

NOTES

On a 19th Century Color Lithograph of Red Riding Hood by the Artist J. H. is the fourth and last song in a cycle titled *The Land of Nod*. More a scene than a song, *Red Riding Hood* is a character study that I delighted in writing for the renowned tenor Paul Sperry. *The Land of Nod* was commissioned by and is dedicated to Paul, a dear friend for over thirty years. The poems for the set are by his childhood friend, Alice Wirth Gray. In 1992, Paul telephoned me and exclaimed, "I've just read a new book of poetry and thought immediately of you." I had to admit that Paul was right. Alice Wirth Gray's quirky sense of humor was right up my alley. Paul and I premiered the work together at Merkin Hall in 1993.

—Tom Cipullo
April 24, 2020

Tom Cipullo (b. 1956)

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TEXT

The wolf makes a funny face
not to be taken seriously as evil,
but as if there's something wrong
with his eyes. He's old
and getting cataracts or he's
trying to start a conversation
by winking at Riding Hood,
where she stands by a cheery spread
of amanita phalloides, wondering
how to get back to her basket of goodies
which she left on the other side
of the clearing while gathering flowers,
and now of course the wolf blocks her way.
Some people have a crucifix over the bed:
I have a wolf.

The NIGHT POLICE Interrogate Riding Hood:
Nice try, kid, but daisies don't grow
in that woods. Look at those trees,
their trunks acid-green with moss.
There's not enough light in there
for an impatiens or a cineraria.
And that basket with the bottle
of Bordeaux sticking out. Explain that.
This is a German forest if ever one was:
grim Grimm, blacker than Black.
Don't you tell us about Perrault:
for you all stories with fear in them
will always be German. Your mom
is sending you through these woods
by yourself with a bottle of imported wine?
You expect us to buy that?
Save us all time.
You knew that wolf.
You've been encouraging him.

I've always loved that picture
because there's Riding Hood far left
and the wolf far right
and the center absolutely empty.
So much space between girl and wolf
that is so much more interesting
than either of them. You can see
into and into the woods
until it's so dark you can't.
You can see such a long way
into the story.

What RIDING HOOD Told the Cops:
Of course I talked to him,
it's what the books say to do:
try to keep them talking.
Reason with them. Look, Mr. Wolf,
sit down. We'll drink the bottle.
Then we'll go on to Grandma's
and redden our teeth on her.
They sent me here.
They must have known
the way the world is.

Myself, I would like to get past
all that little-girl-and-the-wolf thing
into the dark beyond them both.
Honestly, I thought it must be
a rite of passage. That the solution
might be hidden in the basket
under the white cloth.
When I peeked, I found
she'd sent me off in the dark
without so much as a flashlight.

The Report of the NIGHT POLICE
continues:
We picked the girl up in the woods.
Rather, what we mean to say is
that's where we took her into custody.
She looks like an angel,
but you just can't tell
What was in the basket,
we wanted to know. Was she
trying to get rid of something?
We asked her to explain herself,
and she says her mother
hung the lithograph of a wolf
over her bed. A likely story.
What woman would do a thing like that?
There may be enough evidence
to run her folks in, too.

The WOLF:
For God's sake.
I was lost.
Can't you tell?
She seemed to mistake me
for someone she knew.
I didn't want to frighten her.
You're not going to try
to hang this one on me,
are you? I'd never
have gone there alone.
That's why we always
travel in packs.
I mean it's dark in there.
Dangerous.

Testimony of the HUNTER:
So I heard all this yelling
from the old lady's cottage
a female in distress I sez
and I don't think twice
but bust down the door
gun at the ready
and that kid and the wolf
(that's him over there,
yer honor) well, you wouldn't
believe it, the amount of blood
and that kid does she have
a mouth on her it embarrasses me
when girls talk so foul like that

if she was my daughter
I'd beat her till she was civil
and I'd crack all the teeth
in her dirty mouth and I'd
take away her clothes and lock her up
to sit in her own filth until
she'd learned a little respect.
What's that, sir? You want me
to stand down? Well, sure,
if you say so.

MOTHER:
Of course I hung the lithograph
over her bed. It's a work of art.
You think something like that
is going to scare that child?
Anyway, I had to put it somewhere,
it was a gift. And let me tell you,
there was a perfectly safe path
around those woods,
through a public park,
and well patrolled.
But not her.
You couldn't keep her
from looking for trouble,
and able to find it
where there is none.
My husband was no help at all:
what do you expect a mother to do?
Oh, if only
we'd been rich enough
to buy her a car.

It was all so complicated:
who was this Riding Hood?
I never liked the grandmother.
Sometimes the wolf wasn't so bad:
he could have eaten the girl
there in the forest but he
put off a present treat
to eat a stringy old lady
in the future. That's not
the reasoning of a beast.
Then, never did I doubt
he liked Riding Hood
more than the others did.
What do you mean?
What do I see in the picture?
Is this some kind of Rorschach?
I want to talk to my attorney.
It was my mother
who hung the picture
over my bed.
Those dark woods,
beckoning,
a challenge.
A place to go to
from the place you are

Commissioned by Paul Sperry

On a 19th Century Color Lithograph of Red Riding Hood by the Artist J. H.

for Mezzo-Soprano and Piano

Alice Wirth Gray

Tom Cipullo (ASCAP)

Slowly and very freely (♩ = c. 52)

Voice: *p con tenerezza*

Spoken: The wolf makes a funny face not to be taken seriously as evil, but as if there's something wrong with his eyes. He's

Piano: *p* *colla voce sempre* *pochiss.* *pp*

Ped. *poco* Ped. Ped.

4 *ppp* *whispered secretly* *p* *poco*

old and get - ting cat - a - racts, or he's try - ing to start a con - ver -

Piano: *pp* *p* *mp*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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7 *mf* *3* *3* *cheerfully*

sa - tion by wink - ing at Rid - ing Hood where she stands by a cheery spread of amanita phalloides,

mf *poco f* *meno f* *molto legato* *p*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

10 *dolce* *sost.* *a tempo* *parlando rapidamente*
p *poco* *mp* *3* *3*

won - der - ing how to get back to her bas - ket of good - ies which she

a tempo *parlando rapidamente*

p sempre

Ped. Ped.

12 *mf* *sost.* *a tempo* *poco f* *3* *3* *sost.* *f* *ff* *dolciss.* *sub. pp*

left on the oth - er side of the clear - ing while gath - er - ing flow'rs,

a tempo

mp *poco f* *f* *ff* *sub. pp*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

15 *mf conversational* **Più mosso** (♩ = 72) *poco f*

and now of course the wolf blocks her way. Some peo-ple have a cru - ci - fix

p teneramente **Più mosso** (♩ = 72) *poco f*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

19 *rall.* **ppp** *whispered*

o - ver the bed: I have a wolf.

rall. **ppp**

f

Ped. Ped. Ped.

23 *a tempo* *accel.*

a tempo *accel.*

p legato *mp* *mf* *f*

Spoken: The NIGHT POLICE interrogate Riding Hood:

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

27 **Fast** (♩ = 132-144)

ff harshly

Nice try, kid. but

ff *poco f*

8va
Ped.

31

dais-ies don't grow in that woods. Look at those trees,

ff *poco f*

8va
Ped. liberamente Ped. Ped. Ped.

36

their trunks a - cid green with moss.

ff *poco f*

8va
Ped. Ped. Ped.

40 *mf*

There's not e - nough light in there for an im - pa - tiens or

Ped. come sopra

44 *ff*

cin - e - rar - i - a. And that bas - ket with that

intense sub. p *f* *meno f*

8^{va} Ped. *Ped.*

48 *ff*

bot - tle of Bor - deaux stick - ing out. Ex - plain that.

8^{va} Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.*

52 *pp*

This is a Ger - man for - est if ev - er one was;

pp

Ped. Ped. Ped. *

56 *f* *ff* *fff*

grim Grimm, black - er than Black.

f *ff*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. *

60 *pp* *mf*

Don't you tell us a - bout Per - rault; for you all

sub. pp *poco f* *legato*

Ped. Ped.