

PROGRAM NOTES

I often use the phrase “dramatic art song” to describe my work. These songs could also be called monodramas or short operas. The salient feature is that they are stories which involve characters in action, as opposed to settings of descriptive poetry.

“The Old Things,” a short story by Jessie Anderson Chase, was one of 81 prize winners in the collection *Short Stories from Life*, published in 1916. I discovered it on the Project Gutenberg website, a valuable resource. I was immediately taken with how the author had poetically touched upon aging, what we care about, and what we chose to leave behind in the end. The story had simplicity and heart. I crafted an original libretto, retaining only the characters, the basic plot and a few lines here and there.

As to performance, when singing the lines of the Old Man and Miss Tabby, I suggest the singer not apply too much camp or affectation. A very slight change in vocal tone and posture should be enough to delineate each character without going overboard. We do not want to undermine the underlying sincerity and seriousness of the text with overt theatrics.

The narrator is not gender specific, so anyone can sing this song. This piece can also be performed by three singers, each taking a role.

Duration: ca. 10:30

Steven Mark Kohn (b. 1957)

For biographical information visit:
www.ecspublishing.com

AVAILABLE EDITIONS

Medium Voice and Piano	9234
High Voice and Piano	9235

TEXT

In the little village where I live, everyone knows everyone.
Old familiar houses and shops and nooks and byways...
we know them all.

Here is the house of the old man, the one with the stone wall.
And there is where the old woman lives...the one with all the cats.

One day in late summer, while out for my walk, the old man peered over his stone wall and spoke to me.

"Excuse me. You are a lawyer, are you not?" I nodded that I was.

"Can I call upon your services, my friend? I am near the end of my life. I have no children, and have little to leave behind.
Only two things. One is a rocking chair, which my mother would sit in and rock me. I never felt so safe and warm.

There is a mirror, and I, as a lad, would see my face over my mother's shoulder. It still holds a picture of my mother smiling up at me. These are all I have of value in the world. My chair and mirror.

You may know the old woman down the street. They all call her "Miss Tabby." But her name is Helen. I've known her all my life. In our youth, we were to be married. But time has a way of gently slipping by, and dreams can wither on the vine. We grew old together, here in this small town, like two trees in the same forest. Almost touching. Almost touching...

I was hoping you could help me make my will. I would like to leave them to her. My chair and mirror."

I assured him it would be done.

Two weeks had gone by, when out for my walk, I came upon the house of Miss Tabby, the one with the cats. She was puttering in the yard when she saw me.

"You are a lawyer, aren't you?" I nodded, "yes."

"Ha! Just the one I wanted to see! I am very old, you might have guessed. And I have many cats, you may have heard. And I am near the end of my life. But hey, that's okay. People die every day. I can live with that.

I have only one concern, my two old cats. The young ones will be fine, they are strong. But the old ones, my angels, they are all I care for in this world. Someone will have to look after them.

Do you know the old man down the street? He lives in the house with the stone wall. We were young together, but we grew old apart. A world away, only three doors down. He was always a kind man. I can trust him.

I was hoping you could help me make my will. I would like to leave them to him, my dear old tabbies."

I assured her it would be done.

The paperwork was drawn up and signed. The chair and the mirror would go to Miss Tabby, and the two old cats would end up in the care of the old man.

The next Sunday morning, as the church bells faded in the distance, something in the paper caught my eye. An old man and old woman died in the village on the same night. Their houses and possessions went for sale. There was the rocking chair, which his mother would sit in and rock him. And there was the mirror he loved as a lad. They were offered at auction but no one was buying, not one single person was willing to bid for them.

I sit now in his rocking chair. The mirror lies over my hearth. And the two dear cats are mine as well, sleeping by the fire.

These old things cost me nothing. But I would have paid gold. I would have paid gold.

The Old Things

for High Voice and Piano

Libretto and Music by
Steven Mark Kohn (BMI)

With gentle motion, evenly ♩ = 112-118

Voice

Piano

p legato sempre

with pedal

3 *p*

In the lit-tle vil-lage where I live, ev' - ry-one knows ev' - ry - one.

5

Text: Adapted from "The Old Things" by Jessie Anderson Chase (1865–1949), first published in *Short Stories from Life: The 81 Prize Stories in "Life's" Shortest Story Contest*, 1916 (PD).

6

7

mf

Old fa - mil - iar hous - es and shops and nooks and by - ways...

9

poco rit. *a tempo*

we know them all.

poco rit. *a tempo*

mp

11

Slower, freely, quasi recitative

mp

Here is the house of the old man, the one with the stone wall. And

Slower, freely, quasi recitative

13

spoken freely

there is where the old wom - an lives... the one with all the cats.

p

16 In tempo

mf *p sub*

18 *mp*

One day _____ in late sum - mer, _ while out for my walk, the

legato sempre

20 *mf* *rit.* *freely*

old man peered o - ver his stone wall and spoke to me.

rit. *mf*

23 *a tempo* *mf* *spoken*

“Ex - cuse me. You are a law - yer, are you not?” I nodded that I was.

a tempo *mf*

41 *mf*

sit in and rock me. I nev - er felt so safe and

45 *poco rit.*

warm. *poco rit.*

49 *mp dolce* *pù f*

There is a mir - ror, and I, as a lad, would see my face o - ver

53 *push and grow* *quasi recit., senza misura* *f with passion* *ritard.*

my moth - er's shoul - der. It still holds a pic - ture of my moth - er smil - ing up at me.

quasi recit., senza misura *ritard.*

12

85

will. I would like to leave them to her. — My chair and mir - ror.” —

89

rit.

Tempo primo ♩ = 112-118

I as - sured him it would be done.

rit.

Tempo primo ♩ = 112-118

ppp legato sempre cresc.

92

mf

94

poco rit.

mp *poco rit.*

96 *a tempo*

a tempo

mf

98 *poco rit.* *a tempo* *mp*

poco rit. *a tempo* *mp*

Two weeks— had gone by, when

pp tranquillo

101 *poco*

out for my walk, I came up - on the house of Miss Tab - by, — the

poco

103 *pp* *freely, quasi recit.*

one with the cats. She was put-ter-ing in the yard when she saw me.

pp

146 *f* *pp*

stone wall. — We were young — to - geth - er, but we grew old a - part. A

149 *pp* *ppp* *distantly* *L.V. sempre*

world a - way, on - ly three doors down.

152 *pp* *distantly, as if in a memory* *Red.*

He was al - ways a kind man. I can

154 *Slower, more freely* *p* *Slower, more freely* *loco*

trust him. I was hop - ing you could help me make my will.

156

I would like to leave them to him,— my dear old tab-bies.” I as -

As in the beginning ♩ = 96-100

(a touch slower)

p freely, quasi recit.

158 *rall.* *pp* *freely, quasi recit.*

sured her it would be done. The pa-per-work was drawn up and

As in the beginning ♩ = 96-100

(a touch slower)

rall.

pp

161

signed.

The chair and the mir-ror— would

164

More in tempo

go to Miss Tab-by,— and the two old cats would end up in the care of the

More in tempo

solemnly

194 *più f* *push and grow*

lad. They were of - fered at auc - tion but no one was buy - ing, not

197 *quasi recit., senza misura* *f with passion* *rit.* Solemnly ♩ = 80-84, as before

one sin - gle per - son was will - ing to bid for them.

quasi recit., senza misura *rit.* Solemnly ♩ = 80-84, as before

200 *p calmly, with reverance*

I sit now in his rock - ing chair. The mir - ror lies o - ver my hearth. And the

legato simile

204 (*p sempre*)

two dear cats are mine as well, sleep-ing by the fire.

(*p sempre*)

208 *f sub., with great passion*

These old things cost me noth-ing. But I would have paid gold.

f sub., marc.

ten.

211

rit. *pp sub.* *a tempo* *rit.*

I would have paid gold.

rit. *a tempo* *rit.*

pp sub.

Ped.