

# **THE HALLS WITHIN THE MIRROR**

A solo mini-opera of internal struggle, childhood memories, and a tragic incident.

Music and text composed by Howie Kenty. For soprano Rebekah Norris. Commissioned by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music's International Electronic Music Week, 2015. For more music, video, and information, visit <http://hwarg.com>.

## Lyric Sheet

### **i. Present: Awakening**

What is it? What is it that has happened?

*What is it?*

*What is it that has happened?*

Nothing has happened. Nothing bad has happened.

*Something bad.*

*Something bad has happened,  
and it spreads like a noxious plume.*

*Why is she here?*

I am ... waiting. I am waiting.

*Why are we here?*

### **ii. Driving: First Memory**

It's last night, I'm driving darkened roads, trees above.

I am... troubled, troubled.

*She's anxious.*

*(too fast, too fast)*

But it's late; there is nobody. Maybe there's nobody...

*(maybe there's nobody)*

But in the mirror, headlights through the woods.

*But they disappear.*

*And you've drifted...*

*drifted from our lane.*

I right myself, but there's still the thrumming center line...

*Something bad...*

I won't speak of it.

But something. Something happens.

*(But something. Something happens.)*

*What is it?*

*What is it that has happened?*

As I drive, I'm taken by a memory...

### iii. Childhood: First Memory

I'm five, perhaps. It's summer, children swimming.

There's a watcher.

A boy, maybe three, hides, in grass outside the watcher's sight.

I know him; he's wild, strange.

He's kneeling, and I'm curious.

I approach, and he's holding something, shaking.

*Something bad.*

*Something bad has happened.*

It's ... a toad, gripped tight in his hand.

I see ... he's crushing it, as hard as he can.

I falter; he sees me, stares, and presses harder.

I can't move; I don't stop him, and maybe it's too late.

There is an eternity.

*(There is an eternity.)*

He squeezes, blank eyes on me, and opens his hand.

Far away, the watcher calls. A look, and he flees carelessly.

*And?*

Slowly I near the space he's left, and look down.

My thoughts become dark, and... I'm driving...

But nothing happened.

I drove home.

*But nothing happened.*

*(but nothing happened but nothing happened)*

*(there was a curve there was a curve)*

*(there is a curve there is a curve)*

### iv. Driving: Second Memory

*There's a curve*

*she's been absent and suddenly*

*(and suddenly)*

*a car's there, right now*

*(right now)*

*and we're far out of our lane.*

*You jump and swerve but late*

*(too late too late)*  
*and the car kisses off her side, wailing panic.*  
*It careens off the road*  
*and the brakes shriek*  
*and there's an awful rending behind us.*  
*She scrapes to a stop*  
*and it didn't happen*  
*it didn't happen it*  
*(It didn't happen it didn't happen)*  
*it didn't but we're frozen.*  
*There is an eternity.*  
*I turn slowly, and the mirror calls, and she can't look...*  
*but she does.*  
*What do you see?*  
*What do you see?*  
The lights are still on...  
She sees, at the dark's edge,  
A thousand glass bits glimmering...  
Smoke, a tree, warped steel...  
*What else do you see?*  
There's... a shape behind the wheel.  
She shifts... There's another... in the grass.  
Nothing is moving. And nothing moves.  
*(Nothing is moving. And nothing moves.)*  
*And what did we do...?*  
*And what did we do?*

#### **v. Childhood: Second Memory**

I remember... I'm small, the same day.  
It seems like the same day.  
I'm running to my house.  
Someone's chasing, chasing.  
*(something bad...)*  
*(something bad...)*  
I reach the door, swing it open, and look back.  
*(Who is it?)*  
But as I turn, the door slams on my hand.  
From here, I know only pain.  
*(From here, I know only pain.)*  
And that later, every fingernail blackens... and falls off.

I am they, and they are you, and you are me. I am they, and they are you, and you are me...  
*(I am they, and they are you, and you are me. I am they, and they are you, and you are me...)*

#### **vi. Present: Despair**

There was nothing I could have done to change what happened.

*You could have changed the end.*

*We still don't know what to do.*

*We could have changed the end.*

There's nothing to do now that it's been done.

There's nothing to do now that it's been done.

*(There's nothing to do now that it's been done.)*

We're stalked as if by a distant wraith,

And there is nothing to do now that it has been done.

*(And there is nothing to do now that it has been done.)*

#### **vii. Driving: Third Memory**

She's still in the car.

*(We push all thoughts away.)*

She stares blankly, waiting.

*There is an eternity.*

Slowly, I'm myself... and I'll open the door.

But headlights flash through trees behind... I find my foot on the gas pedal.

The car lurches, then pulls forward.

Soon, the lights leave the mirror, and I'm gone.

It seems... I'm in a great, empty space, no trees, no sky... endless grey on all sides.

*(I'm in a great, empty space, with no trees, no sky, endless grey on all sides.)*

I float on nothing, above nothing, a dark murmur.

*(I float on nothing, above nothing, a dark murmur.)*

#### **viii. Present: Waiting**

Later, I don't know when, I wake in bed.

*(Later, I don't know when, I wake in bed.)*

And I am waiting. I am waiting...