

IF I CAN STOP ONE HEART FROM BREAKING

SSA Voices, *a cappella*

Jennifer Klein

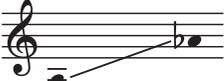
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Part-by-Part



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Ranges:

Sop 1  Sop 2 

Alto 

Language: English

Use: General/Festival

Time: Approx. 4:45

*Difficulty: Moderate

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About the Poet and the Poem

Poet Emily Dickinson grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts, in the mid-19th century. Though a prolific writer, her poems remained unpublished until after her death when her family discovered some 1800 of her poems compiled in a series of booklets created and sewn together by Dickinson herself.

After one year at college, Dickinson moved back to the family home, where her writing became her escape from the day-to-day life of domestic chores which she loathed. She is said to have become somewhat of a recluse, keeping to her room and observing the world from her bedroom window. It is known by the language in her numerous letters to others that she held strong opinions on many topics, including progressive views on religion, the role of women in society and marriage, and even love itself.

One hypothesis is that this poem, discovered after Dickinson's death, was in response to a somewhat clandestine romance she had that ended unhappily. Another suggests it was borne of her years of serving as caregiver for her ailing mother.

Whatever the motivation for writing this poem, Dickinson makes clear that one's life becomes more meaningful when it is spent helping others, rather than focusing on one's own interests alone. She thought this so important, she stated this twice in her short poem.

The Poem, with Dickinson's Punctuation and Capitalization

If I can stop one heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one in pain

Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again,
I shall not live in Vain.

A Few Performance Notes:

Start small and build. Like the "little engine that could" thought itself into success through repeated statements, let the opening idea grow from a wishful thought into a strongly-held statement of truth.

The high F notes in the Soprano 1 part in mm. 26-28 are optional. Even one voice on that note will help make that crescendo moment pop.

Be aware of word painting and the use of pitches to express the text (like at m. 27 with "aching").

One benefit of an unaccompanied piece is the opportunity to shape the notes, phrases and tempos to draw your audience into the story you tell. Take your time at the beginning, letting the opening solo line linger into the silence of the caesura. The fermata at m. 19 builds the suspense as it crescendos into a rest before the declaration is at last made. Heed the stretch of the tenutos and the movement of the accelerandos. Doing so allows this music to mimic human life, giving it lungs that breathe and a heart that beats ... a life not lived in vain!

13 *mf*

If I can stop one heart from break-ing, If I

mf

If I can stop one heart from break-ing,

Alto, tutti *mf*

I can stop one heart from break-ing, If I

mf

18

If I can, I shall not live in vain;

f

If I, If I can, I shall not live in vain;

f

If I can, I shall not live in vain;

f

23

mf

If I can ease _____ one life the ach - ing,

mf

If I can ease _____ one life the ach - ing,

mf

If I can ease _____ one life the ach - ing,

mf

28

Or cool one pain, _____ Or cool one pain, Or

Or cool one pain, _____ Or cool one pain, Or

Or cool one pain, _____ Or cool one pain, Or

32

accel.

help one faint - ing rob - in Un - to his nest a - gain,

help one faint - ing rob - in Un - to his nest a - gain,

help one faint - ing rob - in Un - to his nest a - gain,

accel.

36

a tempo*mp*

One faint - ing rob - in Un - to his nest,

One faint - ing rob - in to his nest, to his nest,

One faint - ing rob - in to his nest, to his nest,

a tempo

mp

40

p

I shall not live in vain. If I

p

I shall not live in vain.

p

I shall not live in vain. If I

45

cresc. poco a poco

If I can stop one heart from break - ing, I

cresc. poco a poco

If, If I can stop one heart from break - ing, I

cresc. poco a poco

I can stop one heart from break - ing, I

cresc. poco a poco

ff

ff

ff

ff

50 *f* **accel.**

shall not I shall not live I

shall not I shall not live I

shall not I shall not live I

accel.

54 *mf* **a tempo rit.**

shall not live, I shall not live in vain.

shall not live, I shall not live in vain.

shall not live, I shall not live in vain.

a tempo rit.

