

SOME DARK BLUE

Beth Mathison

Manny wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. He had been over and over it in his mind, and still he didn't know what to do.

He watched her from his seat at the bar while she sang at the back. The piano player, a young man with a dark suit, swayed to the music as he played each piece, his fingers fluid over the keys.

She also wore dark. An indigo shift dress that rode low in the back and moved sinuously with her body. Manny had noticed the color when he had gone to the restroom earlier, steadying himself on the bar as he passed close to her.

Lavender. The subtle scent met him when he had walked past the piano. Rising up above the sharp tang of alcohol and sweat and something deeper, more primal. The cloying aroma of human emotion in the dark mahogany tables, in the scuffed floor that even daily polishing wouldn't remove. He was sure it was lavender.

Now, sitting next to Jack, Captain Jack to the regulars, Manny could not help thinking about the scent of lavender.

"Another," Jack grunted, pushing his tumbler away from him. Jack had obviously had a bad day, his hair stuck up in all directions, dark circles under his eyes. Manny fingered his own drink, a scotch on the rocks, feeling the thin film of moisture coat his fingers.

He had thought he wasn't a man who sat and reflected on life, on the nature of the universe.

But here she sang, her voice low in the dim light, the music light around her. And with it, he pondered the why of his existence.

The long, smooth reach of her leg. The way she brushed a lock of her hair from her forehead, her eyes uncovered and vulnerable. \

It wasn't just sex, the way he watched her. It was part of it, there was no doubt. But there was more. Something that reached down into a part of him that was cool, and not often touched.

"It's the time of your life," Jack said, reaching for his refilled glass, its liquid amber in the ambient light. He lifted his glass to the line of bottles behind the bar. "To you and yours." Turning towards Manny, he leaned over, his eyes wild and empty at the same time.

"You can be me," Jack said. "It wouldn't take much, but you could be me." Manny noticed the yellowed stain around Jack's collar, the frayed edges of his rumpled suit.

Manny looked away, suddenly scared of something he couldn't name. Damn drunk, he thought. Probably couldn't remember his own name if I asked him.

And there she stood, leaning against the black shape of the piano, one leg crossed over the other. Looking at him through the dark film of the bar.

Manny stood, picking up his drink, filled with an unexpected confidence. Her dress was indigo, he knew. He didn't know the why of the universe, and had ceased to care.

His focus was indigo, and the scent of lavender cutting through the night.