOIN’ IN THE FIRST PLACE

WE’VE GOT THE ‘IN LOVE WITH AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN’ BLUES
AND EVEN THOUGH WE FEEL ABUSED,
EVERY TIME I PURSUE HER, I KNOW SHE’LL REFUSE
BUT SHE’S STILL GOT MY HIGHEST REVIEWS,
WE MUST HAVE A SCREW LOOSE,
CAUSE WE KEEP AMUSING, THESE INDEPENDENT WOMAN BLUES!

WE’VE GOT EMPTY HANDS, THEY’RE THROWING ACES
TRYING HARD TO STAY IN THEIR GOOD GRACES,
WHAT CAN WE DO TO KEEP THEM HANGING AROUND?
KEEP OUR HANDS IN THEIRS AND OUR FEET ON THE GROUND?

(The boys are cut off by the phone ringing. CHARLIE answers)

CHARLIE
Hello, Williams Pianos, this is Charlie Williams speaking. How can I help you Mr. Smith? ...A custom order, what’ve you got in mind...

(Charlie gestures frantically to Joe for something to write with, Joe looks around and finds Olivia’s sheet music with her pencil starts copying down the following)

Upright... standard keys... three pedals... walnut outer veneer—oh, no. I’m sorry sir, we’d have to special order that, we’re really
only doing what we have in stock and repairs at this point...one
hu- one hundred-

JOE
One hundred what?? Keys?

CHARLIE
(covers the receiver) One hundred dollars! He’ll give us one
hundred dollars for the piano!

JOE
You mean, the piano we can’t afford to build. We’re...(he counts)
22 dollars short.

CHARLIE
Yes. No! Wait. (accidentally says that into the receiver) I
mean, hang on just one minute, sir.

(Charlie sets down the receiver and rushes over to a half a
piano on the back wall. He pulls a wad of small bills out
of it and starts counting)

JOE
What’s that?!

CHARLIE
My savings. 15, 20, 21, 22!! I can do it.

JOE
But that’s YOUR money, not company money!

CHARLIE
I’ll get it all back. And then some! And then I’ll be able to
pay the utility bill for this place.

JOE
You can’t pay the utility bill for this place?!

CHARLIE
(back into phone) Hi sir, thank you for waiting. We’d love to
fill that order for you, ready for pickup on the...15th, if that
suits you?...Perfect! Just come in to the shop tomorrow to fill
out the paperwork and we’ll get started. Pleasure doing business
with you... Thanks sir. Have a good day. (hangs up)
JOE
You just threw your savings into a piano. Well, you got them out of that piano, and now you’re putting them into a new piano. Are you crazy?!

CHARLIE
I’m making a personal investment in my own business.

JOE
I’m pretty sure Nora’s going to hate this idea…

CHARLIE
She’ll never know! The piano will get built, we’ll get paid, and I’ll just pay myself back. It’s brilliant!

JOE
I don’t know……

CHARLIE
Come on! If anything, she’ll be proud.

WE’VE GOT THE ‘I’M IN LOVE WITH AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN BLUES’
YOU’VE JUST GOT TO PAY YOUR DUES
WE’LL GIVE BUSINESS A BOOST,
AND THEY’LL BE SEDUCED
THERE’S NO WAY TO LOSE,

JOE
YOU’VE GOT THE ‘I’M IN LOVE WITH AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN’ BLUES
AND BUDDY, I THINK YOU’RE CONFUSED
AND THOUGH IT’S AMUSING, I HAVE TO REFUSE

CHARLIE
A GIRL OR YOUR DIGNITY, WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?
THINK HOW HAPPY THEY’LL BE WHEN THEY GET THE NEWS,

WHEN WE COME AROUND THEY’LL GO A’FALLIN’

CHARLIE/JOE
AND THEY’LL ALWAYS ANSWER WHEN WE COME CALLIN’

JOE
BUT HER VICIOUS AMBITION WILL NOT BE ERASED

CHARLIE
THAT’S WHAT GOT ME IN THE FIRST PLACE
BOTH
I’M IN LOVE WITH AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN BLUES,
AND EVEN THOUGH WE FEEL ABUSED
EVERY TIME I PURSUE HER, SHE’LL ALWAYS REFUSE
BUT SHE’S STILL GOT MY HIGHEST REVIEWS,
WE MUST HAVE SOME SCREWS LOOSE,
’CAUSE WE KEEP ABUSING
THESE INDEPENDENT WOMAN BLUES!

(the boys shake hands. Song button.)

JOE
Fine, I’ll keep your secret! But I still think it’s a dumb idea.

CHARLIE
You’ll see, this is going to be great for business!

JOE
You’re the shop owner, not me. I guess I’m trusting you?

CHARLIE
Thanks. I’m going to put that order in right now!

(CHARLIE goes to the back room. JOE looks around, sits himself down at a piano. Maybe he’s attempting to plunk out a tune, deep in concentration. He doesn’t notice OLIVIA when she enters the shop, so she watches him struggle for a moment before she speaks).

OLIVIA
Afternoon, Joe.

JOE
(Shutting piano quickly) Hi! Sorry.

OLIVIA
Ah, did I just miss your concerto?

JOE
Believe me, your ears are the better for it.

OLIVIA
You know, teaching people to play these is kind of my specialty. ...I could help you. If you want.
JOE
You’d give me lessons?

OLIVIA
Sure! You seem like a quick study. It took you what, a week, to figure out how to build one— I can make you a concert pianist in no time.

(CHARLIE re-enters on the following line)

JOE
I don’t know. I don’t really know how to play music, just, um, (he can’t find the right word) -build it?

CHARLIE
That’s for sure! (to OLIVIA) Morning.

OLIVIA
Morning.

CHARLIE
Joe, while I work on this new order, can you finish up on the Robertson’s piano?

JOE
Already done. I think we can bring it back to their place tomorrow afternoon. Should I wait to tune it until we get it back in their apartment?

CHARLIE
Probably better to wait a day after you move it. Let it settle.

OLIVIA
(to JOE) You can tune pianos?

CHARLIE
Joe here has perfect pitch. Knew there was a reason I hired you.

JOE
Like I said— I know a lot about music, just not pianos. Up to now.

OLIVIA
Wow, I didn’t know.
CHARLIE
I didn’t either, until I heard him singing. Always humming something while he works. Lately its been that bird song. How did that go?

JOE
It’s just an old song. (to OLIVIA) I used to sing, sometimes, back home. Sometimes musicians would play at the town pub, on their way somewhere more important. I could usually get them to let me join for a number or two.

OLIVIA
And still no pianos?

JOE
Hard to carry around on your back.

OLIVIA
(laughs) Fair.

JOE
But, they taught me all kinds of things. Chords, how to make a melody, some vocal technique.

CHARLIE
Oh, I remember!: (singing) LOOKING FOR THE FINEST CLOVER-

JOE
(cutting him off, embarassed) Yep, that’s the song, thanks. Hey, Charlie, do you think you could, um, go check on my work in the back? Double check the pegs on that spinnet for me. Now, please?

CHARLIE
Ahh, yeah. Sure thing.

(He exits with a wink to JOE. Hums/whistles “Redbird, Bluebird” on his way to the workshop. JOE turns back to OLIVIA, still embarrassed.)

JOE
So anyway! Piano lessons?

OLIVIA
Yes! It’ll be fun. And, if you break it trying to play, at least you know how to fix it!
JOE
I’m going to break it?!

OLIVIA
I was just kidding. But what do you say?

JOE
...Yeah. Yeah, ok. I’d like that.

(Both look at each other. OLIVIA breaks first).

OLIVIA
Is this one almost done?

JOE
Yep. Just have to attach the music stand.

(JOE picks up the stand and starts to put it on, but Olivia stops him first).

OLIVIA
Oh, Joe, this is beautiful. You made this?

JOE
Yeah.

OLIVIA
(Inspecting) These are going to be birds?

JOE
Yeah. I- I was going to paint them. That one red, and that one blue.

OLIVIA
Just like the song.

JOE
It’s not nearly done yet, I’ve still got nearly all of the details, and-

OLIVIA
-It’s amazing, Joe, really.

JOE
Well, you must have a lesson soon? I don’t want to keep you. I’ll just be going.
OLIVIA
You can stay if you want-

JOE
I don’t want to be in the way. ...But I should be done here around six tomorrow. Can I have my first lesson then?

OLIVIA
I’ll pencil you in after my meeting at the Mill. I’m going in to see about my song.

They’ll love it! I’m sure of it. See you tomorrow?

OLIVIA
See you tomorrow.

(JOE goes outside and closes the shop door behind him. Both singing in their own worlds)

1.07A. (Funny Redbird Reprise)–JOE/OLIVIA ***(DEMO 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOE</th>
<th>OLIVIA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>FOR MY LOVE</td>
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</table>

(End of scene.)
Scene 5

(The next evening. OLIVIA bursts into the store, a flurry of frustration and paper and pencils)

OLIVIA
Ugh! (Looks around, nobody is in the storefront. Louder:) Ugh! (Still nobody appears) Oh, somebody come listen to me nag!

(Joe comes out, holding a hammer or something)

JOE
Am I late? It’s not six already is it?

OLIVIA
What?

JOE
My first piano lesson?

OLIVIA
Right! I knew what you meant.

JOE
What happened? Meeting didn’t go well?

OLIVIA
It was awful! (She hops up onto a piano) I was at the Green Mill all day. The band had rehearsal, so I waited for hours, and finally they went on a break- so I walked right up to Duke and asked him about my song. And he laughed! He handed the music back to me and said ‘Sorry girlie. It’s just not what we play- needs more spunk’.

JOE
You, of all people, need more spunk?

OLIVIA
Every week I bring them my songs, and they say the same thing! I try and try, but I’m always stuck watching them play the same old songs every night.

JOE
Aw, don’t get yourself down. Someday they’ll pick it up and see how good it is!
OLIVIA
What if it isn’t though? What if I am boring?

JOE
You know that’s not true!

OLIVIA
Then what’s wrong with my music?

JOE
I’m sure I couldn’t tell you. I don’t know much about playing pianos, just about making them.

OLIVIA
Right, your lesson! Let’s do that.

JOE
We can wait for another day, if you want!

OLIVIA
No, I said six, and it’s six now. Sit down.

JOE
I’m a little scared.

OLIVIA
Good. So, you hold your hands like this:

(she demonstrates, JOE tries to copy)

No, wrists up.

(he adjusts)

Good.

JOE
Now what?

OLIVIA
Just press down on the keys first, see how it feels. Every piano has different weight, so-

(JOE presses down all ten fingers at once, a big cluster)
OLIVIA
(Demonstrating as she talks) Ok, maybe let’s go one at a time? Thumb is one, then two, three, four, and pinky is five. So try putting them here - G, A, B, C, D. (Plays the scale for him)

JOE
(Concentrating very hard, looking at OLIVIA’s hands) One, two, three, four, five - G, A, B, C, D.

OLIVIA
Good! Now press down.

(JOE does, but he can’t sync up his hands, playing a syncopated rhythm by accident)

JOE
I can’t get them to go one at a time!

OLIVIA
(laughing a bit) I mean, syncopation is usually a later lesson, but - wait!

JOE
I know, I’m a hopeless student!

OLIVIA
No no no, Joe, you’re a genius! It’s supposed to be ragtime! Move!

(OLIVIA shoves JOE off the bench and pulls out her sheet music)

JOE
I am? I mean, I am! (to back) -Hey Charlie, come listen to my musical genius!

(CHARLIE trudges in from the back)

CHARLIE
What’s going on now?

OLIVIA
So, this is what I just played for Duke. The one he said was boring.
(She plays the song. It is boring. CHARLIE and JOE look at each other skeptically.)

CHARLIE
...That’s what you gave to Duke?

OLIVIA
Yeah.

CHARLIE
Well...He was right, it’s boring.

OLIVIA
But see what happens when-

(NORA bursts in the front door)

NORA
-What song was that?

JOE
Olivia wrote it.

NORA
Oh, neat! When are you going to finish it?

OLIVIA
I gave it to Duke today, but he didn’t like it.

NORA
I can see why. It’s dreadfully boring.

CHARLIE
Nora, come on!

NORA
Sorry. But you’ve got to make it less -

OLIVIA
-I KNOW!!! (they all stop chattering) Thank you for the kind words. But what I was trying to tell you, is that Joe gave me the idea to rag it.
NORA
So you won’t change any of the notes; just rag what you’ve got there?

OLIVIA
Exactly.

CHARLIE
That just might work! Good thinking, Joe.

(OLIVIA, CHARLIE, and NORA start looking at the music together, all chattering)

JOE
Um….(CHARLIE, NORA, and OLIVIA stop and look at him) I feel like you guys are going to yell at me if I ask this, but……what are you talking about?

CHARLIE
What do you mean?

JOE
(With trepidation) What’s ‘rag’?

NORA
Excuse me? What’s rag? Oh Charlie, we have failed in educating our poor friend.

CHARLIE
(Gravely) Yes, we have. But we can fix this, and we can fix it right now!

NORA
You really don’t know what ragtime is?

JOE
Unless it’s in traditional Bohemian folk songs, no.

OLIVIA
But- it’s ragtime!

JOE
Well, that explains everything, I’m all caught up. Thank you so much!
CHARLIE
Olivia, just play him that same section you just did for us, but
play it in ragtime.

(Olivia plays the same section, now in ragtime.)

JOE
Hey, that makes it more exciting! But I still don’t really
understand. What makes it a ‘ragtime’?

(The other three look exasperated)

1.07. (Sublime Ragtime)—ALL ***(DEMO?)

CHARLIE
Okay, let’s give this guy the rundown. (OLIVIA continues
playing) Rag, or ragtime, is the latest and greatest musical
sensation since the piano itself. Ragtime is, essentially, a
rhythm.

OLIVIA
(Still playing) You see, they rhythm is sync-

CHARLIE
—I was getting to that!!

A RAG IS A RHYTHM THAT’S OFF THE BEAT
KEEPS YOU ON THE EDGE OF YOUR SEAT,
A RAG IS A RHYTHM YOU’LL WANT TO REPEAT,
SO SUBLIME, THAT’S RAGTIME!

OLIVIA
But it’s more than that, rag is a movement! It’s different from
everything everyone’s ever done before!

A RAG IS A RHYTHM THAT’S SWEEPING THE NATION
IT’S OLD WORLD MUSIC’S SWEET SALVATION
A PUSH AND A PULL, —A SYNCOPATION,
SO SUBLIME, THAT’S RAGTIME!

NORA/OLIVIA
IF YOU WANT TO KEEP UP,
WITH THE LATEST TRENDS,
YOU GOTTA MOVE A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY,
LEAVE BEHIND SOME FRIENDS,
IF YOU WANT TO DO ANYTHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR, 
YOU GOTTA PLAY A LITTLE DIRTY, 
TO EVEN OUT THE SCORE,

RAG IS A RHYTHM THAT’S NOT SO NICE, 
IT’S EVERY VICTIM’S GREATEST VICE, 
IT’S ALL A GAMBLE, SO TOSS THE DICE, 
SO SUBLIME, THAT’S RAGTIME!

OLIVIA

Joe, you try!

(OLIVIA sits down at a piano, he slides onto the bench next to her at her signal. She plays a short section in rag. Joe tries to imitate it, but he does it straight, not syncopated)

JOE

I just don’t quite get it. Apparently, I can only do it by accident.

NORA

You have to get into it! Just loosen up a little.

OLIVIA

Try this instead. It’s like the scales from your lesson, remember?

(He tries again, and starts to get it. OLIVIA helps him out, and OLIVIA and/or the MD takes over eventually.)

ALL

SUBLIME
SUBLIME RAGTIME,
SUBLIME
SUBLIME RAGTIME,
SUBLIME
SUBLIME RAGTIME,
SUBLIME, MY OH MY,
SUBLIME RAGTIME, RAGTIME

SUBLIME, RAGTIME,
KEEPS YOU ON YOUR TOES,
SUBLIME, RAGTIME,
EVERYBODY KNOWS,
MAKES A MAN FEEL SO FINE,
THAT HE GOES, AND HE GOES, AND HE GOES, AND HE GOES, AND HE GOES, AND HE GOES, EVERYBODY KNOWS, HE’S GOT THAT RAGTIME!

CHARLIE
Olivia, if you rewrite this and give it back to Duke, he won’t be able to say no!

OLIVIA
I’ve got to go work on this— I’ll see you tomorrow!

(She packs up in a hurry)

OLIVIA
(to JOE) -And thank YOU, for the idea!!

(She kisses him on the cheek and runs out the door. JOE is stunned, then smug).

JOE
(acapella to himself)
SO SUBLIME, THAT’S RAGTIME!

(Blackout, end of scene)
Scene 6
(The next day. OLIVIA is at the piano and NORA at the counter, each bent over their sheet music and a pile of shop receipts, respectively. They speak without looking up from their work)

NORA
How’s the writing coming?

OLIVIA
Almost done with the song. How’s the (looks up)...what are you doing?

NORA
(Still not looking up) Organizing the receipts.

OLIVIA: Oh. (Goes back to her work for a moment before:) Wait, what?

NORA
For the shop, they have receipts, and I’m –

OLIVIA
I know what you mean. Why though?

NORA
They’re a mess. I mean, look at this stuff.

OLIVIA
-So, Charlie hired you to be his secretary?

NORA
He didn’t hire me, I’m just-

OLIVIA
-So. You’re tidying up the shop, for free? How on earth did he convince you to do that?

NORA
Because he- He, um, doesn’t know, that I’m doing this.

OLIVIA
Are you crazy??

NORA
I’m not doing anything dramatic, just...organizing.
OLIVIA

Wow.

NORA

What?

OLIVIA

Are you trying to domesticate yourself?

NORA

Now you’re just being dramatic.

OLIVIA

Then why are you doing this?

NORA

I tried looking in the account book, but he wouldn’t even let me open it, he’s too proud. So, I’m just trying to do what I can to help. I can’t stand this stuff not being done. Or worse, being done wrong.

OLIVIA

But you’ve wanted to be Charlie’s business partner since I’ve known you. Why would you do all the work and not take the credit?

NORA

What should I do, go behind his back??

OLIVIA

You have to show him what you’re really capable of. Which is a lot more than this. (Meaning the receipts)

NORA

I don’t know. I want to. But it’s Charlie, he trusts me, and I— he’s—

(NORA stops mid-thought.)

OLIVIA

He’s what? (When she doesn’t answer) You don’t have to let someone take advantage of you just because you love them, you know.

(NORA doesn’t respond; OLIVIA checks the time)
OLIVIA
I have to go. We are not done with this conversation, but you are done with this.

(OLIVIA puts the receipts back at the counter and slides the account book towards NORA)

Take the credit you deserve.

(OLIVIA exits, leaving NORA staring at the book. She opens it hesitantly, then quickly closes it again, frustrated. End of scene.)
Scene 7
(Morning. CHARLIE is on the phone in the shop when JOE enters. CHARLIE seems worried/upset.)

CHARLIE
(into phone) Yes, have a nice day, sir.

JOE
Morning. Another order?

CHARLIE
Another cancelled order.

JOE
Who bailed this time?

CHARLIE
Mr. Stevenson. Said his packers have been on strike for three weeks and he’s going downhill fast. I’ll be next if someone doesn’t order, soon.

JOE
Man, is everyone having a bad time right now??

NORA
Not the Chicago Tribune.

(NORA has just entered the shop with this morning’s paper) At least, not with the way everyone was scrambling for this (gestures to paper) this morning.

CHARLIE
Anything special?

NORA
(reading) ‘US Strips for War: American Steamer Sunk; Break with Kaiser Brings Quick Action’

CHARLIE
Yikes.

JOE
Do you really think Willson’ll really go to war?

NORA
They are low on numbers.
CHARLIE
I think the headline’s a little dramatic, don’t you?

NORA
Sure, but that’s what the Trib does. McCormick doesn’t play around when it comes to that kind of thing.

CHARLIE
Gee, that man must be filthy rich.

NORA
You bet he is. He comes to the Green Mill almost every night to listen to the eleven o’clock set. You know, I bet it wouldn’t be that hard to convince him into buying from you.

CHARLIE
Don’t get my hopes up, now. I need a project too badly.

NORA
I’m serious, I can talk to him.

CHARLIE
Nora, I don’t know if that’s a good idea..

NORA
No, it is! I’ll talk to him tonight, get his telephone for you. Charlie, at least let me do that.

JOE
It’s worth a shot, Charlie.

(OLIVIA comes running in)

OLIVIA
Guess what guess what guess what??!!

CHARLIE/JOE/NORA

OLIVIA
I was just at the Mill, and guess what?!

NORA
What???

(Olivia pulls out a check)
OLIVIA
This is a check from the band, to me, for $10 for my song!!

JOE
(Picking OLIVIA up and twirling her around)
That’s amazing!

OLIVIA
I gave Duke the new one, the one that you helped me with! The whole band loved it—bought it on the spot, and they’re going to premiere it next Friday!

CHARLIE
Your first professional commission! This calls for a celebration! I’ll pull out the bottles—Nora, can you grab the glasses? They’re underneath the register.

NORA
Charlie Williams! It is not proper business to have liquor in your store!

CHARLIE
Shhh, we’re not scolding, we’re celebrating!

JOE
Well, miss professional composer, why don’t you play us something?

NORA
(Coming back with the glasses) Play us the finished song! We never got to hear the final version!

OLIVIA
Well, I orchestrated it all out for the band, so I can’t play it myself!

JOE
Come on, please?

OLIVIA
There are too many parts! -Unless...-

(OLIVIA roots around in her bag and pulls out a sheaf of music.)
OLIVIA (cont.)
Everyone is going to take a part! Joe, you get the guitar, Charlie takes the bass, Nora, you’re the trumpets, and I’ve got the piano. Come on, sit down!!

(OLIVIA leads the other three to pianos)

JOE
Olivia, I don’t think I’ve had enough lessons yet!

OLIVIA
You’ll be great! You can use one hand.

1.08A. (Sublime Ragtime Instrumental/Tag)-ALL

(They all start playing their parts together: CHARLIE starts, then OLIVIA, then NORA and JOE, OLIVIA cueing everyone in.)

SUBLIME RAGTIME,
KEEPS YOU ON YOUR TOES
SUBLIME, RAGTIME,
EVERYBODY KNOWS,
MAKES A MAN, FEEL SO FINE
THAT HE GOES AND HE GOES,
AND HE GOES AND HE GOES AND HE GOES,
EVERYBODY KNOWS HE’S GOT THAT RAGTIME!

(All toast as the final moment of the scene, scene ends)
Scene 8
(Afternoon. NORA comes tearing into the shop, excited and holding a note. CHARLIE is there working.)

NORA
Thank god you’re here! you’ll never guess what happened at work last night!!

CHARLIE
What, did Bix Beirdebecke show up or something?

NORA
No, but Robert McCormick did!

CHARLIE
Nora..

NORA
I sat down with him and told him all about the shop, and how great of a carpenter you are, and he ordered on the spot!

CHARLIE
What?!

NORA
Here! Wrote it down for you.

(She hands him the note; CHARLIE reads.)

CHARLIE
Wow...Double glossed mahogany...custom music stand...This is going to make us a fortune.

NORA
I know! So: how do you feel about that partnership now?

CHARLIE
Nora, I still don’t think-

NORA
-Didn’t you just say this could, and I quote, “make you a fortune”? This huge custom order that I just brought in for you?

CHARLIE
And it’s a really great order! (Looks at the note again) I’ve got to go tell Joe, he’ll be floored!

(Gives NORA a kiss on the cheek)
CHARLIE (cont.)
Saved the day yet again! What would I do without you?

(CHARLIE runs out the door, leaving NORA alone and stunned.)

1.08. (Picking Up Pieces) - NORA

They say, ‘You’re so smart, Nora’
They say, ‘You’ve got it all figured out, Nora’
‘What would we do, if we didn’t have you around?’

‘You saved the day, Nora,’
‘We do not know how to repay you
For all your help, in your debt we’re bound’

I’m always fixing things,
Always running around and picking up pieces,
Follow the leader, even if he doesn’t know the way

If I could do something on my own,
Leading the march, taking the throne,
If I were in the lead,
There’d be no need for a savior,
We’d be fine from the start,
And if I didn’t have a heart, I’d get up and go
But life without you is half a life and so,
I’ll keep picking up pieces as we go

Still, it’s kinda hard,
When they’re quick to discard,
‘Oh, we’re fine, that’s so cute,
What an idea Nora, dear’

‘Cause unless it’s his,
Any idea about the biz
Is nothing that Charlie’d ever want to hear

I’m always fixing things,
Always running around and picking up pieces,
Follow the leader even if I know the way

I want to do something on my own
Leading the march, taking the throne,
If I were in the lead,
There’d be no need for a savior,
We’d be fine from the start,
IF I DIDN’T HAVE A HEART, I’D GET UP AND GO,
BUT LIFE WITHOUT YOU IS HALF A LIFE AND SO,
I’LL KEEP PICKING UP PIECES AS WE GO,

I SEE IT COMING A MILE AWAY,
A STUPID, THOUGHTLESS MISTAKE,
IF HE’D JUST PLAN AHEAD,
IF HE’D JUST LET ME PLAN IT INSTEAD
I’D GET IT RIGHT ON THE FIRST TRY,
IF HE WOULD JUST LET ME LOOK,
IF I COULD JUST OPEN UP THE BOOK

(NORA looks at the account book on the counter. She looks around, then runs to open it, reads, then starts to plan and scribble through the following)

Yikes.

OKAY, MOVE THIS HERE,
SAVE THIS OVER THERE,
IN TWO MONTHS, INVEST,
AND THEN THIS GOES UP THERE,

AND THEN IN A YEAR, WHAT A PLACE THIS COULD BE
I’LL PLAN IT ALL OUT, THEN LET CHARLIE SEE

I WILL DO SOMETHING ON MY OWN,
I’LL LEAD THE MARCH, I’LL TAKE THE THRONE,
AND I’LL BE IN THE LEAD,
THERE IS NO NEED FOR A SAVIOR,
WE’LL BE FINE FROM THE START,
AND IF HE HAS A HEART, WHEN HE SEES WHAT I KNOW,
HE WILL LET ME RUN THIS SHOW,
NO MORE PICKING UP PIECES.

(NORA closes the book and takes it with her. Blackout)
Scene 9

(The next morning. CHARLIE is in the shop alone. Holds a newspaper)

1.09. (We’re In It Deep)—ALL

CHARLIE

“March 1st, 1917. US Bares War Plot”. They can’t be serious? “Actions of Berlin forcing the hand of the President?”. 

CHARLIE

IT’S NOT LOOKING GOOD
DON’T WANNA TURN BACK, EVEN IF WE COULD
IT’S TOO LATE TO TRY
TOO LATE TO DEBATE THE HOW AND THE WHY
IT’S A TIDAL FORCE,
AND WE’VE GOT TO SAIL THE COURSE

WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW,
WATER’S UP TO OUR KNEES
RISEING UP NOW,
NO WAY TO APPEASE
SO STRAIGHTEN UP YOUR SPINE
AND GET READY FOR THE HEADLINE
WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW,
THE RIVER’S RISING

(NORA enters with another newspaper)

CHARLIE

Good morning!

NORA

Is it? It’s freezing cold, the cable cars wouldn’t run, and I had to walk all the way here. I hate March.

CHARLIE

Hopefully the paper is more cheerful than you.

NORA

Fat chance. Here— (reads) “March 17, 1917: Strike Nearer: Refusal for Compromise?”

CHARLIE

What’s that supposed to mean?
NORA
(continuing)
“Railway executives and President Wilson’s representatives said no decision had been reached. The split is as wide as ever…”

CHARLIE/NORA
WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW,
WATER’S UP TO OUR THIGHS
NO TURNING BACK NOW,
NO HIDING THE LIES
SO STRAIGHTEN UP YOUR SPINE
AND GET READY FOR THE NEXT HEADLINE
WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW,
THE RIVER’S RISING

(JOE enters, with a newspaper)

JOE
You have to read this, it has to be some kind of joke!

NORA
What is it?

JOE
“Wilson Administration proposes Espionage and Sedition Act: ‘disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language’ will be considered a federal offense”.

CHARLIE
Can’t be.

JOE
It’s true. It says ‘anyone seen publicly opposing the government, the Constitution, or the American flag will be subject to a $10,000 fine and a 20 year prison sentence’??

CHARLIE
How are they planning to monitor that anyway?

NORA
There are more police around now than I’ve ever seen before, I wouldn’t be surprised if they have little spies walking around in plainclothes to catch people.
CHARLIE/JOE/NORA
THE FLOOD’S COMING SOON,
THERE ISN’T TIME TO CHANGE UP THE TUNE,
WE’RE ALL TOO FAR GONE,
JUST GOTTA CLING TO THE BOAT WE ARE ON,
IT’S A RISING TIDE,
AND THERE IS NOWHERE TO HIDE
WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW,
WATER’S UP TO OUR EYES
RISING UP NOW,
BREAKING ALL TIES
SO STRAIGHTEN UP YOUR SPINE
AND TAKE A LOOK AT THE HEADLINE
WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW,
THE RIVER’S RISING

CHARLIE
There is one good thing, though— I got a call back from that McCormick editor guy that Nora told me about— he gave us an order a custom, double-glossed, mahogany piano!

JOE
That’s going to cost a fortune; it could save the shop!

NORA
It would— but I found out McCormick is a huge anti-war guy.

CHARLIE
So?

NORA
You could get in trouble.

CHARLIE
I can’t give up my only shot at keeping this place open!

NORA
It’s not a good idea Charlie. There are other ways, I know there are—

CHARLIE
I’ve been searching, posting ads everywhere, no bites! This is THE last chance I have.

NORA
It’s not a good business move right now—
CHARLIE
-Give me a better idea then. Anyone, really.

(NORA, doesn’t respond. She walks away. JOE moves to CHARLIE. JOE goes to CHARLIE).

JOE
Nora might be right. Is this a good move, Charlie? This is a lot more money than we usually have to put down...

CHARLIE
It’s the only move I’ve got. If we don’t take this job, the shop’s going under. You’ve got to help me; this shop is all I have.

JOE
YOU PUT YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE FOR MINE
AND I RECOGNIZE YOUR KINDNESS
SO I GUESS I’VE GOT TO SAY YES

JOE/CHARLIE
WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW
THE RIVER’S RISING

NORA
Joe, did you get to read the inserts yet?

JOE
No, why?

NORA
Here.

(Hands JOE the paper; he reads)

JOE

NORA
Keep reading.

JOE
The political areas of Bohemia and Moravia were taken by the armies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Troops from various battalions were sent to keep peace in the area” ‘Keep peace’- Kecáš. (translation: bullshit, pronounced ‘ket-sos’)
NORA
Have you heard from anyone over there lately?

JOE
No, I haven’t heard from my family or from M- (stops himself from saying Margie just in time) -from anyone in about two weeks.

NORA
I’m sure they’re-

JOE
DON’T SAY IT’S GONNA BE FINE
JUST TAKE A LOOK AT THE HEADLINE

OLIVIA
(Running, in with a newspaper)
Charlie, Joe, Nora!!

CHARLIE/OLIVIA/JOE
What?/What is it?/What happened?

OLIVIA
(reads)
“April 6th, 1917. US At War”

ALL
WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW,
THE RIVER’S RISING

(end scene. Blackout.)

END OF ACT 1
(Early morning. CHARLIE is opening up the shop by himself.)

2.01 Building a Song – ALL

CHARLIE

JUST A DAY, AT THE SHOP
WHILE THE WHOLE WORLD’S AT WAR
AND I’M FEELING LUCKY,
I CAN OPEN THE STORE,
’CAUSE THIS IS THE ONLY THING I KNOW
I DON’T KNOW WHERE ELSE I’D GO

SO I’M BUILDING A SONG, IGNORING MY WORRY,
CONSTRUCTING THE KEYS IN MY OWN SPECIAL WAY
BUSINESS CAN WAIT ‘TILL TOMORROW, I SAY!
’CAUSE BUILDING A SONG IS THE BEST WAY TO SPEND A DAY

(JOE enters the shop)

CHARLIE

Morning!

JOE

Hey boss! Any sign of that down payment from McCormick yet?

CHARLIE

He said he’d bring it by this week.

JOE

He said that last week. (CHARLIE looks away) Just let me know? My paycheck bounced last week.

CHARLIE

What?

JOE

Don’t worry (OLIVIA enters the shop, nose in sheet music, she doesn’t say anything and goes straight to the piano) I’m not going anywhere. But I do have to pay the rent somehow.

’CAUSE THE LETTERS KEEP COMING
FROM A DISTANT LAND,
ASKING WHERE IS THE MONEY I SAID THAT I’D SEND?
AND WHERE’S THE WEDDING BAND,
BUT THE TRUTH IS I DON’T KNOW
IF THAT’S THE WAY I WANT THINGS TO GO
'CAUSE I’M BUILDING A SONG, FOR ONE SPECIAL SOMEONE,  
LAYING DOWN KEYS THAT ARE EASY TO PLAY,  
WORKING TO KEEP ALL THE LETTERS AT BAY,  
‘CAUSE BUILDING HER A SONG IS THE BEST WAY TO SPEND A DAY  

(JOE crosses to OLIVIA, and CHARLIE crosses to one of the  
pianos. JOE tries to talk to OLIVIA, but before he can get out a word she holds up her hand to stop him)  

OLIVIA  
BUILDING A SONG FROM THE VERSE TO THE CHORUS,  
MAKE IT UPTEMPO, AND HAPPY, AND GAY,  
WRITING TO KEEP THE BLUES AT BAY,  
BUILDING A SONG IS THE BEST WAY TO SPEND A DAY  

CHARLIE  
Would you two pipe down for five minutes so I can tune this thing?  

OLIVIA  
Sure thing.  

(Olivia and JOE cross up and talk quietly while CHARLIE opens the top and begins to tune one of the pianos. He plunks and sings as he goes)  

CHARLIE  
DUM, DUM, DUM, DUM,  
DA, DUM, DUM, DUM, DUM-  

(he hits an out of tune key)  

Oh, no.  

(He reaches inside the piano and tightens the string, plays the key again)  

DUM.  

(Satisfied, he begins playing and scatting to the chorus of "Building a Song")  

DA BA DOO DA, DA DA BA DOO DA,  
DUM, DA BA-DYA DUM, DA,  
DUM-BA-DOO-DYA, DA BA DOO DA, DA  
DA BA DOO DA BA DOO DA, DA  

DUM, DUM BA DUM, DAT DA  
DUM, DA DUM, BA  
DUM, DUM DUM DA, DAT DA
DUM, DUM DOO DA,

(OLIVIA AND JOE JOIN)
DUM, DUM BA DUM, DAT DA
DUM, DA DUM, BA
DUM, DUM DUM DA, DAT DA
DUM, DUM DOO DA,

OLIVIA
I’M BUILDING A SONG,

CHARLIE
BUILDING A SHOP,

JOE
BUILDING A HOME,

OLIVIA
WE’RE BUILDING A WORLD,

CHARLIE
BUILDING A LIFE,

JOE
NO MORE TO ROAM,

CHARLIE/JOE/OLIVIA
TRYING TO KEEP ALL THE BLUES AT BAY,
WE’RE BUILDING A SONG

(We see NORA outside the shop with the account book)

NORA
I WILL DO SOMETHING ON MY OWN,

CHARLIE
BUILDING A SONG,
IGNORING MY WORRY

LEAD THE MARCH, TAKE THE THRONE
CONSTRUCTING THE KEYS
IN MY OWN SPECIAL WAY,

THERE’S NO NEED FOR A SAVIOR,
BUIJSNESS CAN WAIT ‘TILL
TOMORROW I SAY!

NO MORE PICKING UP PIECES
BUILDING A SONG,
IS THE BEST WAY TO SPEND A DAY

JOE
(to CHARLIE) We’re going to get coffee, you want any?

CHARLIE
No thanks, I’ve got to take care of some things...(he’s looking around for the account book and can’t find it)
You haven’t seen the account book, have you?

JOE
No, I haven’t. I’ll help you look when I get back, I’m sure it’s around here somewhere.

(JOE and OLIVIA exit, CHARLIE is running around the shop, still looking for the book. NORA enters the front door)

NORA
Morning.

CHARLIE
Have you seen the account book?

NORA
‘Good morning Nora! How are you?’

CHARLIE
Sorry. Good morning. Have you seen the account book? I can’t find it anywhere, and I-

(NORA pulls the book out from behind her back and shows it to him)

Why do you-?

NORA
I’ve been working on something for you.

CHARLIE
What?

NORA
It’s a plan. A business plan; I really wanted to finish it and show you today, because the new tax regulations go into effect next week, so I stayed up all night with this. It’s finished. The short of it is, if you can follow this plan I’ve made up, in three years you’d have enough money to buy the building next door and expand the shop.

(CHARLIE looks at her and says nothing.)

I, um, the only thing I was having trouble with was there was no listed source of income for a couple of down payments— for supplies and such, but I assumed the customer fronted the money...Charlie why aren’t you interrupting me? You always interrupt me.
CHARLIE
You took my account book without telling me?

NORA
I hardly though you’d miss it, it’s not like you update it very often-

CHARLIE
-And you took it upon yourself to rework my records, by yourself, for my shop?

NORA
You said you didn’t have time, so I-

CHARLIE
-I know I’m not the smartest guy, Nora, but I thought you trusted me more than this.

NORA
Of course I trust you. I’m trying to help you! I love this place as much as you do, don’t you understand-

CHARLIE
No, I don’t understand! I don’t understand why you’d go behind my back like this.

NORA
Charlie, I’m confused. I’ve told you for ages that I want to be a part of this with you; now I’m finally doing something about it. I’m helping the business-

CHALRIE
Well this isn’t your business, is it?!

(NORA is stunned. She doesn’t respond, just drops the account book on the table and exits, leaving CHARLIE onstage alone. Blackout).

Scene 11
(JOE and OLIVIA are in the piano shop. She’s at the piano and JOE has the carved music stand)

JOE
Writing a new song for Duke? Can I hear?
OLIVIA
It’s not done yet. They asked me to write another song, since the first one went so well! I’m supposed to finish it by Friday— but I’m having a hard time working at an unfinished piano.

JOE
Well, I finished the music stand. If I put it on will miss composer extraordinaire be able to finish her song?

OLIVIA
I suppose.

(Olivia writes in her lap as Joe comes over to attach the stand. He pauses to watch her write)

JOE
What’s that?

OLIVIA
A letter.

JOE
Ok, I’m not THAT new to town. Or the world.

OLIVIA
You asked what it was!

JOE
Fine. Who’s the letter from?

OLIVIA
Family, I guess.

JOE
You guess?

OLIVIA
Joe, stop it.

JOE
From back home?

OLIVIA
No.

JOE
Oh— well you said your mom and sisters, before, so I just assumed—
OLIVIA
Remember what happened the last time you assumed something about me? (beat) I have ‘family’ here.

JOE
(beat) Look, I’m not trying to hit a nerve- though I keep doing that anyways. I’m just trying to learn a little bit more about you.

OLIVIA
Why?

JOE
So I can sell your story to the Tribune, of course. (she barely cracks a smile) Come on.

OLIVIA
Fine. Um- my dad lives in Chicago. I came here when I was fourteen. He’d been here for about a year before me- he played upright bass, but there weren’t a lot of jobs for him in Bohemia, you know, so he came here. I was the oldest, so I got sent next. So I show up with my tiny suitcase at his door, and some woman answers it.

JOE
You mean he was-

OLIVIA
Yep. Not exactly the family band I thought it was going to be.

JOE
So, he writes, and you-?

OLIVIA
Don’t answer.

JOE
But you gave him your address?

OLIVIA
No. He must have seen the ad I used to have in the Trib for my piano lessons, when I still taught here. So this is where they come. And anyway, what would I say? “Dear dad, You broke my mom’s heart and stranded me in Chicago. Thanks for nothing, Sincerely, Olivia.”
JOE
Maybe he has a reason-

OLIVIA
A reason for cheating? For lying to my entire family? What was his plan when my mom saved enough money to sail across? I’d like to see him ‘reason’ with her then.

JOE
You’re right. I didn’t mean to—(trails off, decides to change the subject). So, how did you end up here? (meaning to the piano shop)

OLIVIA
(She finally laughs) I ran.

JOE
What?

OLIVIA
I ran! I left my suitcase, and ran away. And I ran, and I ran, until I ran INTO Charlie.

JOE
Really?!

OLIVIA
Just up there. (She points to the spot on the street where JOE and CHARLIE met) And he just asked “Do you need-

OLIVIA/JOE:
“help finding your way?”

JOE
And the rest is history, isn’t it? (beat) That’s really—(searching for the right word)really brave.

OLIVIA
What?

JOE
You didn’t go home. And you kept playing music, after all of that.

OLIVIA
I can’t imagine doing anything else.
JOE
See, but that’s it! It’s what you want to do! Most people just go wherever they’re told.

OLIVIA
That’s not true, lots of people are-

JOE
Well then I’m not. I’ve never done what I want before, just what other people want. (beat) I’m- flying around, it seems, all the time. I go where people tell me to go, be with who I’m supposed to be with, do whatever job falls into my lap. And I wish I could just decide for myself for once- (he stops mid-thought)

OLIVIA
What do you want, Joe?

(JOE looks at OLIVIA. For once in her life, she doesn’t run away. JOE kisses her. End scene).

Scene 12

2.02) THE TIPTOE RAG – ALL

(Morning. JOE enters the shop, CHARLIE is there already)
CHARLIE

Hey.

JOE

Hey.

CHARLIE

How’s it going?

JOE

Okay. Do you have my –

CHARLIE

Your what?

JOE

-My pay? I was s’posed to get it day before yesterday.

CHARLIE

I’m still waiting for McCormick’s deposit; we’re, ah, a little drained. You know as soon as I can, I’ll give it to you–

JOE

Yeah, I do. Okay.

I SHOULDN’T HAVE LENT ALL MY SAVINGS AWAY
GOT NO WAY TO MEET MEANS TO THE END,
NO MONEY TO MARGIE OR MOTHER TO SEND
BUT IT’S FINE, IT’S FINE, IT’S OKAY,

JOE/CHARLIE

ROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND EACH OTHER,
TALKIN’ BUT NOT SAYING MUCH AT ALL,
IF WE SAY WHAT’S ON OUR MINDS, THE CARDS WILL FALL,
FALL DOWN, SO KEEP TOEIN’ AROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND,
AS THE MINUTES CRAWL.

(CHARLIE goes upstage to work as OLIVIA enters and immediately crosses to JOE).

JOE

Morning.

OLIVIA

Hi.
JOE
Can I? (About to go in for a kiss, remembers CHARLIE is still there and gets nervous) - never mind.

OLIVIA
What? Why?

JOE
It’s just that I better get to work.

(JOE walks off in a hurry)

OLIVIA
Oh. Ok- bye?

JOE/OLIVIA
IF IT’S NOT ONE, IT’S THE OTHER OF US THAT’S RUNNING AWAY, FEELING SHY,

JOE
FEELING TOO GUILTY,

JOE/OLIVIA
(TO) LOOK IN HIS/HER EYES
SO MUCH A LOOK CAN IMPLY

SO, ROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND EACH OTHER, TALKIN’ BUT NOT SAYING MUCH AT ALL
IF WE SAY WHAT’S IN OUR HEARTS, THE CARDS WILL FALL, FALL DOWN, SO KEEP TOEIN’ AROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND, AS THE MINUTES CRAWL.

(OLIVIA goes to the piano as NORA enters, who is clearly looking for OLIVIA but gets stopped by CHARLIE)

CHARLIE
Nora! Can we-?

NORA
No.

CHARLIE:
I didn’t even finish!

NORA
So?
CHARLIE:
I just want to explain myself, though-

NORA:
I just came for my bag. Then I’d really better go.

(NORA tries to scoot around CHARLIE to get to the back room)

NORA/CHARLIE:
EVERY BRUSH OF THE ELBOW HAS GOT US ON EDGE,
IT’S HARD JUST TO SAY HELLO,

+OLIVIA/JOE:
TEETERING ON THE EDGE,
TRYING TO PUT ON A SHOW,

SO, ROUND, TIPTOE’ AROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND EACH OTHER,
TALKIN’ BUT NOT SAYING MUCH AT ALL
IF WE SAY WHAT’S ON OUR MINDS, OR IN OUR HEARTS,
THE CARDS WILL FALL,
FALL DOWN, SO KEEP TOEIN’ AROUND, TIPTOEIN’ AROUND,
AS THE MINUTES CRAWL.

(NORA finally gets to the back room, with CHARLIE following close behind, trying -unsuccessfully- to get a word in edgewise. OLIVIA and JOE remain onstage. She is sitting on top of the piano he’s been working on.)

OLIVIA
Are you okay? You’ve been... on edge.

JOE
Fine, sorry. Just a lot on my mind. But you’re going to have to move eventually; I’ve got to finish this by the end of the day.

OLIVIA
I know, I know. I’ve got to get to work anyways.

JOE
You mean, lessons? All the way over there? (he points to the other piano) Well yes it’s quite a long commute, you better get going or you’ll be late!

(OLIVIA laughs)

OLIVIA
No, I— I had to take another job. There are too many kids that can’t afford lessons any more, and when they can’t afford lessons, I can’t afford rent. So now I’m a typist for the Chicago Tribune. Woohoo.

JOE
So we’re both working for the enemy now, huh?

OLIVIA
Looks like it. Anyway— why is McCormick asking for all these carvings?

JOE
It’s a present for his fiancée.

OLIVIA
Wow. Guy must be loaded.

JOE
When you’re the editor of the Tribune, a custom-made cedarwood, double-glossed piano probably feels like nothing. What I’d give to be McCormick.

OLIVIA
I don’t know; doesn’t seem like the guy has a lot of friends. Half of town wants him to side with Wilson instead of opposing the war in the paper. The other side wants him to just shut up about the war and pretend it isn’t happening.

JOE
I suppose. What I meant, though, is that I’d give just about anything to be able to buy something as nice as this for you.

OLIVIA
(embarrassed, but pleased) Well, I wouldn’t mind having one of these (indicates the piano) at my place. But, we can still have fun. How about I get us in to see Bix at the Mill on Saturday, and you can buy the drinks? It’s a fun set, we can dance!

JOE
I can’t let you pay!

OLIVIA
You don’t have to— I made friends with the door manager, going there so often to see Duke about my songs, so he sneaks me in
free now. But remember, I am the one with a steady salary here. Has Charlie figured out why your check bounced?

JOE
No, and he keeps running away every time I try to ask him about it. But I will not run away from the opportunity to dance with you for a whole night.

(JOE grabs hold of OLIVIA’s waist and begins to dance with her in the shop, they are laughing and having fun as NORA enters through the front door. JOE breaks off, embarrassed, which confuses OLIVIA, but she doesn’t ask him why.)

NORA
Morning, lovebirds! How are things?

OLIVIA
Nora, stop!

NORA
I’m just teasing. Where’s Charlie?

JOE
He’s been in the back all day. Don’t know what he’s doing though; this (gestures to piano) is the only job we’ve gotten in the last two weeks. Guess people are too focused on donating to the war effort to think about replacing their soft pedal.

OLIVIA
They’re all focused on this stupid war.

NORA
Did you guys get the Trib yet today?

OLIVIA
No, but I typed the damn thing.

NORA
New job everything you dreamed of and more?

OLIVIA
More like a nightmare. Typing is not as easy as playing piano.

JOE
What does the paper say?
NORA
Just confirms your story, Joe: ‘May 9 1917: New Tax Hits Everybody: Increase in all existing tariffs to bring in $1,800,000 for War effort’

JOE
McCormick and his piano are worth more than all our lives; this alone will keep us afloat.

NORA
Will it?

OLIVIA
What?

(The phone rings on the counter; JOE and OLIVIA wait for NORA to answer)

NORA
It’s not my business, is it?

(OLIVIA answers the phone)

OLIVIA
Hello, Williams Pianos, how can I help you? (pause) NO, this is not Mr. Williams. (pause) Yes, I’ll grab him. (covers receiver) CHARLIE! TELEPHONE FOR YOU! (back to receiver) Yes, he’ll be with you in just a moment.

CHARLIE
Jeez, Olivia, trying to blow my ear off?

OLIVIA
Some guy wants to talk to you.

(Charlie takes the phone from Olivia)

CHARLIE
Hello, this is Charlie Williams, Williams Pianos, how can I...Oh, of course, hello Mr. McCormick, how are you?...The war, yes, tough stuff, I’m aware. My best employee Joe is finishing up those carvings you requested, and then you’ll have a nice instrument to take your mind off...What? You’re not?...I’m sorry sir, I don’t
understand...Gosh, I’m real sorry to hear that- But sir, it’s practically finished, what are we supposed to do with such a custom project?...Yes, of course, it’s not your problem. But are you sure-Of course sir. Yes...I’m sorry too. Goodbye. (hangs up)
He canceled the order.


JOE/NORA/OLIVIA
(ad lib) What?!/He can’t do that!/No way!

CHARLIE
He’s been fined. Too many anti-war sentiments in the Trib, and they cracked down on him. Said to hold it until the war’s over and the paper picks up again, but until then he’s not buying.


OLIVIA
They can’t actually do that?! I thought for sure it was all a scare tactic.


JOE
What are we supposed to do now? My savings are in this thing, he can’t just not buy it!


NORA
What do you mean your savings are in it?


CHARLIE
We-


NORA
Charlie, you two are invested personally in this?


CHARLIE
We didn’t have enough money to make it otherwise.


NORA
’I don’t need help at the shop Nora!’ ’I’ve got everything handled Nora’ Well, clearly you don’t! You just sunk you and your best friend AND your business.


CHARLIE
Don’t rub it in-


NORA
-I don’t have to be nice any more. What’s your plan, independent businessman? How’re you going to fix this?
CHARLIE
As of now, Williams Pianos is closed!

(JOE grabs the account book)

JOE
There’s got to be something in here that we missed, a payment someone didn’t make, something-

CHARLIE
Joe, I’ve been looking through that book all morning. There’s nothing. I’ve got to shut down, and we’ve got to find other jobs. I know some guys at Fletcher’s Grain Mill, we can probably-

(JOE stalks out the door)

CHARLIE
He hates me.

OLIVIA
He’s upset. Anyone would be.

CHARLIE
He forgot his wallet.

(OLIVIA picks up the wallet, which has a letter sticking out of it. She reads the end.)

OLIVIA
‘All my love, your Margie’. His cousin is really sappy.

NORA
(Comes over to read letter) This ‘Margie’ doesn’t sound like a cousin to me.

OLIVIA
(inspecting the rest of the letter) ‘Can’t wait for you to come home…I wish with all my heart… My darling fiancée?’

NORA
Wow.

CHARLIE
I thought she was just a fling-
OLIVIA
-You knew about this? You knew about her?

CHARLIE
I didn’t know it was serious! He mentioned her, once, when we first met, but she never came up again, and I think she’s from his hometown, so I just assumed-

OLIVIA
I’ve got to go. I have work.

NORA
At 8 in the morning?

OLIVIA
Yes, at the Trib we start at 8, because it takes a lot of time and effort to tell the truth every day- something some people don’t seem to care for.

(Olivia starts to storm out, Nora grabs Joe’s wallet)

NORA
Olivia.

(She holds out the wallet to Olivia; after a moment she takes it and exits the shop. Joe is running back to the store when she leaves.

JOE
Oh, thank you! I was just coming for that. Need all the money I can get now. (she doesn’t give it to him) Where are you off to so early?

OLIVIA
I’m working extra hours at the Trib.

JOE
What? Why?

OLIVIA
I have to fend for myself.

JOE
Well there’s got to be some way I can help you, you shouldn’t work so much-
OLIVIA
-Jesus, Joe, are you insane?! You have no job, no money, since you were stupid enough to put all of it into that piano. And who are you to tell me how much I should or should not work?

JOE
I didn’t think this would happen! I’m sorry I trusted Charlie! But can’t you give more lessons instead of working all day at the Trib?

OLIVIA
You think there are any kids left to give lessons to? They’re all working! Two of the boys I gave lessons to enlisted on Monday.

JOE
That’s not right, they shouldn’t be fighting-

OLIVIA
They have no choice! They’re trying help their country and the people who love them- more than I can say for you.

JOE
What?

OLIVIA
Here’s your wallet- and your letter. I’ve got to go.

(OLIVIA hands JOE the wallet and Margaret’s letter.)

JOE
Olivia, I -

OLIVIA
-A fiancée. Were you ever going to tell me?

JOE
I was waiting for the right time-

(OLIVIA is already exiting, slams the door behind her.)

Scene 13

1.10. (Scattered)-ALL
(Evening. CHARLIE is writing a letter to OLIVIA)
CHARLIE
HELLO OLIVIA
HOW ARE YOU LATELY?
IT’S BEEN A MONTH SINCE THE SHOP CLOSED DOWN
DOES THE TRIB TREAT YOU RIGHT?
DID YOU SLEEP LAST NIGHT?
SO MANY THINGS ARE ODD TO ASK IN LETTERS
BUT YOU’RE TOO FAR AWAY
TO ASK YOU FACE TO FACE

SEED, SCATTERED AND SOWN,
ALL OVER THE CITY
TRYING TO SEE MY FRIENDS SOMEWHERE,
DOES GROWING UP MEAN GROWING FURTHER APART,
CAUSE WE’RE SCATTERED,
IN PLACE AND IN HEART

NORA
(Writing a letter)
HELLO JOE,
HOW ARE THINGS ON THE WEST SIDE?
NOTHING MUCH DIFFERENT, HERE UP TOWN,
DID YOU WRITE OLIVIA?–
SHE’D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU
HARD TO SPILL A SECRET IN A LETTER
BUT I MISS MEDDLING EVERY DAY

(JOE enters holding a paper with ad listings)

JOE
Western Beef is a ‘no’ for jobs. That leaves, um…

(He looks through the paper)
Well.

(A leaflet falls out of the paper)
‘There is a place in line for you, will you fill it? Join the US
Army,’ huh. (reads) ‘Compensation and benefits?’

JOE/OLIVIA
(both writing letters)
HELLO NORA/DEAR CHARLIE,
GOOD TO HEAR FROM YOU,
WISH I COULD SAY ALL IS DULL AND THE SAME

JOE
BUT I’M LOSING MY COURAGE

OLIVIA
I’M FEELING DISCOURAGED

BOTH
THERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN’T LET ON IN LETTERS
WITHOUT LETTING ON YOU’RE LOSING THE GAME

CAUSE WE’RE SCATTERED,
IN PLACE AND IN HEART

JOE
(To himself, underscored. Others remain frozen onstage)

Nobody’s hiring an immigrant carpenter-slash-piano maker. Who

would’ve thought?

(He pulls out another form and a pencil from his pocket)

‘It’s different. I have to fend for myself.’ Well, if she can, I

guess I can too.

(Filling in blanks)

Name: Joesph Loula. Preferred branch: …army. Available date of

enlistment: as soon as possible.

(JOE thinks for a minute, pulls out a blank sheet and
begins writing)

JOE
DEAR OLIVIA,
I AM SORRY, I…

(He thinks a minute, struggling to find the right words)

JUST KNOW I LOVE YOU SO,
I DON’T KNOW THE WORDS TO SAY,
THERE’S JUST ONE GIRL
I’M WRITING TO TODAY

ALL
SEED, SCATTERED AND SOWN,
ALL OVER THE CITY (SCATTERED AND SOWN)
TRYING TO SEE MY FRIENDS SOMEWHERE
DOES GROWING UP MEAN GROWING FURTHER APART (FURTHER APART)
CAUSE WE’RE SCATTERED,
IN PLACE AND IN HEART

(CHARLIE is waiting, alone in the shop. NORA enters)

NORA
Hi.

CHARLIE
You got my note.

NORA
I did.

CHARLIE
I’m sorry.

NORA
Okay.

CHARLIE
I didn’t want to tell you all of those down payments in the book were my own money. I was so embarrassed; I knew you’d blow a gasket if you found out. Which you did do, to be fair.

(NORA gives him a look)

Not the time, got it. I figured I could make it through the war, and then fix everything when business picked back up. But that didn’t work, obviously. So, I just stayed away.

NORA
Why couldn’t you have said that a month ago? Or at least sent a ‘Hi! I’m alive and not starving to death?’

CHARLIE
I hate letting you down. Plus — Everyone’s starving right now.

NORA
(Nods) I saw the new campaign: (reads from the paper) “Eat less wheat, help the fleet!” I’ll give it to them, it’s catchy.
(After an awkward silence) Look, Charlie, I appreciate the apology, but if that’s all you’ve got to say, I have to get going. (She starts to leave)

CHARLIE:
-I read your business plan.

(NORA turns back around)

NORA:
You did?

CHARLIE
(nods) It’s good. Better than anything I could ever come up with.

NORA:
I know.

CHARLIE:
It’d be foolproof if we had ANY money, at all. And if I still had a carpenter. I haven’t heard from Joe in weeks.

NORA
I haven’t heard from him. I hope he’s okay. I’ve tried sending letters, but I haven’t heard back.

CHARLIE
I haven’t either. I can’t believe that girl was his fiancée this whole time. I thought he was head over heels for Olivia.

NORA
I think he was. He was just stupid.

CHARLIE
How’s Olivia? I haven’t seen her in a while either.

NORA
She works all day, every day- only way I see her is if she comes to the Mill after the Trib office closes. She’s all right. They’re doing her newest song tonight for the first time (hesitating before inviting him along) You should come out and listen.

CHARLIE
You want me to come? (She nods) I don’t know that I’ll be able to contribute much to the festive mood.
NORA
Well, maybe a drink will loosen you up. I happen to know a lady behind the bar that can slip you one for free.

CHARLIE
You’re so lucky you kept your job.

NORA
If there’s one thing people will always find money for, it’s drinking. I picked an industry with job security.

CHARLIE
Not interested in that partnership any more, huh? I don’t blame you.

NORA
We’ll open this place up eventually. And you’re not going to take no for an answer this time.

CHARLIE
I’m a mess.

1.11. (Bottom of the Well)—NORA/CHARLIE ***(DEMO 12)

NORA
THINGS MAY NOT BE PERFECT
FAR FROM IT, IT’S TRUE
AND THE END LOOKS FAR AWAY, I WILL ADMIT
MONEY, A JOB, AND HAPPINESS
YOU’RE LACKING THROUGH AND THROUGH (HEY!)
BUT THE THING THAT YOU AND I
HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO DO, IS

LOOK UP FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL
ADMIT THAT THINGS AREN’T GOING SO SWELL,
AND LOOKING UP FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL,
‘WE CAN’T GO DOWN FROM HERE’

WE’RE HERE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL,
BUT ON DARK DAYS, YOU ALWAYS TELL ME,
LOOK UP, FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL,
BECAUSE WE CAN’T GO DOWN FROM HERE!

CHARLIE
I LOST MY BUSINESS

NORA
(WE’RE IN IT DEEP NOW)

CHARLIE

I LOST MY FRIEND

NORA

(UP TO OUR KNEES)

CHARLIE

ISN’T THIS THE END

NORA

NO IT’S NOT MY FRIEND, BECAUSE WE CAN’T GO DOWN FROM HERE!

CHARLIE

WE’RE REALLY IN IT DEEP NOW

NORA

WATER’S RISING

CHARLIE

I’M HAVING TROUBLE SEEING HOW

NORA

UP TO OUR KNEES

CHARLIE

I’M NORMALLY AN OPTIMIST

MOST BAD MOODS ARE QUICK DISMISSED

BUT HOW CAN WE GET OUT OF THIS?

THE WATER’S RISING

NORA

BECAUSE NO MATTER WHAT

WHICHEVER WAY THINGS GO

THERE’S ONE THING I’LL ALWAYS KNOW

I’VE GOT YOU

CHARLIE

I’VE GOT YOU, TOO

BOTH

NOW THERE’S JUST ONE THING TO DO,

LOOK UP FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL

 ADMIT THAT THINGS ARE (GOING) PRETTY SWELL

CAUSE I’VE GOT YOU AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL
AND WE CAN’T GO DOWN FROM HERE

WE COULD WALK THROUGH HELL
BUT I’D BE COMPELLED
TO SMILE ‘CAUSE I’VE GOT YOU

I’VE GOT YOU AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL,
AND WE CAN’T GO DOWN FROM HERE!

NORA
You feel like that drink now?

CHARLIE
One thing first.

(CHARLIE looks around the shop, and sees the shop keys on
the counter. He grabs them, and goes to stand in front of
NORA)

This isn’t quite right, but I want to do this before I lose my
nerve.

(CHARLIE gets down on one knee and holds out the keys to
NORA)

Nora Duchek, will you marry me?

NORA
What??!!

CHARLIE
Nora Duchek, will you marry me! And be Nora Williams, co-owner
of Williams’ Pianos?

NORA
(smiling) Charlie, why are you doing this?

CHARLIE
I’ve wanted to since the day I met you. You’re the only one who
can make me laugh when it feels like everything’s gone downhill.
You are the smartest, bossiest—

NORA
-Hey!

CHARLIE
-Kindest, bravest woman I know. You deserve so much better than
me, but somehow you’ve decided that you want to stay with a
broke, failed piano maker. If that doesn’t deserve a key ring, I don’t know what does.

NORA
Charlie, you know I don’t care how much money you have. I don’t care what job you have. I just care about being with you. That’s all I need.

CHARLIE
So, is that a yes???

NORA
Yes, it’s a yes!

(CHARLIE slips the key ring on NORA’S finger, she laughs, they both kiss. SCATTERED REPRISE Underscoring starts as JOE walks on to read a letter. Oohing exists under the following:)

1.12. (Scattered Reprise 1)-ALL

JOE
(reading) Dear Mr. Joseph Loula...Sergeant J.S. Anderson requires your enlistment...August 17th- in two days??

(JOE joins other three:)

ALL
CAUSE WE’RE SCATTERED
Scene 14

(A different evening. NORA and CHARLIE are in the shop. It’s clear that nobody’s been in for a while, everything is dingy and dusty, but otherwise just as they left it. NORA has the day’s paper.)

NORA
Where are they? It’s nearly 8:30.

CHARLIE
I’m sure they’re on their way.

NORA
I just can’t wait to tell them.

CHARLIE
Believe me, me too.

NORA
Do you think Olivia and Joe will be mad we didn’t invite them to the courthouse?

CHARLIE
They’ll understand. And we’ll have a nice party later. But right now, nobody has much cash to spare on a big fancy wedding.

NORA
True. But, we can at least drink some champagne! (She goes to grab the bottle)

CHARLIE
Oh, so now it’s okay to have alcohol in the shop? Not a ‘bad business practice’ any more??

NORA
You’re out of business, remember?

CHARLIE
How could I forget?

NORA
Sorry. I just want to tell Joe and Olivia we’re married! And to see them. Joe I haven’t even heard from, and Olivia and I work opposite schedules.
CHARLIE
Patience, Mrs. Williams, they’ll be here any second now. In the meantime, anything fun in the paper?

NORA
Has there been anything ‘fun’ in the Trib since 1914? No—just telling us to give more money: “Hun or Home? Buy more Liberty Bonds!”

CHARLIE
Do they really think that any of us have money to spare? I’ve been out of work for nearly three weeks!

NORA
I’ll do just about anything to get this business over with.

CHARLIE
It’s been a long year. Do they have the new enlistments in there?

(NORA hands the paper to CHARLIE)

NORA
They’re usually on the back page.

CHARLIE
Um, Nora?

NORA
What?

CHARLIE
Look: (NORA reads where he’s pointed)

NORA:
No, it’s got to be another Joe.

(OLIVIA enters the front door)

OLIVIA
Hi. Oh, this place is dusty. What’s the news? I got your letter.

NORA
You didn’t tell us about Joe!
OLIVIA
What? No, he sent me a letter, I just got it this morning, and I need to talk to him.

CHARLIE
So you don’t know?

OLIVIA
Know what??

NORA
That he enlisted!

OLIVIA
What? No he didn’t.

CHARLIE
It’s right here in the paper.

(OLIVIA grabs the paper from him)

OLIVIA
I can’t believe- why didn’t he tell me? I got his letter, so I went to his apartment to talk to him, but he was gone...and now he’s gone...

NORA
I’m sure he didn’t mean to just run out-

OLIVIA
-No, that’s exactly what he meant to do. First he’s got a secret fiancée, and now he’s gone without a trace-

(CHARLIE starts out the door)

NORA
Charlie where are you going?

CHARLIE
I’m going to follow my stupid friend over there.

NORA
Charlie, he’s already gone-

CHARLIE
I know. Anybody know the address of the enlistment office?
NORA
You can’t just enlist!

CHARLIE
Why not? It’s a job, which I don’t have. It’s a purpose, which I also don’t have. And Joe might be a cheater, but at least he did something and isn’t moping around a dingy shop like me. I’m going.

NORA
Charlie- what about our-

(CHARLIE has already stalked out, NORA follows, calling after him. OLIVIA is alone onstage.)

1.13. (Fool Me Twice)-OLIVIA ***(DEMO 13)

OLIVIA
ONE, ONE TIME
YOU’D THINK ONE TIME
WOULD BE ENOUGH TIME
TO GET IT THROUGH MY THICK HEAD, NO

ONE, HEARTBREAK
ONE BETRAYAL ONE MISTAKE,
SHOULD MAKE ME WANT TO WALK AWAY, NO
FOOL ME ONCE IS JUST PLAIN CRUEL,

I SHOULD LAUGH,
’CAUSE HOW DID I MANAGE
TO END UP BRUISED AND BROKEN?
I COULD CRY A MILLION TIMES
BUT I’D JUST DO IT AGAIN

DONE, I’M DONE
LETTING UP, AND HAVING FUN,
WHEN IF COMES TO FUN, I’VE HAD NONE
FOOL ME ONCE IS JUST PLAIN CRUEL,
FOOL ME TWICE AND I’M THE FOOL

SHAME ON YOU,
FOR MAKING ME SO BLUE
SHAME ON ME,
FOR LOVING SO CARELESSLY,
FOOL ME ONCE, JUST CRUEL
ONE TIME IS CRUEL,
BUT TWICE AND I’M THE FOOL
(Blackout)
Scene 15

1.14. (Scattered Reprise 2)-ALL
(Afternoon. OLIVIA is trying to write a letter. It is not going well. Scattered Underscoring)

OLIVIA

(writing) Dear Joe,
I hope you’re all right.

(she pauses, flips the paper and starts over)

Dear Joe,
I hate you.

(pauses, throws it out and starts again)

Dear Joe,
I love you.

Oh, no no no. (she throws that page too and starts again)

Dear Joe,
I need you. (pauses) -to come home. (pauses again) So I can slap you across the face.

(She crumples up the letter, giving up completely)

I wouldn’t even know where to send it.

(JOE enters in uniform, writing a letter)

JOE

(Dear Olivia,

(Pauses, he can’t find the right words right away either)

THERE’S JUST ONE GIRL
ON THE OPPOSITE END OF THE WORLD
SHE’S BEAUTIFUL, SMART,
AND I TORE IT APART,
AND I FINALLY KNOW WHAT TO DO,
AND MAYBE,
WHEN I’M BACK SHE’LL TALK TO ME,
‘CAUSE I WOULD BE SO LUCKY,
TO HAVE THAT GIRL,
(NORA enters, writing a letter. JOE remains onstage while CHARLIE and NORA sing.)

NORA
HELLO CHARLIE

CHARLIE
DEAR NORA

BOTH
GOOD TO HEAR FROM YOU
WISH I COULD SAY ALL IS DULL AND THE SAME

CHARLIE
MADE IT OKAY
WROTE YOU STRAIGHT AWAY
TO SAY THAT I MISS YOU
THERE ARE THINGS, YOU CAN’T LET OUT IN LETTERS,
LIKE LOVE AND LONGING AND –

(Piano ‘bomb’ heard offstage)

CHARLIE
(hurriedly writing) I have to go. I love you. Charlie.

(CCHARLIE folds up the letter quickly, drops his bag, and stands while NORA/JOE/OLIVIA sing. Another piano ‘bomb’ goes off, and CHARLIE responds. He slowly walks past JOE, OLIVIA, and spending an extra moment with NORA as they sing the following. He exits.)

NORA/JOE/OLIVIA
OOH OOH OOH
OOH OOH OOH
OOH OOH OOH
OOH OOH
AAH

(Blackout)
Scene 16
(Midday. NORA has just gotten her mail. JOE enters stage in full army gear. He’s looking around, but NORA spots him first.)

NORA
Joe?!

JOE
(Smiling grimly) War’s over.

NORA
I’m so glad you’re back! (They hug) I answered your letter, did it ever get to you? I was just grabbing my mail, about to get lunch. Do you want to come?

JOE
Sure.

NORA
(leading him down the street, leafing through her mail.) My treat. And this means Charlie should be back any day now too-

(NORA cuts herself off when she comes to one official-looking envelope)

‘U.S. Army Office, Important Notice, c/o Charlie Williams.’

(JOE stops in his tracks, understanding immediately what the letter is).

NORA
Joe? (He does not answer) Will- will you open it?

JOE
Me? Um, I-

NORA
-Please. Read the letter.

JOE
(opens the letter, begins to read. He attempts and fails to deliver the letter smoothly).

‘Dear Mrs. Williams,
On behalf of the Chief of Staff, United States Air Force, I regret to inform you of the untimely death of your fiancée, Private Charlie C. Williams. He died while repairing military equipment during battle on April 28th, 1918. While further details are unavailable at this time-

(NORA runs away, crying, and leaves Joe with the letter).

JOE

Nora, come back-

(OLIVIA enters from wherever NORA has just exited. She is startled to see him).

OLIVIA

What are you doing here? What happened to Nora?

(JOE does not speak but hands her the letter. OLIVIA reads it silently, and eventually looks up to JOE).

What?

JOE

I don’t even know all of the details myself. We weren’t at the same base.

OLIVIA

(Gesturing back where NORA exited) And did she just - (JOE nods)

(JOE looks at OLIVIA, who is clearly very upset. He tries to go to her but she backs up).

I have to go find her.

(She starts off after NORA, but JOE runs after and turns her around)

JOE

Olivia-

OLIVIA

What, Joe?

JOE

I’m sorry. About all of it.
OLIVIA
I know.

JOE
I was wondering if-

OLIVIA
-Not now.

JOE
But I-

OLIVIA
Joe, not all of us were in the trenches, but we all fought this war. I’m very glad you’re safe. I said not now.

(JOE doesn’t retort again)

OLIVIA
-I have to go find Nora.

(OLIVIA exits following NORA, and JOE is left alone on stage. End Scene.)
Scene 17

(About month later, morning. NORA is in the piano shop, silently staring at the piano, which has an unopened letter on it. Next to it is another bunch of papers. The rest of the shop is largely as they left it, but dimmer/dustier; It has clearly not been used for a while. OLIVIA enters)

OLIVIA
Hi. (NORA doesn’t answer). Last day before the shop lease expires, right? (Still no answer) Nora, what’s-

(She is interrupted by JOE coming into the shop behind her. They look at each other.)

JOE
(To OLIVIA) Last day on the lease. Thought I’d come say goodbye to the place.

(OLIVIA doesn’t reply. They both look at NORA, who is still staring at the letter.)

NORA
(Numbly) I got a letter.

OLIVIA
I know. I saw the eviction notice on the counter last week.

NORA
No.

(She picks up the letter on the table)

I got a letter. From Charlie.

OLIVIA
Oh. (Doesn’t know what to say). Has it been here all this time?

(NORA doesn’t answer. Both pause in silence. NORA picks up the letter and opens it. CHARLIE appears upstage of them, writing the letter. He is his normal, well, happy self.)

CHARLIE/NORA (unison)
‘Dear Nora, I’m so glad you found this–’

CHARLIE
I hoped you wouldn’t have to, but here we are. I’m sorry. For leaving. For being too full of pride to stay. You’re the best woman, the best person, I know. I wanted to live up to all of
that, and do something, great, for once, for you. I guess if you’re reading this, it didn’t work out like I planned. BUT, it does mean that you made it back to the shop without me. ‘Cause the shop is home. Our home. The other paper in the envelope is the new lease for the shop— which includes a new owner.’

(OLIVIA takes the other papers and reads)

OLIVIA

CHARLIE
(continuing to write, smiling)
‘I put your new name on there, I hope that’s ok. Partners, just like you always wanted, right? And as your business partner, I have just one request: Make Williams home again. For you, for Olivia, for Joe (he messed up, but he’s a good guy and a good carpenter, which you need), and for these pianos. I know you’ll have the place up and running like clockwork in no time. Better than I ever could. But don’t forget that pianos are more than hammers and pedals and keys. They’re your way home.
Take care of things, ok?

NORA/CHARLIE(unison)
‘I love you. Charlie’
CHARLIE goes to the MUSIC DIRECTOR, who exits as CHARLIE takes his place. The others do not notice this. He begins to accompany NORA)

1.15. (Silver Lining)-ALL
NORA
ALL I EVER WANTED
WAS HALF OF THIS PLACE
ALL I EVER WANTED
ALL I WANTED
WHAT’S THE POINT OF HAVING SOMETHING TO OWN
IF YOU’RE GOING IT ALONE

OLIVIA
YOU’RE NOT ALONE
YOU’RE FAR FROM ALONE
AND AS LONG AS I’M LIVING
YOU’LL HAVE SOMEWHERE TO GO
IT’S NOT THE SAME, I KNOW
THIS IS YORU SHOP
THIS IS CHICAGO
THIS IS OUR HOME

CHARLIE
THINGS MAY NOT BE PERFECT
FAR FROM IT, IT’S TRUE
AND THE END IS NOT THE THING THAT YOU WOULD THINK

OLIVIA
THERE’S A SILVER LINING
IN A CLOUD OF GRAY
THERE’S A SILVER LINING
ON THIS RAINY DAY
THERE’S A SILVER LINING
THERE IS SOMETHING TO SAVE
BUT WE HAVE TO BE BRAVE

NORA
IT SOUNDS STUPID

OLIVIA
DELUSIONAL,
NAIVE OR EVEN INSANE
MAYBE THAT’S WHAT IT TAKES
TO GET THROUGH THE RAIN

NORA
I have to open this place back up.

OLIVIA
Then do it! You know this place.

NORA
But I don’t know everything. It was supposed to be the two of us. I know the business, I know how it all works, but I still need-

JOE
-a carpenter?

(beat)
I might be able to help there.

NORA
Joe,-
JOE
I know, I messed up. I lied to both of you. I shouldn’t have lent Charlie the money, and I should have told you about Margie.

NORA
Could you even do all of the work here on your own?

JOE
I’ll figure it out. Learned from the best, after all.

NORA.
(after a moment, holds out her hand) Welcome to Williams Pianos. We’re happy to have you on board.

JOE
(shaking her hand) Looking forward to it. (hug)

NORA
As for the other half of your apology— (NORA indicates OLIVIA and crosses to the counter with both letters, leaving JOE with OLIVIA)

JOE
Hi.

OLIVIA
Hi.

JOE
Did you, did you get my letters?

OLIVIA
(with a chuckle) All 37 of them.

JOE
One for every day since I’ve been home. Did you read them?

OLIVIA
(Deciding whether or not to tell him) Every day.

JOE
So you know I ended things, with Margie.

OLIVIA
That doesn’t change—
JOE
YOU’D BE STUPID TO FORGIVE ME
TO TURN ON A DIME
PUT YOUR HAND IN MINE
AND PRETEND IT’S ALL FINE
EVEN SO
YOU’RE THE SMARTEST WOMAN I KNOW
DON’T MAKE ME GO, LET ME
BE YOUR SILVER LINING
NOT YOUR EVERY DAY
JUST YOUR SILVER LINING
I WON’T GET IN YOUR WAY
I’LL TRY NOT TO BOTHER YOU
IT’S A PRICE I’LL PAY
TO BE YOUR SILVER LINING

What do you say?

JOE
SO MANY QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS
THAT’S THE WAY THAT IT GOES

OLIVIA
ISN’T IT FUNNY
HAVE TO FORGET?

NORA
THERE’S SOMETHING HAPPENING

NORA/OLIVIA
LIKE WE’VE NEVER SEEN

JOE
SOMETHING SUBLIME

OLIVIA/NORA
THERE’S A SILVER LINING
IN THIS CLOUD OF GRAY
THERE’S A SILVER LINING
ON THIS RAINY DAY
THERE’S A SILVER LINING
THERE IS SOMETHING TO SAVE
BUT WE HAVE TO BE BRAVE

OLIVIA/NORA/JOE
MIGHT BE STUPID, DELUSIONAL
NAIVE OR EVEN INSANE
OLIVIA/NORA
‘CAUSE WE’RE LOOKING AT THE CLOUDS

OLIVIA/NORA/JOE
AND WE MIGHT NOT EVER FIND OUR GROUND

(Blackout)

The end.