

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

Nancy White

medium voice and piano

---

Elizabeth Alexander

---

*Seafarer Press*  
www.seafarerpress.com

## 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  
© 1992 by Nancy White. Reprinted by permission of the author.

---

**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...**

Nancy White

for medium voice and piano

Elizabeth Alexander

(♩ = 68-72)

Musical notation for measures 1-6. The piece is in 6/8 time. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present. A pedal point (*Ped.*) is indicated at the beginning.

Musical notation for measures 7-11. The piano part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present. A pedal point (*Ped.*) is indicated at the end of the system.

Musical notation for measures 12-16. The vocal line begins with the lyrics: "I'll tell you a sto - ry, — then. — of how I was". The piano part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present. A pedal point (*Ped.*) is indicated at the end of the system.

Musical notation for measures 17-20. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "walk - ing, — how as I was". The piano part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present. A pedal point (*Ped.*) is indicated at the end of the system.

Musical notation for measures 21-24. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "walk - ing I smelled some - thing, — some - thing". The piano part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present. A pedal point (*Ped.*) is indicated at the end of the system.

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

Ped. Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 25 through 29. The vocal line starts with a melodic phrase on 'su - gar - y,' followed by a rest, and then continues with 'e - lu - sive,'. The piano accompaniment features a flowing eighth-note melody in the right hand and a more rhythmic bass line in the left hand. Pedal points are indicated below the piano staves at measures 25, 27, and 29.

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

Ped. Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 30 through 35. The vocal line continues with 'spi - cy, you could call it,' followed by a rest, and then 'and smo - ky'. The piano accompaniment maintains the eighth-note texture. Pedal points are indicated at measures 32, 34, and 35.

in a sad sort of way. \_\_\_\_\_

Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 36 through 40. The vocal line concludes the phrase with 'in a sad sort of way.'. The piano accompaniment features a more complex harmonic structure with some chromaticism. Pedal points are indicated at measures 37 and 39.

ad lib. poco. rit. \_\_\_\_\_

mm

Ped. Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 41 through 45. The vocal line has a long rest, with 'ad lib.' and 'poco. rit.' written above it. The piano accompaniment continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Pedal points are indicated at measures 41 and 43.

pushing forward slightly

45 *mp*

Al - so like blos - som - bare - ly

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

49

born, Pale and half un - done to the

*Ped.* *Ped.*

53 *ad lib.*

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

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

58 *ten.* *ad lib.*

car - ry - ing snow. O

*ten.* *Ped.* *Ped.*

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.

Opal Palmer Adisa, poet ◦ Margaret & George Alexander, parents ◦ Yehuda Amichai, poet ◦ Bjorn Arneson, generous web designer ◦ Scott Bates, poet ◦ Abbie Betinis, composer/colleague ◦ Dennis Blubaugh, music dealer ◦ Michael deVernon Boblett, poet ◦ Ray Bradbury, writer ◦ Norbert Capek, visionary ◦ e. e. cummings, poet ◦ Philip Dacey, poet ◦ Emily Dickinson, poet ◦ Evelyn Dudley, poet ◦ Rob Eller-Isaacs, minister/writer ◦ Sophia Lyon Fahs, writer ◦ Richard M. Fewkes, writer ◦ Peshia Gertler, poet ◦ Richard S. Gilbert, minister/writer ◦ Jack Gallagher, composer/teacher ◦ Paul Gerike, proofreader ◦ Steve Harper, technical advisor ◦ Steve Hawkins, generous web designer ◦ Edie Hill, composer/colleague ◦ Langston Hughes, poet ◦ Mark Humphrey, piano technician ◦ Karel Husa, composer/teacher ◦ Kalidasa, poet ◦ Garrison Keillor, storyteller ◦ Denise Levertov, poet ◦ George Ella Lyon, poet ◦ Jonathan Machen, artist ◦ Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet ◦ J. David Moore, composer/colleague ◦ Joan Wolf Prefontaine, poet ◦ Gerald Rich, poet ◦ Carl Sandburg, poet ◦ King Sigismund III, religious reformer ◦ Steven Stucky, composer/teacher ◦ Rabindranath Tagore, poet ◦ Howard Thurman, civil rights leader/writer ◦ John Greenleaf Whittier, poet ◦ Theodore C. Tackering Williams, poet ◦ Daniel Winter, pianist/teacher ◦ Nancy Wood, poet ◦ Yehudi Wyner, composer/teacher ◦ Paul Adams, technical advisor

**A LOT OF HARD WORK & CREATIVITY WENT INTO BRINGING THIS MUSIC TO YOU...**



**...AND SOME OF IT WAS EVEN MINE.**

---

**THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK.**

**(YOU KNOW WHY.)**

**A COMPLETE PERUSAL COPY MAY BE PURCHASED FROM ELIZABETH ALEXANDER AT**

*Seafarer Press*  
[\*\*www.seafarerpress.com\*\*](http://www.seafarerpress.com)

6 99 **tempo meno mosso**

**accel. poco a poco**

twang.  
*cleanly, like bells*

*pp*

**accel. poco a poco**

Detailed description: This system contains measures 99-103. The vocal line (top) features a melodic phrase starting with a dotted quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note, all under a slur. The piano accompaniment (bottom) consists of two staves. The right hand plays a series of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a bass line with some chords. Dynamics include *pp* and **accel. poco a poco**.

104

(♩ = 80) *mf*

Oth - er

*mf*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 104-107. The vocal line (top) has a rest for the first three measures, followed by a half note and a quarter note. The piano accompaniment (bottom) continues with eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A tempo marking of (♩ = 80) and a dynamic of *mf* are present.

108

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

*sfz* *sfz*

*Ped.* *Ped.*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 108-111. The vocal line (top) has a long melodic phrase with slurs. The piano accompaniment (bottom) features a complex bass line with slurs and accents. Dynamics include *sfz* and *Ped.*

112

threads through the air, the

*sfz* *sfz*

*Ped.* *Ped.*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 112-115. The vocal line (top) has a long melodic phrase with slurs. The piano accompaniment (bottom) continues with slurs and accents. Dynamics include *sfz* and *Ped.*



116

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

Ped. sfz Ped. sfz

120

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

Ped. sfz Ped. sfz

125

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

Ped. Ped.

130

hap - pi - ness and sad - dle soap, the lem - on

*pushing forward more*

Ped. Ped. f

Opal Palmer Adisa, poet ◦ Margaret & George Alexander, parents ◦ Yehuda Amichai, poet ◦ Bjorn Arneson, generous web designer ◦ Scott Bates, poet ◦ Abbie Betinis, composer/colleague ◦ Dennis Blubaugh, music dealer ◦ Michael deVernon Boblett, poet ◦ Ray Bradbury, writer ◦ Norbert Capek, visionary ◦ e. e. cummings, poet ◦ Philip Dacey, poet ◦ Emily Dickinson, poet ◦ Evelyn Dudley, poet ◦ Rob Eller-Isaacs, minister/writer ◦ Sophia Lyon Fahs, writer ◦ Richard M. Fewkes, writer ◦ Peshia Gertler, poet ◦ Richard S. Gilbert, minister/writer ◦ Jack Gallagher, composer/teacher ◦ Paul Gerike, proofreader ◦ Steve Harper, technical advisor ◦ Steve Hawkins, generous web designer ◦ Edie Hill, composer/colleague ◦ Langston Hughes, poet ◦ Mark Humphrey, piano technician ◦ Karel Husa, composer/teacher ◦ Kalidasa, poet ◦ Garrison Keillor, storyteller ◦ Denise Levertov, poet ◦ George Ella Lyon, poet ◦ Jonathan Machen, artist ◦ Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet ◦ J. David Moore, composer/colleague ◦ Joan Wolf Prefontaine, poet ◦ Gerald Rich, poet ◦ Carl Sandburg, poet ◦ King Sigismund III, religious reformer ◦ Steven Stucky, composer/teacher ◦ Rabindranath Tagore, poet ◦ Howard Thurman, civil rights leader/writer ◦ John Greenleaf Whittier, poet ◦ Theodore S. Lockering Williams, poet ◦ Daniel Winter, pianist/teacher ◦ Nancy Wood, poet ◦ Yehudi Wyner, composer/teacher ◦ Paul Adams, technical advisor

**A LOT OF HARD WORK & CREATIVITY WENT INTO BRINGING THIS MUSIC TO YOU...**



**...AND SOME OF IT WAS EVEN MINE.**

---

---

**THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK.**

**(YOU KNOW WHY.)**

**A COMPLETE PERUSAL COPY MAY BE PURCHASED  
FROM ELIZABETH ALEXANDER AT**

*Seafarer Press*  
[www.seafarerpress.com](http://www.seafarerpress.com)

147 *mf*

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

*mf*

Ped. Ped.

150 *senza misura - very freely* *thoughtfully* *p warmly*

sweat salt - ing my lips, mm

*8va*

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.

159 *deliciously*  
 the smell is me, mm  
 Ped. Ped. Ped.

162 *p*  
 mm me.  
 8va  
 Ped.