

# I'll Tell You a Story, then...

Nancy White

high voice and piano

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Elizabeth Alexander

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## Just Once I Want To Write a Gentle Thing

(Song Title: "I'll Tell You a Story, then...")

*Nancy White*

I'll tell you a story, then,  
of how as I was walking, I smelled something sugary,  
elusive, spicy, you could call it,  
and smoky in a sad sort of way. Also  
like blossom barely born, pale and half-undone  
to the wind that still might even be carrying snow,  
this scent I decided to follow.  
Sometimes I stumbled on the path, silver  
with stones worn smooth as kindness,  
or had to stop and rest among pines  
where the smell settled a little, at home  
with their religious and sensuous twang. Other times,  
I moved fast, snatching at its mulchy sweet threads  
through the air, the leaf and rotten-meat ribbons of scent,  
rough tongues of tigers who have recently feasted, the living decay  
of happiness, and saddle soap, the lemon urgency of sex,  
honey of the air — where did it come from?  
I rose panting up the slope, muscles strung on the searching  
bow of my body, raised the back of my hand  
to wipe away the sweat  
salting my lips  
and realized the smell —  
the smell is me.

From "Sun, Moon, Salt," published by The Word Works  
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**Notes:** "I'll Tell You a Story, then..." was composed in October 2005 for Ruth MacKenzie, using a collaborative process which married her strong folk-influenced singing style with my own background writing art songs. As in the classical tradition, the poem itself shapes the formal and emotional structure of the music, and the rich harmonic palette grows directly out of the meaning of the words. However, the gestures, inflections and melodic nuances in the vocal line are deeply rooted in popular singing styles, and the use of a microphone takes full advantage of the intimacy of Ruth MacKenzie's expressive voice and Nancy White's earthy poem.

for Ruth MacKenzie

# I'll Tell You a Story, then...

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for high voice and piano

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(♩ = 63-76)

*p*

Ped.

8<sup>va</sup>

This system contains measures 1 through 6. It features a high voice line and a piano accompaniment in 6/8 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 63-76. The piano part begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a pedal point (Ped.) in the bass register. The high voice line has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final note of the system. An 8va bracket is shown above the staff.

Ped.

This system contains measures 7 through 11. The piano accompaniment continues with a steady eighth-note pattern in the bass. The high voice line has a long melodic phrase with a slur and a fermata over the final note. A pedal point (Ped.) is indicated at the end of the system.

12

*p*

I'll tell you a sto - ry, — then, — of how I was

Ped.

This system contains measures 12 through 16. It includes the vocal line with lyrics: "I'll tell you a sto - ry, — then, — of how I was". The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand. A piano (*p*) dynamic is marked. A pedal point (Ped.) is indicated at the end of the system.

17

walk - ing, — how as I was

Ped. Ped.

This system contains measures 17 through 20. The vocal line continues with lyrics: "walk - ing, — how as I was". The piano accompaniment continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand. Two pedal points (Ped.) are indicated at the end of the system.

21

walk - ing I smelled some - thing, — some - thing

Ped.

This system contains measures 21 through 24. The vocal line continues with lyrics: "walk - ing I smelled some - thing, — some - thing". The piano accompaniment continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand. A pedal point (Ped.) is indicated at the end of the system.

25

su - gar - y, e - lu - sive,

Ped. Ped. Ped.

30

spi - cy, you could call it, and smo - ky

Ped. Ped. Ped.

36

in a sad sort of way.

Ped. Ped.

41

*ad lib.*  
mm

Ped. Ped.

45 pushing forward slightly

*mp*

Al - so like blos - som bare - ly

Ped. Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 45 through 48. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 45, followed by a melodic line starting in measure 46. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more active treble line with arpeggiated chords. Pedal points are indicated at the start of measures 46, 47, and 48.

49

born, Pale and half un - done to the

Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 49 through 52. The vocal line continues with a melodic line that has a slight upward inflection. The piano accompaniment maintains the eighth-note bass line and arpeggiated treble. Pedal points are marked at the beginning of measures 50 and 51.

53

*ad lib.*

wind that still might e - ven be car - ry - ing snow,

Ped. Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 53 through 57. The vocal line features a long, expressive melodic phrase with a wide interval. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with arpeggiated figures. Pedal points are indicated at the start of measures 54, 55, and 56.

58

*ten.*

*ad lib.*

car - ry - ing snow. O

Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 58 through 61. The vocal line starts with a tenuto note in measure 58, followed by a melodic line. The piano accompaniment continues with arpeggiated patterns. Pedal points are marked at the beginning of measures 59 and 60.

63 *mf* boldly, with greater urgency

This scent I de -

Ped. Ped.

67 *p* expectantly

- ci - ded to fol - low, this scent I de - ci - ded to

Ped. Ped. Ped.

72

fol - low.

Ped.

77 *mp*

some-times I stum-bled up - on the path, sil - ver with

*mp*

Ped. Ped.



99 **tempo meno mosso** **accel. poco a poco**

twang.

*cleanly, like bells* **accel. poco a poco**

*pp*

104 (♩ = 80-84) *mf*

Oth - er

*mf*

108

times, I moved fast, snatch - ing at its mul - chy smooth

*sfz* *sfz*

Ped. Ped.

112

threads through the air, the

*sfz* *sfz*

Ped. Ped.



116

leaf and rot - ten meat rib - bons of scent,

*sfz sfz*

Ped. Ped.

120

rough tongues of ti - gers who have re - cent - ly feast - - ed,

*sfz sfz*

Ped. Ped.

125

the liv - ing de - cay of hap - pi - ness, of

Ped. Ped.

130

hap - pi - ness the lem - on

*pushing forward more*

*f*

Ped. Ped.



147 *mf*

raised the back of my hand to wipe a - way the

*mf*

Ped. Ped.

150 *senza misura - very freely*

sweat salt - ing my lips, mm

*thoughtfully* , *warmly* *p*

*mf*

Ped.

**Meno mosso**  
**Piano maintains the feeling of 6/8**

151 *mp*

and re - a - lized, and re - a - lized,

*colla voce* *p*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

154 *p*

and re - a - lized the smell is me.

Ped. Ped.

156 *introspectively, warmly*

*mm*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

159 *deliciously*

the smell is me, *mm*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

162 *p*

*mm* me.

*8va*

Ped.