

Sense/Nonsense
Three Settings to Poems
by Edward Lear
for SATB Choir

*An Old Man Of The West
The Table and The Chair
Nutmackers and Sugartongs*

David Harris

© 2016

Edward Lear's poetry is, by definition, nonsense. Yet, within his silly, fantastical depictions of a dotty old man, talking tables and chairs, and sugartongs and nutcrackers that ride horses, are morals that speak as loudly as his humor. I've chosen these three poems because of the lessons they tell us about determination and self-definition in the face of others' expectation. The Old Man of the West defiantly dons a garment that doesn't fit, in spite of the perceived eye rolling (even bullying?) of those around him. The Table and Chair, old friends who have always done the same thing in life, decide to take a chance and see what else they might be able to do if they break their habitual existence. They find that their boldness brings about untold adventure, and excites those around them into changing themselves as well. Possibly the most important lesson comes when they find themselves in a difficult place, and someone is there to give them a hand, becoming new friends in the process. The Nutcrackers and Sugartongs seem to be younger, more impetuous friends. Their goals are similar though, to break out of the mold. They fling themselves into life, and by doing so, change in such profound ways that they can never go back to their calm, two-dimensional lives. Their neighbors aren't quite as excited by their desire to buck authority, but they learn their lesson, and ride off into a new way of being. In his fantasy world, Lear offers us a clear motivation to take risks, imagine the impossible, and to trust in yourself and those closest to you.