

Life Is Not a Garden

SATB and piano



Elizabeth Alexander

Seafarer Press

Life is Not a Garden

(Chorus) Life is not a garden, sunny and bright,
Life is not an endless twinkle star night,
Life is not a mountain towering high,
With its spire climbing higher 'til it meets the sky.
Life is not a gentle flowing stream,
And no matter what the song says: Life is not a dream.

For in the world that I know, there are bitter winds that blow,
And the mountains are blocking the way I need to go.
There are storms, there is rain, there is trouble, there is pain.
There's no doubt about it: some days I could do without it.

Chorus

For in the world where I live, there is so much to forgive,
And so many take more than they intend to give.
The unknown turns to fear, growing stronger year by year;
Then one day it's hatred. It can get so complicated.

Life is not a garden, an Eden to behold,
But that doesn't mean that everything is hard and barren and cold.
At any time or place a tiny miracle can bloom,
In a crowded city or a lonely room.
Find a place in the stillness of your heart,
A wilderness where something green can start to make a home.
Keep it safe and keep it warm,
Keep it sheltered from each passing storm.
Let its young and tender form remind you:
There is beauty, there is splendor yet unseen, deep within, still asleep,
Slender and rare, but always there.

For as our journeys unfold, there are many hands to hold,
And the people who love us are worth their weight in gold.
Though many tears grow from pain, some flow with joy we can't explain —
A garden it's not, but it's the only world we've got.

Life is not a garden, row after row,
But nobody can tell me that my seeds won't grow,
I plant them in my home, and I plant them in the street,
I plant them in the heart of every stranger I meet.

Life is not a garden, sunny and bright,
Life is not an endless twinkle star night,
Life is not a mountain towering high,
With its spire climbing higher 'til it meets the sky.
Life is not a gentle flowing stream —

But even though it is a mighty far cry
From the garden and the mountain and the starry sky,
I'm gonna keep working to make this world that dream.

Elizabeth Alexander, with students from Community of Peace Academy choir

Commissioned by Community of Peace Academy Chorus (conductor John Sorlien)
and One Voice Mixed Chorus (conductor Jane Ramseyer Miller)

Life Is Not a Garden

SATB and piano

Elizabeth Alexander,
with students of Community of Peace Academy

(♩ = 92-96)

Pno

(pedal lightly)

5

Ped. Ped. Ped. *

MEASURES 9-24, 1st TIME: Sopranos and Altos only, singing Alto Line.
MEASURES 9-24, 2nd TIME: Tutti, sung as written

9 *mp*

S

A

mp (melody)

T

mp

B

mp

pedal lightly

The concept for this song was created with students of Community of Peace Academy, St. Paul, MN.
This commission was underwritten by the American Composers Forum
with funds provided by the Jerome Foundation.

13

S
Life is not an end - less twin - kle star night. —

A
Life is not an end - less twin - kle star night. —

T
Life is not an end - less twin - kle star night. —

B
Life is not an end - less twin - kle star night. —

17

S
Life is not a moun - tain, tow - er - ing high, — with its

A
Life is not a moun - tain, tow - er - ing high, — with its

T
Life is not a moun - tain, tow - er - ing high, — with its

B
Life is not a moun - tain, tow - er - ing high, — with its

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

21 *mf*

S spi - re* climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

A spi - re* climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

T spi - re* climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

B spi - re* climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

mf

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

* *Composer's Note: My setting of the word "spire" on two syllables never fails to generate lively debate at choir rehearsals! Here, as in everyday speech, "spire" and "higher" needn't be aggressively polysyllabic, but the diphthongs should be gently implied on the second beats of measures 21 and 22.*

MEASURES 25-31: 1st TIME: Sopranos & Altos sing Alto Line, Tenors & Basses sing Bass Line
 MEASURES 25-31: 2nd TIME: Tutti, sung as written

25 *cantabile*

S Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing, flow - ing

A *cantabile* Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing stream, *p*

T *cantabile* Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing, flow - ing stream. *p*

B *cantabile* Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing stream, *p*

Ped. (*pedal lightly*)

BOTH TIMES: Tutti, sung as written from here on

31 *p* *mp*

S stream, And no mat - ter what the song says:

A And no mat - ter what the song says:

T And no mat - ter what the song says:

B And no mat - ter what the song says:

p *mp*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

36

S Life is not a dream.

A Life is not a dream.

T Life is not a dream.

B Life is not a dream.

mf

(pedal lightly)

Ped. Ped. Ped.

40 *mp* *mp*

A 1. For in the life that I know, there are bit - ter winds that blow, and the
2. For in the world where I live, there is so much to for - give, and so

T 1. For in the life that I know, there are bit - ter winds that blow, and the
2. For in the world where I live, there is so much to for - give, and so

mp

Ped. Ped.

53 *f* with a little attitude

S
There's no doubt a - bout it, Some days I could do with - out it.
Then one day it's ha - tred, It can get so com - pli - cat - ed.

A
f with a little attitude
There's no doubt a - bout it, Some days I could do with - out it.
Then one day it's ha - tred, It can get so com - pli - cat - ed.

T
f with a little attitude
There's no doubt a - bout it, Some days I could do with - out it.
Then one day it's ha - tred, It can get so com - pli - cat - ed.

B
(f) with a little attitude
There's no doubt a - bout it, Some days I could do with - out it.
Then one day it's ha - tred, It can get so com - pli - cat - ed.

Ped. *

57

Ped. Ped. Ped. *

59

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

63

f

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

67 *p*

T Life is not a gar - den,

B Life is not a gar - den,

p

Ped. Ped. Ped.

71

T an E - den to be - hold, but that

B an E - den to be - hold, but that

Ped. Ped.

75 *mp*

T does - n't mean that eve - ry - thing is hard and bar - ren and

B does - n't mean that eve - ry - thing is hard and bar - ren and

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

79

T cold.

B cold.

Ped.

84 Solo: *mp* pensively

A

At an - y time or place a ti - ny mir - a - cle can bloom.

Ped. Ped. Ped.

90

A

In a crowd - ed cit - y or a lone - ly room.

Ped. Ped.

96

S

p *espressivo*

Find a place in the

A

Tutti: *p* *espressivo*

Find a place in the

T

p *espressivo*

Find a place in the

B

p *espressivo*

Find a place in the

Ped. Ped.

113

warmly *mp*

S home, Keep it safe and keep it warm,

warmly *mp*

A home, Keep it safe and keep it warm,

mp *warmly* *mf*

T home, A home Keep it

mp *warmly* *mf*

B home, A home Keep it

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.*

119

f

T shel - tered from each pass - ing storm.

f

B shel - tered from each pass - ing storm.

mf *f* *sfz* *sfz*

Ped. *Ped.* *sfz*

125

dolce

mp

(keep pedal depressed)

131 Solo: *mp* tenderly

T Let its young and ten - der form re - mind you: _____

mp

Ped. Ped.

136 Solo: *mf* tenderly

S _____ There is

T _____ There is beau - ty, _____

mf

Ped. Ped. Ped.

140

S splen - dor yet un - seen, deep with - in, _____

T _____ yet un - seen, deep with - in, _____

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

145 *p*

S still a - sleep. _____

T still a - sleep. _____

p

Ped.

Solo or Tutti:

151 *p*

T

Slen - der and rare,

(*p*)

Ped.

155

T

but al - ways there,

Ped.

161 Tutti: *p*

S

For as our jour - neys un - fold, there are

A

For as our jour - neys un - fold, there are

Ped.

165

S

man - y hands to hold, and the peo - ple who love us are worth their

A

man - y hands to hold, and the peo - ple who love us are worth their

Ped. Ped. *

181 (*mf*) *f*

S gar - den it's not, but it's the

A gar - den it's not, but it's the

T gar - den it's not, but it's the

B gar - den it's not, but it's the

mf *f*

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.*

185

S on - ly world we've got.

A on - ly world we've got.

T on - ly world we've got.

B on - ly world we've got.

mf

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.*

188 Solo: *mp*

B It's the on - ly world we've got.

mp

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.*

195 *mp with determination*

S Life is not a gar - den, row af - ter row, but no -

A Life is not a gar - den, row af - ter row, but no -

mp with determination

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

199

S bo - dy can tell me that my seeds won't

A bo - dy can tell me that my seeds won't

Ped. Ped. Ped.

202

S *(mp)* grow. I plant them in my home, and I plant them in the

A *(mp)* grow. I plant them in my home, and I plant them in the

T *mp* I plant them, I plant them, I plant them, I

B *Tutti: mp* I plant them, I plant them, I plant them, I

mp

Tutti: mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

206 *f*

S street, I plant them in the heart of ev'-ry stran-ger I meet:

A street, I plant them in the heart of ev'-ry stran-ger I meet:

T plant them, I plant them in the heart of ev'-ry stran-ger I meet:

B plant them, I plant them in the heart of ev'-ry stran-ger I meet:

f

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. *

211

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. *

215 *mp*

S Life is not a gar - den, sun - ny and bright.____

A Life is not a gar - den, sun - ny and bright.____

T Life is not a gar - den, sun - ny and bright.____

B Life is not a gar - den, sun - ny and bright.____

mp

pedal lightly

227 *mf*

S I spi - re climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

S II spi - re climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

A spi - re climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

T spi - re climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

B spi - re climb - ing high - er 'til it meets the sky.

mf

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. *

231 *cantabile*

S I Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing, flow - ing,

S II *cantabile* Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing, flow - ing stream.

A *cantabile* Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing stream,

T *cantabile* Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing, flow - ing

B *cantabile* Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing stream,

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

236 *p*

S I
flow - ing stream, *(p)* But e - ven *mf* (melody)

S II
(p) But e - ven

A
(p) But e - ven

T
p stream. But e - ven

B
(p) But e - ven

p

Ped. Ped.

241 *molto cresc.* *mf*

S
though it's a might - y far cry from the

A
though it is a might - y far cry from the

T
molto cresc. *mf*
though it's a might - y far cry from the

B
molto cresc. *mf*
though it's a might - y far cry from the

mf

Ped. Ped.

245

S gar - den and the moun - tain and the star - ry sky, — I'm *f*

A gar - - - den and the star - ry sky, — I'm *f*

T gar - - - den and the star - ry sky, — I'm *f*

B gar - - - den and the star - ry sky, — I'm *f*

f

Ped.

249

S gon - na keep (p) work - ing to make (k) this world that

A gon - na keep (p) work - ing to make (k) this world that

T gon - na keep (p) work - ing to make (k) this world that

B gon - na keep (p) work - ing to make (k) this world that

f

Ped. *

253

S
dream. _____ that

A
dream. _____ that

T
dream. _____ that

B
dream. _____ that

pedal lightly

257

S
dream. _____ *ff*

A
dream. _____ *ff*

T
dream. _____ *ff*

B
dream. _____ *ff*

ff

Choral Music by Elizabeth Alexander

April Rain Song (Langston Hughes)	SATB	SEA-006-01
Before the Bread (English folk prayer)	SSSS	SEA-023-00
Blessed Be the Flower That Triumphs (Boblett)	SATB	SEA-078-00
Cherish Your Doubt (Alexander)	SSAA, pno	SEA-063-02
Climb (Edna St. Vincent Millay)	SATB, pno	SEA-059-00
Dragon Dance (Elizabeth Alexander)	S, pno	SEA-001-00
The Earth Called To My Friend (Nancy Wood)	SSA, pno	SEA-057-00
Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm (Amichai)	SATB	SEA-026-01
Faith Is the Bird That Feels the Light (Tagore)	SSA	SEA-068-00
Fighting Over What We Believe (Alexander)	SAB youth choir, SATB	SEA-099-00
Finally On My Way To Yes (Pesha Gertler)	SSATB, pno	SEA-019-00
Folks, I'm Telling You (Langston Hughes)	SSATB, pno	SEA-027-00
For So the Children Come (Sophia Fahs)	SATB, pno	SEA-010-00
Glen Song (Scott Bates)	SSATB, pno	SEA-025-00
I Write This Poem Out of Darkness (George Ella Lyon)	SSA, fl, vln, pno	SEA-024-00
If You Can Walk You Can Dance (Zimbabwean Proverb)	SAB, pno	SEA-022-03
Immortal Love (John Greenleaf Whittier)	SATB	SEA-017-00
Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (arr. Polish carol)	SSA	SEA-020-00
The Journey (Evelyn Dudley)	TTBB	SEA-075-00
Jump! (Ray Bradbury)	SSA	SEA-090-00
Life is not a Garden (Alexander)	SATB, pno	SEA-064-00
May This Be a Working Alleluia (Alexander)	Children's choir & SATB	SEA-098-00
Morning Bread (Amy Lowell)	SATB	SEA-060-00
...or a musician (Philip Dacey)	SATB, orchestra	SEA-007-00
A Palette To Paint Us As We Are (Gerald Rich)	SA, pno	SEA-014-00
Praise Wet Snow Falling Early (Denise Levertov)	SATB, pno	SEA-015-00
Reasons for the Perpetuation of Slavery (Alexander)	SSAA	SEA-091-00
Spring Grass (Carl Sandburg)	SATB	SEA-006-03
They Have Freckles Everywhere	SSAA	SEA-076-00
Those Who Wish To Sing Always Find a Song	SSS, pno, oboe	SEA-022-01
To Make a Prairie (Emily Dickinson)	SSA, pno	SEA-016-00
Tomorrow, God Willing (Garrison Keillor)	TTBB	SEA-077-00
Trust the Seeds (Alexander)	SATB	SEA-009-00
We Lift Up Our Hearts (Richard Fewkes)	Children's choir & SATB	SEA-021-00
We Remember Them (Sylvan Kamens & Jack Riemer)	SATB	SEA-083-01
Where There Is Light in the Soul (Chinese proverb)	SAB	SEA-070-00
When the Song of the Angels Is Stilled (Thurman)	SSAA	SEA-062-04
Why I Pity the Woman Who Never Spills (Prefontaine)	SSAA	SEA-058-00
CD: <i>Finally On My Way To Yes</i> - Award-winning choral works by Elizabeth Alexander		SEA-CD-001

*For a complete catalog of over 60 pieces for mixed, women's, men's & children's choirs,
along with recordings and score excerpts, visit:*

Seafarer Press ~ www.seafarerpress.com