



Climb

Edna St. Vincent Millay

SSATB and piano

Elizabeth Alexander

Seafarer Press

On Thought In Harness

from *Wine From These Grapes*

My falcon to my wrist
Returns
From no high air.
I sent her toward the sun that burns
Above the mist;
But she has not been there.

Her talons are not cold; her beak
Is closed upon no wonder;
Her head stinks of its hood, her feathers reek
Of me, that quake at the thunder.

Degraded bird, I give you back your eyes forever, ascend now whither you are tossed;
Forsake this wrist, forsake this rhyme;
Soar, eat ether, see what has never been seen; depart, be lost,
But climb.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

© 1934, 1962 by Edna St. Vincent Millay and Norma Millay Ellis.
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Composer Note:

When Darciann Ketter commissioned *Climb* for her high school choir to sing at graduation, she involved the singers in a big way. Shortly after we signed the commissioning contract I received an enormous envelope containing letters from every chorus member describing their values, hopes and fears. They also sent copies of their favorite poems.

I was blown away by the vulnerability and courage in those letters. My own sons were in middle school, and I couldn't help imagining where their own dreams might lead them. When that time came, their job would be to leave and my job would be to let go. I hoped I would be good at it.

The fear of leaving and letting go is all over Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "On Thought in Harness." At first Millay seems to fault the falcon for its own timidity, but then lets it slip that this reticence might be traced to none other than the speaker herself: "me, that quake at the thunder."

With this in mind I began the song with solitary, introspective solos, full of longing and disappointment. The narrator's brave inner voice is ushered in by the chorus, which eventually reveals the truth about the ground-bound bird: *The falcon will be free to depart when her human is ready to let her go.*

When the time came for my own sons to leave home, I ended up being pretty good at letting go. I had some help in the matter because when I wasn't good at it, my sons didn't hesitate to remind me what my job was. And as it turns out, they've ended up being damned good fliers.

Climb

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(♩ = 50-54)

S I

S II

A

T

B

Pno

p

f

Red.

4

p

f

Red.

7

S Solo

mp

My fal - con to my wrist re - turns from no high

p

12

S Solo

air.

p

f

Ped.

15

S Solo

sent her to the sun that burns a - bove the mist,

p

18

S I

S II

A

T

B

but she has not been there.

p

p

p

p

p

ped.

21

mf

Ped.

24

T *p* Her tal - ons are not cold, her

B *p* Her tal - ons are not cold, her

clear, bell-like
m.s.

p

Ped.

27

S I *p* Her

S II *p* Her

A *p* Her

T beak is closed up - on no won - der; Her

B beak is closed up - on no won - der; Her

Ped.

A

31

S I head stinks of its hood, her fea - thers reek of me, her

S II head stinks of its hood, her fea - thers reek of me, her

A head stinks of its hood, her fea - thers reek of me, her

T head stinks of its hood, her fea - thers reek of me, her

B head stinks of its hood, her fea - thers reek of me, her

34

S I fea - thers reek of me that quake that quake at the

S II fea - thers reek of me that quake that quake at the

A fea - thers reek of me that quake that quake at the

T fea - thers reek of me that quake that quake at the

B fea - thers reek of me that quake, that quake at the

37

S I
thun - der, thun - der.

S II
thun - der, thun - der.

A
thun - der, at the thun - der.

T
thun - der, at the thun - der.

B
thun - der, at the thun - der.

f
mf

Ped.

40

mf espressivo

Solo
De - gra - ded bird, I give you

mf

Ped.

43

Solo
back your eyes for - ev - er, I give you

mf

Ped.

46

Solo

back your eyes _____ for - ev - er, _____

S I

S II

A

T

B

p

as -

p

Red.

B

49

S I

as - cend, _____

S II

as - cend, _____ as - cend, _____

A

- cend, _____ as - cend, _____

T

as - cend, _____ as - cend, _____

B

as - cend, _____ as - cend, _____ as -

p

mp

p

mp

p

mp

mp

57

ff

S I

now

ff

S II

now

ff

A

now

ff

T

now

ff

B

now

Tempo II (♩ = 150-162) *

(The piano part in mm.59-60 will sound *exactly* like mm.57-58!)

59

S I

mf

as

mf

Ped.

* One way of handling this metric modulation is to simply allow the pianist to play mm.59-60 without being conducted. To help the singers adjust to the new tempo, the conductor may wish to conduct a few measures in 4/4 rather than in 2/2.

C

61

S I - cend now whith - er you are

S II as - cend, *mf*

A as - cend *mf*

T as - *mf*

B as - *mf*

Red.

63

S I tossed, whith - er you are

S II whith - er you are tossed,

A whith - er you are tossed,

T - cend whith - er you are tossed,

B - cend whith - er you are

Red.

Opal Palmer Adisa, poet • Paul Adams, technological hero • Stephen Alexander, lyric consultant • Ginny Allen, Agile coach and friend • The great people at American Composers Forum • Yehuda Amichai, poet • A. R. Ammons, poet • Jennifer Anderson, conductor and composer advocate • Scott Bates, poet • Abbie Betinis, initiator of collaborative endeavors • Beth Norton, conductor and composer advocate • Dennis Blubaugh, more than just a music dealer • Michael deVernon Boblett, poet • Edna Busby, my first piano teacher • Ray Bradbury, writer • Augustin Cadena, translator • Norbert Capek, minister and advocate for religious freedom • Jessica Corbett, editor • David Cummings, poet • Philip Dacey, poet • Catherine Dalton, composer and scrum partner • Emily Dickinson, poet • Evelyn Dudley, poet and caregiver • Rob Eller-Isaacs, minister and composer advocate • Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher and poet • Louise Erdrich, writer • David Allan Evans, poet • Sophia Lyon Fahs, writer • Richard M. Fewkes, minister and writer • Sasha Gertler, poet • Jack Gallagher, composer and teacher • Paul Gerike, proofreader • Jocelyn Hagen and Michael Hagan, founders of Graphite Marketplace • Steve Harper, just about everything • Steve Harkins, web designer • Edie Hill, composer and friend • Langston Hughes, poet • Margaret and George Heald, piano technician • Karel Husa, composer and teacher • David Ignatow, poet • Kabir, mystic • Linda Kachelmeier, composer and scrum partner • Ruth Palmer, conductor and composer advocate • Joan Wolf Prefontaine, poet • Paul Rardin, conductor and composer advocate • Kalidasa, poet • Steve Kaul, recording engineer • Søren Kierkegaard, philosopher and poet • Dorothy Knost, piano teacher • Ben Krywosz, artistic director of Nautilus Music-Theater • Denise Levertov, poet • George Ella Lyon, poet • Jonathan Machen, vocalist • Dawna Markova, writer • Anne Matlack, conductor and composer advocate • Nancy Menk, composer advocate • Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet • Jane Ramseyer Miller, conductor, composer, social activist • Joe Mish, conductor and composer advocate • J. David Moore, composer • Gerald Rich, poet • Carl Sandburg, poet • friend • King Sigismund III, religious reformer • Ann Silsbee, composer, poet and friend • Simon Alexander-Adams, sounding board, fellow creative, and awesome son • Steven Stucky, composer and teacher • Rabindranath Tagore, poet • Sister Peronne Marie Thibert, teacher and writer • Oliver Alexander-Adams, unconventional thinker and light of my life • Howard Thurman, civil rights leader and writer • Everyone whose work supports the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries • Charles Varney, high school choral director • Anna Vonhuben, illustrator and graphic designer • Nancy White, poet • John Greenleaf Whittier, poet • Theodore Chickering Williams, poet • Daniel Winter, pianist and teacher • Nancy Wood, poet • Yehudi Wyner, composer and teacher

**A lot of hard work
and creativity went
into bringing this
music to you...**



**...and some of it
was even mine.**

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Elizabeth Alexander

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69

S I

S II

A

T

B

tossed;

tossed;

tossed;

tossed;

Ped.

72

mp

Ped.

75

T

B

mp

as -

mp

as -

D

77

mp

S I For - sake this wrist, for - sake this rhyme;

mp

S II For - sake this wrist, for - sake this rhyme;

mp

A For - sake this wrist, for - sake this rhyme;

T - cend, as - cend, as -

B - cend, as - cend, as -

Red.

79

S I for - sake this wrist, for - sake this

S II for - sake this wrist, for - sake this

A for - sake this wrist, for - sake this

T - cend, For - sake this wrist, for - sake this

B - cend, For - sake this wrist; for - sake this

Red.

81 *mf*

S I

rhyme;

S II

rhyme;

A

rhyme;

soar

T

rhyme;

B

rhyme;

mf

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

83

S I

soar,

S II

soar

eat

A

eat

T

soar,

B

soar,

mf

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

85

S I

S II

A

T

B

e - ther, soar

e - ther,

eat e - ther, soar,

eat e - ther,

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

87

S I

S II

A

T

B

soar,

soar

soar

soar,

as - cend now,

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

99

S II *mp* See what has nev - er been

A *mp* See what has nev - er been

T *mp* See what has nev - er been

B *mp* - part, See what has nev - er been

mf

Red.

101

S I *mp* as - - -

S II seen,

A seen,

T seen,

B seen,

mf

Red.

103

S I - cend, See what has nev - er been

S II See what has nev - er been

A See what has nev - er been

T See what has nev - er been

B See what has nev - er been

Ped.

105

S I *f* seen, de - part, be

S II *f* seen, be

A *f* seen, de - part, be

T *f* seen. de - part, de - part,

B *f* seen. de - part, be

Ped.

Ped.

Ped.

Ped.

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117

S I
lost, _____ de - part, de - - -

S II
lost, be lost, de - part, de - - -

A
lost, _____ de - part, de - -

T
_____ be lost _____ de - part, de - part, de - -

B
lost, be lost, de - part, de - part, _____ de -

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

121 *ff*

S I
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, de -

S II
ff
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, de -

A
ff
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, de -

T
ff
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, de -

B
ff
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, de -

125

S I
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, but *mp*

S II
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, but *mp*

A
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, but *mp*

T
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, but *mp*

B
- part, be lost, de - part, be lost, but *mp*

mp

130

S I
climb, *mf*

S II
climb, *mf*

A
climb, *mf*

T
climb, *mf*

B
climb, *mf*

mf

Red.

133 *p*

S I
climb,

S II
climb,

A
climb,

T
climb,

B
climb,

mp

137 *pp*

S I
climb,

S II
climb,

A
climb,

T
climb,

B
climb,

p

8va

Selected Choral Music by Elizabeth Alexander

A Palette To Paint Us As We Are (Gerald Rich)
SATB, piano • SEA-014-01
SSA, piano • SEA-014-02

Beware the Winter Settin' In (Alexander)
SATB, Celtic band, opt. children's choir • SEA-139-00

Blessed Be the Flower That Triumphs (Boblett)
SATB • SEA-078-00

Cherish Your Doubt (Alexander)
SATB, piano • SEA-063-01
SSAA, piano • SEA-063-02

Die Gedanken Sind Frei (German protest song, arr.)
SATB, piano • SEA-087-00

Do Not Leave Your Cares at the Door (Norman Naylor)
SATB • SEA-071-00

Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm (Yehuda Amichai)
SATB • SEA-026-01

Faith Is the bird that feels the light (Tagore)
SSA • SEA-068-00

Fighting Over What We Believe (Alexander)
SATB, soloists, piano • SEA-099-01

Finally On My Way To Yes (Pesha Gertler)
SSATB, piano • SEA-019-00

Folks, I'm Telling You (Langston Hughes)
SSATB, piano • SEA-027-00

Glen Song (Scott Bates)
SSATB, piano • SEA-025-00

Handles (Alexander)
SSA, piano • SEA-148-00

How To Sing Like a Planet (Alexander)
SATB, piano • SEA-105-01

If You Can Walk You Can Dance (Zimbabwean Proverb)
SAB, piano, claves • SEA-022-03
TBB, piano, claves • SEA-022-05
SSA, piano, claves • SEA-022-06
SATB, piano, claves • SEA-022-07

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SATB • SEA-017-00

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (Polish carol, arr.)
SSA • SEA-020-00

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SSA, string quartet • SEA-090-00

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SATB, chamber ensemble • SEA-123-00
SATB, piano • SEA-123-09

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1-4 part choir, soloist, piano • SEA-141-03

...or a musician (Philip Dacey)
SATB, orchestra • SEA-007-00

A Palette To Paint Us As We Are (Gerald Rich)
SA, piano • SEA-014-00
SATB, piano • SEA-014-01

Praise Wet Snow Falling Early (Denise Levertov)
SATB, piano • SEA-015-00

Reasons for the Perpetuation of Slavery (Alexander)
SSAA • SEA-091-00

Same Birds (David Allen Evans)
SATB • SEA-128-00

Song of Kabir (Kabir)
SATB • SEA-119-00

The Gate is Open (Sister Peronne Marie Thibert)
SATB • SEA-097-01

They Have Freckles Everywhere (Alexander)
SSAA, piano • SEA-076-00

To Make a Prairie (Emily Dickinson)
SSA, piano • SEA-016-00

We Lift Up Our Hearts (Richard Fewkes)
Unison children's choir, SATB, piano • SEA-021-00

We Remember Them (Sylvan Kamens, Jack Riemer)
SATB, piano • SEA-083-01

Where there Is Light in the Soul (Chinese proverb)
SAB • SEA-070-00
SATB • SEA-070-01
SSA • SEA-070-02
TBB • SEA-062-03

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SATB • SEA-062-00
TTBB • SEA-062-02
SSAA • SEA-062-04
SATB, flute • SEA-062-05

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