

THE GRAVE WAS TOO
SMALL SO WE HAD TO
TAKE THE HORSE OUT



ERIC SHANFIELD

THE GRAVE WAS TOO SMALL SO WE HAD TO TAKE THE HORSE OUT

Eric Shanfield | 2013 | 10'

poems by Heather Christle

1. Castle

2. We Have To Account For Gravity

3. It Is Like Surgery But It Is Not Surgery

4. Kinds of Weather

2 Sopranos

Violin

Heather Christle is one of my favorite contemporary poets, and I have long intended to set a group of her poems. This project began as a set of nine songs for two sopranos with clarinet and violin, and on July 6th and 7th 2013 I composed all nine songs by hand on paper—you know, the way it used to be done. Unfortunately upon completion I immediately realized most of them were sort of terrible. Luckily the four that weren't terrible were all with solo violin, and since two were for two voices and two for solo voices I just went with those.

The basic idea behind this piece was to write straightforward melodies supported by as simple and repetitious an accompaniment as possible, hopefully imparting a kind of naïve sophistication to the music. I ended up somewhere between Satie and the Mountain Goats, which sounds about right.

The title comes from an interview with Christle in *The Believer* magazine; it was a title she came up with at a party for somebody else's untitled poem. Of course there could be no other possible title for this cycle.

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poems by Heather Christle

CASTLE

A house is an elephant I live in
I live in one room and death
is also in it like a plant
I forget sometimes to water
With time I can forget anything
Lost to me have been some lakes
What are death's priorities
and what are mine and can
we reach a happy agreement
People have said to me in quotes
"safe as houses" and I feel
safe here but I think
my feeling is wrong
An elephant is kind but not safe
is maybe troubled
goes to drink and troubles
the water I can see it
I can see it but I do not understand
I went to steal bread and by mistake
I stole harm
Now harm is in the room
What if we eat it
In the room you are here
just a little, you relax
in your own potential form
I feed you and then I feed death
I bring you water
Time elapses, quilts us into place
This elephant we live in is rising
I think we cannot make her safe

WE HAVE TO ACCOUNT FOR GRAVITY

Very large I am I am very
large for this aquarium I am
getting water everywhere and
also on my big self Do I really
have to live here forever or
could somebody please beam me
elsewhere Maybe a helicopter
Where do we purchase
the world's largest one or
what is a new source for light
and did I mistakenly eat it
because please witness how
my incision casts on the ceiling
—I don't know—a *glow*

IT IS LIKE SURGERY BUT IT IS NOT SURGERY

When you split infinity you just get more
infinity It's different with crackers with bells
with an eagle When an eagle flies into
a bell the bell rings the eagle collapses
There is a finite distance from the bell
to the ground It is harder to say when
the bell completes ringing For a man
with tinnitus the sound does not end For
infinity childhood was rough At the zoo
infinity could not pet the eagle was
not allowed but kept spreading everywhere
It was embarrassing An eagle in a cage
is in some ways a symbol You can
split her up from her real parts

KINDS OF WEATHER

I got so mad when I died in a balloon with all my hope there were people blanketing the earth
like placemats I loved those people they were wheat to me they sustained me but I couldn't show
it I was so mad and I died it's not normal for a human to be contained in a basket aloft in blank
air like water in a red cup I took the shape of my death and my anger there was no forgiveness
there were all of these clouds stratocumulus cumulonimbus I punched them they were some
pieces of water I looked down at all the people they were units they shifted around they clumped
up into little factions there was no way to join them from the balloon I couldn't hear a thing not
a gull and not a mosquito nothing would become of me now I was learning like a machine I
installed my face in the basket started chewing I chewed the air until there wasn't enough to still
name it I ate up the earth ate up those people and then I was nowhere and they could not save me

THE GRAVE WAS TOO SMALL SO WE HAD TO TAKE THE HORSE OUT

1. CASTLE

Heather Christle

Eric Shanfield

♩=138

Soprano 1 *f*
A house is an e - le-phant I live in_____

Violin *f* con sord.

5
S. 1
I live in one room and death is al - so in it like a plant I for - get some-times to

Vln.

10 **11**
S. 1
wa-ter_ With time I can_ for - get a - ny - thing

Vln.

15 **18**
S. 1
Lost to_ me have been some lakes What are death's pri - o - ri - ties_ and

Vln.

20
S. 1
what are mine and can we reach a hap - py_ a - gree - ment

Vln.

THE GRAVE WAS TOO SMALL SO WE HAD TO TAKE THE HORSE OUT - 1. CASTLE

2

25

S. 1

Peo-ple have said to me_ in quotes "safe as hou - ses" and I feel

Vln.

30

S. 1

safe here but I think my feel - ing_ is wrong An

Vln.

35

S. 1

e - le-phant is kind but not safe is may-be trou bled goes to drink and trou-bles the___ wa-ter

Vln.

40

S. 1

I can see it I can see it___ but I do not un - der - stand

Vln.

45

S. 1

I went to___ steal bread and by___ mis - take I stole. harm Now

Vln.

50

S. 1

harm is in the room What if we eat it In the room you are here

Vln.

55

S. 1

just a lit - tle you re-lax in your own po - ten - tial

Vln.

60

62

S. 1

form I feed you and then I feed death

Vln.

65

68

S. 1

I bring you wa - ter Time e - lap - ses quilts us in - to

Vln.

71

72

S. 1

place This e - le-phant we live in is ri - sing I think we can - not make her safe

Vln.

via sord.

THE GRAVE WAS TOO SMALL SO WE HAD TO TAKE THE HORSE OUT

2. WE HAVE TO ACCOUNT FOR GRAVITY

Heather Christle

Eric Shanfield

♩ = 112

mf

Soprano 1
Ve - ry large_ I am

Soprano 2
Ve - ry large_ I am

Violin
mf

5 8

S. 1
ve - ry large_ for this a - qua - ri - um_ I am get - ting wa - ter

S. 2
ve - ry large_ for this a - qua - ri - um_ get - ting wa - ter

Vln.

9

S. 1
e - very - where on my big self

S. 2
e - where and al - so_ on my big self_

Vln.

14

S. 1
Do I real - ly have to live__ here for - e - ver__ or

S. 2
Do I real - ly have to live__ here for - e - ver__

Vln.

21

18

S. 1
could some - bo - dy please beam me else - where May-be a he - li - cop - ter__

S. 2
could some - bo - dy please beam else - where May-be a he - li - cop - ter__

Vln.

23

S. 1
Where do we pur - chase the world's lar - gest one__


S. 2
Where do we pur chase the world's lar - gest one__ or

Vln.

28

S. 1
 what is a new source for light and did I mis -

S. 2
 what is a new source for light did I mis -

Vln.


33 **34**

S. 1
 ta - ken - ly eat it be - cause please wit - ness how my in - ci - sion

S. 2
 take eat it be - cause please wit - ness how my in - ci - sion

Vln.


37 **39**

S. 1
 casts on the cei - ling I don't know a glow

S. 2
 casts on the cei - ling I don't know a glow

Vln.


THE GRAVE WAS TOO SMALL SO WE HAD TO TAKE THE HORSE OUT

3. IT IS LIKE SURGERY BUT IT IS NOT SURGERY

Heather Christle

Eric Shanfield

♩ = 76
mf

Soprano 2
When you split _____ in - fi - ni - ty _____

Violin
IV III II I II III *sempre al fine*
mf

4
S. 2
_____ you just get more in - fi - ni - ty

Vln.
mf

7
S. 2
_____ 9 _____
It's dif - ferent with crack - ers with

Vln.
mf

10
S. 2
bells with an ea - gle _____

Vln.
mf

13
S. 2
_____ *f* _____
When an ea - gle flies _____

Vln.
f

Detailed description: This is a musical score for Soprano 2 and Violin. The piece is in 6/8 time with a tempo of quarter note = 76. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into five systems. The first system (measures 1-3) features a Soprano 2 line with lyrics 'When you split _____ in - fi - ni - ty _____' and a Violin line with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and a fingering sequence 'IV III II I II III' and the instruction 'sempre al fine'. The second system (measures 4-6) continues the Soprano 2 line with lyrics 'you just get more in - fi - ni - ty' and the Violin line. The third system (measures 7-9) shows the Soprano 2 line with lyrics 'It's dif - ferent with crack - ers with' and a measure rest at the beginning. The fourth system (measures 10-12) continues the Soprano 2 line with lyrics 'bells with an ea - gle _____' and the Violin line. The fifth system (measures 13-15) features the Soprano 2 line with lyrics 'When an ea - gle flies _____' and a Violin line with a triplet pattern and a dynamic marking of *f*.

16

S. 2

in - to a bell the

Vln.

19

S. 2

bell rings the ea - gle col - lap - ses

Vln.

22

S. 2

23

Vln.

mf

25

S. 2

mf

There is a fi - nite dis - tance from the bell

Vln.

28

S. 2

to the ground It is hard - er to say when the

Vln.

31

S. 2
bell com - pletes ring - ing

Vln.

34

S. 2
f
For a man with tin - ni - tus the sound does not end

Vln.
f

37

S. 2
For in - fi - ni - ty chil - ld - hood was

Vln.

40

S. 2
rough

Vln.

42

43

S. 2
mf
At the zoo in - fi - ni - ty could not pet the ea - gle was

Vln.
mf

46

S. 2
not all - owed

Vln.
f

49

S. 2
p
but kept spread - ing ev - ery - where

Vln.
p sub. *sim.*

54

S. 2
It was em - bar-rass - ing — An ea - gle in a

Vln.
f

57 $\text{♩} = 76$

58

S. 2
cage is in some ways a sym - bol

Vln.

61

S. 2
You can split her up — You from her real parts

Vln.
ff

THE GRAVE WAS TOO SMALL SO WE HAD TO TAKE THE HORSE OUT

4. KINDS OF WEATHER

Heather Christle

Eric Shanfield

$\text{♩} = 168 / \text{♩} = 56$

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Violin

p

sim.

I got so mad when I died

9

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

in a bal - loon with all my hope

19

18

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

p

Ah

there were peo - ple blan - ket - ing the earth

26 31

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

like place - mats I loved those peo - ple

mp

34 41

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

they were wheat to me they sus -

42

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

tained me but I could - n't show it

51

THE GRAVE WAS TOO SMALL SO WE HAD TO TAKE THE HORSE OUT - 4. KINDS OF WEATHER

p

S. 1
Ah

S. 2
p
I was so mad and I died

Vln.
p

61

59

S. 1
mp
it's not nor-mal for a hu-man

S. 2

Vln.
mp

75

68

S. 1
to be con-tained in a bas-ket a-loft in

S. 2

Vln.

76

S. 1
blank air

S. 2
mp
like wa - ter in a red cup

Vln.

84

87

S. 1
I took the shape of my death and

S. 2
Ah Ah

Vln.

p sub.

92

95

S. 1
my an - ger there was no for - give - ness

S. 2

Vln.

mf *mp*

mf

101 107

S. 1 *p* there were all of these clouds *f sub.* stra - to - cu - mu - lus

S. 2 *f sub.* stra - to - cu - mu - lus

Vln. *p* *f sub.*

109 115

S. 1 *mf* cu - mu - lo - nim - bus I punched them

S. 2 *mf* cu - mu - lo - nim - bus I punched them

Vln. *mf*

117 125

S. 1

S. 2 *mp* they were some pie - ces of wa - ter I looked

Vln. *mp*

126

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

down at all the peo-ple_ they were u - nits_ they

134

139

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

shift-ed a - round_ they clumped up in -

143

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

to lit - tle fac - tions there was no way to

155

151

S. 1 *mf* Ah

S. 2 *mf* join them from the bal - loon

Vln. *mf*

165

159

S. 1 not a gull

S. 2 I could-n't hear a thing — gull

Vln.

168

S. 1 and not a mo - squi - to no-thing would be - come of me now —

S. 2 mo - squi - to

Vln.

179

176

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

mp

I was learn-ing like a ma-chine

mp

185

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

mf

mf

I in-stalled my face in the blan-ket start-ed

start-ed

193

S. 1

S. 2

Vln.

f

f

mf *f*

chew-ing I chewed the air

chew-ing I chewed the air

200 *mf*

S. 1 un - til there was - n't e - nough to still name it

S. 2 un - til there was - n't e - nough to still name it

Vln. *mf*

207

S. 1 *ff sub.* I ate up the earth ate up those peo - ple and then *mf*

S. 2 *ff sub.* I ate up the earth ate up those peo - ple and then *mf*

Vln.

216

S. 1 *p* I was no - where *pp* and they could not save me

S. 2 *p* I was no - where *pp* and they could not save me

Vln.

221