

88 Keys

By

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FADE IN:

INT. HA HA HOUSE, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

A makeshift dressing room, fashioned out of what appears to be an old broom closet.

BUDDY, early thirties and dressed in a tuxedo with glittery jacket, sits at a small wooden chair, stares into a smudged vanity mirror that has just a few functioning bulbs left.

He opens his mouth wide, stretches his jaw. He blows his lips together, which results in a motor boat noise.

A knock at the door. Buddy turns and answers it without ever having to leave his chair.

Outside the door stands TEX, a late fifties man dressed in a flashy cowboy outfit. He stands with his hands at his side, a smile beams on his face.

TEX

Did I tell you I'd get you a
dressin' room or what? Huh? Huh?

BUDDY

Yeah, now where's the rest of it?

Tex's smile fades.

TEX

Oh, don't be like that. It's
better than nothin' right?

BUDDY

Yeah, I guess so. Time for me to
go on yet?

TEX

Nah, you still got a few
minutes. The crowd's still gettin'
warmed up. Just do your mouth
exercises.

BUDDY

I already did 'em, and since when
does the crowd need a warm up? I
go out there, do my thing, and
that's that.

TEX

Well, let's just say this ain't the kinda crowd you normally play for.

Buddy sits, confused.

BUDDY

Then what kinda crowd is it?

Tex gestures to his right.

TEX

You oughta see for yourself.

Buddy gets up and exits the dressing room.

INT. HA HA HOUSE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Buddy moves to a curtain at the far end and peeks out. He only looks for a second before he turns back to Tex.

TEX

See?

Buddy's visibly upset. He moves back down the hallway, stops just a few feet from Tex.

BUDDY

What's wrong with you?

TEX

Ain't nothin' wrong with me. It's work, ain't it?

BUDDY

This isn't what I do at all.

TEX

Yeah, well what you do ain't exactly payin' the bills lately. You know what ten percent of nothin' is? It's squat. We gotta take what we can get.

BUDDY

What about the TV show? I thought you got a few good hits on that.

TEX

I did, but when it was all said and done, it was no different than bookin' you a party gig. Everybody wants clowns and shit nowadays.

BUDDY
Yeah, but... adults?

TEX
Hey, they used to be kids.

BUDDY
I can't go out there, Tex. My show
isn't meant for them.

Tex is angered by this.

TEX
Look, I don't care if your show's
not meant for the pope, there's two
hundred bucks out on that stage and
you're damn well gonna get
it. What the hell's the matter
with you anyway, boy? What kinda
kid would have a birthday party in
a comedy club on Saturday night?

Buddy thinks it over.

BUDDY
I thought maybe they were mature
for their age.

TEX
You, sir, are a certified jackass.

BOB, an early forties man, walks up.

BOB
Better get ready. You're on soon.

TEX
How's the crowd lookin'?

BOB
It's been better, but hopefully
whatever it is you do can turn 'em
around.

Bob looks to Buddy, who looks unsure.

BUDDY
Uh... okay?

BOB
Good, good. See you out there, and
thanks for coming out on such short
notice.

TEX
No problem. Happy to oblige.

BOB
Oh, and one other thing... don't
fuck up.

Bob leaves. Buddy's even more nervous now.

TEX
Alright, you heard the man. You're
just about up.

BUDDY
Any requests?

TEX
Just do a standard set. Break a
leg.

Tex guides Buddy back to the curtain.

BUDDY
This is gonna be a disaster.

MC (O.S.)
And now, ladies and gentleman,
making his debut at the Ha Ha
House... Buddy, The Friendly Piano
Man!

Buddy takes a deep breath, steps through the curtain to the
sound of polite applause.

INT. HA HA HOUSE, STAGE - NIGHT

Buddy stands on stage, a powerful spotlight blasts him in
the face.

He squints through the light to get a better look at the
crowd. He's frozen.

TEX (O.S.)
(whisper)
Move. Move to the keyboard.

This jars Buddy out of his stupor. He moves to a keyboard
located at center stage, takes a seat at a small stool.

In one fluid motion, he cracks his knuckles and plays a
quick fanfare. A cheesy smile now on his face as he leans
into the mic in front of him. He's in character.

BUDDY
Hello, everybody!

Buddy waves his hands above his head, like a conductor trying to orchestrate a response.

BUDDY
Hi, Buddy!

Dead silence.

BUDDY
Maybe later! Anyway, as you already know, my name is Buddy, The Friendly Piano Man, and I'm here to take you on a journey of magical excitement and wonder.

A HECKLER in the crowd chimes in.

HECKLER (O.S.)
Get with the funny, Liberace!

BUDDY
I'm going to start out with one I'm sure none of you are familiar with, but I think you'll enjoy it just the same. You ready?

Buddy tries to steer the crowd again.

BUDDY
Hey, Buddy, sounds like fun!

Fail.

Buddy starts in on the keyboard, plays a slightly up tempo melody that segues into singing.

BUDDY
Have you ever really wondered, what it takes to tie your shoe? It isn't really magic, I can tell you what to do. To tie your shoe... through and through...

Buddy focuses on the song, but can't help but notice the people in the crowd exchanging odd glances. "Is this guy for real?"

BUDDY
...you start out with the left lace, and loop it in your hand,

BUDDY
*then swoop the right around it,
 it's not hard I know you can... you
 can do it. You can do it.*

Still nothing. Not only is Buddy bombing horribly, he's being looked at like a total weirdo.

BUDDY
*And lastly all you have to do, is
 pull that right lace through, and
 if you've done just as I told you,
 you will have tied your shoe. Oh
 yes you have... you've tied your
 shoe.*

Buddy slows the melody, building up for the big finish.

BUDDY
*Oh yes you have... you've tied your
 shoe!*

Buddy holds the last note and plays out the rest of the tune, finishes with a big smile on his face.

He speaks into the mic.

BUDDY
 And there you have it. You've tied
 your shoe. How 'bout that!

HECKLER (O.S.)
 I wear velcro shoes!

Buddy doesn't miss a beat.

BUDDY
 Hey, that's alright. Maybe my song
 will help you become a big boy.

Oohs and Aahs from the crowd amongst a few chuckles.

Buddy's finally gotten a reaction and wastes no time in using it.

BUDDY
 Okay, let's go right on into
 another one, and please pay close
 attention cause it might just
 change your life.

Buddy plays once again, only now it's a much slower tune. Almost melancholy in a way.

BUDDY

*A stranger's just a friend, that
you are yet to meet, so if someone
you don't know, approaches on the
street, say hello... say
hello... say hello.*

Buddy's momentum fades. The crowd just isn't into it.

BUDDY

*There's no danger in a stranger, if
that stranger is your friend, and
if you do just like I tell you,
you'll be friends until the end...
until the end... until the end.*

Slight laughs, but these aren't with Buddy, they're at him, and he knows it.

He stops playing and looks to the crowd. He's going about this all wrong.

He lowers his head, stares at the keys. The crowd boos.

Buddy looks back to the crowd, spots Bob in the back, who's not pleased at all by the silence.

He plays the melody again as he looks to the air in thought. When he's got it, he goes back to the mic.

BUDDY

*Now know that every stranger, is
not a friend dressed in disguise,
some will lock you in a crawlspace,
or gouge out both your eyes...
because they're bad...*

The crowd erupts into laughter.

INT. HA HA HOUSE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Tex stands back stage, wide-eyed. This is obviously not a normal set.

BUDDY (O.S.)

*...because they're bad. Because
they're bad.*

INT. HA HA HOUSE, STAGE - NIGHT

Laughs and a few claps are still in the crowd. Buddy stays straight faced.

BUDDY

*...and if you want to stay safe,
just take this simple plan, don't
answer ads on craigslist, or get
free candy from a van... because
they're bad... because they're
bad... because they're bad.*

Buddy finishes with a few notes and the crowd erupts into a large applause.

BUDDY

You guys like that one?

Hoots and whistles confirm that they do.

BUDDY

How about another one?

Buddy orchestrates yet again.

BUDDY

Hey, Buddy --

CROWD

Sounds like fun!

Success! Buddy smiles.

BUDDY

Alright, on with the show!

Buddy starts in on another song as we...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. HA HA HOUSE, STAGE - NIGHT - LATER

Buddy, now pretty sweaty after all the time under the lights, clinks away at the keys with each word that he sings. It's the big finish.

BUDDY

*It's not improper touching if it's
family!*

One last note and the piano goes silent. Buddy stands, takes a bow to a standing ovation.

He waves, takes one more bow, and exits stage left as the uproar continues.

INT. HA HA HOUSE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Buddy steps through the curtain, immediately greeted by Tex, who looks none to pleased.

Buddy smiles.

BUDDY
How about that?

TEX
Boy, what in the hell is wrong with you? That wasn't no damn regular set.

BUDDY
Did you hear what was going on out there when I played it straight? Those people don't wanna learn about tying their shoes and not sticking stuff in light sockets. It's a comedy club, they want funny.

TEX
Well, I don't think what you did was so damn funny. Improper touchin'? I thought it was downright disgustin'.

Buddy gestures toward the crowd area, where applause is still in effect.

BUDDY
I think those people out there would disagree with you.

Tex spots something over Buddy's shoulder.

TEX
Aww shit, here we go.

Buddy turns to see Bob approach.

There's no expression on his face. He just eyes Buddy and Tex for a moment. Buddy shrugs.

BUDDY

So, what'd you think?

Bob's blank stare is replaced by a huge smile. He pats Buddy on the back.

BOB

That has got to be one of the funniest goddamn acts I've ever seen. That's a great gimmick you got there.

Buddy looks to Tex. "Told ya so".

BOB

I know we only discussed a one night deal, but we'd love to have you back. You interested?

Buddy's elated.

BUDDY

Su--

Tex steps in, back on the job.

TEX

I think we might be able to oblige that, but how 'bout we up the deal a little bit. Say, three hundred a show?

Bob rubs his chin, thinks it over.

BOB

Done, but only if he headlines and does a thirty minute spot.

TEX

Deal.

Bob and Tex shake hands on the deal.

TEX

Pleasure doin' business with ya.

BOB

Same here. We'll see you back here tomorrow night.

BUDDY

Count on it.

Bob leaves. Tex puts his arm around Buddy.

TEX

You see that? That's just good
managin' right there. You stick
with me and keep takin' my advice,
kid. You'll go places.

Buddy rolls his eyes.

BUDDY

Yeah, I'll do that.

TEX

Good, now let's go work on some
more of those wholesome songs.

INT. HA HA HOUSE, STAGE - NIGHT

SUPER: THE FOLLOWING NIGHT

Buddy sits at the keyboard on stage. The crowd is in
hysterics.

BUDDY

*You get yourself a shovel, and find
a private spot, then dig as quickly
as you can, before it starts to
rot...*

Claps and more laughter from the crowd.

BUDDY

*...I know when you first met her,
she was quite the looker, but the
problem with her now is that she's
just an old, dead hooker...*

Buddy plays for the big finish.

BUDDY

*...she's... just... an... old...
dead... hooker!*

Buddy takes a slight bow, spots Tex off to the side of the
stage, angry. Buddy smiles and winks at him.

FADE OUT.

THE END