

Jessica Rudman

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# A Forest that is a Desert

*for a Cappella SATB Choir*

Text by Kendra Preston Leonard

2019  
ca. 11:00-12:00

# A Forest that is a Desert

a Cappella SATB Choir

- I. In the Stony Mountains (3:30)
- II. Shadow Reel to Last Breath (2:30)
- III. Hospice (ca. 5:00-6:00)

## Program Notes

*A Forest that is a Desert* was commissioned by Choral Arts Initiative for the 2019 PREMIERE | Project Festival. The work sets three texts written by Kendra Preston Leonard specifically for this composition.

When I first received the CAI commission, I looked through a number of Kendra's text and was drawn to her lovely work "My mother is a poem by Yeats," which expresses the profound grief of watching a loved one succumb to dementia. Full of ideas, I texted to ask if she would be open to me setting it. She was thrilled - but another composer already had secured the rights to set the poem!

I resigned myself to choosing another text, but couldn't get the first poem of my head enough to find something that resonated strongly. After some brainstorming, Kendra generously agreed to write a companion text exploring similar themes. Within a couple days, she sent three new poems written in memory of her mother, hoping that one might be a good fit. I loved all three and was particularly drawn to them as a set.

The resulting work, *A Forest that is a Desert*, uses traditional choral writing, coloristic vocal effects, and indeterminacy to bring to life Kendra's evocative words. The music is intended to reflect the mental effects of dementia on those who suffer from it and also express the complex emotions felt by loved ones watching that decline.

## Performance Notes

General:

- The work can be performed in full, or any individual movement or pair of movements may be performed.
- Glissandos should take the full value of the note on which they are placed.
- Grace notes should be performed on the beat.
- Solos for a voice type that occur in different places of the piece may be performed by different singers or by the same singer.

I:

- The whispered gibberish should create the effect of garbled speech without recognizable words.
- The whispered names should create a jumble of sound with recognizable words sometimes coming out of the texture. Singers may need to voice these more to allow names to be clearly heard.

### III:

- The third movement ends with an ostinato (mm. 48-51) that repeats while singers move one by one to a Recessional, which they sing while departing the stage.
- The departures starting after the first repetition of measures 48-51 should not feel like a coordinated mass exit but rather a trickle that builds over time.
- Singers should leave one at a time and may leave at any place in the ostinato. They do not need to leave at the repeat sign.
- Singers should leave in such way that the sections on stage are relatively balanced for as long as possible. In other words, one voice type should not all leave first, followed by another, and another.
- A suggested plan of departure based on a 24-member choir is:
  - First two times through: all sing mm. 48-51 on stage
  - Third time: one singer starts to walk away
  - Fourth time: two singers of different voice types start to walk away
  - Fifth time: four singers (one from each voice type) start to walk away
  - Sixth time: eight singers (two from each voice type) start to walk away
  - Seventh time: all remaining singers start to walk away, except for one alto
- As singers leave, they may choose to look back at the singers around them, take and then release the hand of the person next to them, or otherwise use physical gestures and facial expressions to convey emotion at their departure.
- Singers should walk around or through the audience, and if possible, each should take a different path from the person(s) exiting just before them.
- Singers should fully exit the hall or stand quietly behind the audience until the end of the piece.

### **Composer Contact Information**

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## Text

### 1. In the Stony Mountains (excerpt)\*

[I turn her chair and she turns to me  
and she is looking so very far away;  
her eyes sweep the room and come about  
to land on me and she says

Oh—

oh,  
I am having  
the most terrible  
hallucination

and] I think she has lost me forever,  
amid names and faces and trees

so much is lost  
in a forest  
that is desert

my hand circles on her  
back, all spine, stony mountains  
and I tell her  
I tell her  
that I'm real and she says

how  
how can you be here?

I flew, I tell her:  
I flew here to see you.

But how can that be?  
It just is; I am here.

\* Bracketed text not set

### 2. Shadow Reel to Last Breath

'There is no revelation  
in her vexed words, lost sleep,  
the catch in her throat.

Shadows reel about the room  
where a lamp is always on,  
a little sun.

We turn her body,  
turn her sheets,  
take turns around her bed.  
We walk,  
with anarchy and darkness  
on the clock,  
an arc.

Rock, and step, and circle.

Listen, listen,  
her speech is rough  
and loose.  
We keep our tears silent  
and our gazes blank.

'The hour comes round at last.

### 3. Hospice

Hear the willow sweep away  
the leaves that fall on the brick,  
and fix the light by the wardrobe  
where the old shade riddles it round.

One breath in and one breath out  
while the second hand sweeps in silence;  
her hands trace circles in the air  
and on the counterpane.

Hold my hand, you won't get lost.  
The moon circles the earth, and the tide  
comes in and out, sweeping clear the beach;  
the waves arc and recede.

## A Forest that is a Desert

Kendra Preston Leonard

Jessica Rudman (b. 1982)

## I. In the Stony Mountains

**Freely** ♩=60

Soprano: *Sh* *n* *f possible* *n*

Alto: solo *ppp* barely audible *n*  
*You*

all others *n* *f possible* *n*  
 whisper gibberish to create a hum of conversation without recognizeable words

TENOR: like wind or waves *n* *f possible* *n*  
*Sh*

BASS: *fp* *n*  
*Dm*

Piano: **Freely** ♩=60

4

S. *n* *f possible* *n*  
 whisper people's first names in a confused jumble

Alto: solo (tenor may substitute as needed) *ppp*  
*I*

all others *n* *f possible* *n*  
 whisper gibberish

T. *n* *f possible* *n* *pp*  
*Sh* *Sh*

B. *fp* *n*  
*Dm*

Pno.

7 solo **8** *mp* *mf* 3  
I think she has lost me for -

S. solo *pp* *mf*  
Oo

solo *pp* *mf* *gliss.*  
Ah

all others *n* *f possible*  
whisper first names of people with occasional common names of trees mixed in

1/2 section *n* *f possible* *n*  
whisper people's first names

A. 1/2 section *n* *f possible* *n* *n*  
whisper gibberish whisper people's first names

T. *f possible* *n* *f possible*  
whisper people's first names

B. *fp* *n*  
Dm

Pno. **8** 3

The musical score is written for a vocal ensemble and piano. The vocal parts are Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The piano part is labeled 'Pno.'. The score is in 4/4 time and features a mix of solo and ensemble parts. The Soprano part has a solo line starting at measure 7, followed by a solo line at measure 8. The Alto part has a solo line starting at measure 7, followed by a solo line at measure 8. The Tenor part has a solo line starting at measure 7, followed by a solo line at measure 8. The Bass part has a solo line starting at measure 7, followed by a solo line at measure 8. The piano part has a solo line starting at measure 7, followed by a solo line at measure 8. The score includes various dynamics such as *mp*, *mf*, *pp*, *f possible*, and *fp*. It also includes performance instructions such as 'whisper first names of people with occasional common names of trees mixed in', 'whisper people's first names', 'whisper gibberish', and 'gliss.'. The score is marked with a '7' at the beginning of the Soprano part and an '8' at the beginning of the piano part. The Soprano part has a '3' above it, and the piano part has a '3' below it.

**poco accel.**

10

S.

e - ver, a - mid names and fa - ces, names and

A.

whisper first names of people with occasional common names of trees mixed in

whisper people's first names

names and

names and

T.

whisper first names of people with occasional common names of trees mixed in

B.

whisper first names of people with occasional common names of trees mixed in

Pno.

**poco accel.**

13 *solists*  $\text{♩} = 72$  *f*

S. fa - ces and trees. So much is

*all others* *n* *f*

A. and trees. So much is

*f*

T. fa - ces and trees. So much is

*f*

B. names and fa - ces and trees. So much is

*mf* *ff* *f*

Pno. Names and fa - ces and trees. So much is

$\text{♩} = 72$

16 *(sempre f)*

S. lost in a fo - rest\_ that is de - sert.

*(sempre f)*

A. lost in a fo - rest\_ that is de - sert.

*(sempre f)*

T. lost in a fo - rest\_ that is de - sert.

*(sempre f)*

B. lost in a fo - rest\_ that is de - sert.

Pno.



**19 Suddenly still** ♩=60

S.

A.

T.

B.

Pno.

**19 Suddenly still** ♩=60

22 S.

A.

T.

B.

Pno.

26 **accel.**

S. *mp* sto-ny mount - tains *p* I tell her,

A. *mp* sto-ny mount - tains *p* I tell her,

T. *pp* Sh *f possible* *p* I tell her,

B. *mp* and I tell her, *mf* I tell her,

Pno. 26 **accel.**

**rit.**

S. *mp* tell her that I'm real *mf* and she says how, *f*

A. *mp* tell her that I'm real *mf* and she says how, *ff* she says

T. *mp* tell her that I'm real *mf* and she says how, *ff* she says

B. *f* tell her that I'm real and she says how,

Pno. **rit.**

36

S. *mp*  
I flew here to see you. *n* *f possible*  
whisper gibberish  $\frac{3}{4}$

A. *tutti* *mp*  
tell her: I flew here to see you.  $\frac{3}{4}$

T. *mp*  
But how can that  $\frac{3}{4}$

B. *n* *f possible* *n* *mp*  
whisper gibberish But how can that  $\frac{3}{4}$

Pno.  $\frac{3}{4}$

40

S. *n* *p* *tired* *tutti* *pp*  
It just is; I

A. *f possible* *pp*  
Sh I

T. *mf*  
be?  
To B.

B. be?

Pno.

43

S. *p*  
am here, I am here,

A. *p*  
am here, I am here,

T. *n* *f possible* *p*  
whisper gibberish I am here,

B. *n* *f possible* *n* *f possible*  
whisper gibberish whisper gibberish

Pno.

**accel.**

46

*mp* *mf* *f*

S. I am, I

A. I am, I

T. I am, I

B. I am, I

Pno.

**rit.**

50

*ff* *pp*

$\text{♩} = 60$

S. am here.

A. am here. I am here,

T. am here. I am here,

B. am here.

Pno.

\* omit tie and hold final chord if not performing movement II

\* omit tie and hold final chord if not performing movement II

**rit.**

$\text{♩} = 60$

## II. Shadow Reel to Last Breath

**With nervous energy** ♩=132

2nd time only  
solo *p*

S. There is no re-ve-la-tion

1st time only  
\* omit if not performing movement I

A.

1st time only  
\* omit if not performing movement I

T.

1/2 section  
*pp*

B. Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

**With nervous energy** ♩=132

Pno.

4

S. in her vexed words, lost

A.

1/2 section  
*pp*

T. Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

B. da da da da da Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

Pno.

7

S. *mp*  
sleep, the catch in

A.

T. *p*  
Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

B. *p*  
Dm da da da da da da da da da da da

Pno.

12

10

S. *mf*  
her throat. Sha - dows reel a-

A.

T. *mp*  
Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

B. *mp*  
Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da da da da

*mp*  
Ah

12

Pno.

13

S.   
bout the room where a lamp is

A.

T.   
Dm da da da da Dm da da da da

B.   
Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da Dm da da da da da

Ah

Pno.

16

S.   
al - ways on, a lit - tle sun.

A.

T.   
Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

B.   
da da da da da Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da da da

Ah

Pno.



21

19

S.

A.

T.

B.

Pno.

*f*

We turn her bo - dy, \_\_\_\_\_

*mf*

Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

*mf*

Dm da da da da da da da da da da da

*mf*

Ah Ah

21

22

S.

A.

T.

B.

Pno.

turn her sheets, take turns a-round her bed. \_\_\_\_\_ We turn her

Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

Dm da da da da da da da da da da da

Ah

25 *tutti* *f*

S. We walk, \_\_\_\_\_ with an - ar chy and dark - - ness \_\_\_\_\_

A. bo - dy, \_\_\_\_\_ turn her sheets, take turns a-round her bed. \_\_\_\_\_

T. *tutti*  
8 Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

B. Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

Ah \_\_\_\_\_ *f* Ah \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

28

S. \_\_\_\_\_ on the clock, \_\_\_\_\_ an arc. \_\_\_\_\_

A. We turn her bo - dy, \_\_\_\_\_ turn her sheets, take turns a-round her bed. \_\_\_\_\_

T. Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

B. \_\_\_\_\_ da da da \_\_\_\_\_ Dm da da da da da Dm da da da da da

Ah \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

31 **32** *mf*

S. Lis - - - - - ten,

A. We turn her bo - dy, turn her sheets, take turns a-

T. *ff* Rock, and step, and cir - cle. Rock, and step, and cir - cle.

B. *ff* Dm da da da da da da da Her speech is rough and

Ah Her speech is rough and

Pno. **32**

34 *f* *gliss.*

S. lis - - - - - ten, lis - -

A. round her bed. We turn her bo - dy, turn her sheets,

T. *f* Rock, and step, and cir - cle. Rock, and step, and cir - cle.

B. loose, lis - ten, her speech is rough and loose, lis - ten, her

Pno.

37

S. *gliss.* *gliss.*  
- - ten, lis - - - - ten, lis - -

A. *gliss.*  
take turns a-round her bed. Lis - - - - ten,

T. *f*  
Rock, and step, and cir - cle. Rock, and step, and cir - cle.

B. *f*  
speech is rough and loose, lis - ten, her speech is rough and loose,

Pno.

40

S. *gliss.* *gliss.*  
- - ten, lis - - - - ten, lis - - - - ten,

A. *gliss.* *gliss.* *gliss.*  
lis - - - - ten, lis - - - - ten, lis - - -

T. *gliss.*  
Rock, and step, and cir - cle. lis - - - - ten,

B. *f*  
lis - ten, her speech is rough and loose, lis - ten,

Pno.

43 *ff*

S. We keep our, *gliss.* we keep

A. *gliss.* ten, lis - - ten, *ff* We keep *gliss.* our *gliss.*

T. *gliss.* lis - - ten, *gliss.* lis - - ten, *gliss.* lis - - ten,

B. her\_ speech is rough, her\_ speech is rough, her\_ speech is rough, her\_ speech is rough,

Pno.

46

S. *ff* our *gliss.* tears\_ si - lent

A. tears, We keep *gliss.* our *gliss.* tears\_ si - lent

T. *ff* We keep our tears We keep our tears si - lent

B. *ff* lis - ten, lis - ten, lis - ten, We keep our tears si - lent

Pno.

**poco rit.****51 Painful** ♩=96

49

S. *fff*  
and our gaz - es blank. The hour \_\_\_\_\_

A. *fff*  
and our gaz - es blank. The hour \_\_\_\_\_

T. *fff*  
and our gaz - es blank. The hour \_\_\_\_\_

B. *fff*  
and our gaz - es blank. The hour \_\_\_\_\_

Pno. **poco rit.** **51 Painful** ♩=96

53

S. **molto rit.**  
— comes round at last.

A. **molto rit.**  
— comes round at last.

T. **molto rit.**  
— comes round at last.

B. **molto rit.**  
— comes round at last.

Pno. **molto rit.**

ATTACCA

## III. Hospice

**Gentle** ♩=56

S. *solo pp*  
Oo

A. *solo pp*  
Oo

T. *solo pp*  
Oo

B. *solo pp*  
Oo

Pno. *solo pp*  
Oo

**accel.** . . . . .

5

S. *solo*  
Oo

A. *solo*  
Oo

T. *solo pp*  
Oo

B. *solo pp*  
Oo

Pno. *accel.* . . . . .

**9 Flowing** ♩=66

S. *tutti pp* *p* *pp*  
Hear the wil - low sweep a - way the leaves that fall on the brick, and

A. *tutti pp* *p* *pp*  
Hear the wil - low sweep a - way the leaves that fall on the brick, and

T. *tutti pp* *p* *pp*  
Hear the wil - low sweep a - way the leaves that fall on the brick, and

B. *tutti pp* *p* *pp*  
Hear the wil - low sweep a - way the leaves that fall on the brick, and

Pno. **9 Flowing** ♩=66

**poco rit.**

13 S. *mp* *p*  
fix the light by the ward - robe where the old shade rid - dles it round.

A. *mp* *p*  
fix the light by the ward - robe where the old shade rid - dles it round.

T. *mp* *p*  
fix the light by the ward - robe where the old shade rid - dles it round.

B. *mp* *p*  
fix the light by the ward - robe where the old shade rid - dles it round.

Pno. **poco rit.**



17 ♩=76

*mp* *mf* *p* all except for solo

S. One breath in and one breath out while the sec-ond hand

A. One breath in and one breath out while the sec-ond hand

T. One breath in and one breath out while the sec-ond hand

B. One breath in and one breath out while the sec-ond hand

Pno. 17 ♩=76

21 solo *mp* slightly lost

S. all others Her hands trace cir - cles in the air

*mp* *pp*

sweeps in si - lence; Hold

A. sweeps in si - lence; Hold

*mp* *pp*

sweeps in si - lence;

B. sweeps in si - lence; Hold

Pno.

25 solo

S. and on the coun - ter pane. *p* The

all others *p* The

my hand,

A. my hand, The

T. *p* Hold my hand, *mp* you won't get lost.

B. *p* my, Hold my hand,

Pno.

29

S. *mp* moon cir - cles the earth, *p* rit.

A. *mp* moon cir - cles the earth, *p*

T. *pp* and the tide comes in and out, *mp*

B. *pp* and the tide comes in and out, *mp*

Pno. 29 rit.

32 *mf* *mp* *p* *mp*  $\text{♩} = 66$  34

S. sweep-ing clear the beach; the waves arc and re -

A. sweep-ing clear the beach; the

T. sweep-ing clear the beach;

B. sweep-ing clear the beach; the waves arc

Pno.

accel. rit. *pp* *mp* *mf* *p*

36 cede. the waves arc and re - cede.

A. waves arc, the waves arc and re - cede.

T. the waves arc, the waves arc and re - cede.

B. and re - cede. the waves arc and re -

accel. rit. *mf* *pp* *mp* *mf* *3*

Pno.

41 ♩=66

S. *mp* *mf* *mp*  
One breath in and one breath out

A. *p* *mp* *mf* *mp*  
One breath in and one breath out

T. *p* *mp* *mf* *mp*  
One breath in and one breath out

B. *p* *mp* *mf* *mp*  
cede. One breath in and one breath out

Pno. 41 ♩=66

44 *mf* *f*

S. *mf* *f*  
Hold my hand, you won't get lost. One breath

A. *mf* *f*  
Hold my hand, you won't get lost.

T. *mf* *f*  
Hold my hand, you won't get lost. One breath

B. *mf* *f*  
Hold my hand, you won't get lost.

Pno. 44

48

S. in and one breath out, One breath

A. Hold my hand, you won't get lost.

T. in and one breath out, One breath

B. Hold my hand, you won't get lost.

Pno. 48

Continue to repeat the measures above. After the first time through, performers should begin slowly exiting the stage one by one as described in the performance notes. When a person starts to leave, they should sing the Recessional below.

Eventually all singers except for one alto should leave the stage and sing the Recessional.

Once all other singers have begun to walk away, the remaining alto repeats mm. 48-51 (ad lib. as desired) until everyone has finished the Recessional. Then, the alto soloist should sing mm. 48-51 one final time as written, slowing down and getting softer.

## Recessional

Sing 2-4 of the following phrases with the lyrics. Then sing 2-4 on "ah" or "oo." Finally, hum 2 or more as needed to finish exiting. Always pause between each phrase.

Start in time with the music repeated above and sing the phrases as written. As you proceed, get increasingly out of sync with the ensemble either by becoming shifted off from their meter/pulse or by slowing down. You may also start to vary and fragment the melodies as you get further from the stage.

Each singer will sing the Recessional at their own time and in their own way. The phrases should be sung in varied orders and repeated as desired. They should be sung in any comfortable octave.

So much is lost in a fo-rest that is de - sert

She has lost me for - e - ver

lis - ten, lis - ten

Rock, and step, and cir - cle