

The time of Greed one: Lycaon

(Time – 3.27)

Imagine a time when greed is god, when compassion has lost her crown and callous cruelty is enthroned in her place. The darkness, the chaos, emboldens evil things. Rage, envy, jealousy, creep from their crannies. Men love only plunder. Mercy is forgotten; son kills brother; daughter mother. The temples are derelict; spiders are the only worshippers. Everywhere the chant is, 'More.'

Up on Olympus, Zeus shook his head. The smell rising from the earth of sweat and smoke and blood and bile was too much. Such rumours he heard – surely mankind had not stooped so low. He would investigate.

He disguised himself as a traveller. He flashed down to the palace of an Arcadian king: Lycaon was the king's name. There are laws, customs that must be respected. Strangers should always be welcomed. King Lycaon greeted this traveller with a smirk. He ushered him into the feasting hall: 'Tonight we will eat in your honour.'

He gave the stranger a bowl of wine, made his apologies and slunk into the kitchen. There he prepared a cauldron, poured water, sprinkled herbs, vegetables, stirred them – then butchered one of his own sons and threw the fleshy lumps into the pot.

Lycaon returned to the hall, entertained the traveller with chatter whilst the stew bubbled. Guests gathered. Like a virus, the secret spread from one table to the next. Each greeted the news with a lupine grin. Zeus scanned the faces. He saw the sneers, the whispering. A golden bowl was set before him. He dabbed it gingerly. Out of the broth bobbed a toe. So – the tales were true. These were not men, they were animals.

A thunderbolt pierced the palace, pierced Lycaon himself. The king's hair stood on end, he howled, fell on all fours, his robes ripped. The guests sank to their knees and yowled in reply. Bristles burst forth from their backs, their bellies, their arms, their legs, their very faces. Knives of bones erupted from their jaws: wolves. They became wolves.