

Life Is Not a Garden

SSAA and piano



Elizabeth Alexander

Seafarer Press

Life Is Not a Garden

*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 life 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.

*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 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.

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Life Is Not a Garden was composed as a collaboration between a high school choir and a community chorus in Saint Paul, Minnesota — ensembles with very different makeups. Over half the members of Community of Peace Academy choir were 1st or 2nd generation Hmong immigrants who came from Vietnam and Cambodia via refugee camps, whereas One Voice Mixed Chorus' singers were members and friends of the gay and lesbian community who were committed to using music to build bridges and foster tolerance. For more about this unique collaboration, see www.elizabethalexander.com

Growing up in the Carolinas and Appalachian Ohio, Elizabeth Alexander gained her love of language and music from her parents, a minister and a piano teacher. These passions are reflected in her over 100 choral and vocal pieces, which have been performed by more than 2000 choirs.

Elizabeth lives in St. Paul, where she reads voraciously, shamelessly encourages her teenagers' jokes, and tends her garden during the three month period in Minnesota that is not winter. She believes she has the best job in the world.



Cover Art: "Flowers from my backyard" by Jonathan Machen. Jonathan lives in Boulder, Colorado with his wife and two young children. There he manages the Solstice Center LLC, a healing arts facility. He takes his inspiration from the people around him and the beauty of the Rocky Mountains and American Southwest. Other loves are playing with his kids, playing guitar, backpacking, skiing, bicycling and kayaking. More of his art can be seen at www.haikutimes.com

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Elizabeth Alexander

(♩ = 92-96)

Pno

mp

(pedal lightly)

5

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. *

MEASURES 9-24, 1st TIME: Everyone sings S II part
MEASURES 9-24, 2nd TIME: Sing as written

9

mp

S I

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

mp

S II

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

mp (melody)

A I

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

mp

A II

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

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 I Life is not an end - less twin - kle star night, _____

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

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

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

17

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

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

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

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

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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

A II 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: All Sopranos sing S II part; All Altos sing A II part

MEASURES 25-31: 2nd TIME: Sing as written

25 *cantabile* *p*

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

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

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

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

p

Ped. (pedal lightly)

32 *mp*

SI And no mat - ter what the song says:

S II *mp* And no mat - ter what the song says:

AI *mp* And no mat - ter what the song says:

A II *mp* And no mat - ter what the song says:

mp Ped. Ped. Ped. *

36

SI Life is not a dream.

S II Life is not a dream.

AI Life is not a dream.

A II Life is not a dream.

mf (pedal lightly) Ped. Ped. Ped.

40 *mp*

AI 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

A II *mp* 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.

45

A I
 moun - tains are block - ing the way I need to go. There are
 man - y take more than they in - tend to give. The un -

A II
 moun - tains are block - ing the way I need to go. There are
 man - y take more than they in - tend to give. The un -

f

Ped. Ped. *

49

S I
 Vs.1
 1. storms, rain, trou - ble, pain.

S II
 Vs.2
 1. storms, rain, trou - ble, pain.

S I
 Vs.2
 2. Oo grow - ing strong - er year by year,

S II
 Vs.2
 2. Oo grow - ing strong - er year by year,

A I
 storms, there is rain, there is trou - ble, there is pain.
 known turns to fear, grow - ing strong - er year by year,

A II
 storms, there is rain, there is trou - ble, there is pain.
 known turns to fear, grow - ing strong - er year by year,

mp

mf

Ped. Ped. *

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...AND SOME OF IT WAS EVEN MINE.

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67 *p*

Tutti

Life is not a gar - den,

p

Ped. Ped. Ped.

71 *mp*

Tutti

an E - den to be - hold, but that does - n't mean that

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

76

S
Tutti

eve - ry - thing is hard and bar - ren and cold.

A
Tutti

eve - ry - thing is hard and bar - ren and cold.

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

81 *mp pensively*

A
Solo

At

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

85

A Solo

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

Ped. Ped. Ped.

90

A Solo

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

Ped. Ped.

96

SI

SII

AI

AII

p *espressivo*

Find a place in the

Find a place in the

Find a place in the

Find a place in the

Ped. Ped.

101

S I still - ness of your heart, *p* A

S II still - ness of your heart, *p* A

A I still - ness of your heart, *p* A

A II still - ness of your heart, *p* A

ped.

107

S I wil - der - ness where some - thing green can start to make a

S II wil - der - ness where some - thing green can start to make a

A I wil - der - ness where some - thing green can start to make a

A II wil - der - ness where some - thing green can start to make a

ped. *ped.* *ped.*

113

warmly mp

S I home, Keep it safe and keep it warm,

warmly mp

S II home. Keep it safe and keep it warm,

mp *warmly* mf

A I home, A home. Keep it

mp *warmly* mf

A II home, A home. Keep it

Ped. Ped. Ped.

119

f

A I shel - tered from each pass - ing storm.

f

A II shel - tered from each pass - ing storm.

mf f

sfz sfz

Ped. Ped. sfz

125

dolce

mp

(keep pedal depressed)

Solo or Tutti:

151 *p*

S Solo

Slen - der and rare,

(*p*)

Ped.

155

S Solo

but al - ways there,

Ped.

161 *Tutti: p*

S II

A II

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

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

Ped.

165

S II

A II

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

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

Ped. Ped. *

169

SI *p* Though man - y

S II weight in gold.

AI *p* Though man - y

A II weight in gold.

Ped.

173

SI tears grow from pain, Some flow with

AI tears grow from pain, Some flow with

Ped.

177

SI *mp* joy we can't ex - plain. *mf*

S II *mf*

AI *mp* joy we can't ex - plain. *mf*

A II *mf*

Ped.

181

SI
gar - den it's not, _____ *f* but it's the

S II
gar - den it's not, _____ *f* but it's the

AI
gar - den it's not, _____ *f* but it's the

A II
gar - den it's not, _____ *f* but it's the

mf

Ped.

185

SI
on - ly world we've got.

S II
on - ly world we've got.

AI
on - ly world we've got.

A II
on - ly world we've got.

Ped.

188

A Solo
mp
It's the on - ly world we've got.

mp

Ped.

195 *mp with determination*

Tutti

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

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

199

Tutti

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

Ped. Ped. Ped.

202

SI

grow. I plant them in my home, and I plant them in the

S II

grow. I plant them in my home, and I plant them in the

AI

grow. I plant them, I plant them, I plant them, I

A II

grow. I plant them, I plant them, I plant them, I

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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219

SI
Life is not an end - less twin - kle star night._____

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

AI
Life is not an end - less twin - kle star night._____

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

223

SI
Life is not a moun - tain, tow - er - ing high,_____ with its

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

AI
Life is not a moun - tain, tow - er - ing high,_____ with its

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

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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.

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

A II 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,

cantabile *p*

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

cantabile *p*

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

cantabile

A II Life is not a gen - tle flow - ing

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

236 *p*

S I flow - ing stream, But e - ven *mf*

S II But e - ven *mf*

A I stream. But e - ven *p*

A II flow - ing stream, But e - ven *p*

p

ped. *ped.*

241 *mp* *mf*

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

S II though it is a might - y, it's a might - y far cry from the *mf*

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

A II though it's a might - y far cry from the *mf*

mp *mf*

ped. *ped.* *mf*

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253

SI
dream. that

S II
dream. that

AI
dream. that

A II
dream. that

pedal lightly

257

SI
dream. *ff*

S II
dream. *ff*

AI
dream. *ff*

A II
dream. *ff*

ff