

## Foreword

It is both difficult yet possible to imagine what might have been going on when this spiritual was first sung—during slavery, a time when families were easily separated, sold off, or killed. Or perhaps that person was not even aware of who their birth mother was. Or with another line of thinking, it is difficult to imagine the feelings of not being able to learn of ancestral origins for African Americans whose ancestors were brought here for slavery.

As one who is not African American, I cannot own the real horrific stories that might have produced this deep song and its sentiment. But perhaps many of us from different journeys have indeed experienced situations or contexts where we feel something like this—a sense of feeling lost, unable to connect, feeling like there are unknown origins.

Personally, during pandemic, I felt this way. As one who is deeply involved in the activities of gathering and singing, it was extremely disorienting to suddenly have both banned: gathering and singing. People who did so were dying. We could not breathe together, sing together, or even be together, yet we so longed to do so.

It was during those months that two of us (the soloist and me on the piano) went to the empty Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis to record this arrangement, mostly improvised. The poignancy of the large, beautiful, but empty space with the expression of lament was overwhelming.

Yet there are many contexts that can yield the feelings and emotions that this spiritual can help us express. It is with gratitude, respect, and compassion that this spiritual is sung, and to that end, the improvisation captured in notation.

David Cherwien  
April 2023

For Katherine Castille and the National Lutheran Choir

# Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child

Solo Voice, SSATB, and Piano

Negro Spiritual

David M. Cherwien

Very freely (♩ = 40) *p*

Solo

Some-times I feel like a moth-er-less child.

Soprano  
Alto

*unis. ppp*  
mm

Tenor  
Bass

4

Some-times I feel like a moth-er-less child. Some-times I feel like a

mm mm mm

7

moth-er-less child. A long way from home, a

mm nn long

Text: Negro Spiritual (PD).

Tune: MOTHERLESS CHILD, Negro Spiritual (PD).

Music: David M. Cherwien (ASCAP), newly arranged, and copyright © 2023 Birnamwood with this publication.

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**With great intensity**  
*ff*

Solo

long, long way — from — home. Some-times I feel like a

S  
A

way from home. Some - times I feel like a

T  
B

Some - times I feel like a

**With great intensity**  
*ff*

Pno.

*mp* *ff*

13

moth-er-less child. — Some-times I — feel, — like a moth-er-less child. — Oh, —

moth - er - less child. — Some - times I feel like a moth - er-less child. Oh, —

moth - er - less child. — Some - times I feel like a moth - er-less child. Oh,

16

some-times I feel like a moth-er-less child. A long way from

some - times I feel like a moth - er - less child. A long way from

some - times I feel like a moth - er - less child. A long way from

19

home, a long, long, way from home.

*mp*  
home, a long way from home.

*mp*  
home, a long way from home.

*mp*

*Slower, more free, with a sense of resignation*

22

*mp*

Some-times I feel like I'm al - most gone...

*pp*

nnn

*pp*

nnn

*Slower, more free, with a sense of resignation*

*pp*

25

Some-times I feel, like I'm al - most gone... Some-times I feel like I'm

*pp*

nnn

nnn

28

al - most gone — A long way — from home, — a

aw mm,  
aw mm,

31 **Slower**

long, long way — from — home. — *ten.*

nnn unis.  
nnn home.

**Slower**

*ppp*