

Muriel
Catherine Rand

Muriel was sexy, and she knew it. She had the fastest fingers in Memphis, and could play a Baby Grand like most people only dreamed of making love, and everyone loved to watch her. But she had no interest in them. The Hollywood hired her right out of high school, and she's played every Friday night since. Her only tips were used napkins, but the drinks were free.

She noticed his shoes immediately. They were blue leather. No one in Memphis wore anything but dull brown. He walked proudly, in a way that made her want to dance with him all night. The first patron Muriel had taken any interest in.

Friday nights, the only sight more distinguished than the plain but elegant dress she wore, or her closed off smile, was Muriel's crucifix. It hung below her collar, edging towards the top of her dress, persuasively pulsing with every new chord she pumped. The gold of the cross glinted under her spotlight, and the men couldn't help but stare.

Muriel didn't play for the men, though. She had no interest in people, and played for the music. She poured forth each song with such force that even the drunks would occasionally quiet themselves to hear her.

But when she saw his blue shoes, she couldn't concentrate. Her fingers slipped and she grew flustered. Attempting to ignore him, she scolded herself with the force of her song. She clung to the music, her only familiar refuge.

When her break arrived, she looked for the man without thinking, but his blue shoes had faded into the gray of city streets. Out back, she fiddled with the last cigarette

of her second pack today. She found comfort in the release of having something to hold and a reason to stop for a while. Still, Muriel's thoughts kept roaming unusually far.

As the night droned on, the Hollywood grew emptier and drunker, but the shoes that passed Muriel's piano were all the same shade of mud. As she continued to play the notes, her thoughts, for the first time, turned to something other than music. Her crucifix shone more brilliantly than ever, reflecting even the blue and red of the dim lights, and Muriel could think of nothing but escaping Memphis and the Hollywood. She had had enough monotony. She needed to find herself a pair of those beautiful blue suede shoes.