

Seth Houston, choral composer

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Land of Snows

for SATB chorus a cappella

text by John Leland

Seth Houston

www.sethhouston.com

1999

Notes

Land of Snows was written in 1999 for my grandmother, Jean Farwell, who was then terminally ill. I was traveling with my sister in Tibet and researching Tibetan monastic dance traditions (*chams*). “Land of Snows” is an endearing term Tibetans use to describe their homeland, hence the title.

Like much of my music, *Land of Snows* was composed outside, in this case while hiking down a mountain on the outskirts of Lhasa. I wrote the piece down and worked out some of the harmonies in a guest house that night, amidst the unremitting din of Chinese Buddhist devotional music blaring in the background. When my grandmother’s health took a turn for the worse, my sister and I immediately returned home. I finished the piece at my family’s home in Craftsbury, Vermont, in the comfort of a quiet room with a piano. Village Harmony, the Vermont-based youth choir directed by Larry Gordon, premiered it the following week. I sang it at my grandmother’s memorial service, with my father and two cousins, just a few weeks later.

The verse portion of the text, by John Leland (1754-1841), was a favorite of composers in the early New England shape-note singing tradition. It was set by Stephen Jenks (1772-1856) in his 1805 composition *Evening Shade* (most recently published in *The Sacred Harp*) and Elisha West (1756-?) in his composition *Evening Hymn* (now published in *Northern Harmony*), among others. Settings of the text were also incorporated into the nineteenth century camp meeting tradition. Leland’s text, combined with the more hopeful refrain “Oh, may we meet in Heaven,” appears in the song *Heavenly Meeting*, harmonized by John McCurry and published in his 1860 collection *The Social Harp*.

Land of Snows is set in the Dorian mode. The minor aspects of the mode (the flatted third and seventh) reflect the overall sadness of the theme, and the context of the piece’s composition. The major sixth, however, and the resultant major IV chord which features prominently in the refrain, reflects the element of hope. The piece draws on several characteristics of the shape-note tradition: independent contrapuntal lines, the main melody in the tenor part (or “lead”), a “fuging section” in the second half of the piece, and being named after a geographical location. However, its harmonic language is decidedly more contemporary.

Land of Snows was recorded by Northern Harmony, directed by Larry Gordon and Patty Cuyler, on their 2000 album *Crossing Boundaries*.

About the Composer

Seth Houston is a choral director, composer, and performer living in Boulder, Colorado. Currently completing a master’s degree in choral conducting at the University of Colorado, Houston also holds degrees in composition and religion from Oberlin College. Houston has been teaching middle school and high school choirs in Waldorf schools since 2001, and also founded and directed the youth chorus *Big Sky*. Houston’s choral compositions are widely performed and have been featured on *A Prairie Home Companion*, in *Sing Out!* magazine, and in the choral collection *Northern Harmony*.

Verse (untitled, from "Evening Hymn")

John Leland

(1754-1841)

The day is past and gone,
The evening shades appear.
Oh may we all remember well
The night of death draws near.

We lay our garments by,
Upon our beds to rest.
So death will soon disrobe us all
Of what we here possess.

And when we early rise
And greet the unwearied sun,
May we set out to win the prize
And after glory run.

And when our days are past,
And we from time removed,
Oh may we in Thy bosom rest,
The bosom of Thy love.

Chorus (from "Heavenly Meeting")

anon.

Oh may we meet in Heav'n,
In Heav'n alone no sorrow's found,
And there's no parting there.

Land of Snows

John Leland, 1792

for Jean "Gabby" Farwell

Seth Houston, 1999

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 84$
p

The day is past, is past and gone, the eve - ning shades ap - pear. Oh may we all re -

p

The day is past, is past and gone, the eve - ning shades ap - pear. Oh may we all re -

p

8 The day is past, is past gone, the eve - ning shades ap - pear. Oh may we all re -

p

The day is past, is past and gone, the eve - ning shades ap - pear. Oh may we all re -

6

mem - ber well the night of death draws near. Oh may we meet in

pp

mem - ber well the night of death draws near. Oh may we meet in Heav'n, Oh

pp

mem - ber well the night of death draws near. Oh may we meet in

pp

mem - ber well the night of death draws near. Oh may we meet in Heav'n, Oh

11

Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

may we meet in Heav'n, - in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

8 Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

may we meet in Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

sub. p *mf*

sub. p *mf*

sub. p *mf*

16

there's no part - ing there.

there's no part - ing there. Lord, keep us safe, us safe this night, se - cure from all our

8 there's no part - ing there.

there's no part - ing there. Lord, keep us safe, us safe this night, se - cure from all our

p

p

A

21

fears. Let an - gels guard us while we sleep 'til morn - ing light ap - pears. Oh

fears. Let an - gels guard us while we sleep 'til morn - ing light ap - pears. Oh

26 *sub. p*

may we meet in Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no

may we meet in Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no

32 *mp* **B** *more intensely*

sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing there. And when we ear - ly,

And when we ear - ly,

sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing there. And when we ear - ly,

36 *more intensely still*

ear - ly rise and greet the un-wear - ied sun, May we set out to win the prize and

ear - ly rise and greet the un-wear - ied sun, May we set out to win the prize and

ear - ly rise and greet the un-wear - ied sun, May we set out to win the prize and

41 *p*

af - ter glo - ry run. Oh may we meet in Heav'n, Oh may we meet in

af - ter glo - ry run. Oh may we meet in Heav'n, Oh

af - ter glo - ry run. Oh may we meet in Heav'n, Oh may we meet in

Land of SNOWS

46

Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing
 may we meet in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing
 Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing

51

pp C

And when our days, our days are past, and we from time re - moved, Oh
 there. And when our days, our days are past, and we from time re - moved, Oh
 there. And when our days, our days are past, and we from time re - moved, Oh
 there. And when our days, our days are past, and we from time re - moved, Oh

56

cresc. poco a poco

may we in Thy bo - som rest, the bo - som of Thy love. Oh
 may we in Thy bo - som rest, the bo - som of Thy love. Oh may we meet in
 may we in Thy bo - som rest, the bo - som of Thy love. Oh
 may we in Thy bo - som rest, the bo - som of Thy love. Oh may we meet in

poco rall. *a tempo*
f

61

may we meet in Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no
Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no
may we meet in Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no
Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no

D *ppp*

66

sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing there. Oh may we meet in
sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing there. Oh may we meet in Heav'n, Oh
sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing there. Oh may we meet in
sor - row's found, and there's no part - ing there. Oh may we meet in Heav'n, Oh

Land of Snows

rall.

ritard a fin

71 *mf* *p*

Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

mf *p*

may we meet in Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

8 *mf* *p*

Heav'n, Oh may we meet in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

mf *p*

may we meet in Heav'n, in Heav'n, In Heav'n a - lone no sor - row's found, and

76

there's no part - ing there.

there's no part - ing there.

8 there's no part - ing there.

there's no part - ing there.