

My Mother Was An Upright Piano

by Tania Hershman

My mother was an upright piano, spine erect, lid tightly closed, unplayable except by the maestro. My father was not the maestro. My father was the piano tuner; technically expert, he never made her sing. It was someone else's husband who turned her into a baby Grand.

How did I know? She told me. During the last weeks, when she was bent, lid slightly open, ivories yellowed.

"Every Tuesday," she said. "Midday. A knock at the door."

The first time, I froze. A grown woman myself, I listened to my mother talk and was back playing with dolls and wasps' nests. I cut my visit short. My mother didn't notice. She'd already fallen asleep.

The second time, I asked questions.

"Mother," I said. "He....came round. On Tuesdays. How many?"

"We are fallen stars, he said to me," whispered my mother, the formerly-upright piano. "You and me, he said. And then he would take my hand." She closed her eyes, smiled.

My father, the tuner, never took anyone's hand. He was sharp, efficient. I searched my mother's face for another hint or instruction. "Should I find myself one?" I wanted to ask. "A fallen star? A maestro? Am I like you?" But she had stopped talking and begun to snore gently. I sat with her, watching the rise and fall of her chest and the way her fingers fluttered in her lap, longing for

arpeggios to dance across my stiffening keys.

