

HOLLOW

written by

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TO FORGET THE DEAD WOULD BE AKIN TO  
KILLING THEM A SECOND TIME.

- ELIE WIESEL

**EXT. FIELD - DAY**

Smoke billows. Too thick to see the world.

The sound of a distant CRACKLING FIRE and SHOVELS DIGGING.

A SOLDIER pushes a heavy wheelbarrow through the smog. The smoke dissipates and swirls behind him as he sets the wheelbarrow down at the edge of a--

**MASS GRAVE**

The Soldier grabs a shovel and jumps down into the hole, joining other soldiers.

Dirt flies up from the hole as the soldiers dig.

A BURNED FOOT dangles over the wheelbarrow's edge.

FADE TO:

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

A child's feet.

They belong to JONA (13) who lies in bed.

Jona's eyes are closed. Shallow breaths. Still. Pale skin. A feeding tube worms its way up his nose.

Catheter tubing snakes from under the bedcovers and onto the floor. The collection bag is full of urine.

Near the bed, LORIK (40s) sleeps in a reclining armchair.

He could use a haircut, a shave, and a coffee. Any relationship that requires a presentable look hasn't needed him for weeks.

All is quiet, except for Lorik's shallow breathing.

Morning light streams through the sliding glass door, which leads to the backyard.

From far offscreen, a distant THUD.

Lorik's eye twitches.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Lorik's green eyes shoot open.

Another KNOCK comes from the front door.

**I/E. ENTRANCE HALL/FRONT PORCH, LORIK'S HOUSE - DAY**

Lorik opens the door.

Nobody there.

Lorik looks down the street. A row of suburban homes.

As he shields his eyes from the sun, we notice a faded SCAR on the inside of his right hand; his palm and fingers were severely cut.

Lorik looks down.

At his feet, an overstuffed SUITCASE, tagged for travel and bound shut with saran wrap, sits on the doorstep.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

Lorik drops the suitcase on the desk. The name on one of the dangling tags reads "MARSELA MURATI."

BEEP.

Lorik checks the alert on his phone:

"JONA BREAKFAST"

Beneath that, a calendar reminder:

"REFUGEE OFFICER 12:00 PM"

Lorik lowers his phone to look at Jona, then the piss-filled catheter bag.

**INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

-- Lorik empties the catheter bag into the toilet.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

-- Lorik screws the bag back into Jona's catheter.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

-- At the kitchen counter, Lorik preps a disgusting-looking smoothie. The blender blades WHIR.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

-- Lorik hangs the smoothie-filled feed bag on its stand near Jona's bed. The liquid flows from the bag, down the feeding tube, and up Jona's nose.

-- While Jona "eats," Lorik pulls back the blanket and looks at Jona's bare legs. He tenderly begins massaging Jona's left leg, working and stretching the muscles.

-- Lorik unclips the feeding tube, then slides his arms under Jona's armpits and hoists him up into a sitting position.

-- Now propped up in the reclining chair, Jona's head lolls to the side. Lorik lifts his eyelid to reveal vacant green eyes. Lorik waves his hand in front of Jona's face. No reaction. Disappointed, Lorik releases the lid, which falls back into place.

Lorik opens a nightstand drawer. Inside, a pile of hand towels, fresh collection bags, and a reflex hammer.

Lorik grabs the hammer.

LORIK

Ready?

He gently hammers Jona's knee.

It doesn't return a kick. Lorik tries again. Nothing.

Lorik exhales. Better luck next time.

Lorik checks his phone. The notification for the "REFUGEE OFFICER" appointment hovers beneath the time: 9:30 AM.

Lorik looks through the sliding glass door to the backyard.

LORIK (CONT'D)

It's nice out. How about some sun?

Eyes closed and head lolling, Jona says nothing.

**EXT. BACKYARD - DAY**

Lorik holds Jona up by his armpits. Jona's head droops like a day-old balloon as they do a lap around the grassy lawn.

Lorik takes a step, Jona takes a step. It's like taking a scarecrow for a walk.

**LATER**

Jona slumps on a lawn chair.

Lorik pushes a ROARING LAWNMOWER around the yard. He stops. Crouches in the grass. Pulls a weed up by the roots.

**LATER**

Lorik walks up to Jona on the patio furniture. He looks between the child and the freshly trimmed lawn.

LORIK  
What do you think?

Jona says nothing.

Lorik checks his phone. It's almost 11 AM. The "REFUGEE OFFICER" notification still hovers.

LORIK (CONT'D)  
We've got one hour.

Lorik lowers the phone. Looks at Jona.

LORIK (CONT'D)  
You've got nothing to worry about.  
You're a Belba.  
(beat)  
No matter what she says, you're staying here with me.  
(beat)  
Let's get ready.

**INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

-- Lorik showers. Through glass, we see the vague shape of his body and hear the HISS of water.

-- At the bathroom sink, Lorik shaves. Rinses.

**INT. DINING ROOM - DAY**

-- Lorik wipes dust from the counters and tables.

-- Lorik carefully arranges framed and loose photographs on a shelf near a window.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

-- The bedroom has been tidied up. Jona lies in bed. Lorik sits in the recliner, looking fresh. He taps his foot. Checks the clock. 12:15 PM.

-- Lorik paces, phone to his head. He's on hold.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY**

-- Still on hold, Lorik peers out the living room window, checking the street. Nobody there.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

Lorik sits back in the armchair heavily. Looks at Jona.

LORIK  
They don't know where she is.

Jona doesn't seem to mind.

Lorik drums his fingers. His gaze falls upon the suitcase resting on the desk.

**LATER**

A ball of saran wrap lands on the floor.

Lorik digs through the suitcase. He separates the contents into two categories: practical necessities and personal keepsakes.

Wedge between neatly folded clothes is a children's book--an Albanian title.

Lorik smiles, strokes the cover fondly. He opens the book to the title page, anticipating...

"Lorik" is written in faded crayon. Beside it, in childish-but-neat handwriting: "Marsela"

LORIK  
Did she read this to you?

He flips the page. Children's handwriting marks up the margins.

Lorik sets the book on the desk. He unpacks the clothing from the suitcase to the dresser drawers.

Once the suitcase is empty, he notices a zippered pocket inside.

He tries to open it, but the zipper is stuck. He yanks it hard, finally prying it open.

Within the pocket he finds a double-sided KNIFE. The blade curved like a scythe. Black floral carvings decorate the handle. The insides of the grooves are stained.

The knife is familiar. Unpleasantly so.

Lorik holds the knife up to the light with his left hand, then raises his right hand beside it, exposing his SCAR.

LORIK (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Why would she keep this?

Jona says nothing.

Lorik gazes at the knife for a long traumatic beat.

Eventually, he wipes his eye. Pulls himself together. Drops the knife into the dresser, buries it under clothes, and slams the drawer shut.

Lorik stands there, his breathing growing ragged. His heartbeat pounds in his ears. He clenches his fists.

Lorik falls into his armchair. Closes his eyes. Forces himself to take calming breaths.

But--he hears something: a haunting, disembodied voice.

Vague warbling SINGING in Albanian:

SINGING VOICE (O.S.)

*Hazmi zu vatane...*

*Lulet u thane...*

Lorik's eyes fly open.

The singing voice abruptly stops.

Lorik looks at Jona.

Lorik gets to his feet. Looks out the window.

SINGING VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*Flaka mbuloi fshane...*

Lorik whirls around.



Looks at Jona, who is as still as ever.

After watching Jona for a beat, Lorik backs out of the bedroom into the--

**HALLWAY**

--and looks this way and that. Nothing there--

SINGING VOICE (O.S.)

*Foshnjat u qane...*  
*O ju djemte tane...*

It's coming from around the hallway corner.

LORIK

Who's there?

SINGING VOICE (O.S.)

*Nxirrni jatagane...*  
*Flaka mbuloi fshane...*

Lorik creeps down the hall--

Turns a corner--

And steps in a PUDDLE OF WATER in the middle of the floor.

Strange. But the voice SINGS again, gripping his attention.

The voice comes from behind a CLOSET DOOR.

As the singing drones on, Lorik takes tentative steps toward the closet, leaving wet footprints behind.

As he puts his hand on the closet door--

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Somebody's at the front door.

The singing abruptly stops.

Lorik looks down the hall--his wet footprints and the puddle they came from are now gone.

Lorik yanks open the closet. Hanging coats.

The world seems to have righted itself.

Lorik takes a breath and closes the closet.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Lorik opens the door to the--

FRONT PORCH, revealing GRACE, 30s, professional, carrying folders. Her smile hurried but earnest.

GRACE

Hi. Mr. Lorik Belba?

LORIK

(corrects pronunciation)  
Lorik Belba. Yes.

GRACE

Lorik Belba, sorry. Grace Mueller,  
Office of Refugee Resettlement.  
Sorry I'm late.

LORIK

Not a problem. I'm not going  
anywhere.

Lorik smiles, shakes her hand, and steps aside. Grace slips past him into the entrance hall and looks around the clean house appraisingly.

**INT. JONA'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Lorik approaches Jona's bed. Grace lingers by the door, taking in the sight of the unconscious child.

LORIK

You've got a visitor, Jona.

Lorik waves Grace in.

LORIK (CONT'D)

This is Grace. She's going to help  
make sure you stay here with me.

Grace responds with a half-smile.

LORIK (CONT'D)

You can talk to him.

GRACE

Hi Jona. Has your uncle been taking  
good care of you?

Jona says nothing.

As Grace steps closer, she bumps into the suitcase lying open on the table. Lorik scrambles to clear the way.

LORIK  
Sorry, my sister's things. The  
airline still had them.

GRACE  
(pause, then)  
I'm sorry for your loss.

Lorik nods, waves his hand. *Thanks, but what's there to say?*

Grace glances at her watch and then raises the folder she's been carrying.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
So, I have the results of his last  
doctor's visit and the MRI--

LORIK  
(surprise)  
You do? They haven't sent me  
anything yet.

Sitting on the edge of the desk, Grace pulls papers from the folder and hands them to Lorik.

GRACE  
Until his immigration status  
settles, he's still in state  
custody. Health records will go to  
my office.

Lorik doesn't think much of this arrangement but takes the papers.

LORIK  
Good news?

GRACE  
Mostly good.

LORIK  
Why don't we move to the dining  
room?

He glances meaningfully between Grace and Jona. Grace nods and stands.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Lorik and Grace sit across from each other at the dining room table.

LORIK

If there's any bad news, I don't want him to hear it. I'd like to keep things positive.

GRACE

Not a bad idea. He can probably hear us. There isn't anything physically wrong with him.

Grace slides one of the doctor's notes across the table.

GRACE (CONT'D)

His coma is essentially a stress response. Between the sudden immigration and his mother's death... It's rare, but there's a term for it: "resignation syndrome."

As Lorik examines the paper:

GRACE (CONT'D)

The good news is that he's likely to wake up.

LORIK

How does that affect his custody?

GRACE

That depends. You're still set on becoming his guardian?

LORIK

Of course. I'm the only option.

GRACE

His father might fight for custody.

LORIK

(snorts)

We don't need to worry about that. His father can't even hold down a job. He won't fight for him.

GRACE

You'd be surprised. I've seen abusive fathers go to great lengths to keep their kids.

LORIK

It doesn't matter what his father wants. My sister died to get Jona away from that man.

GRACE

But is that what Jona would want? To live here, in the United States, with you?

A vulnerable pause:

LORIK

I don't know.

(beat)

You'll have to ask him when he wakes up. But I can tell you this: it's what my sister would have wanted. He can't go back to Kosovo.

GRACE

The two of you must've been close.

Lorik stands. Grabs the stack of old family photographs from the shelf and flips through them, showing them to Grace.

LORIK

I come from a big family. But after the war... It was just me and Marsela.

Lorik hands her a newer photograph:

**PHOTO - HILLSIDE, KOSOVO**

Adult Lorik, ADULT MARSELA (30s), and younger Jona out on a hike, posing for the camera.

Lorik puts his thumb down over Marsela's face. Only Lorik and Jona remain in the picture.

LORIK

Jona and I are all that's left. As long as I've got hands and feet, he's mine to take care of.

Grace takes in Lorik's serious expression. She nods.

GRACE

Based on the situation with his father, I'm inclined to agree that you'd make the better guardian.

Lorik smiles. An ally?

GRACE (CONT'D)

But--his health complicates everything. Are you prepared to fight for guardianship even if his condition doesn't improve?

LORIK

He just needs to recover from the shock. Then he'll wake up.

GRACE

But if he doesn't?

The possibility hangs heavy in the air.

GRACE (CONT'D)

If this goes on, he'll need a feeding tube installed. Round-the-clock care. Are you prepared for that?

LORIK

(pause, then)

I'll do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes.

GRACE

Okay. That's good.

(hesitates)

The only other thing that might affect your odds... Your health. Your history of mental illness.

LORIK

(beat)

That was a long time ago.

GRACE

Maybe so. But losing your sister, taking on a new responsibility... You're going through a lot. How're you handling it?

Lorik hesitates.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Off the record.

LORIK

It's a challenge.

(beat)

But I'm up for it.