

*I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven*

Eudora Welty, a long time resident of Jackson, Mississippi, was born in 1909, or 110 years ago! She didn't live that long – but came close, dying at age 92 in 2001. She lived to be a classic American short story writer – a model for future artists.

One of her stories, “The Key”, struck home for me recently when I experienced one of those moments when suddenly my mind opened up to a new grasp of things – like a magical sunrise.

This story tells of such a moment – one we may hope will happen in our own lives if it hasn't happened yet.

Albert and Ellie Morgan of Yellow Leaf, Mississippi, are sitting – amid others - in the waiting room of a small train station. Also present is a redheaded young man, standing, who observes the others while he tosses a small key from hand to hand. He was a stranger. *So intent and wide was his gaze that anyone who glanced after him seemed rocked like a small boat in the wake of a large one . . . There was an excess of energy about him . . . his eyes were widened with gentleness.*

Suddenly the key falls to the floor – with *a fierce metallic sound like a challenge, a sound of seriousness.* It almost made people jump. But not Albert and Ellie, for you see they were deaf – they used finger talk. Nevertheless the key came close to Albert's feet. He picked it up. His face was full of wonder as if the key had fallen out of the sky. He held it, struck by a strange joy. *“I found it. Now it belongs to me. It is something important. It means something. From now on we will get along better, have more understanding. Maybe when we reach Niagara Falls we will even fall in love . . .”*

That's where they were headed, saved up for. They had a picture of Niagara Falls. He said: if you stand by a rail, *lean up hard against it – Then you can hear Niagara Falls.* [As in the miracle in which Jesus cures people who are deaf, impeded in their speech – spiritually?] Niagara Falls! What an overwhelming metaphor of the magnitude and power of God's grace!

Their train comes and goes. They miss it. Ellie isn't so sure of their venture to a place so far from home and even Albert begins to doubt – reaching inside his pocket to touch the key. Was it really a symbol of the couple's potential marital happiness – or of something else – something strange and unlooked for which would come . . .? The redheaded young man then dropped another key into Ellie's handbag – a key tagged “Star Hotel, Room 2”. At least they would have a room for the night.

You get the impression that the young man, looking restless and weary, may be a symbol of God, so often offering keys, signals, enticements that could flood us with new life – and yet is so often left “holding the key”.