

The TORRENT



for narrator, SATB choir or madrigal quartet & piano
poem by Jenny Joseph ©2009
music by William Vollinger ©2012



21 Ruckman Avenue Woodcliff Lake, NJ 07677 U S A
phone: 201-391-3519 e-mail: williamvollinger@aol.com
website: www.williamvollinger.com

THE TORRENT

poem by Jenny Joseph ©2009

The torrent blasts through the gorge
Exhilarating, dangerous, beyond death.
Only what is native to this element
Survives in the airless seethe of its champagne.
Its plumey spray explodes at the mile-high wall
And smoke from its rebound fills in the abyss;
It moistens the top of the cliff, greening the lip
Of the dark arid plateau, where some people stand.
They are drawn to look through the boil into the entrails.
Mist swirls and thickens, veiling from the humans
The core of power, knowledge of which is death.

The shaft of a spotlight makes a bright cone of it.
Those at the base looking into its eye
Are held by the luminous point. Outside,
There's not even nothing. There is no beyond.
The light extinguished or shattered, we are left
Blind on a platform at cliff-edge of dark.
No place that we can know is there, to move to.
And with that néant comes paralysis.
There is no air a human being can breathe.

Keep breathing, though; small movements within that circle
Will push blood through your veins until you can raise
Your eyes to face the blank, and begin to make out.
Where dark thins to a gloom, how, gradually,
Like a dimmer turned up strengthening the light.
Like a blush filling the skin, air permeates.
Evenly, slowly, colour suffuses perspective
Through which a body can move.

Miles from the Falls
Water spills to the plain
And widens over the levels.

Walk out of your house one morning into the town
Into the blue – no mark to fix dimension
As a place to be under. It is just the air.
Scarce visible, comes to your sight by chance
The only wisp in the whole unweighty sky:
Half-moon at zenith high in the azure stationed.
Curve of nail cuticle strengthens like a rind hardening,
The infill's diaphanous, a fragment of stippled veil
Transparent threads the wind might move but doesn't.

No personal appointment or passionate need
Has drawn you here, this day like a holiday,
A day that sheds
On nothing very lovely, no Towers of Strength,
On nothing exceptional or desirable –
Benevolence.

A grubby woman heaves herself off the bus and hobbles away.
A well-dressed Jamaican youth turns and approaches: 'Excuse me'.
'Yes?' anxiously; peering. 'Your scarf'. Not hearing: 'My -- ?'
'You left your scarf on the bus. I picked it up. And then I couldn't
see you.'
'Oh thank you. *Thank* you' flinging out hands as if to welcome a child
'It's very special. I'm so glad not to have lost it. How very good of you.'
The young one crosses the road, laughingly they gesture their goodbyes
The shafts that beam from their eyes meet through dense traffic,
exchanging pleasure,
Conspiring in love.

The day begins to tire. The shops are crowded.
Two people weave across the road to the chemist
She turning back to shepherd him, whose habit
(Supporting *her*) makes him reach for her elbow.
Thick stockings wrinkle into outsized plimsolls.
His face is large and mottled. Somehow they get
Into the chemist's. They apologize

To people who block their way; you follow in.
He worries he let the door bang in your face
Turns back to hold it for you now. 'So sorry
To push in front' 'Oh no you didn't' 'Did the door
Hit you? How rude of me!' 'No, not at all' 'I do apologize.'
You want to tell him – but he's ambled off
To find his wife or the things they've come to purchase.

Charisma is not looks or voice or witchcraft.
But a grace of attention, irresistibly attractive,
Affectionate regard, a cherishing.

You want to see them again, to know them a little.

A few pleased words and courtesies to the till girl
Then clutching their packages and each other's hands
Swaying in tandem zig-zag they cross the road.
He turns unsteady at the kerb and in triumph
Thumbs up to the other side, a radiance
Of concern and tenderness and pleasure in it.
And those who see it know it is for them.

The ruinous force, leashed by the gorge it has made,
Thundering through the mountains becomes the great river,
An artery feeding a land where people can live.

duration: 10 min.

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NOTES: This piece may be performed either by a choir with solos or madrigal quartet (in which case sneak breaths as possible). The narrator should be louder than the choir (except for character solos at end) and probably use a microphone. The narration should be done naturally (not sprechstimme), smoothly (not mechanically) and rhythmically approximate. The words have been hyphenated more phonetically (as they really sound) as opposed to the dictionary hyphenation. Accent marks serve two purposes, as actual accents, but also to not use trickier meters like 7/8 etc.

♩ = 80 throughout

"the voice of the poem, not the narrator" --J.J.

Narrator
THE TOR-RENT
The tor - rent blasts through the

Sopranos
f wild
The tor - rent blah - ah - asts through the

Altos
f wild
ee-uh-huh

Tenors
f wild
roll "r"s
rrrr

Basses
f wild
ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh

Piano
let ring
TACET TO MEAS. 93

N
gorge Ex - hil - a - ra - ting, dan - ge - rous, be - yond death.

S
gorge — ex - hil - a - rat - ing - hil - a - rat - ing ee-yuh-huh dumm dumm dumm

A
ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh *spoken p* be - yond death

T
— ex - hil - a - ra - ting, dange - rous dumm dumm dumm

B
ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh

8

N On-ly what is na - tive to this e - le-ment Sur - vives in the air - less seethe

S *f* on-ly what is na - tive to thih ee-uh - huh sur - vives in the air leh - zzz

A *f* ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh

T *f* rrrr rrrr to this ee-uh - huh sur - vives in the air - leh zzz

B *f* on-ly ee-uh-huh ee-uh - huh ee-uh-huh ee-uh-huh ee-uh huh

11

N of its cham-pagne. Its plu - mey spray ex -

S cham-pagne voo voo voo voo ex -

A ee-uh-huh ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom

T cham-pagne It's plu - mey spray ex

B ee-uh-huh plode ex - plode ex - plode ex -

13

N
plodes at the mile - high wall And smoke from its re-bound fills in the a-

S
plodes voo voo voo voo voo voo from it's re-bound fills in

A
ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom ploom

T
8 plodes eee fills in *SOLO*
dark mp

B
plode ex - plode ex - plode ex - plode the a-

15

N
byss; It moi-stens the top of the cliff, green-ing the lip Of the

S
It moi-stens the top of the cliff. greep dih-dih -

A
It moi-stens the top of the cliff, greep oo

T
8 It moi-stens the top of the cliff, greep dih-dih -

B
TUTTI f
byss; It moi-stens the top of the cliff, green-ing the lip oo

18

N dark a-rid pla-teau, where some peo-ple stand. They are drawn to

S *mp* dark a-rid pla-teau some some peo-ple stand drawn drawn drawn look

A *mp*

T *mp* 8 dark a-rid pla-teau some some peo-ple stand drawn drawn drawn look

B *mp*

21

N look through the boil in-to the en-trails. Mist swirls and

S *mp* *back of throat* 3 look look the boil bee-uh-duh bee-uh *p* zz uh zz

A *mp* *back of throat* 3 bee-uh-duh bee-uh *p* Mist swirls thic-

T 8 look look the boil bee-uh-duh bee-uh *p* Mist swirls thic-

B *back of throat* *mf* 3 *p* bee-uh-duh bee-uh in-to the en-trails woo uh woo

24

N
thic-kens, veil-ing from the hu-mans The core of pow - er, know-ledge of which

S
uh zz. uh zz. uh zz. uh zz.

A
thic-kens veil-ing from the hu-mans the core of pow-er pow-er know-ledge of which

T
8 thic-kens veil-ing from the hu-mans the core of pow-er pow-er know-ledge of which

B
uh woo uh woo uh woo uh woo

mf

ff bring out

mf

27

N
is death. The shaft of a spot-light makes a bright cone of it.

S
— is death ah ee uh ee uh ee uh

A
is death The shaft of a spot-light makes a bright cone of it

T
8 is death The shaft of a spot-light makes a bright cone of it

B
— is deh stagger breathing

sfp

SOLO

f

mf

mf

mf

30

N
Those at the base look-ing in - to its eye Are held by the lum-i-nous point. Out - side,

S
ee uh ee uh ee uh ee uh ee uh ee uh

A
Those at the base eye eye eye eye eye eye are held _____ out - side

T
8 luh - luh-luh-love look-ing in - to its eye are held by the lum-i-nous point _____ out - side

B
_____ dum dum

f p

f p

p

34

N
There's not e - ven no-thing. There is no be-yond. The light ex - tin-guished or shat-tered,

S

A
There's not e - ven no-thing there

T
8 _____

B

pp

pp

pp

TUTTI p

p

p

p

dun dum dum dum dum dum there is dun dum dum dum dum dum dum

38

N we are left Blind on a plat-form at cliff-edge of dark. No place that we can know is there, to

S

A

T 8 dun dun dun blind dun dun dun dun dun of dark dun dun dun dun dun know is there ee

B 3 dun dun dun blind dun dun dun dun dun of dark dun dun dun dun dun know is there oo

42

N move to. And with that né - ant comes pa - ra-ly-sis. There is no

S oo duh duh duh duh duh comes duh duh There is no

A ooo duh duh duh duh duh comes pa - ra-ly-sis is

T 8 ee stagger breathing

B oo stagger breathing

46

N
air a hu-man be-ing can breathe Keep brea-thing, though;

S
air a hu-man be-ing can breathe Keep brea-thing, though;

A
air hue be-ing breathe Keep brea-thing, though;

T
8 (ee) *mp*

B
(oo) *mp*

50

N
small move-ments wi-thin that cir-cle Will push blood through your veins un-til you can raise Your

S
small move-ments wi-thin that cir-cle Will push blood through your veins un-til you can raise Your

A
small move-ments wi-thin that cir-cle Will push blood through your veins un-til you can raise Your

T
8 (ee)

B
(oo)

53

N eyes to face the blank, and be-gin to make out. Where dark thins to a gloom, how, gra-dual-ly, Like a

S eyes to face the blank, eee ³ Where dark thins to a gloom, ahh ³

A eyes to face the blank, and be-gin to make out. ooo ³ how, gra-dual-ly, Like a

T (ee)

B (oo)

57

N dim-mer turned up streng-the-ning the light. Like a blush fil-ling the skin,

S dim-mer turned up streng-the-ning the light. blush blush blush blush

A dim-mer turned up streng - the-ning the light. mmm mmm

T streng - the-ning the light mmm mmm

B streng - the-ning the light boom boom boom boom

60

N
air per - me - ates. E - ven - ly, slow - ly,

S
blush blush per - me - ates e - ven - ly ah ah

A
mmm E - ven - ly, slow - ly

T
mmm E - ven - ly, slow - ly

B
boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom

63

N
co - lour suf - fu - ses per - spec - tive Through which a bo - dy can move.

S
ah ah ah

A
co - lour suf - fu - ses per - spec - tive through which a bo - dy can move

T
co - lour per - spec - tive per - spec - tive ooo move

B
boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom

66

N
Miles from the Falls Wa-ter spills to the plain And wi - dens

S
f > Miles from the Falls Wa-ter spills to the plain And wi - dens

A
f > Miles from the Falls Wa-ter spills to the plain And wi - dens

T
f Miles from the Falls Miles from the Falls Miles from the Falls

B
f Miles from the Falls Miles from the Falls Falls Miles from the Falls Miles from the Falls

70

N
o-ver the le-vels. *p* pure like the sky Walk out of your house one mor - ning in - to the

S
o-ver the ooo

A
o-ver the le-vels Walk out of your house one morn - ing in - to the

T
Miles from the *SOLO mp* Walk out of your house one morn - ing in - to the

B
Falls. ooo

mp *tutti mp* *SOLO mp*

p pure like the sky stagger breathing

74

N town In-to the blue - no mark to fix di-men - sion As a place to be un - der.

S In-to the blooo

A town in-to the blooo *p* pure like the sky stagger breathing

T town In-to the blue no mark to fix di-men - sion As a place to be un - der

B

78

N It is just the air. Scarce vis - i - ble, comes to your sight by chance The on - ly

S It is just the air.

A

T It is just the air. Scarce vis - i - ble, comes to your sight by chance The on - ly

B

82

N
wisp in the whole un-weigh-ty sky: Half-moon at ze-nith high in the a-zure sta-tioned.

S
SOLO mp wisp *TUTTI mf* Half-moon at ze-nith ha

A

T
8 wisp in the whole un-weigh-ty sky: *p* pure like the sky ooo *stagger breathing*

B

86

N
Curve of nail cu-ti-cle streng-thens like a rind har-den-ing, The in-fill's di-

S
p ooo

A
mp Curve of nail cu-ti-cle streng-thens like a rind har-den-ing The in-fills di-

T
8

B
mp Curve of nail cu-ti-cle streng-thens like a rind har-den-ing The in-fills di-

89

N
a-pha-nous, a frag-ment of stip-pled veil Tran - spa-rent threads the wind might move but does-n't.

same soloist as m. 82 mp

S
wisp wisp wisp wisp

A
p
ahh

T
SOLO mp
8 wisp wisp wisp wisp wisp
bring out

B
a-pha-nous a frag-ment of stip-pled veil Tran - spa-rent threads the wind might move but does-n't.

93

N
No per-so-nal ap-point-ment or pas-sio-nate need Has drawn you here, this day like a

ppp

S
does - n't.

A

T

B

Piano
mp legato without pedal

96

N ho-li-day, A day that sheds On no-thing ve-ry love-ly, no Tow-ers of Strength, On

S

A

T

B

99

N no-thing ex-cep-tio-nal or de-sir-a-ble Be-ne-vo-lence.

S Be-ne-vo-leh

A ne-vo-leh

T vo-leh

B leh

rit

TUTTI *mp*

Leo.



16
102

N
A grub-by wo-man heaves her-self off the bus and hob-bles a - way. A well-dressed Ja-mai-can youth

S
p
stagger breathing

A
p
stagger breathing

T
p
stagger breathing

B
p
stagger breathing

mf clumsy
mp not clumsy

105

N
turns and ap-pro - aches: an-xious-ly;

S
and ap-pro - aches:

A
mf SOLO bring out

T
mf SOLO bring out 'Yes?'

B
mf and ap-pro - aches: 'Ex-cuse me'.

mp

108

N peer - ing. Not hear - ing:

S

A

T 'Your scarf.' 'My ?' *laughingly* 'You left your scarf on the bus.

B

111

N fling - ing out hands as

S

A 'Oh thank you. Thank you' *realizing >*

T I picked it up. And then I could-n't see you.'

B

115 N if to wel-come a child

S

A 'It's ve-ry spe-cial. I'm so glad not to have lost it. How ve-ry good of you.'

T

B

119 N The young one cros-ses the road, laughing - ly they ges-ture their good - byes The

S *mf* ah - gah pay their good - byes ah *same soloist as m. 28*

A *TUTTI mf* ah gah

T *TUTTI mf* ah gah pay

B *mf* ah gah

122

N shafts that beam from their eyes meet through dense traf - fic, ex - chan-ging plea-sure, Conspi-ring in

S ee uh ee uh ee uh love

A pay love

T love

B pay love

(mf) *TUTTI*

125

N love. The day be - gins to ti-re. The shops are crow-ded. Two peo-ple weave a-cross the

S love Two people doo doo doo doo

A

T love

B Two peo-ple weave doo

SOLO mp *mp* *p* like a quiet bell

sustain ped. slightly into each next chord

130

N road to the che-mist She tur-ning back to shep-herd him, whose ha-bit (Sup-por-ting

S doo doo doo_ She tur-ning back to shep-herd him_____

A

T

B doo doo doo_ doo_____ him whose ha-bit sup-port-ing

133

N her) makes him reach for her el-bow. Thick stoc-kings wrin-kle in-to out-sized plim-solls.

S her reach for her el-bow Thick stoc-kings wrin-kle wrin-kle in-to out-sized plim-solls

A

T

B her makes him reach for her el-bow Thick_____ wrin-kle wrin-kle in-to out_____ plim_____

137 21

N His face is large and mot-tled. Some-how they get In-to the che-mist's. They a-po-lo-gize

S *mf* woo large and mot-tled *mp* some-how ooo in the che - mist's a-po-lo-gize

A

T

B His face is large mot-mot-tled ooo they get in-to che - mist's a-po-lo-gize

141

N To peo-ple who block their way; you fol-low in. He wor-ries he let the door bang in your face

S oo oo oo oo oo oo oo bang in your face

A

T

B to peo-ple who He wor-ries he wor-ries door bang in your face

mf

roll down

145

N Turns back to hold it for you now. 'Oh no you did-n't'

S mm hold it hmm

A

T

B *mf* bring out out of breath
mm hmm 'So sor-ry To push in front' 'Did the door

bring out

149

N 'No, not at all' You want to

S

A

T

B Hit you? How rude of me!' 'I do a - pol-o-gize.'

out of range

153

N *>*
tell him but he's am-bled off To find his wife or the things they've come to pur-chase.

S

A

T

B

157

N

S *TUTTI mf warm & clear*
Cha-ris - ma _____ is not looks _____ or voice _____ *mp* or witch - craft.

A *mf warm & clear*
Cha-ris - ma _____ is not looks _____ or voice _____ *mp* or witch - craft.

T *mf warm & clear*
Cha-ris - ma _____ is not looks _____ or voice _____ *mp* or witch - craft.

B *TUTTI mf warm & clear*
Cha-ris - ma _____ is not looks _____ or voice _____ *mp* or witch - craft.

161

N

S

A

T

B

But a grace _____ of at-ten-tion, _____ ir-re-sis-ti-bly _____ at-trac-tive, _____

But a grace _____ of at-ten-tion, _____ ir-re-sis-ti-bly _____ at-trac-tive, _____

But a grace _____ of at-ten-tion, _____ ir-re-sis-ti-bly _____ at-trac-tive, _____

But a grace _____ of at-ten-tion, _____ ir-re-sis-ti-bly _____ at-trac-tive, _____

165

N

S

A

T

B

— Af-fec-tio-nate re-gard, a che-ri-shing, to

— Af-fec-tio-nate re-gard, a che-ri-shing.

— Af-fec-tio-nate re-gard, a che-ri-shing.

— Af-fec-tio-nate re-gard, a che-ri-shing.

mp

169 *3/4* *4/4* *3* *3* *3*

N know them a lit-tle. A few pleased words and cour-te-sies to the

S *same soloist as m. 129 p* hm hm hm hm hm

A

T

B *same soloist as m. 129 p* hm hm hm hm hm

172 *3* *3* *3* *3* *3*

N till girl Then clut-ching their pac-ka-ges and each o-ther's hands Sway-ing in tan-dem

S *mp* Then clut-ching clut-ching clut-ching and each o-ther's hands sway³-ing sway-ing

A

T

B *mp* Then clut-ching clut-ching clut-ching o-ther's hands sway-ing sway-ing

175

N zig-zag they cross the road. He turns un-stea-dy at the kerb and in tri-umph Thumbs

S zig zag they cross the road turns turns un-stea-dy at the kerb and in tri-umph thumbs

A

T

B zag zig they cross the road un - steh - un - steh — dee — and in tri-umph tri - umph

p unsteady *f*

unsteady

178

N up to the o-ther side, a ra-di-ance Of con - cern and ten-der-ness and plea-sure in it.

S up a ra - di - ance of con-cern and ten-der-ness and plea-sure in it.

A

T

B up to the o-ther side, a ra - di - ance of con-cern and ten-der-ness and plea-sure in it.

p warm

p warm

181

N And those who see it know it is for them.

TUTTI p

S And those who see it know it is for themmm

p warm

A And those who see it know it is for themmm

p warm

T And those who see it know it is for themmm

TUTTI p

B And those who see it know it is for themmm

mp playful

184

N The ru-in-ous force, leashed by the gorge it has made, Thun-de-ring through the moun-tains

ff

S Thun-de-ring through the moun-tains

ff

A Thun-de-ring through the moun-tains

ff

T Thun-de-ring through the moun-tains

ff

B Thun-de-ring through the moun-tains

fff

Sub- - Leo.

187

N
be-comes the great ri-ver, An ar-te-ry feed-ing a land where peo-ple can

S
be-comes the great ri-ver, An ar-te-ry feed-ing a land where peo-ple can

A
be-comes the great ri-ver, An ar-te-ry feed-ing a land where peo-ple can

T
be-comes the great ri-ver, An ar-te-ry feed-ing a land where peo-ple can

B
be-comes the great ri-ver, An ar-te-ry feed-ing a land where peo-ple can

p

190

N
live. niente

S
live. niente

A
live. niente

T
live. niente

B
live. niente

ppp

(no ped.)