

A Gust of Song

By

Drew Lang

(217) 741-4299
drew.lang@tutanota.de

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: Modern day. Midwest United States, nowhere in particular. Around noon.

AT RISE: The small kitchen of a middle class home. The sink is filled with dishes and the table is a mess, strewn with streamers, confetti, various plates and utensils, etc. There is a window above the sink with a wind chime hanging in front of it, and an open door to stage right, streaming in light from outside. A FATHER stands to stage left. He is lit by a spotlight, and is around 40-years-old. He wears simple clothes.

FATHER

(to audience)

I'm having an existential crisis. Well, see, not in the sense that I'm unsure of what I did with my life or that I felt I had no purpose. Those days came and went, and any answers I found wouldn't have helped me. It's just, I often forget I had a say in what happened to me.

(beat)

It was a strange feeling, that disconnection; as if everything I did I was observing through an old memory.

(A MOTHER enters from stage left, calling to someone outside. She is around 39-years-old. She is haphazard in appearance; she doesn't much care about her looks anymore. She is on a cell phone.)

MOTHER

Out there! Right out there! Yes, yes, set it down, please!

FATHER

I'd only been with a few women. It would be all well and good with them in the beginning. Some irresistible, primal urge would take hold of me, and I'd feel connected to myself again. It was good to feel primitive. But at some point there was a switch that flipped, and I found myself unhappy with where I was again. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised that it happened to the woman I was sure it wouldn't happen to.

MOTHER

(to phone)

I'm sorry, when did you say it would be ready?

(beat)

Yes, that's fine, I'll be there in a few.

(CONTINUED)

FATHER

We never had one of those love-at-first-sight moments or anything. We just sort of met through friends. Said our hellos, laughed at jokes that weren't funny--you know, went through the required steps to somehow call it a relationship. Romance was never my strong suit, but we had our moments. And they were *good* moments. Moments that stuck out from it all. It really was nice while it lasted.

MOTHER

(motioning out the door)

No, no, no! I said to put out the plates and napkins last, the wind will blow them away!

(Mother exits through door at stage right.)

FATHER

She laughed and craned her neck to look back at me. Her head nuzzled into my chest while my arms wrapped around her torso. "The wind is the greatest musician I've ever known," you said. "I heard the wind blow of a gust of song through the store window, and I just had to have one."

(beat)

You keep it inside, now. You never hear a song with the window closed.

(pause)

You learn to live without feeling. What was it Kurt Vonnegut said? "How nice--to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being alive?"

(pause)

I never understood that line.

(The mother and THE FIRST SON enter from stage right. He is around 17, and clearly attempts to act the man. There is a visible strain between them. Pointed judgment and defensive deflections.)

THE FIRST SON

I just don't understand why the hell we have to throw some big party for him, mom. He's almost thirteen. No one has parties like this at thirteen.

MOTHER

It's what he says he wants. What do you want me to do, refuse to give it to him?

THE FIRST SON

At least set *some* sort of boundaries, what the hell are the kids gonna think when they arrive and see a goddamn clown for entertainment?

(CONTINUED)

MOTHER

He said he wanted it--and *watch your language!*

THE FIRST SON

Well even you should know better than that.

FATHER

I remember looking at the yellow glow behind us, as if each pair of headlights was a different ghost haunting us across the highway. You cried in the front as I heard the engine mounting. The radio muttered white noise while black clouds rolled above. I noticed then as one last breath escaped my lungs that I couldn't see the stars above us. The ground fell into the sky, and I could swear the cars were orbiting around me.

MOTHER

Will you just please support him, okay? You don't have to enjoy it, just *please*, for me, don't ruin his day?

THE FIRST SON

If I don't ruin his day, then all you'll do is ruin his social life. Can't you just get rid of the clown at least?

(*Beat.*)

MOTHER

I'm not going to argue with you.

THE FIRST SON

Mom--

MOTHER

What would your father say?

(*Pause.*)

THE FIRST SON

My *father*?

FATHER

All I really remembered after was bliss. I had finally felt something: and that was nothing at all.

MOTHER

Would you argue with *him*?

THE FIRST SON

I dunno how he has anything to do with this mom, I can barely even remember him.

(CONTINUED)

FATHER

When my son was four-years-old, I took him out to the backyard and he and I planted an apple tree. I held his hand in mine as we packed the soil down. He danced and laughed in the cool spray of the hose. I remember how the drenched glass glistened like porcelain and short flares into my eyes as I looked down to him and said, "One day, when your dad's old and buried, you can come back here, right to this spot, and pluck an apple from where you're standing."

(beat)

The tree died by the end of winter.

THE SECOND SON

(o.s.)

Mom!

(THE SECOND SON enters, whining. He is almost 13-years-old.)

THE SECOND SON

When is the cake getting here?

MOTHER

I'm gonna go pick it up in a few minutes, don't worry!

THE SECOND SON

Mom! My friends are gonna be here soon!

MOTHER

Well I forgot, I'm sorry! It'll be here on time, don't be so ungrateful!

THE FIRST SON

See? He's always so damn selfish, you give him everything. He doesn't even try to be thankful for this shit!

MOTHER

Language!

THE SECOND SON

(visibly upset, tearing up)

Mom, it'll be embarrassing!

THE FIRST SON

Oh, what, you're about to cry over your cake not being here on time?

MOTHER

Honey, don't cry! It'll be fine, my god!

(CONTINUED)

FATHER

My son was too young to understand what happened. The other didn't even have teeth. I did what I could to soften the blow. Whatever money I could make, I did.

(beat)

I worked a lot of overtime. It was all I could do.

THE FIRST SON

Don't *console* him! He's being a little baby!

THE SECOND SON

Shut up!

(The mother is at a boiling point.)

MOTHER

Both of you shut up! I'm tired of having to deal with one of you bickering while the other cries!

THE FIRST SON

Mom--

MOTHER

I don't want to hear another word out of either of you, do you understand me?

(pointing to the first son)

You: go outside and keep setting up the tent.

(pointing to the second son)

And you go to your room and stay there until the party starts, do you hear me?

THE SECOND SON

But mom--!

MOTHER

Your goddamn cake will be here on time, now go.

(The second son hesitates, and exits in defeat. The first son holds his ground.)

FATHER

I was there when my wife gave birth to my first son. I can be proud of that. He writhed in my arms like a wounded dog, and I saw something beautiful. Some sort of invention of nature--an arrangement of atoms.

(beat)

I dug a hole that same day. Made an impression in the earth to make sure my son had something to remember me by. He sprained his ankle in it when he was three.

MOTHER

Don't make me repeat myself.

(CONTINUED)

THE FIRST SON

I told you he's terrible, mom!

MOTHER

I told you to set up the tent.

THE FIRST SON

Won't you at least just *try* and make him less of a spoiled brat?

MOTHER

He is your brother and my son, and I will not have you talk about him like that, do you understand? Now *go set up the tent.*

THE FIRST SON

(leaving, getting the last word)
You can barely even *call* him my brother...

(The first son exits.)

MOTHER

(yelling o.s.)
This is *not* the end of this discussion, do you understand me?!

FATHER

I thought, maybe everything would be okay. For her and the kids. Maybe everything would be better. It wasn't easy to see life through panes of glass. The edges got foggy and blurred. But at least I did something. Dig a hole, conceive a child--we do what we can to be as godly as possible.

(The mother sighs, leans herself against a chair to calm down.)

FATHER

But you can't be remembered by just existing. It takes more than that.

(The mother stands up, retrieves herself, and begins cleaning the dishes.)

FATHER

And people like me, they didn't have the luxury of fame, or of fortune. So they did what they could.

(The mother pauses, admires the view outside, and opens the window. She finishes up cleaning.)

FATHER

And when I look at them, I realize that they're not surviving without me...

(beat)

They're *living*.

(The mother goes to the table and grabs her keys, preparing to leave. She pauses to admire the wind chime.)

FATHER

So dig a hole, plant a tree, procreate--it doesn't matter. Because it'll take some sort of will of the universe to mention you again.

(beat)

But I think that's okay.

(The mother exits.)

FATHER

"How nice--to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being alive." Huh.

(beat)

How nice.

(The spotlight fades on the man. Lights stay lit on house as gentle wind breezes through the window. The wind chime sounds. Fade out.)

THE END