

“Bestia”

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Fiction

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It began to rain late in the afternoon, just as Lucius was leading the flock home. The drops were bulbous and frigid, another sign that autumn was progressing. He gazed down the gradual, verdant slope toward the sea, where it appeared to be pouring down, where the waves grew tall and frothy white as they approached the rocky shore.

The storm surged inland and the wind picked up, causing his wool paenula to lift and flap around his form. He yanked his pileus down over his ears and leaned into the gusts. The rain came harder and the goats began to bleat plaintively.

By the time they reached home, Lucius was soaked through. His son Felix – four years old, undersized but plump and always gleeful – came running out into the storm to greet them. He stomped in a puddle then ran behind the goats, shouting as his father swung his crook, directing them into the stone pen with the donkey.

“You will get sick if you stay out here for long,” Lucius warned his son.

“No, Dada!” Felix splashed through another puddle and laughed.

Lucius shook his head and half-smiled.

The cottage was warm and damp and smelled of mutton. Dora was squatting and stirring a heavy iron pot which hung from a tripod over the hearth fire. She looked to Lucius as he entered and removed his soggy paenula and hung it from a peg near the door.

“Hello, love,” he said.

“Hello,” she replied. Then, seeing Felix’s condition: “Will you please dry the boy before he gets sick?”

“Yes, yes.”

When the meal was ready, Lucius lit the oil lamp and set it in the center of the table. Dora served steaming clay bowls of stew and a half-loaf of hard sourdough. When she sat, they held hands and intoned a brief prayer.

Lucius soaked up the gravy with his bread and hummed his approval – a simple yet satiating dish. “The winter will be a cold one,” he said.

“I should think so,” Dora responded, wiping Felix’s chin with a cloth mappa. “Is it time for the market?”

“Not yet. I want to wait until the fair.”

“What is the market?” asked Felix.

“It is where we sell the goats and the cheese,” Lucius answered.

“I like the goats.”

“Do you have a favorite?”

“Yes. The one with the black spot on his head.”

Lucius pictured the goats. At least a few of the two dozen had black spots on their heads.

“His name is Nuknuk.”

“You shouldn’t name the goats, baby,” said Dora.

“Why not?”

“Because they have to go away after a while.”

“But why?”

Dora and Lucius shared a look. “Because this is what we do in order to live,” Lucius said. “We raise the goats, and we make the cheese, and we sell them when the time is right.”

“But not Nuknuk.”

Lucius leaned back and sighed. “You show me Nuknuk and I will decide if we keep him until next year.”

Felix slipped a spoonful of stew into his mouth and smiled.

After supper they sat upon the big bear rug. Felix played with a toy horse while Lucius strummed his lute. Dora sang along – ancient, melancholy ditties that had been passed down through her maternal ancestry. Her voice was thick but agile and enchanting, not unlike some of the popular singers at the festivals. She was an exceptional woman in Lucius’ eyes – a skilled homemaker and gardener, a patient and generous mother, a devoted and compassionate wife. He did not deserve such good fortune, but now that he had it, he would never let it go.

When they slept that night the storm continued to rage, whipping against the shell of the cottage and rattling its wooden roof. Rainwater seeped down the inside of the stone walls and soaked parts of the floor. The goats were rankled and restless. Dora tucked herself tightly against Lucius’ body, her hair smelling of firewood and spice. Felix slumbered quietly on his straw-stuffed mattress on the other side of the room.

Lucius could not sleep for a time, so he listened to the sounds of nature and thought about what the winter would bring. They were reasonably well-stocked with grain and cured meats,

and they would acquire the rest at the market. The goats looked well: sturdy, unafflicted. It had been a hearty season, thank the gods.

But his dreams were fraught. In them, he was on the deck of a trireme as it sailed through a charcoal bay toward an ancient, fortified city. Lucius was surrounded by grizzled soldiers preparing for an attack, wearing plumed bronze galeae and iron lorica hamata over leather tunics. And the oarsman, bare-chested and bronze-skinned and brawny, pulled at their oars in time with the shouts of the pilot, propelling the craft at a clip toward the shore. And he began to panic because he was neither soldier nor seaman and he did not know why they were advancing on this city nor what his role would be. He grabbed one of the soldiers and begged of him clarification, but the soldier spoke a foreign tongue and shoved him aside. Lucius tried several more men, but they offered the same brusque response. He ran to the gunnel and looked down into the sea and saw that the water was roiling and inhospitable and, on every side, more triremes transporting warriors. Then flaming arrows began to rain down upon the boat, embedding in the planking and striking through his armored brethren. Lucius was not equipped with protective garments nor outfitted with shield or sword. He was, quite shamefully, naked and filled with dread. And in a matter of moments, the boat would reach its berth and the assault on this unknown city would begin and he would meet his fate.

There, the nightmare ended.

Lucius and Dora arose with the rooster's crow. He started a fire in the hearth while she went to the outhouse. When it began to flame and crackle, he stepped outside to check on the flock. The sky was a spectrum of rich hues, from black-purple in the west to lavender and rose in the east, accented by an infinite net of stars mutely twinkling. The goats were uncharacteristically silent, likely exhausted by the overnight storm. Lucius walked over to the

pen and peered inside. Half of them were laying quietly, chewing cud, while the rest were standing and clustered near the far wall. The donkey stood motionless with its heavy eyelids shut.

Lucius sensed that something was off. He furrowed his brow and looked more closely. Then he pulled open the gate and stepped inside. The goats bleated softly and moved out of his way. He gently touched their cashmere backs as he walked across the enclosure. Some of the seated animals stood up slowly and looked at him with expressionless eyes. Lucius crossed his arms and began counting.

Dora was scrambling eggs over the fire when he reentered the cottage and took a seat at the table.

“Is it quite wet out there?” she asked.

“Yes, love. Quite wet,” he answered distractedly.

She looked over her shoulder at him. “Something wrong?”

He sighed. “We are missing two goats.”

“Missing? How?”

“I don’t know. There are only twenty-two in the pen.”

“Was the gate latched?”

“Of course.”

“Did it come undone in the storm?”

“No, no.”

She returned to her cooking, lifted the pan off of the fire and carried it to the table. She scraped some eggs onto his plate then retrieved a warm oat cake and placed it next to the eggs.

“So how did they get out?”

“It is not possible that they escaped.”

“Jackals?”

“A jackal cannot carry a goat out of the pen.”

She sat across from him and they began to eat quietly.

“Surely, you will find them,” she said.

“We shall see.”

Lucius led the flock out to the pasture as the sun began to rise above distant peaks. The grass was slick and lush, the mud cold and soupy. While the goats nibbled at the earth, he climbed to the crest of a nearby hill and scanned the area. There was, as expected, no sign of the two missing animals. Goats, he knew, do not simply wander off from the herd, especially in the middle of the night. Someone or something abducted them. Wolves? They were rare in this area and had never entered the pen in his lifetime of herding. Bandits? Perhaps, but highly unusual, especially this far from the city.

The incident put Lucius in a foul mood. He had been enthusiastic about his prospects at the market. This was to be a bumper year. The last few winters had been a struggle for the family, lean times. He was looking forward to a full pantry. The disappearance of two goats was not disastrous, and would not cause notable hardship, but it was ominous. At the least it indicated something was out there that should not be out there. Something evil, he feared.

Lucius gazed inland at the rolling hills and the thick forest and listened intently. Only the steady breeze. Only the far-away wash of the surf.

That night, he took a nap immediately after supper. Dora woke him after two turns of the hourglass. Then she got in bed and Lucius sat on Felix’s mattress and told the boy a story about a

fox and a goose who traveled across the countryside together. When he finished with the story, both Dora and the boy had fallen asleep.

Lucius stayed awake throughout the night, periodically stepping outside to check on the goats in their pen. Once, shortly before dawn, they seemed to be unsettled briefly. He retrieved his thrusting spear and, his heart beating in his ears, stepped out into the night. Holding it at the ready, he approached the pen, then walked around its circumference. He looked out into the fields but detected nothing unusual. He stood guard for a time before finally returning to the cottage.

When the rooster crowed, Lucius took a seat on the bed next to his wife and gently stroked her head until she roused.

“How was the night, love?” she asked, her voice scratchy and tired.

“Quiet.”

“Hmm. Are you tired?”

“No, I am very awake. Would you like some honey-water?” He kissed her bare shoulder.

“Yes, that would be nice.”

Lucius guarded the flock for the following two nights, but they passed without incident, so he returned to his normal sleep schedule.

A week later, in the early morning, Dora shrieked upon stepping outside. Lucius leapt out of bed and ran to her.

“Over here,” Dora said, pointing to the dirt outside of the pen.

Lucius walked over and squatted to examine the area. There was a line of blood and entrails that extended eastward from the wall of the pen. He followed the trail until it disappeared

into the grass, then squinted his eyes and looked toward the hills, shrouded in the predawn mist, toward the shadowy green and amber tree line.

In the pen, the goats were antsy, eager to be loosed into the pasture. Lucius counted them: nineteen. Three missing. This was no longer a small problem.

He allowed the flock to graze for only a short time that day, returning them to the pen well before sunset. He hitched the donkey to the wagon, placed his axe in the back, then set out toward the woods.

“Shall I postpone our supper, Lucius?” Dora yelled after him.

“Eat without me, love. Save some bread perhaps.”

“Don’t be gone long.”

Lucius spent several hours chopping and collecting hardwood branches of varying sizes. When he finally filled the wagon, it was the dark of night and he was bone tired.

As he led the donkey back through the trees toward the cottage, he heard a disturbing sound not far away. A grumbling roar of some kind. It came from his left and, for a moment, he froze, placed his hand on his dagger, and listened carefully. The moon provided some illumination but he could see no more than twenty or thirty paces through the density of the foliage. Nothing moved. The roar came again, louder and more aggressive, from directly behind him. Lucius whipped around, unsheathing his dagger, but spied nothing. He decided to wait no longer and, at a quick step, pulled the donkey along.

After Felix went to bed, Lucius described his experience to Dora. They sat at the table in the orange flicker of the lamp.

“You should not go out at night anymore,” Dora implored, her eyes concerned.

“I may have to sometimes.”

“Then not until we resolve this problem.”

“First we have to figure out what the problem is.” He leaned back and exhaled.

His wife nodded solemnly and placed her soft hand atop his.

Although experiencing a fair degree of anxiety, Lucius struggled to keep his eyes open while guarding the flock that night. For a time, he paced and jumped up and down to keep his blood flowing and to remain alert. But when the exhaustion overcame him, he took a seat against the wall of the pen with his spear across his lap. And just when it seemed that dawn would never come, the horizon began to pale.

In the morning, Dora helped her husband build a thorny, dome-shaped enclosure over the top of the pen using the branches he had collected, tying them in place with lengths of durable twine. Felix lingered nearby, throwing stones at the feet of the donkey and making squawking noises. When the task was complete, Lucius felt fairly confident that the new structure was sturdy enough to keep large carnivores at bay and to remain anchored during storms.

And two uneventful weeks passed. Though the animals had, at times, bleated and bayed in the middle of the night, there were no further attacks.

Lucius traveled to the city on the back of his donkey for the autumnal festival. This was the one day each year that he left his wife and child alone. In his absence, Dora would keep the goats confined in the pen and feed them barley and hay. And, they agreed, she would not leave the safety of the cottage after sundown. He carried with him two blocks of fresh cheese and one kid, which he hung from a saddlecloth sling attached to the saddle. For the first few miles, the kid was agitated and noisy, but it eventually quieted down for the remainder of the ride.

As the morning air warmed, he approached the city, which seemed to have sprawled considerably since his last visit, although the vista was still dominated by the grand stone and

concrete aqueduct that transported water from the hills. On the main road were many people walking and riding horses and donkeys, bringing with them a variety of livestock and foods and wares to sell on the streets. Many more were coming in from the villages specifically for the munus, which was Lucius' primary purpose as well. There was no greater entertainment than gladiator battles and venationes featuring exotic, man-eating beasts. As a youth he had dreamed of becoming a bestiarius, hunting these dangerous animals for sport, cheered on by a legion of adoring fans. Of course, at age twenty-eight now, that dream had long since evaporated.

Lucius made his way to his favorite taberna, which was situated in the Galatian district not far from the city center. He tied the donkey to a post in the stable and presented the goat to the stableman, who offered him three silver denarii. Lucius negotiated for a fourth coin then shook the man's hand and handed off the animal.

Clemens the innkeeper charged him three sestertii for a night's stay and one hot meal, which was a high price due to the festival. However, Lucius gladly paid it and put the cost out of his mind.

"We are happy to have you back," Clemens told him.

"I appreciate your exceptional hospitality."

"And how is the family?"

"The wife is a goddess and the son is growing like a vine," Lucius answered proudly.

"Any more little ones in your future?"

Lucius chuckled. "I have a feeling this winter will be a productive one."

He stored his travel bag in his room and then went out into the city carrying his cheese in a small satchel.

The streets were clogged with raucous festivalgoers, jumpy animals, and huffy urban guards. The calls of vendors selling jewelry, meats, vegetables, and textiles pierced the air. Harlots stood in front of the lupanarium, flashing their legs and beckoning to the men who passed. The thought of a romp with one of them excited Lucius. His wife was quite satisfying in bed, but, as the saying went, there is nothing more alluring than the unfamiliar. Nevertheless, he did not want to bring any sort of pestilence home with him, and he did not want to violate his marriage vows, so he resisted the temptation and hurried through that section of town.

Later, Lucius sold his cheese to a Corsican merchant, then walked to the amphitheater, which rose above the many multi-story insulae and shops that surrounded it. The entry lines were long, but he arrived early enough to find a good seat on the aisle halfway up the cavea. To his left sat an older Greek man and woman who spoke broken Latin. They were excited to see a gladiator named Felix fight. Lucius told them that was also his son's name and they smiled brightly.

The gladiator matches did not disappoint. In particular, the *hoplomachi* melee, featuring nine heavily armored combatants with spears and swords, was an epic contest. After half an hour, only two of them remained standing: a robust Gaul with a fish-shaped helmet and a slender Macedonian in a conical *konos* with a spike at its peak. As they approached each other for what was sure to be their final engagement, the spectators rose to their feet and bellowed encouragement. Lucius, of course, rooted heartily for the Macedonian; Dora was a descendant of that stock.

The Gaul moved first, lunging ferociously with his gleaming, double-edged *gladius*. The Macedonian defended with a round, phalangite shield, which he wore attached to his lead forearm. The iron clash produced a concussive clang that echoed throughout the arena. The

Macedonian then struck back with his five-foot hasta, which featured a leaf-shaped tip. The Gaul swatted the spear away with his sword. Then the men began whirling and striking and parrying in a frenzied, arms-length brawl, which was exhausting simply to witness.

Lucius was awed by the endurance and agility of the combatants as they performed their mortal dance. Finally, quite unexpectedly, the Gaul ducked under a spear thrust and swung at the Macedonian's knee. The blade split the joint of his greaves and sliced clean through. The Macedonian howled a gruesome, harrowing howl and flopped onto his back. Blood spurted both from his thigh and from the amputated lower leg. The Gaul raised his sword triumphantly and stamped his feet and the crowd roared in approval. Lucius, disappointed and slightly sickened by the gore, applauded politely.

Later, after a break during which Lucius purchased a strip of salted pork and two cups of wine, the venatio commenced. A dozen bestiarii congregated in the center of the arena, holding a variety of weapons including composite bows, javelins, swords, and nets. Then, to the sound of horns, the beasts were released from their pens beneath the crowded cavea. Lucius was astonished by the number and ferocity of the animals; there were more of them than in past venationes and these specimens appeared overgrown, almost giant versions of the species. There were three angry lions with thick manes and prominent musculature; two tigers, which were as large and even more aggravated than the lions; a cluster of tusked boars; a pack of black wolves; a great brown bear that stood on its hind legs and bellowed; and, strangest of all, a silver, rotund beast larger than the rest with one short and one long horn on its snout. When it emerged, the audience went wild with appreciation. The Greek man explained to Lucius that the animal was called a rhinoceros and came from the unknown interior of Africa.

The horns blasted again, signaling the start of the hunt and, immediately, there was a flurry of activity. The bestiarii broke into teams of two and set out after the various creatures, many of which were skittish due to the pomp and circumstance of the event. Others, however, especially the larger carnivores, were not cowed. They advanced boldly toward their human adversaries.

The first beast targeted was the bear. A bestiarius approached it carefully and then, with a running surge, heaved a javelin which impaled its shoulder near the neck. The bear reared up and growled, the javelin appearing like a toothpick in its massive trunk. It lumbered belligerently toward the attackers, both of whom wielded short swords. One man dared step into its path and strike, but was immediately swatted to the ground by a gigantic paw. The bear began to maul him when, quite bravely, the other bestiarius advanced and drove his sword, hilt-deep, into its ribs. The bear squealed, retreated from the men a few steps, then dropped to its belly having incurred a mortal wound. The injured man remained on the ground, writhing, until four boys emerged with a stretcher and carried him off.

Similar engagements between man and beast took place in all parts of the arena. Bestiarii snared a leopard with a net, leapt over a charging bull, wrestled boars, subdued the rhinoceros with ropes. Crossbowmen in horse-drawn chariots shot charging tigers and sprinting wolves with bolts. As a grand finale, the most elite of the hunters donned sun-sparkled bronze armor from head to toe and pursued the largest lion armed only with a trident. It was a lengthy, bloody engagement that culminated when the lion pounced upon the supine bestiarius, who, at the right moment, drove the razor-sharp prongs of his weapon into the animal's underbelly. Lucius and his Greek neighbors joined the audience in a rapturous standing ovation and the bare-breasted

festival nymphs emerged into the arena to place flowered crowns atop the triumphant bestiarii's heads.

After the munus concluded, the crowds spilled out of the vomitoriums into the surrounding streets and alleyways. Many were quite inebriated and a tremendous celebration ensued. Drummers led impromptu parades that radiated out from the amphitheater. Dancers and jugglers wove their way amongst the throngs along with musicians playing a motley array of instruments and singing ribald songs from throughout the empire. Lucius flowed with the celebrants who surrounded him and, from time to time, purchased a swig of wine with a copper quadrans. Ultimately he found himself ushered into a lounge of sorts, where a group of erotic dancers performed for a rapt audience, accompanied by lutes and lyres and drums. A dwarf squeezed through the crowd, collecting coinage in a small sack. Lucius watched them until the sun went down then returned to the taberna and took a seat in the crowded dining hall. Clemens' sweet wife and daughter served platters of roast pork and goat sausage with artichokes and olives and loaves of buttery panis quadratas. He washed it all down with a few more cups of syrupy, spiced wine.

As he finished the meal, a harlot approached and sat next to him on the bench. She was short and busty with long eyelashes and a crooked smile.

"Ye look like ye need a friend," she cooed.

A sober Lucius would have rebuffed her advance from the get-go but, now, a dozen cups of wine bubbling through his system, he allowed himself to flirt a bit. "A man can never have enough friends in this unforgiving world," he replied.

She giggled and slid closer to him. "How 'bout a pour of that wine, dear?"

She held forth a bronze cup and he ladled a scoop of wine out of the krater.

“Thank ye, love. What’s yer name?”

“They call me Lucius.”

“Ooh, that’s a strong name! I bet ye have a big fella in those pants.”

He laughed at this and she laughed and placed her hand on the inside of his thigh.

“My wife would not look kindly on this,” he warned her half-heartedly.

“I’m yer wife fer the night, love,” she replied, planting a wet kiss on his jaw.

In Lucius’s loins, something stirred.

That night, the malevolent dream returned: the triremes stuffed with soldiers; the flaming arrows and boiling sea. They made landfall and rapidly disembarked onto a gravelly beach at the foot of the city’s great wall. From the battlements, the defenders fired bolts and dropped stones while the attackers put up ladders and battered the gate. And, soon, they had breached the gate and the rampaging soldiers burst into the city and were met by swordsmen and pikemen, and Lucius found himself, naked still, in the midst of a vicious melee. And so he dropped to the ground and crawled amongst the feet and knees of the combatants and amongst the dying men in the blood-soaked mud. And he reached a door and banged and screamed for help. And the door swung open and he pulled himself inside and shut the door behind him. And he was in small temple strewn with blazing candles and fogged with burning incense. And he crawled to the stone altar at the far wall, and he pulled himself to his feet. And upon the alter, naked too, outlined with candles, laid out like a corpse in rigor mortis, was Dora. And he leaned over her and peered into her peaceful face, closer and closer, his tears dripping onto her cheeks, and then her eyes snapped open and she spoke, her hollow voice echoing through the nooks of the temple, up to its arched ceiling: *Now and forever. Now and forever.*

Lucius returned home the next morning, excited to recount the sights and sounds of the festival to Dora and Felix. In the spring, he decided, Felix would be old enough to attend the munus and they would enjoy it as a family. He would ask his cousin to tend to the herd while they spent a few days in the city. By then, gods willing, Dora would be pregnant again. It would be a welcome getaway.

As he approached the cottage, he sensed that something was wrong. Felix was standing in the garden, wearing only his loincloth.

Lucius dismounted and approached his son, who stared solemnly at his feet.

“Where is your mother, Felix?”

The boy swayed, but did not respond.

Lucius strode past him to the cottage. The door was open and a fire smoldered in the hearth. His wife was not inside.

“Dora!” he shouted.

He walked to the pen. The goats shuffled and watched him through the gaps in the tree-branch enclosure. Near the gate lay his spear, seemingly cast aside. He picked it up and looked closely at it. Blood had stained its iron tip. His breath froze in his chest.

Lucius ran to the far side of the pen, and then he saw her, what remained of her. He approached on unsteady legs and, tears clouding his eyes, assessed her condition. She lay twisted in the grass, her body decimated, her intestines pulled from her belly and piled in moist, pink clumps. Her face had been shredded and gouged beyond recognition. An arm had been torn off at the shoulder. There was more blood than Lucius had ever seen come from a human. Black flies circled and dipped into the gore. He swatted them away as he cried.

That night, Lucius built a pyre and burned his wife's body. As the flames licked the night sky, he stared into them and swooned with remorse. The good woman died a horrible death because Lucius was compelled to go off and pleasure himself, to leave his home undefended when he knew that evil lurked nearby. How selfish! How fiendish! How unforgivable! Indeed, he may have been fornicating with that unclean harlot at the very moment Dora was attacked and partially devoured. Perhaps there was a causal link between the two events. The air reeked of charred flesh. The pyre wood crackled and hissed. Felix wrapped his small arms around his father's thigh and whimpered.

In the morning, Lucius tied yellow string around each of the goats' necks then, with the donkey in tow and Felix perched on its saddle, herded the animals, except for two, toward the city. They went straight to the market, where Lucius made a deal with the first bidder he encountered. It was for far less than he could have earned a few weeks later during the final livestock fair of the season, but there was no doubt that this was the appropriate thing to do.

He then led Felix and the donkey over to Clemens' taberna. The old proprietor was there with his wife and daughter. Unable to contain his grief, Lucius sobbed and explained to them all that had transpired. They expressed profound sympathy and agreed to look after the child while he returned to the farm to deal with the infernal menace. Then they provided him and the boy with a meal of grilled chicken, bean and onion stew, and seasoned cucumbers. Knowing that it might be his last meal for a time, Lucius requested a double portion. Afterward, he paid the innkeeper generously, gave his boy a brief hug, and promised to return as soon as he was able. "Be a good child," he said to Felix, his voice wavering. "Your mother is watching. We must honor your mother."

It was dusk when he came back to the farm. He put the donkey in the pen with the two remaining goats then went inside and retrieved his galeus and spear and whetstone. He sat down in the grass and watched the sun set into the sea as he sharpened his weapons. Remembrances of Dora flooded his mind as he worked. Their first encounter at the summer solstice festival, where she performed a traditional dance with other maidens from the north. The first time she had bared her body for him, her shapely breasts and hips, the warmth of her breath. The joyous birth of their son. Their many happy nights singing songs and making love.

Lucius was overwhelmed with despair and self-hatred, unable to comprehend the loss, his failure. He wept fitfully.

When night had descended upon the country he tied a rope around the neck of the larger of the two goats and, with his sword sheathed and spear shouldered, led it toward the trees. They walked far into the forest, deep into its dense embrace, farther than he had ever gone before. The silence was unnatural – no birdcalls, no insect chirps, no breezes in the boughs – like the sound of pure death.

At long last, they arrived at a gently-flowing creek. There he tied the goat to a tree and quaffed of the burbling water. The moon sent down slivers of light in-between the treetops. It was a cool night, the coolest of the season, and Lucius found himself shivering. He tightened the belt around his paenula.

Then he pulled his short sword from its scabbard and held it to the neck of the goat and poked it sharply into the flesh. The goat bucked and yelped and tried to run away, but was restrained by the rope. Lucius grabbed a hold of the animal and put his hand to the blood that had begun streaming from the wound. It was warm and sticky and he smeared some of it onto each of his cheekbones and his chin. For a long moment, he closed his eyes and breathed deeply and

prayed to the spirit of his beloved wife. Then he climbed atop a boulder and raised his sword to the heavens and screamed into the night.