

Assiduity Twenty Four

by J. Mykell Collinz

The grand piano, located in the far corner of the living room away from the big bay windows, sounds happy to be the center of our attention; Luv, sitting on my lap, is pounding on the piano's keys with the palms of her little hands, her fingers spread wide apart, delighted with the results of her efforts.

"You've got the rhythm, darling," I say.

"Don't bang so hard, Luv," Uzma says as she enters the room.

Luv reads my expression correctly and resumes her acoustic adventure.

"You are not ready for the piano," Uzma says, sitting next to us on the bench: "You will learn to sing music first, then you will be ready for the piano when the time comes, which will be soon enough."

Uzma demonstrates a well developed singing voice, progressing effortlessly through major and minor scales, accompanying herself on the piano with one hand.

"My parents were classically trained," she says: "I received singing lessons from them at an early age. I'm delighted you have this well tuned instrument here. It's perfect for Luv, for developing her musical pitch."

I sit across the room on the sofa by the big bay windows, listening and watching while mother and daughter interact at the piano, singing: "do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do." And even in the midst of this joyous occasion, I'm distracted by a chronic nagging dread. A quick mental inventory reassures me. I'm doing what needs to be done. Yet one event on my calendar clearly unnerves me, an appointment to visit the survivalist who originally owned this property and built the house with the intention of living here, a man named Robert Jackson, known in the movement as Robbie Jack. He's incarcerated in the federal prison at Terre Haute, Indiana. The appointment date is coming soon yet there's nothing more I can do to prepare myself. I decided, as a result of a previous nagging dread, it would be best to know him, to determine his attitude concerning the property, not

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wait for him to possibly come after me with a grudge when he gets out.

"You look troubled, John, what's on your mind?" Uzma says, standing by the sofa with Luv in her arms.

"I didn't realize it showed so much," I reply: "Nothing specific, just worried about the world in general, wondering what's happening with Don and Rasheed."

"They're big boys now," she says: "I've stopped worrying about them. In fact, I've also stopped worrying about the world in general. Ever since I came out here, away from the city. It feels great, cathartic. Maybe I should feel guilty about that but I don't. I love this place, its mythic surroundings, the lay of the land, the forest, the house, and I haven't even seen the basement yet."

"Your enthusiasm restores my strength," I say: "I couldn't begin to tell you how cathartic your presence has been for me."

I stand to kiss Uzma and Luv jumps into my arms.

