

"The Givers"

By Mark Nepo

When the doctors broke their huddle,
Her uncle leaned in. "*What would you like?*"
The little girl just beamed, "*A white piano*"
It took him three weeks but he had
One waiting in her room. She played
It every day like the medicine it was.

And the guitar player stopped for water
In Virginia, hearing the gas station owner
On the phone. "*I got no choice. I gotta put
'em down.*" The young man keeps telling
everyone. "*I don't know why, but I had
to take them.*" Now the old dog and
her pups live in his car.

And the nurse who dreams of her
grandma in the backseat on long trips
warming her little hands. And the
cashier, in awe of her sister who after ten
years of meditating gave it up to care for
orphans. Not 'cause she was done with it,
but 'cause found that there is now
everywhere.

And the therapist who opens the memory
of her father like an old napkin holding a
pressed flower. A country doctor, he took
chickens instead of money. She was thirteen
when he died. After the funeral, her brother
in a burst of grief, dumped her father's books
in the burning barrel. It began to rain and the
books. Like broken doves, just softened and
enlarged. When everyone left, she gathered
them up. Now when it rains, she
opens one and it talks to her.

And the son of a heroin addict
Serving soup in a shelter, thinking as,
He pours the ladle a hundred times a day,
"*The givers seldom know what they give.*"