

Life is Not a Garden

SSAA, piano, opt. bass



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 a spire climbing higher till 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 a spire climbing higher till it meets the sky.
Life is not a gentle flowing stream,
And no matter what the song says: Life is not a dream.*



Watercolor created especially for this publication by Yasemin Arkun
<http://painting-drawing.blogspot.com/>

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 a spire climbing higher till 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.

Life Is Not a Garden

SSAA, piano, opt. bass *

Elizabeth Alexander with students of
Community of Peace Academy (St. Paul, MN)

With open eyes and open hearts (♩ = 92-96)

Pno

(pedal lightly)

5

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

mp (melody)

S II

A I

A II

pedal lightly

* Optional bass part may be downloaded at www.seafarerpress.com/works/life-is-not-a-garden

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

S I
spi - re* climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

S II
spi - re* climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

A I
spi - re* climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

A II
spi - re* climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

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

* My setting of the word "spire" on two syllables can generate lively debate at choir rehearsals! Here, as in everyday speech, "spire" needn't be aggressively polysyllabic, but the diphthongs should be gently implied on the second beats of measures 21 & 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

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

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

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

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

Ped. (pedal lightly)

BOTH TIMES: Sing as written

31

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

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

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

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

mp
Ped. Ped. Ped. *mp* *v. v. v.*

36

S I
Life is not a dream. _____

S II
Life is not a dream. _____

A I *mp*
Life is not a dream. _____
1. For in the
2. For in the

A II *mp*
Life is not a dream. _____
1. For in the
2. For in the

mf
(pedal lightly) *v. v. v.* *v. v. v.* *v. v. v.* *v. v. v.* *v. v. v.*
Ped. Ped. Ped.

A

41

S I

S II

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

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

mp

Ped. *Ped.*

45

S I

S II

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 *f*

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.*

49 *mp*

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

S II Vs.1
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,

mf

Ped. Ped. *

53 *f with some attitude*

S Tutti
There's no doubt a - bout it, Some days I could
Then one day it's ha - tred, It can get so

f with some attitude

A Tutti
There's no doubt a - bout it, Some days I could
Then one day it's ha - tred, It can get so

f

Ped. *

56

S Tutti

do with - out it.
com - pli - cat - ed.

A Tutti

do with - out it.
com - pli - cat - ed.

Ped. Ped. Ped. *

B

59

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

63

f

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

67

S Tutti

p

Life is not a gar - den, _____ an E - den to be -

A Tutti

p

Life is not a gar - den, _____ an E - den to be -

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

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 serum 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 • Pascha Gertler, poet • Jack Gallagher, composer and teacher • Paul Gerike, proofreader • Jocelyn Hagen and Tom Hakan, 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 technicians • Karel Husa, composer and teacher • David Ignatow, poet • Kabir, mystic • Linda Kachelmeier, composer and serum 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.**

**This page has been intentionally omitted.
(You know why.) A complete perusal score may be
purchased through any music store or dealer.**

Elizabeth Alexander

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C

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

S I

p espressivo

Find a place in the still - ness of your

S II

p espressivo

Find a place in the still - ness of your

A I

p espressivo

Find a place in the still - ness of your

A II

p espressivo

Find a place in the still - ness of your

Ped. Ped.

103

p

S I heart, A wil - der - ness where some - thing green can

p

S II heart, A wil - der - ness where some - thing green can

p

A I heart, A wil - der - ness where some - thing green can

p

A II heart, A wil - der - ness where some - thing green can

ped.

111

warmly *mp*

S I start to make a home, Keep it safe and keep it warm,

warmly *mp*

S II start to make a home. Keep it safe and keep it warm,

mp warmly *mf*

A I start to make a home, A home Keep it

mp warmly *mf*

A II start to make a home, A home Keep it

ped.

119 *f*

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

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

mf *f* *sfz* *sfz*

Ped. Ped. *sfz*

D

127

S Solo

A Solo *mp tenderly*

Let its young and ten - der form re -

dolce *mp* *mp*

(keep pedal depressed) Ped.

134

S Solo *mf tenderly*

A Solo *mf*

mind you: There is

There is beau - ty,

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

140

S Solo

splen - dor yet un - seen, deep with - in, still a -

A Solo

yet un - seen, deep with - in, still a -

p

p

ped. *ped.* *ped.* *ped.*

146

S Solo

sleep. Slen - der and rare,

A Solo

sleep.

Solo or Tutti:

p

p

ped. *ped.*

153

S Solo

but al - ways there,

A Solo

ped.

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173

S I *mp* *mf*
tears grow from pain, Some flow with joy we can't ex - plain. A

S II *mf*
A

A I *mp* *mf*
tears grow from pain, Some flow with joy we can't ex - plain. A

A II *mf*
A

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

181

S I *f*
gar - den it's not, but it's the on - ly world we've

S II *f*
gar - den it's not, but it's the on - ly world we've

A I *f*
gar - den it's not, but it's the on - ly world we've

A II *f*
gar - den it's not, but it's the on - ly world we've

mf
Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

187 *mp*

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

S I
got.

S II
got.

A I
got.

A II
got.

mp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

F

195 *mp with determination*

Tutti
Life is not a gar - den, row af - ter row, but no - bo - dy can tell me that my seeds won't

mp

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

202

S I
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

A I
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.

206

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

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

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

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

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. *

211

Ped. Ped. Ped. * p

G

215

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

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

219

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._____

223

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.

227

S I spi - re climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

S II spi - re climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

A I spi - re climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

A II spi - re climb - ing high - er till it meets the sky. *mf*

mf Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. *

231 *cantabile*

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

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

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

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

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

236 *p*

S I flow - ing stream, But e - ven

S II But e - ven

A I stream. But e - ven

A II flow - ing stream, But e - ven

p Ped. Ped.

H

241

S I
though _____ it's a might - y far cry _____ from the gar - den and the

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

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

A II
though _____ it's a might - y far cry _____ from the gar - -

Ped. Ped. Ped.

246

S I
moun - tain and the star - ry sky, _____ I'm gon - na keep (p)

S II
- den and the star - ry sky, _____ I'm gon - na keep (p)

A I
- den and the star - ry sky, _____ I'm gon - na keep (p)

A II
- den and the star - ry sky, _____ I'm gon - na keep (p)

Ped. Ped.

250

S I
work - ing to make (k) this world that dream.

S II
work - ing to make (k) this world that dream.

A I
work - ing to make (k) this world that dream.

A II
work - ing to make (k) this world that dream.

pedal lightly

* Ped.

255

S I
that dream. *ff*

S II
that dream. *ff*

A I
that dream. *ff*

A II
that dream. *ff*

ff

About *Life Is Not a Garden*

I am not always pleased when life veers into an unforeseen direction.

The high school chorus at Community of Peace Academy had struggled for several weeks to come up with a concept for a piece of music I was writing for them. They'd shared concerns about injustice, poverty, war and prejudice. They'd affirmed strongly held beliefs about family, community, and acceptance. I had just unveiled a somewhat promising first draft based on one of their brainstorming ideas. It had an upbeat tune and a more or less positive message:

*There are flowers, there are weeds.
All have blossoms, all have needs,
And a lifetime worth of seeds.
This is our garden. This is our home.*

"It's not bad or anything," a skinny young man was saying, trying to be tactful. "But it's just not what I would sing about, personally."

Another student was more direct. "The people in my life always be fighting, disrespecting, judging you. But this song is like 'be happy 'cause everything's fine,' and that's not real life."

I tried not to think about how little time I had to finish composing this song. *It's about the process, I told myself. If the process has integrity, so will the finished product.*

"I hear what you're saying," I said. "But if the garden metaphor won't work, what will? What is life like for you?"

"It's not *like* anything," came an impatient reply from the back. "Life is just life."

This was not going well. After another ten minutes of faltering communication, I threw my hands into the air. "Okay, I gave this my best shot, and it looks like I got it wrong. You're going to have to help me out here."

"I don't know," sighed one girl. "But life is not a garden, sunny and bright."

"Okay," I said slowly, "So what else is life *NOT* like?"

Suddenly there was a question they could answer. We ended the hour with a chalkboard full of ideas, and two days later I showed up with a very different draft. Hard-edged. Blues-inflected.

As I sang the new chorus something in the room woke up. Hands were raised from the back of the room, and students who'd never spoken during brainstorming now put in their two cents. On the way out a student gave me a thumbs up along with the ultimate high school compliment: "You rock."

The new song was much harder to write than the one I'd originally envisioned! It opened with disillusionment and wandered through anger and betrayal, which meant that I had to pass through those places, too. I was often reminded how slim hope can feel.

But by insisting on a darker, more complex view of the world, these young people took me to a multi-layered place I would not have gone had I been left to my own devices. Not only that, but when they premiered *Life is Not a Garden*, they sang it like they *meant* it.