Measures

by Mary Lane

Measure 4

It started in a smocked dress and socks trimmed with lace. I sat beside my mother on the piano bench and studied the crease between her eyebrows while she penciled notes into her book. She touched my knee absently to stop my leg from swinging.

I crawled into her lap and her fingers went to the piano like they were going home. My hands settled over hers and she played. Where her fingers traveled, my tiny ones followed, creating highs and lows.

"I just can't get it right," she mumbled into my hair. Her hands played a chord, layered with another, creating a different sound. She molded the sour notes into a a sweet one. My mother's addiction became my own.

Measure 18

Blending in at a rock concert in ballet flats was harder than I thought it would be. The heavy eye makeup and lit cigarette I never brought to my lips put me somewhere between "Trying Too Hard" and "Bless Her Heart." But I was here for the music.

The back corner of the bar felt safe and I stationed myself there. I stared straight ahead at the stage, barely moving. After my stuffy classical upbringing, I wanted to taste this gritty sound in my mouth and swallow it whole. Or maybe it was just the guy.

He hung back, unassuming and focused. His hands commanded his guitar. Part of me wanted those hands in my mouth. I thought things like this often enough and blushed, letting the want burn up inside me.

We found each other outside, after his set, and I offered him a lit match. Not because I smoked, but because I was taught a lady should always have a light for a gentleman. He didn't exactly look like a gentleman, but that made me want to give him a light that much more.

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My flame met the cigarette in his mouth and the space between us glowed warm. The red cherry burned and his dark eyes studied my face. I held his gaze, not wanting to appear nervous. He inhaled, his cheeks hollowing, his scruff too close, as his eyes bore into mine. I flushed and shook out the match. He would be my first real heartbreak.

Measure 39

Younger men. They've never done it for me. Sure, they were pretty to look at, but most of them still needed to work out their stupid. So, the thirty two year old stage manager took me by surprise. I tried not to notice him, but the way he watched me practice on stage while checking the position of the floor lights, he couldn't look away for long. His dark eyes studied my hands and arms as I played the grand piano.

At dinner, he wore a shirt revealing his tattooed arms and his eyes crinkled when he laughed. They crinkled a lot. He took my hand in his at the end of the night, warming it. “These hands are talented hands,” he said and kissed them. I felt that tug, telling me to let the walls down. They kept my feelings in check, my heart in line, so up they stayed. While I didn't plan on being anyone's fool, I could still have some fun.

In the show's final week he stayed with me in my room. We prepared for closing night, getting ready in the bathroom together. I put on my pearl earrings. He brushed his teeth. We stood shoulder to shoulder and it felt unfairly right. While he rinsed out his mouth, I turned my back to him, exposing my undone dress.

He moved my hair off my back, over my shoulder and zipped me up. His mouth and nose found my skin at the nape of my neck. He breathed me in. I thought about the airplane ticket on the bedside table. It wanted to drag me back home to the careful world I'd built for myself.

Turning around to face him would hurt, but I did it anyway. He kissed, saying, “You should stay here with me.”

And I did.