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Johannes Brahms Reads the Brothers Grimm

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Johannes Brahms Reads The Brothers Grimm

*The composer, on his last day, puts aside his reading
and writes a final appeal to the violinist Joachim,
asking him to destroy the manuscript of Sonatensatz in his possession.*

Vienna, April 1897

My dear Joachim,

I am lying here, caught up in a wolf's body
as surely as any peasant girl on the way to
losing her virtue. Through the window light
reverses direction and the days grow longer.
Behold this man, delirious, hearing music

everywhere, and knowing nothing. You would see
a wolf if you visited me, staring from my bed,
wearing my flesh as good as any disguise I try
to put on. I am not imagining this good German
wolf. I see his face in the night's window glass,

hear him roaming the dark spaces of this country.
He followed the train last May, running hidden
in the trees and the sun's glare the day I came
late for Clara's funeral. Since then, his black
hunger eats inside me. I fear death is not some

far and distant land, but a constant companion.
If you are my friend, you will do for me what
I can no longer do for myself: take the last
meat from the bone, lest it should rot. Burn
that manuscript, so that it might be written:

“He sought the emotional moment of the darkness.
Ecce, lupus. Ecce, homo. He gnawed light like bone.”