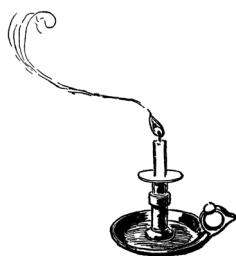


# Shelter This Candle

Edna St. Vincent Millay

SATB, oboe, horn, cello, harp

~ CHORAL PART ~



---

Elizabeth Alexander

---

## To the Wife of a Sick Friend

Shelter this candle from the wind.  
Hold it steady. In its light  
The cave wherein we wander lost  
Glitters with frosty stalactite,  
Blossoms with mineral rose and lotus,  
Sparkles with crystal moon and star,  
Till a man would rather be lost than found:  
We have forgotten where we are.

Shelter this candle. Shrewdly blowing  
Down the cave from a secret door  
Enters our only foe, the wind.  
Hold it steady. Lest we stand,  
Each in a sudden, separate dark,  
The hot wax spattered upon your hand,  
The smoking wick in my nostrils strong,  
The inner eyelid red and green  
For a moment yet with moons and roses,—  
Then the unmitigated dark.

Alone, alone in a terrible place,  
In utter dark without a face,  
With only the dripping of the water on the stone,  
And the sound of your tears, and the taste of my own.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

# Shelter This Candle

for SATB choir, oboe, horn, cello and harp

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Elizabeth Alexander

(♩ = 66)

Musical score for SATB choir and harp. The score is in 6/8 time. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) are shown with rests. The harp part (Hp.) is in the right hand, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The piano part (Pno.) is in the left hand, playing a simple accompaniment. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 66. The harp part is marked *pp*. The piano part has a rehearsal mark (℞) and the instruction "for rehearsal only".



Musical score for Choir (Tutti) and harp. The choir part is marked *pp* and includes the instruction "hold teeth and lips gently apart, exhale deeply". The harp part continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The piano part has a *mp* dynamic marking. The score is marked with a rehearsal mark (℞) and the instruction "for rehearsal only".



Musical score for Choir (Tutti) and harp. The choir part is marked *mp* and *pp*. The harp part continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The piano part has a *f* dynamic marking. The score is marked with a rehearsal mark (℞) and the instruction "for rehearsal only".

14

T *pp* sh

B *pp* sh

Vc.

18

T *mp* *pp*

B *mp* *pp*

Hn.

22

S *pp*

A *pp*

oo - o - oo - o - oo - o - oo - o - oo - o -

26 *mp*

S  
- 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 -

A  
- 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 - 0 - 00 -

T  
sh

B  
sh

Vc.

30 *pp*

S  
o

A  
o

T  
*mp* *pp*

B  
*mp* *pp*

*pp* Ob. *p* Hp.

\* Fed.

35

Musical score for measures 35-37. The upper staff features a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. The lower staff contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, which is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction "Hn.".



38

Musical score for measures 38-40. The upper staff continues with eighth-note accompaniment. The lower staff features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, which is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.



41

Musical score for measures 41-43. The upper staff includes a woodwind part marked "Ob." (Oboe) with a melodic line. The lower staff continues with the accompaniment and a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.



44

Musical score for measures 44-46. The upper staff features a piano accompaniment marked "Hp." (Harpsichord) and a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The lower staff includes a piano accompaniment with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Below the lower staff, there are three measures of piano accompaniment marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction "\* Ped." (Pedal).



47

Musical score for measures 47-50. The vocal parts (T and B) enter in measure 47 with the lyrics "Shel - ter\_\_\_ this". The vocal lines are marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment continues with a steady eighth-note pattern, marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The lower staff includes a piano accompaniment with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

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59

T  
can - - - - - dle,

B  
can - - - - - dle,

*p* *pp* *p* *pp*

Ob.

*p* *pp* *p*

Ped.



62

Pno.

Hp.



66

S  
Shel - ter\_\_\_ this can - dle from\_\_\_ the

A  
Shel - ter\_\_\_ this can - dle from\_\_\_ the

T  
Shel - ter\_\_\_ this can - dle from\_\_\_ the

B  
Shel - ter\_\_\_ this can - dle from\_\_\_ the

*pp* *pp* *pp* *pp*

Vc.

Ped.



70

S wind, *mf* *p*

A wind, *mf* *p*

T wind, *mf* *p*

B wind, *mf* *p*

Ob.

Pno. Hn.

Ped.



74

S *p* nondiv. Shel - ter this can - dle from the

A *p* Shel - ter this can - dle from the

T *pp* *p* *pp*  
o - a - o - a - o - a o - a - o - a - o - a

B *pp* *p* *pp*  
o - a - o - a - o - a o - a - o - a - o - a

Ped.

79

*mp*

S wind. Hold it stead - y,

*mp*

A wind. Hold it stead - y,

*pp* *mp* *pp*

T o - a - o - a - o - a - o a - o - a -

*pp* *mp* *pp*

B o - a - o - a - o - a - o a - o - a -

*mp*

Ped.



82

*pp*

S Hold it stead - - y,

*pp*

A Hold it stead - - y,

*p* *pp*

T o

*p* *pp*

B o

*p*

Ped.

85

T *pp* Hold it stead - - - y, *p*

B *pp* Hold it stead - - - y, *p*

Ob. *mp* *pp* Hn. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

89

T *pp* Hold it stead - - - y, *p*

B *pp* Hold it stead - - - y, *p*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

93

S *mp* In its

A

T *pp*

B *pp*

Ob.

97 **B**

S  
light the cave where - in we

A  
*mp*  
In its light the cave where - in we

*mp*

*Ped.*



100

S  
wan - der, wan - - der,

A  
wan - der, wan - - der,



103

S  
wan - der

A  
wan - - - der, wan - - - der

T  
8  
*mp*  
wan - - - - - der

B  
*mp*  
wan - - - - - der

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115

Hn. *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.* \*

Ob.

119

Tutti *mp*

S *mp*  
Blos - soms with min - er - al rose, and

A *mp*  
Blos - soms with min - er - al rose, and

T *mp*  
min - er - al rose and

B *mp*  
min - er - al rose and

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

123

*mf*

S *mf*  
lo - tus,

A *mf*  
lo - tus,

T *mf*  
lo - tus,

B *mf*  
lo - tus,

*f* \*

*Ped.*

127

Piano accompaniment for measures 127-130. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The dynamics are marked *p*. Pedal points are indicated by 'Ped.' below the bass line.

131

Vocal and piano accompaniment for measures 131-134. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment are shown. The lyrics are: "Spar - kles with crys - tal moon and star, 'Til a". The dynamics are marked *mf*. Pedal points are indicated by 'Ped.' below the piano accompaniment.

135

Vocal and piano accompaniment for measures 135-138. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment are shown. The lyrics are: "man would rath - er be lost, 'til a man would rath - er be". The dynamics are marked *mf*. Pedal points are indicated by 'Ped.' below the piano accompaniment.

138

S  
lost, \_\_\_\_\_ we would rath - er be lost.

A  
lost, \_\_\_\_\_ we would rath - er be lost. \_\_\_\_\_ we would rath - er be

T  
lost, \_\_\_\_\_ we would rath - er be lost.

B  
lost, \_\_\_\_\_ we would rath - er be lost.

Ob.  
Hn.

Ped. \* Ped.



142

S  
\_\_\_\_\_ than found.

A  
lost \_\_\_\_\_ than found.

T  
\_\_\_\_\_ than found.

B  
\_\_\_\_\_ than found.

*f*

Ped. Ped.



146 *full of awe*

S We have for - got - ten where we are,

A *full of awe*  
We have for - got - ten where we are,

T *full of awe*  
We have for - got - ten where we are,

B *full of awe*  
We have for - got - ten where we are,



150

*pp*



153 *pp remembering...*

A We have for - got - ten where we

B *pp remembering...*  
We have for - got - ten where we

*Ad.*

158

S *pp* sh

A are.

T *pp* sh

B are.

*Ped.*



161

S *mp* *pp* *pp* Shel - ter\_\_\_ this

A *pp* Shel - ter\_\_\_ this

T *mp* *pp*

B *pp* *mp* sh

164 **C**

S *p* can - - - - - dle, *pp*

A *p* can - - - - - dle, *pp*

T *pp* o-a-o-a-o-a - o-a-o-a-o-a-o-a-o-a-o-a - o-a-o - - a-o-a - o *p* *pp*

B *pp*

Hp. *p* Ob.

Ed.

168

S *pp* o - i -

T *p* Shrewd - ly blow - ing

172

S o - - - - - i - o - i - o - - - - - i -

T down the cave from a se - cret door

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182

S *mp* o - a - o - a - o - a - o - - - - *mf* a - o - a - o - - -

A *mp* o - a - o - a - o - a - o - - - - *mf* a - o - a - o - - -

T *f* wind, \_\_\_\_\_ Hold it stead - y, \_\_\_\_\_ Hold it

B *f* wind, \_\_\_\_\_ Hold it stead - y, \_\_\_\_\_ Hold it

*mf* Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.



186

S *mp* a - o - a - o Hold \_\_\_\_\_ it stead - -

A *mp* a - o - a - o Hold \_\_\_\_\_ it stead - -

T *mf* *mp* stead - y, \_\_\_\_\_ Hold \_\_\_\_\_ it stead - -

B *mf* *mp* stead - y, \_\_\_\_\_ Hold \_\_\_\_\_ it stead - -

*mp* Vc: \_\_\_\_\_ Ped. Ped. Ped.

191 **rallentando molto**

S *niente* *mf*  
 - y. \_\_\_\_\_ lest we

A *niente*  
 - y. \_\_\_\_\_

T *niente* *mf*  
 - y. \_\_\_\_\_ lest we

B *niente*  
 - y. \_\_\_\_\_

Harp *pesante*

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



196 **D** **a tempo**

S *mp* *pp*  
 stand \_\_\_\_\_ each in a sud - den, sep - a - rate dark, \_\_\_\_\_

A *whispered: mp*  
 \_\_\_\_\_ sud - den, se - par - ate,

T *mp* *pp*  
 stand \_\_\_\_\_ each in a sud - den, sep - a - rate dark, \_\_\_\_\_

B *pp*  
 hold teeth and lips gently apart, exhale deeply *pp*  
 sh \_\_\_\_\_

*pp*

(senza pedale)

202

Musical score for measures 202-208. The score includes vocal parts for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B), and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts have lyrics: [o - i - o - i - o - i - o]. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *mp* and *pp*. The key signature has one flat and the time signature is 9/8.



209

Musical score for measures 209-215. The score includes vocal parts for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B), and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts have lyrics: hot (t) wax (x) spat-tered up - on your hand, The. The piano part includes parts for Horn (Hn.), Oboe (Ob.), and Pedal (Ped.). Dynamics include *mp* and *p*. The key signature has one flat and the time signature is 9/8.

213

T  
smok - - ing wick in my nos - - trils strong,

Hn.

Ob. 4

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. \*

217

S  
the

A  
the

T

B

Hn.

Ped. Ped.

warmly *mp*

warmly *mp*

220 **E**

S  
in - ner eye - lid red and green for a mo - ment yet with

A  
in - ner eye - lid red and green for a mo - ment yet with

*mp*

Ped.



225

S *mf*  
moon and ros - es,

A *mf*  
moon and ros - es,

T *warmly mp*  
with moon and ro - ses,

B *warmly mp*  
with moon and ro - ses,

*mf*  
Ped. Ped. Ped.

230

T *pp*  
then the un -

B *pp*  
then the un -

Hn.

*p*  
Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

234

T  
mit - i - ga - ted dark, the un - mit - i - ga - ted

B  
mit - i - ga - ted dark, the un - mit - i - ga - ted

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

238

Solo *mf*

S A T B

A - lone, a - lone in a

a - lone,

dark,

dark,

*mp*

*p*

*p*

*mf*

Ped.



243

S A T B

ter - ri - ble place,

a - lone, niente

a - lone, niente

*p*

*p*

*pp*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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259 **F**

S *pp*  
with on - ly the drip-ping on the

A *pp*  
with on - ly the drip-ping on the

T *pp*  
with on - ly the drip-ping on the

B *pp*  
with on - ly the drip-ping on the



264

S  
stone and the sound of your tears, and the

A  
stone and the sound of your tears, and the

T  
stone and the sound of your tears, and the

B  
stone and the sound of your tears, and the

Hn.

268

*pp*

S  
taste of my own

*pp*

A  
taste of my own

*pp*

T  
taste of my own

*pp*

B  
taste of my own

Ob.

Vc.

Ped.



**G**

272

Ped.



276



280

284 **H**

S *pp*  
Shel - ter\_ this can - -

A *pp*  
Shel - ter\_ this can - -

Hp.

*Ped. sempre*



289

S *p*  
- dle, Shel - ter\_ this can - -

A *p*  
- dle, Shel - ter\_ this can - -

*Ped. Ped. Ped.*



293

S  
- - - - dle,

A  
- - - - dle,

*mp*

297

Musical score for measures 297-300. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Hold it steady, Hold it". The Soprano and Alto parts have a dynamic marking of *mp* and the lyrics "Hold it". The Tenor part has a dynamic marking of *mp* and the lyrics "Hold it steady, Hold it". The piano accompaniment consists of a right-hand melody with a long note and a left-hand accompaniment with eighth notes.



300

Musical score for measures 300-303. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "stead - y, hold it". The Soprano, Alto, and Tenor parts have the lyrics "stead - y, hold it". The Bass part has a dynamic marking of *mp* and the lyrics "Hold it steady, hold it". The piano accompaniment continues with a right-hand melody and a left-hand accompaniment with eighth notes. A key signature change to one flat is indicated by a double bar line.

303 **I** *mf*

S  
stead - y,

A  
*mf*  
stead - y,

T  
*mf*  
stead - y,

B  
*mf*  
stead - y,

*mf*

*And.*



307

S  
*pp* sh *mf*

A  
*pp* sh *mf*

*sul tasto, flautando*  
Vc.

*pp* *mp*



311

S *pp*

A *pp*

T *pp* *p*

B *pp* *p*

Shel - ter\_ this can - - - - dle,



315

S *pp* *p* *pp*

A *pp* *p* *pp*

T *pp* *p*

B *pp* *p*

oo - o - oo - o - oo - o - oo - o - oo - o

Shel - ter\_ this

Shel - ter\_ this

*gliss.*

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 ◦ Peshha 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. M. Flocking, poet ◦ Daniel Winter, pianist/teacher ◦ Nancy Wood, poet ◦ Yehudi Wyner, composer/teacher ◦ Paul Adams, technical advisor ◦ 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 ◦ Peshha 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. M. Flocking, poet ◦ Daniel Winter, pianist/teacher ◦ Nancy Wood, poet ◦ Yehudi Wyner, composer/teacher ◦ Paul Adams, technical advisor ◦ 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 ◦ Peshha 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

**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.)**

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327 *mf* *pp*

S *mf* *pp*

A *mf* *pp*  
Hold it

T *mf* *pp*

B *pp*  
Hold it

*pp*  
Ped.



331 **J** *mp* sing to the other soloist, or directly to the audience

Solo *mp* sing to the other soloist, or directly to the audience  
stead - y,

Solo *mp* sing to the other soloist, or directly to the audience  
stead - y,

A  
stead - y.

B  
stead - y.

*pp*  
Ped.

335

Musical score for measures 335-340. It features four vocal parts (Solo 1, Solo 2, Alto A, Bass B) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "stead - y,". The piano part includes a pedaling instruction "Ped." and a circled measure number "(8)".



339

Musical score for measures 339-344. It features four vocal parts (Solo 1, Solo 2, Alto A, Bass B) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "stead - y,". The piano part includes a pedaling instruction "Ped." and a circled measure number "(8)".

343

Musical score for measures 343-346. The Solo part begins with a rest and then sings "stead - - - y," with a *p* dynamic. The A and B vocal parts enter with "stead - y." in a *ppp* dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, marked with a *ped.* (pedal) instruction.



347

Musical score for measures 347-350. The Solo part continues with "stead - - - y," and "stead - y," with a *p* dynamic. The Soprano (S) and Tenor (T) parts enter with "sh" in a *pp* dynamic. The Alto (A) and Bass (B) parts continue with "stead - y." in a *pp* dynamic. The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern and *ped.* instructions.

352

Solo

stead - - - y.

S

A niente

T

B niente

(8)



356

*mp*

*niente*

S

A Breathe slowly and deeply, listening carefully:

T *mp* niente

B Breathe slowly and deeply, listening carefully:

(8)

*Ped.*

### Composer's Notes:

Before I composed a single note of *Shelter This Candle*, I already knew several things about the piece. I knew that the poem spoke of love's ability to transform even the darkest moments of our lives into times of comfort, connection and wonderment. I loved the delicious images that the poem offered: light, darkness, exhilaration, loneliness, and the sounds of wind and falling tears. The combination of harp, oboe, horn, cello and choir was nothing short of luscious.

What I did not imagine was how Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem would enter my consciousness so deeply.

I composed the first section of *Shelter This Candle* with a light heart. Crafting the brilliant underground world of "crystal moon and star" was a delight for me, full of "child in a candy shop" moments. After about ten days of composing, satisfied with my work thus far, I laid the song aside for several weeks in order to complete an orchestra piece.

Little did I know what was in store for me when I returned to face the second half of the poem, and the entrance of "our only foe, the wind." On some level, I had lost track of the importance of the poem's title: "To the Wife Of a Sick Friend"! *Oh yes, I remembered. This poem is about how we respond to the most difficult times of life, when we could easily become overwhelmed by grief or despair. During times like these, leaving the cave is not an option.*

Every day, as I worked on the second, darker section of the piece, those words repeated themselves to me — *leaving the cave is not an option*. The conclusion of the song needed a palpable sense of how dreadfully lonely the darkness can become if we allow the light of our love to be extinguished. I took many walks, and reminded myself to breathe. One day, I suddenly understood the exact significance of the last line of the poem: if the candle is allowed to go out, the poet will be able to *taste* her own tears, but she will only be able to *hear* her friend's tears, echoing somewhere out in the dark space, far away.

After the final words of the poem had been set to music, there was still something more to say, but it took me a long time to figure out exactly how to conclude this song. The answer lay, once again, in the poem's title: "To the Wife Of a Sick Friend." *Of course, I thought. We are, all of us in the whole world, in this big earthly cave together. But in the poem itself, there are only two solitary characters: Edna and her friend's wife, holding one candle between them, singing to each other with everything in their hearts: "Steady, steady, steady..."*

- E.A.

April 13, 2008