

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

William G. Davies Jr.
A Street and a Piano

"WELL MA'AM I don't see how we're gonna' get it in without cuttin' off the legs." The man said.

"Oh dear." Mrs. Robeson said, watching the man wipe his brow with a rag.

"I'd just as soon cut my own legs off before that." She said.

"Its a piano lady."

"Oh no! Its much more than that. You have no idea."

"Well?!"

"You've done all you can. And I'm thankful. Leave it there."

"On the sidewalk?"

Mrs. Robeson watched the truck pull away down the narrow street towards the square where the sun was about level with the granite plinth of the Soldiers and Sailors Obelisk when the truck blotted it out and the brass sculpture of the soldier facing her seemed menacingly dark and sad.

A flurry of red leaves descended upon the piano.

Mrs. Robeson blew them away as if blowing out birthday candles.

"They looked like red kisses on your black piano, didn't they?"

"Who said that?" Mrs. Robeson said.

"Me."

"Me?"

"Up here. I'm Mildred Spencer."

Mrs. Robeson looked up into a Maple tree and for a moment saw the glitz of a lowercase alphabet as children might scrawl it in red and yellow crayons. "My mother said I'm the smartest person she knows." Mildred said.

"Well Mildred Spencer, the smartest person your mother knows, I'm pleased to meet you."

Mildred lowered herself to the ground in a series of curlicues.

"Likewise." She said beaming.

"So Mildred, since you're the smartest person your mother knows perhaps you can help me with a bit of a quandary. You know what a quandary is, don't you?"

"Its sorta' like something stupid. But not really stupid cause nobody can figure it out, right?"

"Right." Mrs. Robeson said.

"Shoot."

"Well, I'd like for this piano to be in that room." Mrs. Robeson said for-

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lornly without her usual flair for redemption, a benign characteristic that she surmised was increasingly annoying to people.

"Well that's easy!" Mildred brimmed with exiled inquisitiveness.

"Please, do tell Ms. Spencer, its getting late."

"The way I see it, its like a marriage. And I know what you're thinkin', how could someone my age know anything about marriage. Remember what my mother said about me."

"I most certainly will." Mrs. Robeson mused.

Mildred sashayed her red hair to one side.

"The piano would be the groom."

She placed a red leaf on top of it.

"Dashing. Don't you think?" She said.

"Indeed!" Mrs. Robeson concurred.

"And that room, of course, is the bride."

The sun burnished the windows to a coppery gilt.

Mildred tip-toed to see her shadow exhumed from a hardwood floor.

"The room is empty." She said. "That's so perfect!"

"Thank you." Mrs. Robeson intoned.

"So the bride will look a bit Victorian in this light." Mildred said precisely.

"How old are you young lady?"

"About as old as Emily Dickinson was, when, it has been said, she wrote her first poem. I so love

Emily Dickinson, don't you? You do know who she was?"

"Yes and yes." Mrs. Robeson said.

"Now, we'll need a minister and of course that'll be you."

"A minister?! I'm afraid not." Mrs. Robeson said. "In fact, its become a bit late."

"And I'll be the maid of honor." Mildred said, smoothing a gold maple leaf into her hair.

"Okay, you'll stand here I think."

She positioned herself between the window and the piano.

"Young lady, that's it."

"Ah-ahh! See?! Remember the part, whomsoever shall disagree with this union, let them speak now or forever hold their peace?! Are you speaking up?!"

"I am. I'm concerned your parents will be worried."

"My parents would applaud this, they're romantics at heart."

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"Very well." Mrs. Robeson said. She stood where Mildred indicated and raised her hands as directed.

"That which God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

"I think I'm gonna' cry." Mildred said.

"There, there dear, have a seat next to me."

"That was so beautiful." Mildred said.

A halogen streetlight vaporized on, into an orange glow above the maple tree and flecked the piano with numerous, chattering shadows.

"Is there a song you have chosen for the happy couple?" Mildred said.

Mrs. Robeson became tentative, in that, the improbability existed that she may very well have freed herself from something she hadn't known imprisoned her and only became apparent through this child.

She gingerly folded back the panels over the keys.

Mildred tucked herself into Mrs. Robeson.

"What a magnificent ring." She said.

"Thank you dear, it was a gift from my mother-in-law."

"She must've been very kind."

"She was."

Mrs. Robeson extended her fingers over the keys, somewhere a dove cooed and a breeze brought down a smattering of leaves.