The Conifers

A Chamber Opera
by Joel Rust (music)
& David Troupes (text)

Instrumentation

Flute/Alto Flute

Clarinet in B flat/Bass Clarinet in B flat

Trumpet in B flat

Trombone

Percussion (Vibraphone, tam-tam, drum set [crash, ride, hi-hat, 3 toms, snare, pedal bass drum])

Electric Guitar/Harmonic Series Guitar*

Alis (soprano)

Anna (soprano)

Thea (alto)

Sean (bass-baritone)

Electronics*

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Performance Notes

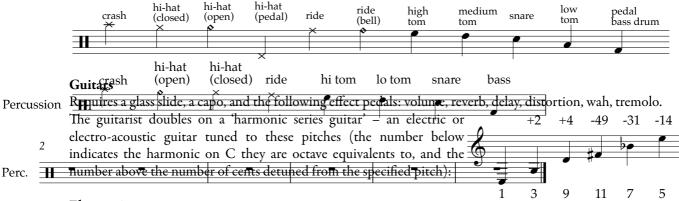
General

Sing + Play - the sung notes may be moved up or down an octave, as required.

Percussion

Cymbals and tam-tam should be allowed to ring, unless specified.

Drum set key:



Electronics

The electronic part is realized by a bank of resonant filters, which create the specified pitches from various field recordings. In the second half, it mainly sounds notes from the harmonic series above certain fundamental pitches, which are provided. It is also joined by pitches produced by stochastic synthesis.

Strings

Palm mute: as in the guitar technique, damp the strings by placing the side of the right hand just above the bridge, while the fingers of the right hand pizzicato.

ST - Sul tasto

SP – Sul ponticello

MSP – Molto sul ponticello OP – Overpressure

Roll chords - e.g.



The Conifers











































































































































































Full Score 86 260 (rattled) mpStill on. But_ use if there's no Sean The bea- con? pp.





























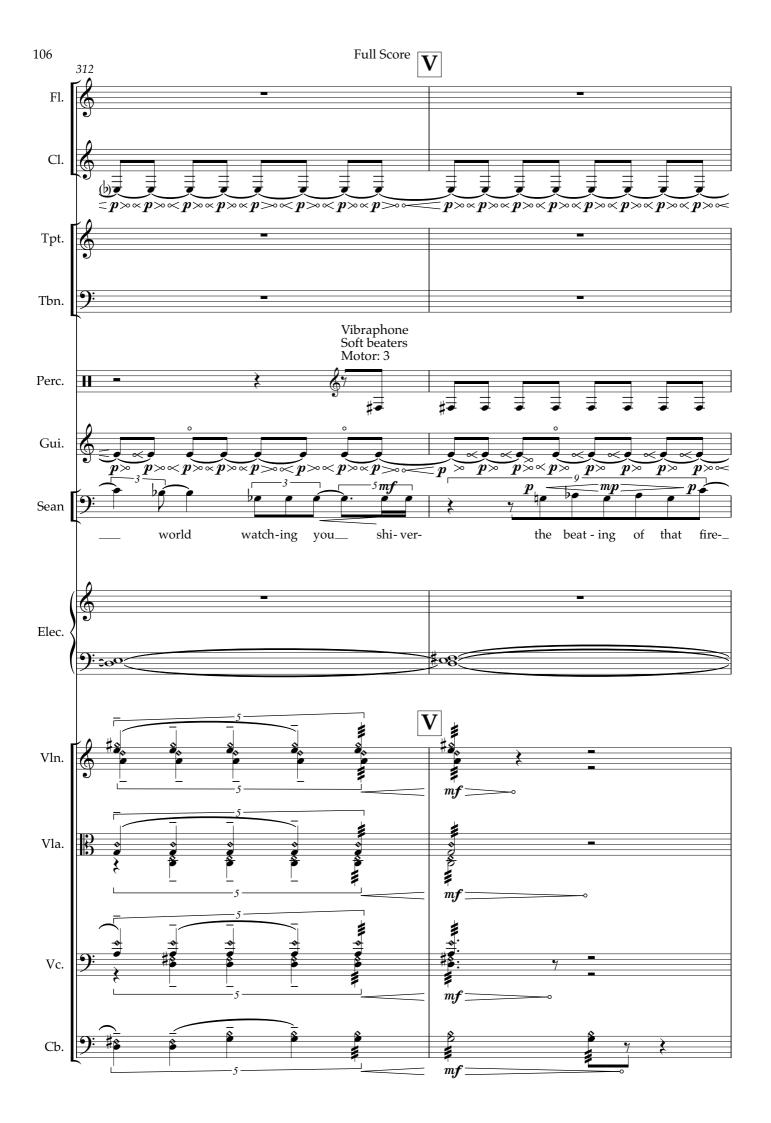




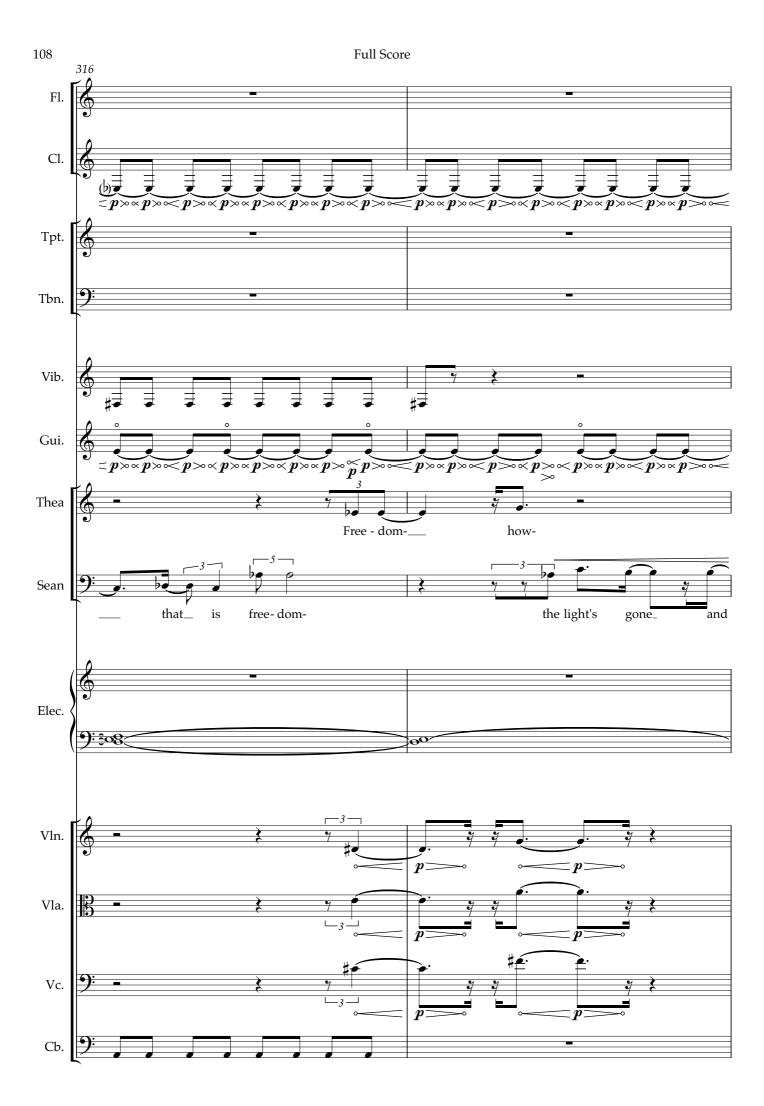










































(long pause, slight assertion of the PLANETVOICE)

ANNA

I'll tell the story of this place to my son. And you only tell a story when it's done.

THEA

Is this world done? Not yet, not quite. I remember once an errand, some trip for work you sent me on—to find some stray machine.

ANNA

You were gone a long time.

THEA

I began to walk, just found a stream and followed it. It joined another. I walked a full day, a second, a third, sleeping out, warm in this strange summer we keep, watching stream join stream, water with water, a river gathering among the million moving things of which perhaps I was one. With a husband sun I tramped the shore as the river pulled stream after stream to itself, a slow road of the rain we allow, and I alone in that birdless land, the yellow sky, the grid breaking at the shore: The sun-soaked road where all of our rules flowed and broke, broke and flowed—slower and slower as the water gathered. The river continues the rain. Sleeping warm in the moss and straw, waking through sun as the river shone I found a lake, miles of light where the hills knelt down and the water rolled and stayed. I couldn't believe how large. I stopped— I could only look. So much water, so much sun and then I saw a bird—

ALIS

Some off world pet,

escaped.

THEA

—Yes, exactly. To meet a bird in a birdless land—there it was—a black rag in the reeds, at home by the lake which still believes it is a river, the river which thinks it must still be rain.



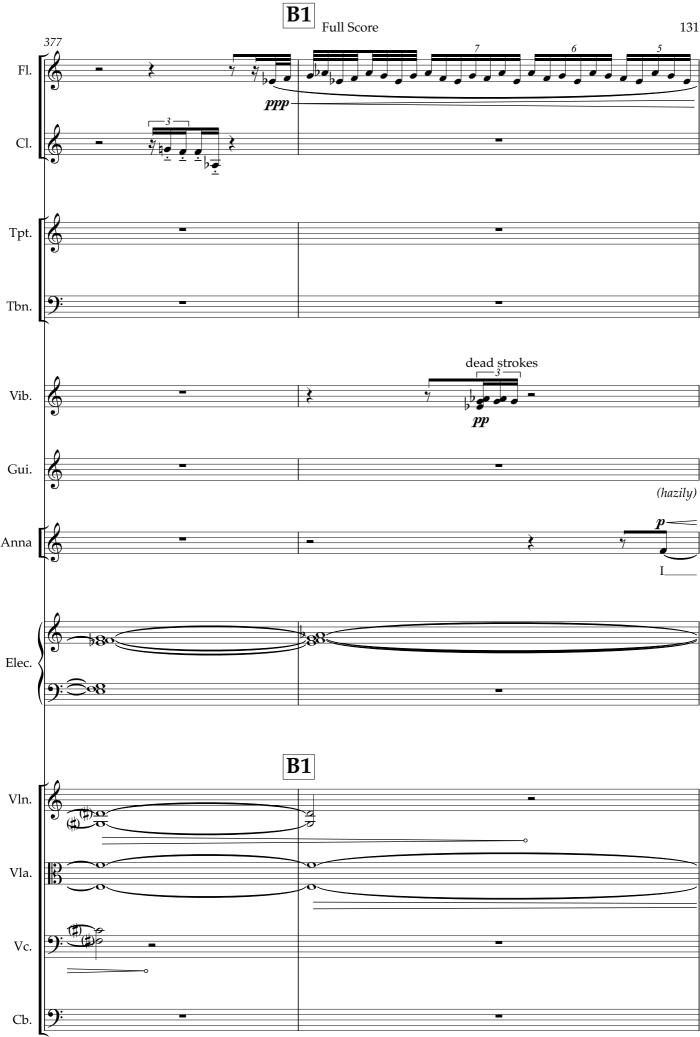


















Full Score 135 385 ten think, day. a free work_ Vla. jeté jeté pp mp





138 Full Score 391 Cl. Anna The. was with. Elec.













Full Score 145 415 Tbn. ppp Gui. A sud - den__ ri sing-Off ca-len-dar, off list__ no. the rain came-Sean That too-_ Elec. Vla. Vc. pizz.































Full Score 161 col-umns and sums. know__ the frac-tion of my-self ex - act



ALIS (cont.)

There is so little of myself I would save and it is not

what you think

the part most resistant to numbers

You would think this but no

The pinnacle sums—the highest—the sharpest—that

is where I am

The finest, the final brick

a ziggurat of quantity

We have been sending up the trees—the land become trees

The land

arriving has risen and the stars and the air

have fallen downward

arriving

We need only the courage to submit

to the balance—the foliate calculations and this

lifelessness around us this new

loss will be

elsewhere an abundance

Did you think you or anyone or anything would last

Did you think you were the solution

The fatal translation—the holy salvage—the unaccounted term

No

Your hairs were numbered when the universe

burst born open

You are a term in the tumult of origins—Listen to me

Pull yourself from the rain—the sky

This falling is a rising

This fear a homecoming love

and we are each of us birthing new mothers

Behold the old stupidities—

O piece us apart, O swallow us whole

only take us

take us-

the throat and gullet the infinite teeth

only take us take us and

keep us

and there's the worst of it, the innermost organ,

most stupid of all. O keep us—keep us—keep

what

Not a single line connects you to the moss—the future

of this world is nothing of your past

The hills

lack even the sight to disregard you—the wind

has no preference—the water

needs nothing—so what

of this sky view these cigarettes and my own fear Nowhere

is the moss my equal—I

will keep myself until the rotless vacuum

the immaculate

takes me

The sun sets but this is a lie—

It rises but again

a lie—a chain dragged—I'm tired

of all the comings and goings the sounds I'm tired

I'm tired

of the sky the blue fishbowl infinity

Only these walls are honest—and we

built them—so here is your stopping—here

is your end—be comforted, compose your world—only

don't ask me to love the sun with its endlessness its return

its lies its lies

I can almost see

a sun which only sets, which lies down—an old woman lying down—and all the singing stops—























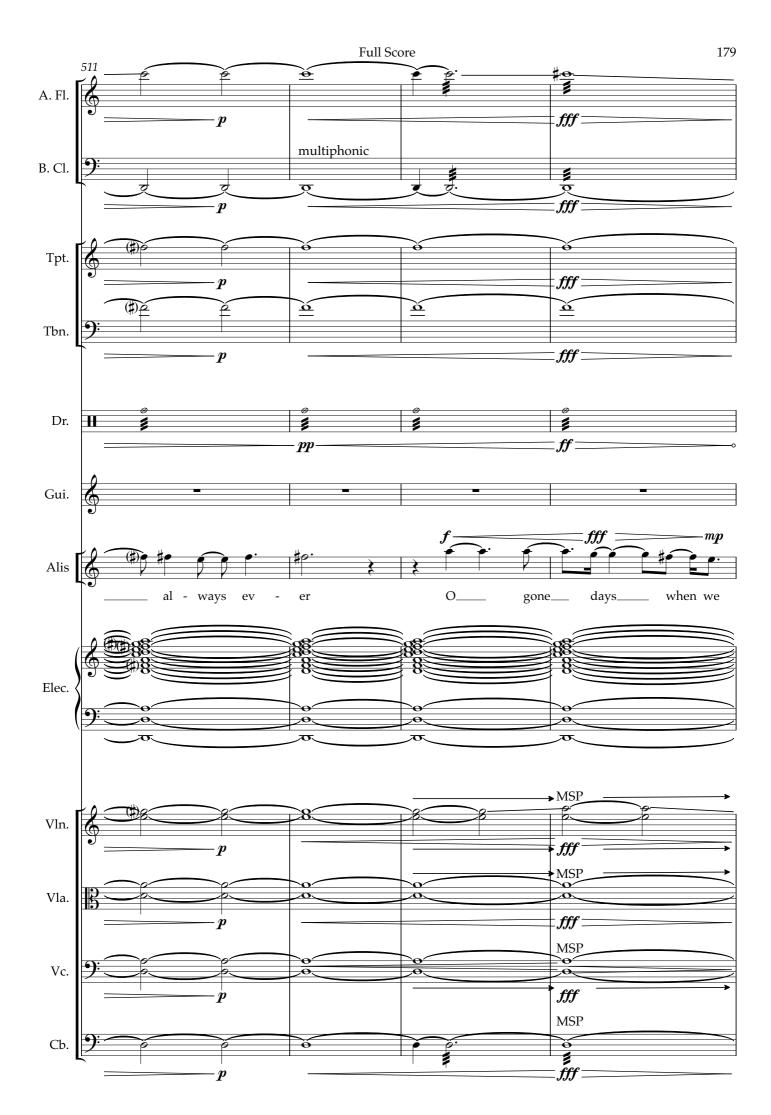


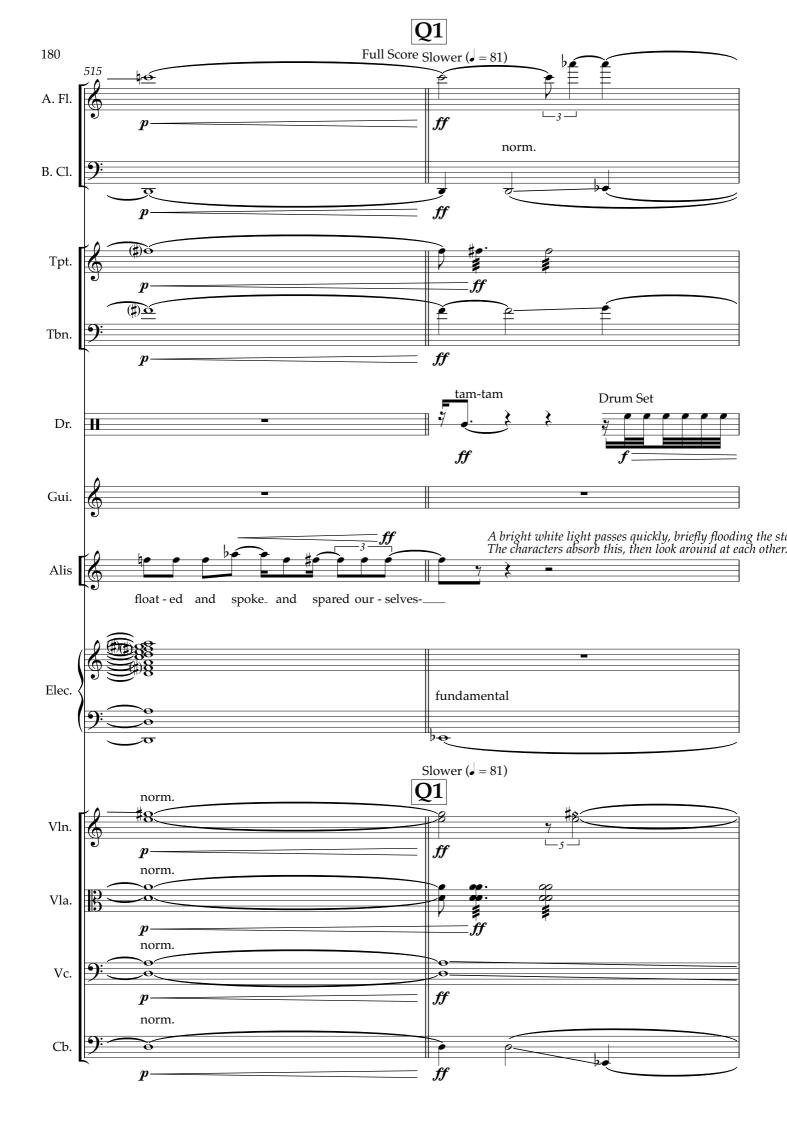
















































THEA

Are we

now a part of the world they left behind?

SEAN

(suddenly alarmed, looking out window)

The lights are going out—look at the streets, the towns—everything blinking.

ALIS

But how? How could they fail so soon?

SEAN

Who's left to fear the dark?

ALIS

But to fail so soon!

One hundred years from now those lights should still be here, on at night, off at dawn, a toy of stars.

It should have lasted.

ANNA

And much else.

ALIS

Not much. But this—this simple toy.

SEAN

(still looking out window)

The wind—knives at a corpse—

THEA

What's that light?

ANNA

What, Thea?

THEA

Along the hills, in the dark—

I can see it now for the dark—this new dark—

ALIS

What does she mean?

THEA

I've seen it before—have you—

a flicker, like a breeze through curtains—but air,

only air.

A blue fire.

ALIS

What does the girl mean?

ANNA

Thea, there's nothing—only night.

SEAN

I've not seen but I've heard—

THEA

Yes—

SEAN

—a sound

of wind, a snapping in my mind

like fire,

a sound of sleeping with your ear to your vein.

ALIS

You're mad.

SEAN

On a still day—a wind—like burning—

The lights—can a ship land like this?

ALIS

Can you fix it?

ANNA

(taking quick stock of herself)

Yes.

(exits)

(not registering ALIS and ANNA's exchange)

We've been watching for years—watching this happen.

ALIS

(derisively)

No more—

I've been watching everything.

ALIS

No more—

THEA

A lumping dragging crawling weeping

Barely there—a face

that finds us and blinks

Finds us again among the lights and blinks

We're leaving now and I'm glad

But the lives

the life

around us now, these are the hard deaths—

looking and finding us

in the star-walled dark—finding

us-

But we have not made this

We are no parent.

ALIS

Someone made it.

The motherless look for a mother blink at the stars and find it.

And the childless look for a child claws at the soil, finds it.

THEA

Perhaps—but listen

you dead thing-













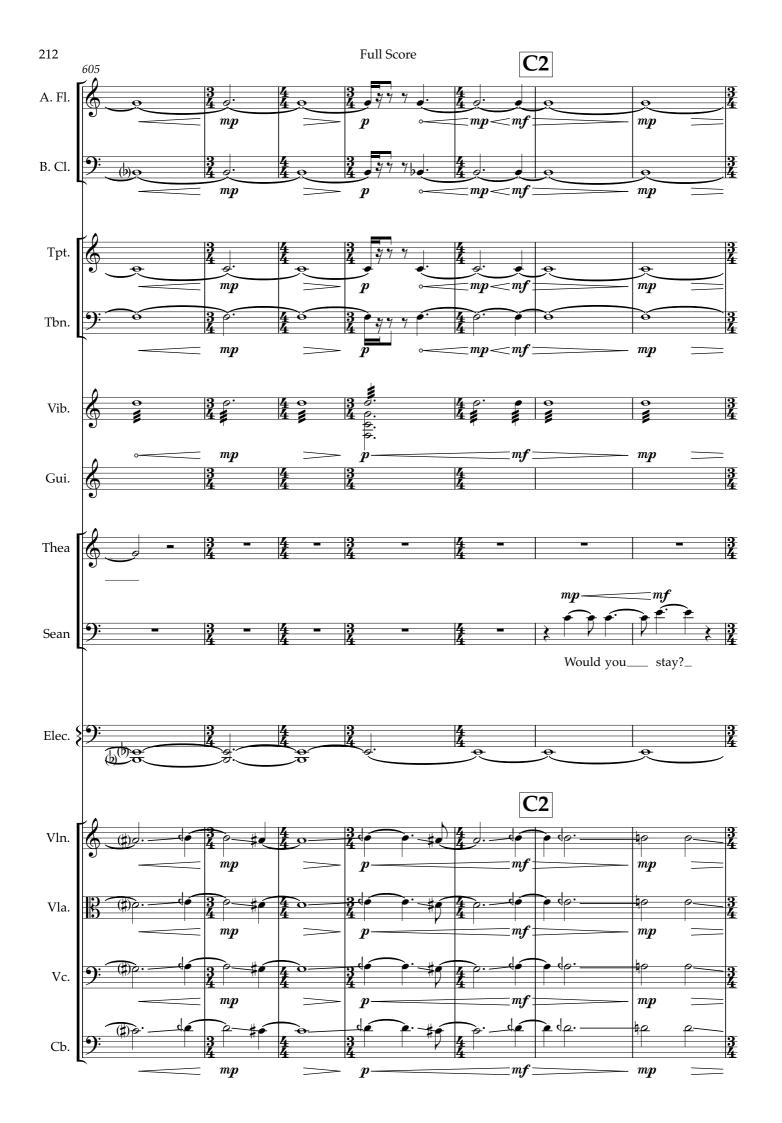




























Full Score 221 645 gliss. B. Cl. Tbn. Dr. Gui. mf Alis lights on?_ Anna do do you mean 'How ma-ny worlds'? you know? Sean Tell_ us. Elec. § Vla. mfVc. mf Cb.





















THEA

Failure may fill us but not this place. This planet dos not burn because it fails. And the wind that races round and joins and joins together—that burning, that voice—sees nothing of our failure, nothing of us at all.

(PLANETVOICE getting louder throughout)

SEAN

But what promises, then? What promises can they offer? Bad enough to learn your life is over, worse to know the next is over too.

ALIS

Did you expect to live forever?

SEAN

I expected to live, to hide myself among the trees, a crop of soul, sprung from a fugitive cone, but part—a part even of your tallies, your sums, smuggled in when everything is cut and counted. And to die the death of such a life, a death which owns the life it wasnot some off-world fever in a room where there's no telling floor from ceiling nothing but walls to keep you in. Learning to live here, I had hoped to die here. But you're right, there's no betrayal. A made world, they said, and we took it. So soon—that is the only regret. That our making should fail so soon.

THEA

But something takes its place, this fire, this blue fire we might yet be midwives to a god, and all our failures spent.

ANNA

Or are we just the afterbirth—buried for luck?

THEA

(referring to crashing, flashing)
Listen—tantrums of an infant.
Everything here is loud and new.
And a ship comes to take us to the silent, the old.

SEAN

Does it come?

ANNA

Far too soon to give up hope. I mean to join my son.

ALIS

But what if nothing comes?

This ship

may be a lie told months ago,

and this world

a lie—and our lives, my life

part of the lie this world has been telling. So here

is the betrayal:

tethered by such poor lies

we never needed strength—

spared the strong poison

we never grew immune.

Now

I crave the largest lies, and the worst: death,

daylight,

and myself.

And all the while this world comes down, boiled

in a final chaos.

(ALIS removes herself slightly, goes to sit by herself.)

THEA

Can we do anything but wait?

ANNA

Nothing to fix, nothing to help. They'll find us if they want to.

SEAN

If we had to stay—

ANNA

No.

There may be food here, in the town,

until it spoils.

But I'm not hungry. My life here is over.

(ANNA looks away, creating a shared conversation between just SEAN and THEA.)

SEAN

What if they don't come?

THEA

(pause)

Twice orphaned—

and sure to die.

(The PLANETVOICE by this point is overpoweringly loud.

A speechless spell of time in which ALIS appears to resolve her confusion and walks off stage right with one of her several bags. The other characters notice her absence and gesture with confusion and some fear toward where she was, but the PLANETVOICE overwhelms anything they might say—and, too, quickly the same sort of WHITE LIGHT floods from stage left. The storm worsens. THEA, ANNA and SEAN gather their things amid the infrequent flashes of electric lamplight and more distant bluish storm-light, allowing finally only a few disjointed glimpses of their last actions of gathering themselves and exiting into the WHITE LIGHT.

The PLANETVOICE continues to organize and assert itself now onto a chaotic and humanless stage. After a minute or so of music, ALIS enters stage left, new lights creeping ahead of her, indicating that this is no longer the hangar.)





































