

YOU MY LOVE AT HOME AGAIN

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(Hello! Welcome to my play, which is now also your play. Here are some things you should know:)

TEXT LIKE THIS IS A SCENE HEADING

Text like this, over here, is happening now.

With (SONG TITLES) in all caps and parentheses.

Action that follows songs takes place during the songs except where otherwise noted.

(Text over here is context for what is happening now.)

TEXT LIKE THIS IS SUNG

TEXT:

like this is spoken aloud.

“—!” or “—?” or “—“ are thoughts that can be audible

underlined words are emphasized, Capitalized Words have weight

“/“ at the end of a line suggests that what comes next cuts in

(by:

LIRIA: LEE-reeah, a young woman who was once a Wolf,

KARO: KAW-roh, a young man in love with Liria,

MENNA: MEH-naw, Karo’s mother and worried for them both,

THE WOLVES: a chorus of at least 6 women who sing, dance, and speak as one, or not.)

(additionally, names we hear:

JOAH: DJOH-ah, Menna’s younger sister,

DIMO: DEE-moh, Menna’s husband, dead for many years

FINONIE: FIH-noh-nee, a joke Karo makes.)

(A few things to keep in mind:

Please think expansively in how you cast, design, & otherwise realize this story. Menna and Karo are mother and son, but don’t need to resemble one another. Additionally, while Liria’s speech is unconventional and her command of verbal communication varies, she does not speak with any recognizable accent beyond that of her actor. Most importantly: I’ve been specific about everything I want to be specific about, but the rest is up to you. You don’t have to agree with me. I trust you.)

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ACT I

PROLOGUE

There is a low hum from the darkness, the strands of a wordless hymn weaving together.
In sweep the Wolves.

(They are not actual wolves, they are women in bright, beautiful clothing who hold hands and take big graceful leaping steps and support each other at the smalls of their backs and spin on their heels and flash sharptoothed smiles. Wildflowers in their hair and buttonholes. They do not wear aprons or stockings or gloves, their feet are too strange for shoes. Their skin & hair are of every human shade & texture. The hair on their heads is loose and unruly. The hair on their legs is long enough to float. They are wonderful. They are dangerous.)

(Among them, utterly at home, is Liria. This is her heart.)

The Wolves and Liria shift their weight.
They tighten their circle, slowly, step by step.
They crash in and reel out. They whip and whirl for the thrill of it.

The Wolves sing:

MM —

ONE PLOT OF LAND ONCE WAS GREEN
UNDER AN ORCHARD SWEET AND WILD
HIGH ON A MOUNTAIN COLD AND LONELY
FAR AWAY FROM HOME

THOUGH MY DARLING I HAVE CROSSED
OCEANS DEEP AND MOUNTAINS HIGH
I KNOW OF NO SWEETER SIGHT
THAN YOU MY LOVE AT HOME AGAIN

THOUGH MY DARLING I HAVE CROSSED
OCEANS DEEP AND MOUNTAINS HIGH
I KNOW OF NO SWEETER SIGHT
THAN YOU MY LOVE AT HOME AGAIN

BITTER THE WIND THAT COMES AT NIGHT
WAKES ME FROM MY DREAMS OF YOU
WHEN ALL WAS WARM AND YOU STOOD BESIDE ME
PROMISING THE WORLD

THOUGH MY DARLING I HAVE CROSSED
OCEANS DEEP AND MOUNTAINS HIGH
I KNOW OF NO SWEETER SIGHT
THAN YOU MY LOVE AT HOME AGAIN

THOUGH MY DARLING I HAVE CROSSED
OCEANS DEEP AND MOUNTAINS HIGH
I KNOW OF NO SWEETER SIGHT
THAN YOU MY LOVE AT HOME AGAIN

IN RAIN, IN SNOW
IN WIND, IN THE FIRE'S GLOW
AND HOW AM I TO REST
WHEN YOU HAVE LEFT ME ALONE

MM —

One more revolution and —
Karo stands among them.

Liria sees him and is rooted in place.
The circle of Wolves expands around her, they loose their hold on one another.
They let gravity overtake them and they fall to the ground 3like children.

Liria and Karo turn, slowly, in the light.
They approach each other with tenderness. They take their time. They are in love.

The Wolves rise, staying low. A low hum with a hard edge.
They circle, they bide their time, and then all at once —

The Wolves surge in and separate them.
Snapping and snarling, The Wolves button Karo into a horrible and stiff blue military jacket.
The Wolves steal him away into the darkness.

LIRIA:
Karo —!

She tries to follow, but the Wolves hold her back.
When he is out of sight, they release her and she crumples to the ground.
She scrabbles away, after him.

From some distinct distance, a world away: Menna appears.

(She is sturdy, proud. Silver hair. She moves with purpose and power. She wears her husband's coat and carries a covered basket and a walking stick.)

The Wolves cut Liria off and reach for her, trying to pacify her the only way they know how.
She snaps at them with the spiteful panic of a wounded animal.
Their comfort cools, their sympathy hardens. They haul her up by the arms.
They loom over her, closing in like a cage.

Menna knocks at the gate.
The Wolves tense.

MENNA:
Hello?

(Her voice snaps us up out of Liria's heart and into the one room of a one room cabin on a lonely mountain as winter closes in.)

The Wolves drop Liria and scatter into the darkness.

ONE

MENNA:
Liria?

Liria lies in a slump on the floor, asleep.
Menna knocks again at the gate, waits. Nothing.
She pushes at the gate and finds it — open.

MENNA:
(to herself)
Oh, bring me patience.

She locks the gate behind her, draws closer to the house. Knocks on the door.

MENNA:
Hello-o. Liria? Your gate’s open!

Liria is startled awake. She moves gingerly.

LIRIA:
... Karo?

MENNA:
(deflated)
No, no. It’s Menna, I’ve brought food? Some things from the cellar, a hen /

LIRIA:
oh oh hello! one minute, one minute!

Liria staggers up.
She rushes to: lay a beautiful table cloth, sweep, straighten furniture, light a fire, etc.

(She only ever uses her palms and fingers to pick things up, never her thumbs, and she only half-listens while she works: it is of utmost importance that she hides the cabin’s true state from Menna.)

MENNA:
It’s an old hen, a little tougher than I’d like, but. Should last you the week at least.

LIRIA:
(absentmindedly)
yes, yes, thank you, just one minute —

MENNA:
(to herself)
One of my best, actually.

LIRIA:
sorry?

MENNA:
Nothing, just... you going to come let me in, or...?

LIRIA:
one minute, one minute, thank you!

MENNA:
 (to herself)
 All right, all right, “one minute!”

The table is set, the fire is lit, everything is ready for Menna.
 Liria adjusts her clothes just so and swings the door open.

LIRIA:
 welcome in, Mamamenna!

Liria reaches for the physical contact that begins an elaborate greeting ritual.
 Menna pushes past, setting her basket down somewhere convenient.

(She doesn't see the care that Liria has taken, and moves without consideration. She straightens and tidies and shifts things around as she thinks they should be. She is rarely still, rarely able to sit with a moment as it is. Liria hangs back, unsure in her own home.)

MENNA:
 Did you — was this just... open?

LIRIA:
 yes?

MENNA:
 I thought I was clear: you keep it locked, it's not safe up here on your own.

LIRIA:
 yes, but why lock, there is only me here /

MENNA:
 Hoo, but it's cold in here. Did you just lay this fire?

Menna pokes at the fire.

LIRIA:
 (proud)
 Yes, Karo shows me.

MENNA:
 Sure, but it's burning way too quickly, it's going to go out within the hour.

LIRIA:
 oh.

MENNA:
 You've got to feed it as you go, you want it burning slow and steady. And where are your slippers!

LIRIA:
 oh, I do not /

MENNA:
 You know, shoes? But inside?

LIRIA:
 (biting her tongue)

I know “slippers,” but I do not /

MENNA:
Hmpf. Karo didn’t leave you any —?

LIRIA:
no, I /

MENNA:
Of course not, foolish boy. Well here, let me see.

She digs around in the basket, pulls out a pair of too-big slippers with holes, presents them.

MENNA:
Take them. I was going to take them to be mended, but I barely wear these anymore anyway, I’ve got the pair Joah gave me last winter, and anyway. Looks like you need them more than I do.

She thrusts the slippers at Liria.

LIRIA:
oh no, I do not need. thank you.

MENNA:
No, take them, take them. Sorry they’re not in better shape, but /

LIRIA:
really, I do not /

MENNA:
Just take them.

LIRIA:
okay.

She isn’t thrilled.

LIRIA:
thank you.

MENNA:
Well, try them on.

Liria carefully tries on the slippers. She has never been so uncomfortable.

MENNA:
And?

LIRIA:
oh, good, good. nice... color.

MENNA:
Hmm no, far too big. Well. Better than nothing. At least until I can find something more suitable.

Liria starts to take them off.

MENNA:
Well don’t take them off, now that they’re on!

LIRIA:
sorry.

MENNA:
Oh, not to worry, I'm headed to Joah's in a few days, I'll see if she has any she can spare. Her grandbabies have feet about your size, well maybe a bit bigger by now, especially the oldest, shooting up like a weed! Or so she writes me, been a good while since I've seen her. Hard for her to visit, you know. Or you don't know, I suppose. Anyway, I'll ask all the same.

Liria doesn't quite know what to say.

LIRIA:
Mamamenna, tea? Water? I bring you /

MENNA:
Forgive me, but tell me you at least have a good coat? A coat?

Liria nods, gestures: wait a moment.
She runs to a trunk, pulls out what is clearly a summer jacket. Menna reaches out, feels the material, makes a face.

MENNA:
No, too light, too light by far. You're sure this is it? Karo didn't leave anything else?

LIRIA:
no, but /

MENNA:
Well, when I come next week, I'll bring what I can find, all right? And I'm sure there's a belt or something in there to cinch it all up good if it's all still too big. Some string, or. A rope, or something. But it doesn't really matter, so long as you're bundled up. Understand?

LIRIA:
Yes, of course, bundled up!

She mimes wrapping herself up and then shivering.

(She thinks this is charming and funny. Menna does not.)

MENNA:
Liria, this is serious. You get too cold up here, you die.

LIRIA:
(backpedaling)
no, no... I know. Serious. Karo tells me, but —

(There is such a difference between imagining a thing and understanding a thing. There is such a difference between trusting someone who will be there beside you through the worst and then facing that worst on your own.)

LIRIA:
It is hard —.

MENNA:
Just keep your wits about you, all right? Keep your door locked. And promise me you'll bring in some more firewood. Today. The air's changing, first snow's right around the corner. Could come

tonight! Would be early, but not the first time, and that first one can be a doozy, especially this far up the mountain. You understand?

LIRIA:
(a little sharply)
I understand “snow.”

MENNA:
Of course. Well. Bring in more wood. Today. Bigger logs, get it to burn better.

LIRIA:
(unclear on how something could ever burn “better”)
yes, okay.

MENNA:
Good. All right. Food’s here — should last you through the week and then some. All the usual things, and some pickles. And some odds and ends that’ll be good for soup. Plus the hen, a good one.

LIRIA:
(swallowing her distaste)
thank you.

MENNA:
I’ll be back next week.

LIRIA:
okay. thank you —

Liria begins an elaborate goodbye ritual, which Menna ignores as she wraps herself back up in her coat.

MENNA:
Keep that fire going, you hear? And keep the door locked. You have to be careful up here when the weather turns. It’s not just the cold.

LIRIA:
Okay?

MENNA:
All it takes is one thing going wrong. Could be the cold, could be something worse. Doesn’t have to be big to take you down. Liria.

LIRIA:
—?

MENNA:
Don’t let it.

TWO

Menna leaves. She shuts the gate behind her.

Liria drifts uselessly after her until she’s sure Menna has left.
She lets out a long breath. She sheds her most impeding and uncomfortable garments.

She leaves the door unlocked.

The Wolves stir at her edges.

LIRIA:
(laughing to keep from crying)
“Do not let it.” AHhhh.

Liria takes off Menna’s old slippers and places them gently where they won’t be disturbed.
She begins to return herself and her home to its unvisited state, humming snatches of (ROSE & JASMINE) to herself.

Last is Karo’s summer jacket.
She approaches it shyly.
She holds it to her — an old friend.
It is suddenly too heavy to hold, or look at.

The Wolves hum.
The fire gutters out. Liria holds as still as she can.
They circle the cabin. They test the windows, the door, the cracks in the walls.
Then: in one furious swoop, Liria stuffs the jacket away and throws open a window. Nothing.
The Wolves fall silent and duck her gaze.

(For the Wolves, this is an excellent game.)

LIRIA:
Go away.

The Wolves giggle to themselves. Again, their hum.
Liria shuts the window to chase the sound of them. She throws open the door.
Again, nothing.

LIRIA:
I know you are here, I am not stupid. Go. Away.

Liria shuts the door. She locks it.
The Wolves are not gentle anymore. They rattle every latch. The walls shake.
Liria scrabbles after a weapon: a fire poker, a walking stick, anything.
The Wolves sing (LITTLE COLD HOUSE):

LITTLE COLD HOUSE ON A LITTLE COLD HILL
EMPTY LIKE THE BIRDS ALL FLOWN

LIRIA:
(trying to convince herself)
Not empty. Karo is not here, so what. I am here. I am Here!

LITTLE COLD HOUSE ON A LITTLE COLD HILL
AND A LITTLE HEART ALL ALONE

LIRIA:
no. you are not true, you are Not.

A LITTLE HEART ALL ALONE

The Wolves pour in through the windows, the door, the edges of the room.
They corner her. She swings her weapon wild to keep them at bay.

LIRIA:

no. no no no no no get out GET OUT!

A sharp knock at the door — Menna.

As one, the Wolves abandon the house.

They flood back out into the shadows. Menna does not see them as they go.

Left on the table: a ripe, red, windblown wild peony.

Cautiously, Liria approaches it. Picks it up. Smells it, and is overcome, and rips it to pieces.

THREE

Menna knocks again.

(Menna has with her: her basket, walking stick, a large bundle of clothes on her back. One week has passed, and no time at all.)

Liria yells and snatches her weapon up and at the ready.

MENNA:
Liria?

LIRIA:
What?

MENNA:
It's me, it's Menna. Are you all right?

LIRIA:
oh. oh oh yes, hello Mamamenna. ah, one —. one minute!

MENNA:
Are you —. Is everything —?

Liria rushes to put everything back in order.
She sweeps what was the peony into a pocket or a drawer. She scrubs her face. She lights a hasty, ill-considered fire.

LIRIA:
yes yes yes, one minute, thank you!

MENNA:
(to herself)
O-kay. One minute.

Discreetly, Menna tries the door, just in case.
Liria unlocks and opens the door.

LIRIA:
welcome in /

She begins her greeting ritual, which Menna again ignores. She stays on the threshold and appraises Liria.

MENNA:
Are you sure you're all right?

LIRIA:
yes of course, why /

MENNA:
You yelled.

LIRIA:
oh! Yes. yes. I yell, my. Foot.

MENNA:
Your foot.

LIRIA:
Yes. Not very bad, just. My foot.

MENNA:
Well sit down, sit down, let me take a look /

LIRIA:
No no no, it is okay /

MENNA:
Really, it's no trouble, you're got to be sure there's no deeper damage /

LIRIA:
(firm)
Thank you, no, I am Sure. I am Okay. Thank you.

MENNA:
Well! If you say so.

Menna busies herself with her basket and bundle. Liria trails after.

MENNA
Now, I was right, Joah's grandboys are bigger than you, both of them taller than she is now, I could hardly believe it. But I brought some things just in case. Don't know how they'll work but you should give them a try. A coat, some boots, here. Try them on.

She thrusts a pile of clothes at Liria.

LIRIA:
oh, thank you.

Liria struggles under the pile. She turns her back and tries things on.
Unseen by Liria, Menna straightens things and shores up the fire.
At last, Liria is fully outfitted.

(Everything is very much too big for her. This is a particular kind of blessing and misery.)

MENNA:
Hmm, that one actually fastens over there, you've got to —. Here, let me do it —!

Liria starts to do it herself but Menna muscles in and does it for her.
When Menna turns to bring her something else, Liria struggles to loosen it.

MENNA:
Well, good, that should do you better than what you have right now, at least. And you're going to want to stuff those boots, all right? Keep your feet dry and your ankles from turning.

LIRIA:
thank you.

MENNA:
And are you —. Other than the foot, I mean. Are you —. Are you well?

LIRIA:
Oh, yes, yes, very. Very well. Are —. Are you? Well?

MENNA:
Oh, yes. Yes.

Neither can tell if the other is telling the truth, or how to proceed.

MENNA:
All right, good. I'll be back next week if I can, but if it keeps snowing like this, I don't know if I'll be able to make it. I brought a little extra just in case. All the usual things, plus I found some beans that'll perk right up once you get them in water. Oh and some preserves. Peach. A little taste of summer. Smell alone is divine.

LIRIA:
(sincerely)
thank you.

Liria goes to hug her, but Menna is already leaving.

MENNA:
Should do you for awhile, if you make it last. And Liria —

LIRIA:
yes?

MENNA:
You know —. You know you don't have to stay out here, right?

LIRIA:
I Stay.

MENNA:
Okay, but I mean, you don't have to. Everyone upmountain's already come down to the village to winter over, you know you're the last /

LIRIA:
(steely)
This is to me Home.

MENNA:
Yes, but /

LIRIA:
It is better for me here.

MENNA:
Sure, okay, but it's only going to get harder.

LIRIA:
When Karo comes Home and it is empty here and cold and there is no one, what is it I do?

MENNA:
Listen, we don't know when that'll be. Trust me, I've been through this before. With my Dimo, with Karo's first tour. It's only been a few months, it's only just the beginning. They'll keep him until they're done, there's no way of knowing /

LIRIA:
(a challenge)
Okay. With no Home and no Karo, I am staying where?

MENNA:

I don't know, we'd figure it out. People would understand, you're not the only one missing a husband this year. Or a son.

LIRIA:

No. I stay.

MENNA:

What if you hurt yourself again? What if it's worse next time, and I can't get to you?

LIRIA:

You are in your home alone.

MENNA:

That's different. I'm not a foolish girl up in the middle of nowhere /

LIRIA:

Foolish.

MENNA:

It means /

LIRIA:

I know "Foolish."

MENNA:

Liria, be reasonable.

LIRIA:

I. Stay.

A moment on the edge of a fight.

MENNA:

Okay. If you must, you must. I suppose.

LIRIA:

(without malice)

Thank you, Mamamenna.

MENNA:

Just Menna's fine, really.

LIRIA:

(vastly uncomfortable)

oh. okay. Menna.

MENNA:

Stay warm. Stay safe. I'll be back when I can.

Menna leaves.

Liria immediately locks the door behind her.

She draws the curtains.

FOUR

Again, Liria sheds her most restrictive garments. She piles them on the floor.
 She inspects the basket — on the whole, not irredeemable?
 She smells the beans — the worst. She casts them aside.
 She unscrews the jar of peach preserves and smells it. Carefully tastes the tiniest helping.
 She is overwhelmed. She sighs with pleasure. She sticks her whole hand in the jar and coats it with preserves.
 She laps it up, licking at her hand until it is clean.

She goes in for a second helping, but she catches herself.
 She wrenches herself away. She wipes her hands, her face, she finds a spoon.
 She is inexpert at wielding it. Spooning preserves from the jar is a slow, painful process.

She will not cry, she will not cry, she will not cry.
 Frustration turns to anger turns to rage. She hurls the jar on the ground. Preserves and glass everywhere.

LIRIA:
 No no no no —!

She kneels to try and clean up the mess, to try and salvage what she can.
 It overwhelms her: it is cold, it is dark, she is alone.
 She tries to breathe back her composure. It almost works.

The Wolves creep in through the door, the windows, the walls.
 The fire gutters out.

Liria tries to ignore them and focus on cleaning.
 They sing:

ALONE, ALONE
 EMPTY LIKE THE BIRDS ALL FLOWN
 ALONE, ALONE
 EMPTY LIKE THE BIRDS ALL FLOWN

LIRIA:
 I say to you to Go. Away.

As they sing, they pull the cleaning implements from her hands.
 They rifle through her belongings, her pockets, her hair. Her letters from Karo are thrown like confetti.
 She snatches after them, but there are too many Wolves with too many hands for her to catch them all.

LIRIA:
 No! They are not to you, they are to Me!

Any letters she can tear from the Wolves' hands rip into pieces.
 Their song grows louder and faster and uglier:

ALONE, ALONE
 EMPTY LIKE THE BIRDS ALL FLOWN
 ALONE, ALONE
 EMPTY LIKE THE BIRDS ALL FLOWN

LIRIA:
 Stop. Stop. Stop.

Liria staggers and falls. She curls into a ball on the floor, trying to reach and protect as many letters as she can.
 The Wolves are dancing and rejoicing around her and the door swings open with a SLAM —

FIVE

The Wolves scatter, but not far.

Menna hustles up into the doorway with her basket and walking stick.

(Another week has passed, and no time at all.)

The room is a wreck.

Liria is on the ground. Letters everywhere.

Menna runs to her, casts aside her basket and walking stick and coat.

MENNA:

Liria!

LIRIA:

—?

MENNA:

Oh patience, patience, patience. Liria, can you hear me?

Liria starts awake, takes in the state of her home.

LIRIA:

Mamamenna —

MENNA:

What were you thinking, leaving your door open like that!

LIRIA:

sorry, sorry, sorry /

She lurches upright.

MENNA:

I couldn't see any smoke from the chimney, I thought — /

LIRIA:

yes, yes, yes, I know, I am sorry /

Menna catches her where she stands and guides her gently to a chair, gets her a blanket.

She tsks at the state of Liria's feet.

MENNA:

Hey hey hey, easy now. Sit down before you make things worse. And where on earth are —!

She roots around for her old slippers and helps Liria into them.

Satisfied, she turns to the fire and lays it with a practiced hand.

MENNA:

(talking as she works)

You cannot do this. A few more hours and you would be frozen to death, or eaten by wolves, or worse! You cannot be so careless with your life, do you understand?

LIRIA:

(uncomprehending)

Eaten?

MENNA:
Yes! Torn apart and left for scraps.

LIRIA:
(horrified)
No!

MENNA:
(mistaking Liria's outrage for fear)
Yes, I know, Liria, that is why you cannot keep Doing This.

Liria raises up on her haunches, teeth bared. Her blanket slips to the ground. The slippers make it hard for her to stand.

LIRIA:
I Am Not. Doing this!

MENNA:
Right. Like the fire. And the door. And —

Menna notices the broken remains of the peach preserves. She turns to Liria, heartbroken.

MENNA:
And this.

Liria disappears into the animal she once was. The Wolves outside the cabin stomp a slow, steady rhythm into the ground. The fire shrinks as if in a heavy wind. Lira speaks as one with the Wolves in a new voice full of gravel.

LIRIA + THE WOLVES:
Leave.

MENNA:
What?

LIRIA + THE WOLVES:
GET. OUT.

MENNA:
I don't know —. I don't understand what /

The Wolves' rhythm slowly accelerates. The fire collapses and dies. Menna gathers up her coat and walking stick as quickly as she can. Keeping her eyes on Liria, she edges to the door.

MENNA:
All right. I tried. You know what —! Good luck. Do what you want.

And Menna is gone.

SIX

Liria kicks off her slippers, she throws the windows open, and the Wolves pour in.

They hold tens, hundreds, thousands of white letters thick with wildflowers.

They parade in and scatter them like confetti.

They braid them into Liria's hair and slip them into her pockets.

They drum on the furniture, the floor, the walls.

They scatter Liria's firewood and stuff their pockets with anything they like.

They root through Menna's basket and Liria's cupboards and feast.

She sinks beneath her own surface and disappears into the crowd.

TAKE YOUR RIBBONS, TAKE YOUR LETTERS
OF THESE THINGS I HAVE NO NEED
TAKE YOUR SWEET WORDS OF AFFECTION
THEY HAVE NOW NO USE FOR ME

TAKE YOUR RIBBONS, TAKE YOUR LETTERS
OF THESE THINGS I HAVE NO NEED
TAKE YOUR SWEET WORDS OF AFFECTION
THEY HAVE NOW NO USE FOR ME

TAKE YOUR FLOWERS, TAKE YOUR RING
OF THESE THINGS I HAVE NO NEED
TAKE WHAT'S YOURS AND LEAVE ME LONELY
TAKE MY LOVE AND SET ME FREE

TAKE YOUR FLOWERS, TAKE YOUR RING
OF THESE THINGS I HAVE NO NEED
TAKE WHAT'S YOURS AND LEAVE ME LONELY
TAKE MY LOVE AND SET ME FREE

THEY HAVE NOW NO USE FOR ME
TAKE MY LOVE AND SET ME FREE
THEY HAVE NOW NO USE FOR ME
TAKE MY LOVE AND SET ME FREE
THEY HAVE NOW NO USE FOR ME
TAKE MY LOVE AND —

And from the darkness, Karo appears.

(He lists heavily to one side. His uniform is filthy. His eyes are emptied.)

He approaches the wolf who was once his wife.

In his hand, outstretched: a blue letter printed on heavy paper by a cold military machine.

Everything is still. Everything narrows to this one point.

ACT II

SEVEN

Midsummer. A cool morning.
Liria in a clearing near where she was born.

(Far from the cabin, the winter, the worst. Liria at her most animal. Everything shimmers.)

One effortful foot at a time, she stands. It takes as long as it needs to.
She tries on affects, angles at which to hold her head or hands or hips.
She attempts a smile. It doesn't quite work. Sometimes she makes herself laugh: a sharp, barking sound.

When she has a stance she likes, she takes a deep breath, and tries to say "hello."

LIRIA:
chHHhhH —.

Her lips and tongue will not cooperate. She moves on.

LIRIA:
eh? EHHHHH? LLLLLL.

She gets flustered, she takes a lap. She comes back. Starts over.
Psychs herself out, and then up again.
Steadies herself, breathes.

LIRIA:
hhhhHeLL? o. O! OoooO —.

And Karo is standing at the edge of the clearing behind her, watching.
Quietly, carefully, he settles in.

(In his blue military best, his top buttons undone. A rifle and a bag across his back.)

LIRIA:
o. Lll—o?

KARO:
hello.

Liria wheels around and drops back down, on the defensive.
Karo stumbles up, hands up and arms wide.

KARO:
no no no, it's okay. it's okay!

Liria paces, weighing her options.

(She does not know what to do with a man who neither attacks nor flees.)

KARO:
I'm sorry, I swear.

He reaches for his rifle; Liria's fear coils her up into a spring about to loose.

KARO:
NO no, I mean you no harm. Really.

Slowly, he unclips the rifle and slides it gently away from him so it rests out of reach.
He does the same with his bag.

KARO:
I promise, it's okay.

Liria's nose is pulled to the bag. She edges over to it, keeping her eyes on Karo.
She weighs keeping him pinned or investigating the bag. The bag wins out.

She paws through it. A jar of peach preserves and other provisions. She tears into what she can.

Karo forgets himself and edges closer.

KARO:
Who are you?

Liria snarls, her mouth full of food. He immediately backs off.

KARO:
Okay okay okay, doesn't matter, all right. Enjoy, I guess. Leave me some? If you want?

Liria laughs her strange, barking laugh.

KARO:
Oh I'm funny?

Liria laughs so hard she almost chokes.

KARO:
Hey hey hey careful.

She glares at him and swallows elegantly, just to show she can, before tearing back into her feast with relish.

KARO:
Okay. I see how it is. —. You understand me, don't you.

She makes a big show of ignoring him.

KARO:
Yeah, you do. I didn't know —. My mother told me stories, when I was little?

Liria is trying in vain to pry open the peach preserves.

KARO:
Here, can I —?

She shrugs. Quietly, carefully, he approaches. She noses the jar over to him.
As he opens it, places it between them, gives her the space she needs to approach it, he keeps talking:

KARO:
Yeah, okay. So where I come from there aren't very many wolves, not anymore at least. So we don't have a lot of stories about them. Well, one time my aunt Joah told me the one about a boy

who's so horrible and mean that they turned him into a wolf and cursed him to wander the mountains alone, howling into the night. I was never clear who they were, or why they were running around turning children into wolves? But didn't matter, terrified me! My mother was so upset with her.

Karo sits and watches as Liria tastes the peach preserves.
It is the most extraordinary thing she has ever tasted.
Engrossed and placated, she doesn't mind when he inches closer.

KARO:
But my favorite story was one my mother always told me, about a boy who befriended a nightbird. Or maybe the nightbird befriended the boy, actually. And somehow the nightbird tested him? He had to prove himself somehow, I don't really remember. What's important, is that he did.

By now Liria is listening.

KARO:
And the best part was always right before the end, when he had finally passed whatever the test was, and he had won the nightbird's trust. And so, my mother would say, "on a night when the moon hid its face," the nightbird gave the boy wings, and they flew together to the ends of the earth. And back again.

By now they are closer, closer, closer together.

KARO:
It was different from the other stories she told me. Little lessons about respecting your elders, and telling the truth, and always wearing your coat when the weather turns. This was just — magic. To get to choose! To get to see the world from the sky. And now —. I love that it took the boy time. It wasn't all at once. It wasn't easy, for either of them. And yet.

A moment on the edge of something more.
Karo gingerly lifts, reaches out his hand. Liria holds his gaze.
With all the care in the world, he touches her face.

She is ready to lean into it. Then she runs.

EIGHT

Summer blooms into its full golden glory. The hot bright of midday.
 Karo runs into the clearing near where Liria was born.
 He collects himself enough to whistle the opening notes of (ROSE & JASMINE).

(His military jacket in a heap on the ground, or tied around his waist: irreverently discarded for the moment. Bag somewhere nearby, rifle gone.)

From a great distance away, Liria's answering whistle. Karo brightens immediately.
 He whistles the next few notes — from much closer, Liria with the answering line.
 He whistles the next few notes — no answer.
 He tries again — no answer.
 He looks for Liria — nothing.

He clouds over. He collects his things. Takes one last look before he gives up.

Creeping slowly, Liria tracks him from the edge of the clearing.
 When his back is turned she LEAPS with a roar —

Karo yells and buckles to the ground in fear.
 Liria abandons her game immediately and darts to his side.

LIRIA:
 hey hey no, no, safe! Safe!

He gasps for air.
 He pushes her away, he scrabbles for space, he sinks down to the ground.

LIRIA:
 Me! Me me me! Safe!

KARO:
 I was just. Waiting —!

LIRIA:
 I know! Good! Good! Okay?

KARO:
 I didn't —.

LIRIA:
 Okay okayokayokay, yes.

She breathes, exaggeratedly. She grabs his face and makes him watch her breathe.
 He matches her breath.
 Slowly, everything settles.
 Karo collapses onto his back. Liria, stunned, retreats.

KARO:
 I'm sorry, you. You scared me.

LIRIA:
 sorry. —. okay?

KARO:
Okay? You mean. Am I okay?

Liria nods.

KARO:
Yeah. Yeah, I will be. Hoo. Don't scare me like that.

LIRIA:
No scare.

KARO:
Yes, scare. You scared me.

LIRIA:
No no yes. But. No scare. Good.

KARO:
Good?

She gestures: her hands clasped over her heart.

LIRIA:
Good. Here. Good.

KARO:
I don't understand.

Liria paces.

LIRIA:
Me. I. No Scare.

KARO:
Okay, but /

LIRIA:
No.

KARO:
Okay.

LIRIA:
Good. Here.

KARO:
You're a good... person? I know you're a good person, that's not what I'm /

LIRIA:
Good person! No Scare.

KARO:
No I know you didn't mean it, but still, it's not /

LIRIA:
okay day one.

KARO:
Yes.

LIRIA:
I Scare?

KARO:
YES.

LIRIA:
Yes! I know. Now. I scare? Now?

KARO:
—. Yes!

Liria gets up and pushes him over, palm to heart. She points.

LIRIA:
Okay. You No Good. Here.

KARO:
What?! Just because you didn't want to scare me doesn't mean I don't get to be scared. You came out of nowhere!

LIRIA:
But I /

KARO:
I've only just met you! I don't know if this is —. What this is! I don't know how this works!

He is working himself back into a panic.
Liria follows him in his contortion.

LIRIA:
hey, hey hey hey /

KARO:
This is —. This is my first time anywhere. Ever.

LIRIA:
I know.

KARO:
No, I don't know if you do. I'm supposed to be serving. I'm supposed to be putting everything else, everyone else first. And then you're here, and I don't know what I'm doing, hiding out when I should be in town or in my bunk or waiting for the afternoon call or working on the projects I'm letting slide! To come — I don't even know what.

Liria is wounded, she reaches for him.

KARO:
I don't —!

He pushes her away.
Out of words, Liria shoves him across the floor with a shout.
It is enough to snap him to her so he will listen.

Instead of speaking, she twists and turns her whole self. Her feet trace confident patterns in the dirt.

She tells him: her strength, her confusion, how fully she already is on his side.
It is beautiful and too much, and Karo is crying.

He interrupts her and catches her up.
Together, they sink down. She is crying too. She hates it.

In this new, raw space between them, a far off alarm sounds, calling Karo back.
Karo disentangles himself. He buttons himself back into his jacket.

KARO:
I have to —. I'm sorry.

LIRIA:
okay.

KARO:
Tomorrow.

LIRIA:
Okay.

He gets up, he dusts himself off. Another moment on the edge.
She makes up her mind: she pulls herself up to her most human height, and kisses him.
He doesn't know what to do. Then he kisses her back. And then she lets him run.

NINE

Slowly, the summer light lengthens into autumn.
As time passes, the Wolves sweep in.

(At their wildest, at their most peaceful.)

They sing (ROSE AND JASMINE):

LOVE ALONE IN THE FOREST GREEN
ROSE AND JASMINE ON THE VINE
BENT TO KISS MY LONELY LIPS
SAID HE'D WED HIS HEART TO MINE

LOVE, LOVE, LOVE ALONE
SAID HE'D WED HIS HEART TO MINE
LOVE, LOVE, LOVE ALONE
SAID HE'D WED HIS HEART TO MINE

HERE WE STOOD IN THE FOREST GREEN
ROSE AND JASMINE ON THE VINE
THERE BEFORE ALL OF CREATION
WHEN HE WED HIS HEART TO MINE

HERE, HERE, HERE WE STOOD
WHEN HE WED HIS HEART TO MINE
HERE, HERE, HERE WE STOOD
WHEN HE WED HIS HEART TO MINE

DOWN WE'LL LAY IN THE FOREST GREEN
ROSE AND JASMINE ON THE VINE
SLEEPING SOFTLY IN THE SHADOW
WED TOGETHER FOR ALL TIME

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN WE'LL LAY
WED TOGETHER FOR ALL TIME
DOWN, DOWN, DOWN WE'LL LAY
WED TOGETHER FOR ALL TIME.

They dance with Liria, extensions of her happiness.
Karo joins to watch, and leaves again, and joins, and leaves.

Then, finally, Karo stays.

She teaches him her hello, her greeting ritual.
She pulls him into the Wolves' dance and she teaches him how she moves.
They repeat together, again and again and again until they are all perfectly synced.
The Wolves, lulled, ease away. Their circle widens. They turn their backs to them.

Then Liria and Karo are just turning together in the waning evening light.
Suddenly: a rustle that only Liria can hear from the trees beyond. On alert, she scampers to the edge of the clearing.

KARO:
Come back, it's /

LIRIA:
Shh!

KARO:
It's nothing.

LIRIA:
SHH! Wait.

KARO:
Okay. I'll bite.

LIRIA:
Not Bite, Wait.

KARO:
No, I know, I meant — never mind. I'll wait.

LIRIA:
Good.

Liria waits, tense, until she's sure the coast is clear. She flops back into his arms.

LIRIA:
Not nothing. Little —.

She searches for the word.

KARO:
Rabbit?

LIRIA:
No.

KARO:
Mouse?

LIRIA:
no, no, bigger —

KARO:
Sheep?

LIRIA:
(laughing)
NO, um —.

She attempts a highly dubious birdcall. Karo bursts out laughing.

LIRIA:
Stop stop stop, I Try.

KARO:
A thrush, I think?

LIRIA:
A —.

She tries to make “thrush” fit in her mouth and gives up. She looks to Karo.

KARO:
Thrush.

He mimicks the birdcall perfectly.

KARO:
It's a kind of bird.

LIRIA:
Yes! Yes. Bird, okay. Better than —.

KARO:
Thrush.

LIRIA:
Yes okay. There are... thrushes? In your mountain?

KARO:
(a gentle correction)
On my mountain. But no. Too cold for them, I think.

LIRIA:
Good. I can forget!

Karo laughs.

LIRIA:
Yesterday I am dreaming of your mountain.

KARO:
You are?

LIRIA:
I am. Cold. And dark.

KARO:
Sometimes.

LIRIA:
And lonely lonely.

KARO:
Sometimes. Are you nervous?

LIRIA:
Hmm?

KARO:
Unsure. Scared.

LIRIA:
No, I know "nervous." But. No. Not scared. Curious?

KARO:
Curious is good. But you don't have to make up your mind now.

LIRIA:
What, we stay here? No.

KARO
Why not?

LIRIA:
Really?

KARO.
Really. Why not? Make a fresh start. A start, all new. You and me.

LIRIA:
How?

KARO:
Here is Nothing.

KARO:
It's beautiful.

LIRIA:
Yes, beautiful, but —. I am alone now. No people.

KARO:
You don't care about it at all.

LIRIA:
(about the place)
Not important. What is important: you. Me. A new family. On a mountain.

KARO:
Okay.

LIRIA:
So.

KARO:
So.

LIRIA:
Your mother. How do I call her?

KARO:
Menna.

LIRIA:
Menna?

KARO:
Yeah. Or if you want to be really polite you can call her Mamamenna. It's respectful, but she doesn't really like it.

LIRIA:
Ma-ma. Menna. But okay why —?

KARO:
There's not really a reason, it's just how we do it /

LIRIA:
No, why “Menna”?

KARO:
What?

LIRIA:
It means —?

KARO:
I don’t know. It’s just her name.

Liria stops still.

LIRIA:
do you also have?

KARO:
what. A name?

LIRIA:
Yes.

KARO:
Of course! Of course I do. Wait what have you been calling me all this time?

LIRIA:
(unconcerned)
I do not.

KARO:
What?

LIRIA:
I do not call you, I do not need. I see you, you see me. We talk.

KARO:
Huh.

He pulls back. He begins her elaborate greeting ritual.
She reciprocates, confused.

KARO:
Nice to meet you. Karo.

LIRIA:
Okay. Karo.

KARO:
No, you’re supposed to —. With your name.

LIRIA:
I need?!

KARO:
I mean, yeah. Everyone has one.

LIRIA:

How?

KARO:

What do you mean, we just do. You're born, your parents name you, and then that's who you are. I guess you could change it, if you wanted. But most people don't.

LIRIA:

You are baby Karo? Already?

KARO:

Yeah. After my grandfather.

LIRIA:

Wow. I am not baby me. We are not baby us. We are different.

KARO:

Yeah. We are.

LIRIA:

And when you are old Karo? You are still Karo?

KARO:

I mean I always thought so? But maybe not. Maybe I'll be someone different then, with a different name.

LIRIA:

I am giving old Karo a new name.

KARO:

Oh?

LIRIA:

Not Now! I am not knowing old Karo.

KARO:

Okay. But what about you? Who are you, then?

LIRIA:

Curious.

Karo laughs.

KARO:

Yes. Different. And good /

LIRIA:

(joking with her hand over her heart)
And Good! Here.

A breath.

LIRIA:

I am standing, I am talking. I am loving you.

KARO:

Okay. Ready?

LIRIA:

Ready.

KARO:
Finonie.

LIRIA:
You are sure?

KARO:
(laughing at his own joke)
Nonono, it's no good, it's no good! How about /

LIRIA:
Now serious!

KARO:
Serious. I promise. Ready?

LIRIA:
Ready!

KARO:
Okay. Liria.

Liria smiles like the sun.

LIRIA
Liria.

Karo draws breath to answer her and:

The Wolves swarm in and wrench them both across space and time back to the cabin on the mountain.
At great speed, the summer freezes, cools, darkens back into winter.
Karo is a marionette with cut strings.
The Wolves suit him up in his military best. They wound him. He lists to one side.

In his hand, outstretched: a blue letter, printed on heavy paper by a cold military machine.

The Wolves force Liria's hands to tear the letter open and change everything.

KARO + THE WOLVES:
My deepest condolences to you and your family at this difficult /

Liria rips the letter into pieces, but it is too late.

She roars —
The roof shakes free of the walls, the walls free of the foundation —
The wind howls in —
The Wolves howl out —

And then there is no Liria, there is only the Wolves.

ACT III

TEN

Menna with a lantern, standing before the neglected wreck of what was once the cabin.
The chimney is still standing, but the walls lie in broken, rotting pieces.
The first warm night on the edge of spring.

(Just over a year since the notice. Menna is slower, stiffer than she used to be. She carries: the lantern, a basket with ingredients for soup, a cloth bundle, a bedroll, her walking stick. If she takes the cloth bundle out of her basket, she keeps it close, or lays it on its own cloth. It is too precious to touch the ground.)

A low, shapeless hum from the Wolves in the darkness beyond. Menna goes still.

MENNA:
Liria?

Nothing.

Menna builds a fire. She lays out ingredients for soup, humming to herself.
Again, the Wolves humming from the trees beyond. She catches up the lantern and whirls around.

MENNA:
Liria, is that you?

Drained and slow, Liria and the Wolves approach. In Liria's hands is a letter.

(She is one animal among many, braced and echoed by Wolves with every movement. She has no coat, no shawl, no shoes. She speaks as if from deep underwater, in a voice rusty with disuse. Menna does not see or acknowledge the Wolves.)

LIRIA:
Mamamenna.

Menna lurches up.
She half embraces Liria, half holds her at arm's length.
Clumsily, she attempts what she can remember of Liria's greeting ritual.
Liria neither accepts or rejects this.

MENNA:
You got my letter.

Liria and the Wolves nod. The Wolves mirror her exactly.

MENNA:
And you're here, and you're all right. You are all right?

Liria and the Wolves nod. It is not particularly convincing.

MENNA:
Good. Good, good. Okay. Well sit, sit. I've got soup just about ready. Not a lot, but something.
Warm you up.

Menna goes to tend the soup, but Liria and the Wolves do not follow.

LIRIA:
Mamamenna, I am sorry.

MENNA:
No. Nothing to be sorry for.

LIRIA:
But the House. I am breaking it.

MENNA:
(trying to convince herself)
Oh, I don't care about the house! Let the mountain have it. Foolish to build so far away from the start.

LIRIA:
But Karo is building it.

MENNA:
(sharply)
And he is not here.

Menna takes a moment to collect herself.

MENNA:
I'm sorry, I shouldn't —. Listen, when they sent me the notice for Dimo, I ripped up all his letters.

LIRIA:
no.

MENNA:
I knew I shouldn't, I knew I would regret it. Even as I was doing it, I knew. But I couldn't look at them. I couldn't stand my name in his handwriting. Of course, Karo still had letters from him, I didn't get to those. He had them hidden in all sorts of foolish places. He kept one in a mitten for so long that by the time I noticed, the paper had started disintegrating. Couldn't read it anymore, the ink was all smudged. Not that he knew how to read yet anyway, just. Kept it with him. —. Anyway, my mother came, saw the mess. The letters, me. She locked me in the bathroom until I'd washed myself. When I came out, she'd managed to put a good half of them back together. Maybe I should have burned them, I don't know. I just mean. I suppose I understand. In my own way. It's done, and there's nothing for it, all right?

She spoons the soup into bowls, and hands one to Liria.
Liria accepts. She and the Wolves come to sit by the fire.

LIRIA:
All Right.

MENNA:
Good. Now eat, you look like you need it.

Liria pokes experimentally at the soup. She tastes it hesitantly. Then drinks it down.

MENNA:
Good girl. Have more, if you like.

LIRIA:
thank you.

MENNA:
It's no trouble.

LIRIA:
it is.

MENNA:
No. Does me good to have someone to look after, if I'm being honest.

LIRIA:
Mamamenna, why /

MENNA:
Please. Menna.

LIRIA:
Okay. Menna. Thank you. For soup. But you are asking me here why?

MENNA:
Well. Wait here.

Menna gets up to get the bundle. She moves with difficulty.

LIRIA:
You are hurt?

MENNA:
Oh, nothing serious. Climbed a ladder I shouldn't have, pushed too hard. I'll heal.

LIRIA:
Sit. I do it.

MENNA:
No, I can /

LIRIA:
Sit.

MENNA:
All right. The bundle, just there. Yes.

Liria and the Wolves hand it over. They sit back down beside Menna.

MENNA:
They just sent it a few weeks ago. Buried him without me and then took a whole year to send me anything, but. It's something. Go ahead.

Liria and the Wolves shake their heads.

MENNA:
I keep bringing it up here. Keep trying to leave it, I don't know. But I can't do it. Can't burn it or bury it or —. I don't know.

LIRIA:
so?

MENNA:
I thought you should know it'd come. I thought you should at least have the chance to know.

For a long moment, silence.

(Two women, shrouded in their shared and separate grief.)

LIRIA:
I am not knowing he is going again.

MENNA:
He didn't tell you?

LIRIA:
Maybe? Maybe I am not understanding. There are so many things I am not understanding. I am thinking I am knowing, and then —. It hurts like I am not —. I do not have a word. Just Not. Nothing at all.

MENNA:
I know. I know.

They breathe together. It takes a minute.

MENNA:
You know it doesn't matter to me that you're —.

LIRIA:
That I am What.

MENNA:
Never mind.

LIRIA:
No, no —. I am what?

MENNA:
—. Different.

LIRIA:
Karo says to me this. Before. When I am not knowing Words or Mountain or You. I am thinking he is different also.

MENNA:
Yes. He was. He was. I never knew how to —.

Menna is lost to herself. She can't continue.
Liria reaches for Menna's hand.
Menna accepts, gratefully. They sit for a moment, connected.

MENNA:
Liria, listen. You don't have to tell me where you've been if you don't want to /

Liria and the Wolves bristle. She snatches her hand back.

LIRIA:
You are not needing to worry /

MENNA:

You know, I'm not from here either? Not originally. It's a long time ago now but I was born by the sea. In the house where Joah lives now.

LIRIA:

Mamamenna, I do not /

MENNA:

No, no, listen. I made my choices, I knew what I was doing when I followed Dimo here. And I knew what I was doing when I stayed. And I've done fine without a lot. I've done well. For a long time. But I'm not stupid, I don't have so many years before I won't be able to tend my garden, or the animals, or fix my roof when it needs it. Don't tell me not to worry, I have to. And I know you're not —. I don't pretend to understand you. And it wouldn't be easy, I think we can both agree on that. But I think—. I think we could both use a friend.

LIRIA:

A Friend.

MENNA:

Someone who knew him. Someone who knows me, how I get. And you wouldn't have to stay, not all the time, not if you didn't want to. Or you could, if you'd prefer—?

LIRIA:

I am not knowing.

MENNA:

(gently)

All right. Just —. Think about it? Please?

Liria takes a long moment to think before she answers.

LIRIA:

(gently)

Okay. I am thinking.

MENNA:

All right. Thank you.

Menna banks the fire, readies a bedroll, retires to sleep.
Liria and the Wolves keep watch.

ELEVEN

The night thickens.

Liria and the Wolves pick up the bundle with great care and bring it some distance away from Menna and the fire. Liria kneels to open it, and around her, the Wolves rise.

For a long moment, they circle, dancing a slow and silent mourning.

From their depths, Karo appears. He dances with them.

Liria abandons the bundle. She stumbles up and into the dance, but he is ahead of her and just out of her reach.

LIRIA:
Wait —!

She struggles against their rhythm to get to him and pull him into the center of the Wolves' revolutions. She holds him tight, but his eyes follow the Wolves. His body is unanchored, unresponsive.

LIRIA:
You are here.

KARO:
(pleasantly surprised)
Yes. You are here?

LIRIA:
Yes /

KARO:
Why?

LIRIA:
It is to me Home.

KARO:
Oh.

LIRIA:
It is to You Home.

KARO:
(unconcerned)
It is?

LIRIA:
You are bringing me here.

KARO:
(vague)
I did? I did.

He hums a snatch of (ROSE & JASMINE) like it's a curiosity, trailing off before the end of the phrase.

LIRIA:
You are where?

KARO:
Gone.

LIRIA:
Your body is where?

KARO:
I don't have one.

LIRIA:
What?

KARO:
(unconcerned)
I did. But now it is gone. —. Under an alder tree. Or a birch. —. I don't know. It was so long ago.

LIRIA:
No. Not long.

KARO:
I don't understand. I remember you, but —. I can't remember your name.

LIRIA:
Liria.

For the first time, she has his full attention. He smiles like the sun.

KARO:
Liria.

The Wolves' dance eases to a halt. Keeping their circle, they turn their backs. She reaches for him but he evades her.

KARO:
You have to bury me.

LIRIA:
No.

KARO:
Don't leave me here.

LIRIA:
You are leaving me Alone, and now you are telling me that /

KARO:
I know. I'm sorry. —. I love you.

LIRIA:
You are not remembering I am Liria.

KARO:
Some things are stronger than others.

He holds the bundle out to her. She takes it.

LIRIA:
You are leaving me.

KARO:
Yes.

LIRIA:
But am I loving you.

KARO:
Yes.

LIRIA:
I am not knowing /

The Wolves whirl back around and close in around her. Karo is outside their circle now, disappearing into the shadows.

KARO:
Goodbye, Liria.

LIRIA:
Wait —!

She is caught up by Wolves on all sides. Karo is gone.

TWELVE

The Wolves disentangle themselves away from Liria and kneel around her.
 She hugs the cloth bundle to her chest. They loosen her hold. They help her open it.
 Together with her, they lay everything we know of Karo on the ground: his uniform, his letters, etc.
 She holds her hands out to the Wolves.
 They join her, bringing forward their wildflowers and the many things they once took from her home.

She tries to hold it all, to cover it all with her body. She lets herself feel everything.
 And then — she digs.
 The Wolves flock around her. They try to dig with her, but she nudges them away.
 This is her work to do.
 Maybe she cries, or maybe she is past crying. The Wolves behind her, hands at her back.

Piece by piece, Liria and the Wolves place Karo's belongings in the grave.
 It takes as long as it needs to.
 Finished, exhausted, Liria is finally still: eyes closed, throat open.

LIRIA:
 Okay. Okay.

The first rays of sunrise. Warm and clear.

Liria goes to Menna. She wakes her.
 Together, they approach the grave. They lean on each other. It takes time.
 Around the clearing, the Wolves turn and weave and turn again, singing (EPILOGUE):

THOUGH MY DARLING I HAVE CROSSED
 OCEANS DEEP AND MOUNTAINS HIGH
 I KNOW OF NO SWEETER SIGHT
 THAN YOU MY LOVE AT HOME AGAIN

THEY HAVE NOW NO USE FOR ME
 TAKE MY LOVE AND SET ME FREE
 THEY HAVE NOW NO USE FOR ME
 TAKE MY LOVE AND SET ME FREE

TAKE YOUR FLOWERS TAKE YOUR RING
 OF THESE THINGS I HAVE NO NEED
 TAKE WHAT'S YOURS AND LEAVE ME LONELY
 TAKE MY LOVE AND SET ME FREE

LOVE ALONE IN THE FOREST GREEN

AH —

Liria and Menna bury what's left of him with their bare hands.
 When they finish, they stay close, their arms around one another.

The Wolves hold the last note until they have no more air to give.
 Sun. Faces to the light.
 The Wolves, the women, the wildflowers limned with gold.

END