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Piano Lessons

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Piano Lessons

“One-and-two-and-three-and-four . . .”
On and on, dry-voiced and brittle, droned Miss Price,
The human metronome Mother paid each week
From hard-earned egg money
To instill within her children
Elements of culture:
 Mozart, Beethoven, Bach—
Reduced to weekly music lesson scores in John Thompson’s Modern
Graded Course for the Piano.

Awaiting my turn on the polished bench,
Settled between the arms of Miss Price’s
High-backed wicker chair, a giant Moses basket,
Entranced by lap-size issues of LOOK and LIFE
Or Blondie and Dagwood in the colored comics,
I marveled at our teacher’s pitch-black wig,
Her wrinkled, rougey cheeks,
Her sagging neck skin, delicately ragged
 Like pages of old sheet music.

Her fingernails tapping out the meter of
“On the Good and Faithful God Has Set His Love,”
My sister’s Psalter-Hymnal number of the week,
I wondered if our ancient Miss Price knew
That the real essence of culture,
 in the Calvinistic sense,
Lay not merely in the rhythms of Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach,
But in the higher calling
 of learning to play for church.

Lorna Van Gilst