## "The little eyes that never knew Light"

Song

### Music by EDWARD ELGAR (1897)

Words from the poem "A Baby's Death" by **Algernon Charles Swinburne** 

Available in the following keys

**HIGH ( D )** (original) range C# to G **MEDIUM ( C )** range B to F

"Roundel: The little eyes that never knew Light" is a song with piano accompaniment written by the English composer Edward Elgar in 1897. The words are from the fourth roundel of a poem *A Baby's Death* written by A. C. Swinburne and originally published in the book *A Century of Roundels*.

Its first performance was at a Worcester Musical Union meeting of 26 April 1897, sung by Miss Gertrude Walker, accompanied by the composer.

Gertrude Walker was the daughter of the Thomas Walker, rector of St. Peter's Church in the Worcestershire village of Abbots Morton. She played the organ there and trained the choir, and had already known Elgar for many years.

The song was never published, but is now due to be published in the Elgar Society Edition.

From the original manuscript in the key of D April 2007 Revised August 2008

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#### A Baby's Death, by A. C. Swinburne

A little soul scarce fledged for earth Takes wing with heaven again for goal Even while we hailed as fresh from birth A little soul.

Our thoughts ring sad as bells that toll, Not knowing beyond this blind world's girth What things are writ in heaven's full scroll.

Our fruitfulness is there but dearth, And all things held in time's control Seem there, perchance, ill dreams, not worth A little soul.

The little feet that never trod Earth, never strayed in field or street, What hand leads upward back to God The little feet?

A rose in June's most honied heat, When life makes keen the kindling sod, Was not so soft and warm and sweet.

Their pilgrimage's period A few swift moons have seen complete Since mother's hands first clasped and shod The little feet.

The little hands that never sought Earth's prizes, worthless all as sands, What gift has death, God's servant, brought The little hands?

We ask: but love's self silent stands, Love, that lends eyes and wings to thought To search where death's dim heaven expands.

Ere this, perchance, though love know nought, Flowers fill them, grown in lovelier lands, Where hands of guiding angels caught The little hands.

The little eyes that never knew Light other than of dawning skies, What new life now lights up anew The little eyes?

Who knows but on their sleep may rise Such light as never heaven let through To lighten earth from Paradise?

No storm, we know, may change the blue Soft heaven that haply death descries No tears, like these in ours, bedew The little eyes. Was life so strange, so sad the sky, So strait the wide world's range, He would not stay to wonder why Was life so strange?

Was earth's fair house a joyless grange Beside that house on high Whence Time that bore him failed to estrange?

That here at once his soul put by All gifts of time and change, And left us heavier hearts to sigh 'Was life so strange?'

Angel by name love called him, seeing so fair The sweet small frame; Meet to be called, if ever man's child were, Angel by name.

Rose-bright and warm from heaven's own heart he came, And might not bear The cloud that covers earth's wan face with shame.

His little light of life was all too rare And soft a flame: Heaven yearned for him till angels hailed him there

Angel by name.

The song that smiled upon his birthday here Weeps on the grave that holds him undefiled Whose loss makes bitterer than a soundless tear

The song that smiled.

His name crowned once the mightiest ever styled Sovereign of arts, and angel: fate and fear Knew then their master, and were reconciled.

But we saw born beneath some tenderer sphere Michael, an angel and a little child, Whose loss bows down to weep upon his bier

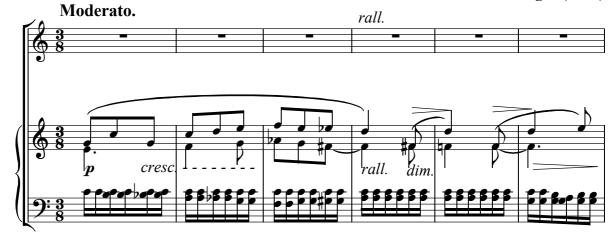
The song that smiled.

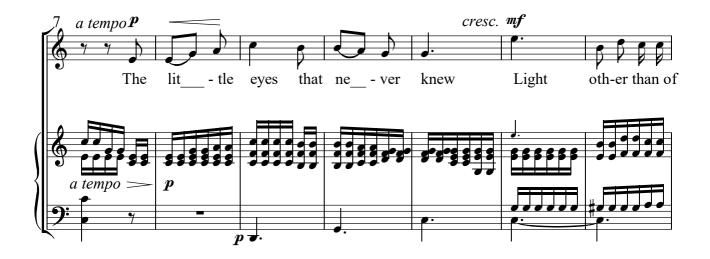
• The poetic form is a *roundel:* a variation of the French *rondeau*, devised by A. C. Swinburne. It is an eleven-line poem where the first part is repeated as a refrain in the fourth and eleventh lines.

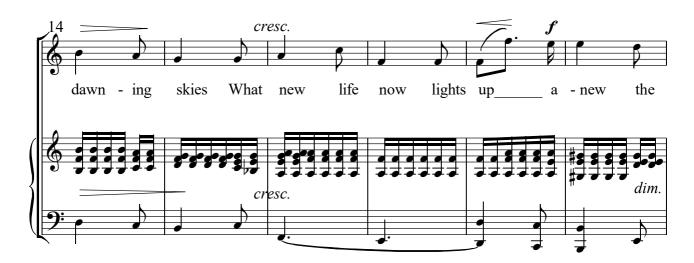


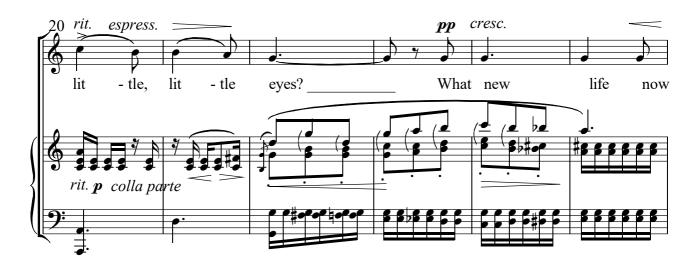
"The little eyes that never knew Light" Words from the poem "A Baby's Death" by A. C. Swinburne

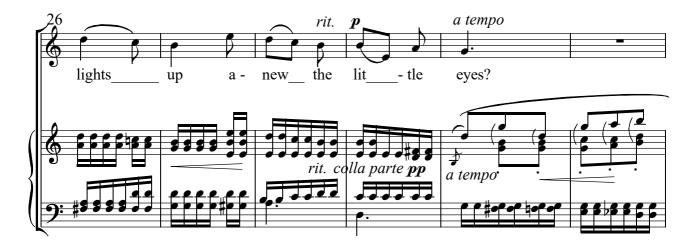
Edward Elgar (1897)





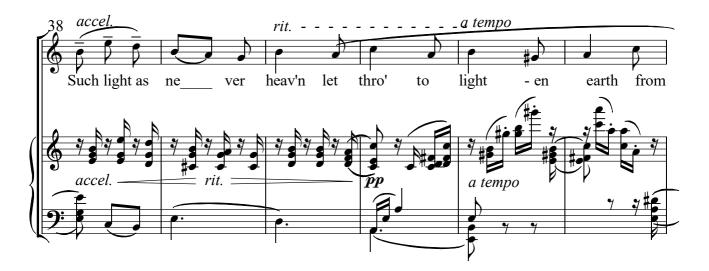


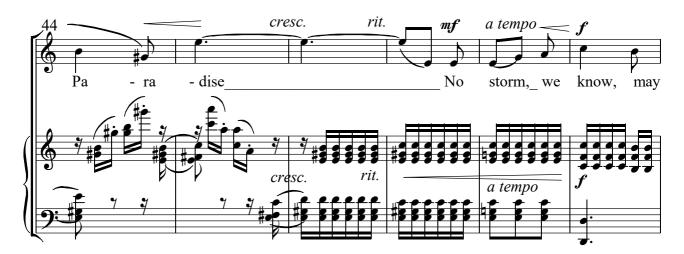


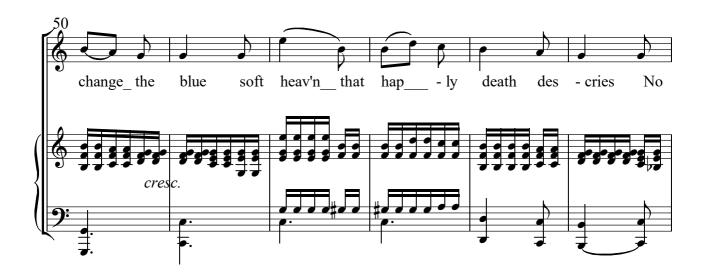


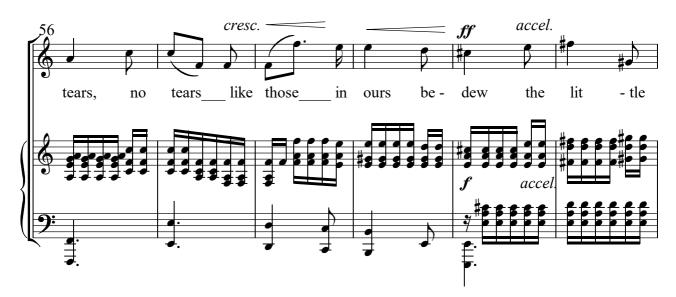


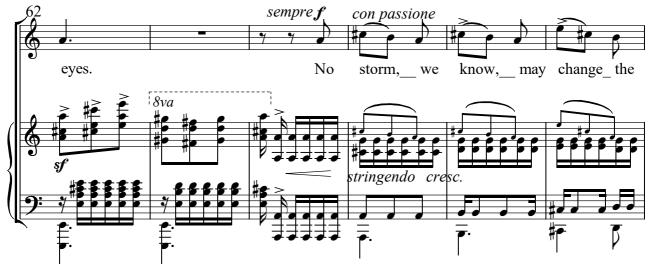
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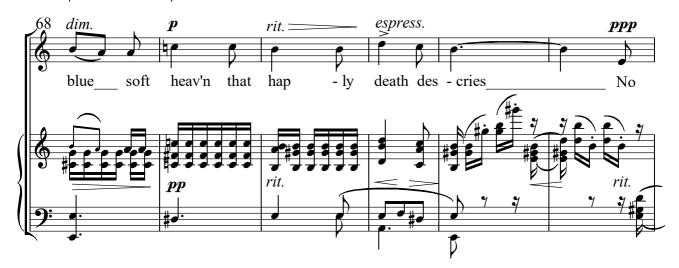




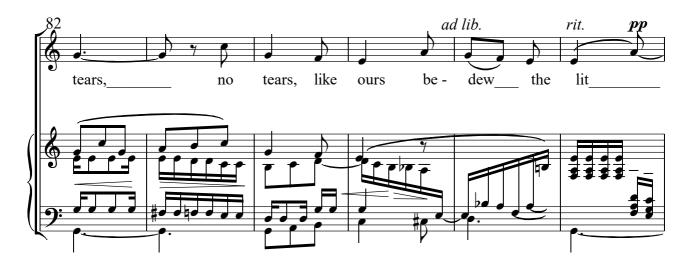














The music transposed by John Morrison from the original manuscript, August 2008.