"THIS DARK CEILING WITHOUT A STAR"

A SYLVIA PLATH SONG CYCLE FOR MEZZO SOPRANO AND SIX INSTRUMENTALISTS

Clarinet in A
Bass Clarinet in Bb
Percussion I - marimba, vibraphone, glockenspiel
crotales, suspended cymbal
Percussion II - claves, large woodblocks, 3 tom-toms,
chinese tom-tom, tenor drum, snare
drum, bass drum
Mezzo soprano - range: g - a"
Piano, celesta - 1 player
Viola

The score is transposed

DURATION: Approximately 19 minutes
"THIS DARK CEILING WITHOUT A STAR"

A Sylvia Plath Song Cycle for mezzo soprano and six instrumentalists

EVENT

How the elements solidify!
The moonlight, that chalk cliff
In whose rift we lie

Back to back. I hear an owl cry
From its cold indigo.
Intolerable vowels enter my heart.

The child in the white crib revolves and sighs,
Opens its mouth now, demanding.
His little face is carved in pained, red wood.

Then there are the stars - ineradicable, hard.
One touch: it burns and sickens.
I cannot see your eyes.

Where apple bloom ices the night
I walk in a ring,
A groove of old faults, deep and bitter.

Love cannot come here.
A black gap discloses itself.
On the opposite lip

A small white soul is waving, a small white maggot.
My limbs, also, have left me.
Who has dismembered us?

The dark is melting. We touch like cripples.
APPREHENSIONS

There is this white wall, above which the sky creates itself-
Infinite, green, utterly untouchable.
Angels swim in it, and the stars, in indifference also.
They are my medium.
The sun dissolves on this wall, bleeding its lights.

A gray wall now, clawed and bloody.
Is there no way out of the mind?
Steps at my back spiral into a well.
There are no trees or birds in this world,
There is only a sourness.

This red wall winces continually:
A red fist, opening and closing,
Two gray, papery bags-
This is what I am made of, this and a terror
Of being wheeled off under crosses and a rain of pietas.

On a black wall, unidentifiable birds
Swivel their heads and cry.
There is no talk of immortality among these!
Cold blanks approach us:
They move in a hurry.

CHILD

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,
The zoo of the new

Whose names you meditate-
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,
Pool in which images
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous
Wringing of hands, this dark
Ceiling without a star.
BY CANDLELIGHT

This is winter, this is night, small love-
A sort of black horsehair,
A rough, dumb country stuff
Steeled with the sheen
Of what green stars can make it to our gate.
I hold you on my arm.
It is very late.
The dull bells tongue the hour.
The mirror floats us at one candle power.

This is the fluid in which we meet each other,
This haloey radiance that seems to breathe
And lets our shadows wither
Only to blow
Them huge again, violent giants on the wall.
One match scratch makes you real.
At first the candle will not bloom at all-
It snuffs its bud.
To almost nothing, to a dull blue dud.

I hold my breath until you creak to life,
Balled hedgehog,
Small and cross. The yellow knife
Grows tall. You clutch your bars.
My singing makes you roar.
I rock you like a boat
Across the Indian carpet, the cold floor,
While the brass man
Kneels, back bent, as best he can

Hefting his white pillar with the light
That keeps the sky at bay,
The sack of black! It is everywhere, tight, tight!
He is yours, the little brassy Atlas-
Poor heirloom, all you have,
At his heels a pile of five brass cannonballs,
No child, no wife.
Five balls! Five bright brass balls!
To juggle with, my love, when the sky falls.

These poems are drawn from the following anthology:

EVENT

ADAGIO  \( J = c. \, 72 \)
THE HOLLOW LIGHT

THAT CHALK CLIFF IN WHOSE RIFT WE LIE

BACK TO BACK

HEAR THE OWL CRY FROM ITS
Cl. A
B. cl. Bb
S. Cym.
V. B.B.A.
L. W. Blks.
Perc.
3.4
Sop.
Piano
Vln.

His little face is carved in pained red wood.

Then there are the two bars—impracticable, hard.
ONE TOUCH: IT BURNS AND SCRENS.
I CANNOT SEE

YOUR EYES.
TEMPO PRIMO

STRINGENDO MOLTO

TEMPO PRIMO

sul tasto

CROTALES
Soul is waving, a small white maggot.

Meno mosso \( j = 58 \)

My limbs, also, have left me.
Who has dismembered us... (s)?

Dark is melting, we too...
RALLENTANDO POCO A POCO
APPREHENSIONS

LENTO $j = c.60$

[Musical notation]
SOP.

WHITE WALL

A BOX WHICH THE SKY

CRESTENZA

EXPRESS.

CL.

B.CL.

H.

PERC.

H.

SOX.

ATE ITSELF INFINITE, GREEN,

CRESTENZA

PED.
THEY ARE IN THE
MIDDLE.

THE
PANINO

Vla.

Vl.

FED

P.

P.

P.

P.
- 20 -

Cl. A.

B. Cl. Bb.
SUSP. LIN.

H.
SAX Bb.

PERC.
SNARE DR.

H.

SOP.

Piano.

Vla.

Cl. A.

B. Cl. Bb.
MARIANBA

PERC.
TOM TOMB UP

H.

SOP.

Piano.

Vla.

steps AT MY BACK SPIRAL into A WELL.
CHILD

ADAGIO  \( \mathfrak{f} = 66 \)
MOLTO MENO MOSSO (d = c.60)

(Viola: sempre pp)

This dark ceiling without a star.

(Viola: pp)
BY CANDLELIGHT

ANDANTE  \( j = \frac{3}{2} \)
Suddenly the hour. The bell tolls.
- 41 -

Cl. A

Bn. Bn.

I

Perc.

II

Sop.

Piano

Vla.

DANCE THAT SEEMS TO BREATHE (THE)

AND LETS OUR SONG WITHER ONLY TO
to a dull blue sub

I hold my breath until you come to life,
L.V. ALLOW THE SOUND TO VIBRATE UNTIL A PIANISSIMO LEVEL IS REACHED.
AT HIS HEELS A PILE OF FIVE BRASS CANNONS... BALLS,

NO CHILD, NO WIFE... (RE).
Dedicated to: Augustina

November 28th, 1988

Christopher L. James