



James Mehling/DN

When He Plays Piano in the Dark

This is part one of a three part fiction story.

Running through the back door, I could hear the crowd's restless chanting and clapping. I ran to my dressing room, tossed my jacket on the couch and put my fresh dry-cleaned suits in the closet. I wished I could have thrown my problems in there as well.

I took a quick look in the mirror and reached for a new suit jacket. "You're late, Derrick! Let's go!" Bobby hollered from somewhere in the hall.

"Yeah, man. Here I come," I replied back, slightly irritated. Like I didn't know I was late. I lingered in the mirror a little longer brushing my fade and shaping the top with my hands.

"Let's go!" Bobby screamed, appearing this time, with his oversized gut in my doorway. He mumbled something as I slid past him. He always mumbled when I was late. He would never do anything more than that because I brought obscene amounts of money into the club. He just grumbled and hollered a lot.

I stopped just outside the curtain that hid me from the crowd and the stage. I waited and adjusted my coat as the M.C. announced my name.

"Well ya'llh the brother is finally ready! Welcome him once again to Jazzy's Joint Derrick Williams!"

The crowd erupted as I walked to center stage. The spotlight shone on me as I sashayed over to the piano. I pumped my fist to the band and then positioned myself at the instrument of my heart and soul.

My eyes closed and I packed my fingers on the ivory keys. The music inside my head began to envelope me. I slipped into the world where I was the Creator and my music had the soul. It seemed to release me from my worries and problems as I played on and on.

Bobby "greeted" me in my dressing room after the show.

"What the HELL! Don't play dumb!" he said, walking to sit on my already smashed couch. "Don't make this late shit a habit, hear!"

His yelling didn't bother me; that was normal for him. After playing here, over the past year, I had become immune to his episodes.

"Sorry B. So many things have been on my mind...." My voice drifted off as the root of my worries came back at me. Bobby picked up on this immediately.

His personality flip-flopped as his fatherly side came oozing out. "Ya'll had a fight, huh?" Thinking of her caused my mind to shoot back just before the night's show, when Misha left me.

"Derrick, give me a chance to be as important as that piano is to you," Misha said, staring at me with her soft brown eyes. I had stared back at her almost mesmerized. I imagined a god with mahogany clay, shaping and molding this beautiful woman that stood in front of me. Everything about her was just....right. Even her long braids were pulled high on top of her head in a ponytail, falling, to drape the strong frame of her face.

"Mi, we've been arguing about this for two weeks. It's getting tired,"

I replied, breaking the spell that had been cast over me. "I need my music, baby. I need to create. It's a part of me." I went into the bedroom to get ready for the show.

"Derrick!" she said, irritated now. "Come on, Mi..." I wanted to end the discussion. I walked back into the hallway buttoning my shirt. "...you know how I feel."

I went back to the room to get my clean suits together. Mi sat on the couch for a few minutes as I got ready. I thought she was waiting for me until she grabbed her purse and started walking to the door.

"Whoa! Whoa! Where are you—" I said, running out of the bedroom.

"Have a good show tonight," she said flatly, grabbing the door-knob. I could hear the pain in her voice as I grabbed her arm.

"Where are you going, Mi?" I asked panicking, hoping that she was just upset like she always was after we had this conversation. But I knew it was more than that.

"I'm tired, Derrick," she said. "I'm tired of giving in, tired of coming in second, after your music." She opened the door and stepped out into the hall.

"It's finally clear to me, right at this moment, that you or this situation will never change — I can't deal with it anymore, Derrick. I can't." She wiped away the stream of tears that flowed down her face, and shut the door behind her.

I walked anxiously to the couch and tried to get my jacket from underneath Bobby.

"She left me, tonight," I said

turning my face from him. I didn't want him to see the hurt, but apparently he could hear it in my voice.

"Derrick, I know how much you love your music, man. I've been there myself. But you need to listen to what's goin' on here," he said slapping his chest. "You can't replace that kind of love with music — it's not the same."

"You sound like Misha, man!" I walked back to my dressing table and started fidgeting with a brush. "What did you want to talk to me about?" I asked, changing the subject. "I know you weren't just waiting here to yell at me."

"Yeah," he said clearing his throat. "...well, tomorrow night there's gon' be some producers from Zephyr Records sittin' in on your session," Bobby said, getting up from the couch. "Word is, they're breaking away from Zephyr and getting their own label. So, of course, they're lookin' for new talent." He started to leave.

"This is it, man! Showtime's at eight. Don't be late!" He paused before shutting the door. "Seriously, don't be late!"

I stood there not knowing if I was still upset about Misha, or excited about Zephyr coming to hear my music. I looked in the mirror and smiled at the thought of my music being recorded.

I made it home about one in the morning, exhausted, to say the least. I dug through the darkness of my apartment to my bedroom, dropping my jacket and car keys somewhere on the floor. I was able to get

my shirt off, but the rest of my clothes didn't have a chance. I collapsed on my bed and passed out.

When I woke up the next morning, I had somehow travelled to the floor. My clothes that I still had on and the sheet that I was tangled in were dampened with sweat. After unraveling out of the sheet, I crawled back in my bed. As I lay there rubbing the sleep out of my eyes, a vivid part of the dream that I had came back to me.

I was in the center of a stage playing the piano. There was no one else there, and the only light was the one that shined on me. The beautiful melody I was playing seemed to echo throughout the room and then vanish into the darkness. Misha appeared in front of me, trying to say something to me, but I couldn't hear her. I had become engrossed in the melody that my fingers were creating. She wouldn't walk into the spotlight, where I was. She just stood on the edge of the darkness.

Bobby also appeared on my side, pointing to Misha, trying to say something to me as well. Again, I wasn't listening. Then, I saw myself, running out of the darkness, though I was still sitting, playing the melody on the piano. My fingers played on as I looked at the image of myself running towards me. It ran into the spotlights and seemed to be yelling at me and pointing at Misha and Bobby.

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