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AP Lang Gothic Story

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Lycaon Lupus

Lycaon galloped across the country-side, head bowed against the impending drizzle. His dark eyes strained to make out shapes only dimly lit by the moonlight. He slowed his horse down in an attempt to orient himself. His pale face stood out luminously against his dark hair and black hood of his cloak. Throwing his head back, Lycaon scowled at the menacing gray clouds moving in on him from behind. Lycaon traveled westward across the declining valleys and sloping hills towards home, some a hundred and fifty miles from his current position.

Lycaon paused, overlooking a valley, saw farmhouses and crop fields straight ahead. Past the farmhouses, the valley began to slope upwards into mountainous terrain, giving rise to the towering treetops of the looming forest that stretching far north and tapered off to the south where it met a small sleepy village, cozily nestled between two hills.

Lycaon decided that the quickest way home was to cut through the forest, instead of following parallel to it until it thinned out. He set off down the hill, into the valley, moving past sleeping farmhouses and swaying crops, following a dirt worn path down the middle of the crop fields. The path ended as the crops did, giving way to rocky soil and twisted roots. Lycaon dismounted and led his horse, Xanthos, up the slight, rocky incline into the dark forest and dense undergrowth. The moonlight disappeared as the forest swallowed them.

Inside the wind could not penetrate the thick foliage, and so the only sounds were those made by Lycaon and his horse. Xanthos shook his head nervously, trying to back out, but

Lycaon failed to notice that anything was wrong. Set on his goal, he was completely blind to any possible dangers. So he forged further into the forest, dragging his reluctant ride behind him.

Crack. Snap. Rustle. Lycaon made no effort to conceal himself or maintain the silence. Yellow eyes peered out into the darkness, watching and following Lycaon from behind trees and underneath bushes, laying in wait. The wolves moved without noise, their paws making no tremors on the earth, and their tails swishing silently in anticipation. Lycaon's horse whined in fright, smarter than he was and, sensing their presence, dug his hooves into the hard ground, refusing to go any further. His ear flattened to the back of his head and his eyes rolled backwards, turning them solid white.

"Come on now," Lycaon said, trying to soothe his steed into continuing their journey. Lycaon held the reins in one hand and stroked Xanthos with the other. He made gentle clicking noises to entice Xanthos to move. *Click. Click.* The wolves, with their gleaming coats and yellow stained teeth moved in on Lycaon. He froze as a faint growl reached his ear. He slowly turned around to find a pair of glistening amber eyes, followed by a pouncing body. Snarls ripped through the forest, and screeches of pain. A wolf grabbed Lycaon by the calf, tripping him and dragged him down. Another went after his neck, snapping at it as Lycaon twisted away on the forest floor. The wolves attacked his horse, clawing his back and biting his forelegs. The black giant stumbled, and his knees hit the ground, the wolves tearing at his exposed underside.

"Xanthos!" cried Lycaon in desperation. A big black wolf with a silver muzzle pounced on his chest, raking his claws across Lycaon's face. Lycaon screeched in pain as the drops of blood blinded him. He stumbled to his feet, only to have the wolves pull him down again as soon as he got up. They played with him, letting him stumble a few feet towards Xanthos, only to bite his heels and push him down again. Lycaon contorted himself until he could reach his pocket, holding a hunting knife. He plunged the blade hilt deep into the nearest warm body swarming

him. The resounding effect was a pain filled howl. Lycaon ran to Xanthos and clung to his neck, pulling himself onto his back, as the wolves tore his cloak from his back and snapped at him. Lycaon urged Xanthos forward blindly, and Xanthos leaped forward, trampling through the forest, and racing past the gigantic trees. Tree branches snapped in their faces and tore their clothes to shreds. The wolves, furious their prey had escaped, pursued them mercilessly through the forest. Their advances, however, faded away as soon as the trees thinned out. Xanthos and Lycaon emerged onto a wide dirt road and slowed down. Xanthos chest heaved from exhaustion, his mouth and sides foaming white. Lycaon wiped blood out of his eyes with a shaky hand, looking behind him into the leering forest. Injured and frightened, Lycaon had nowhere to go. He decided to follow the road until it led him to the village or one of the farm he had seen, where he could implore the local people for shelter. Weary and weak, Xanthos took Lycaon up the hill, following the dirt path until they came to an intricately designed, wrought iron fence.

Beyond the fence, up the gravel driveway, sat a large and stately manor. Carved from grey stone, the massive manor looked abandoned. Ivy crept up its sides, weeds poked through the gravel and the bushes were untrimmed. It seemed like all other manors to Lycaon. Once grand and glorious, the days of money had run out and its owner forces to abandon its upkeep once funds ran out. Lycaon dismounted, and gently pushed the gates. They creaked and shuddered. He pushed with more force and they broke open and swung inward. He led Xanthos forward cautiously, gripping the tattered leather reins tightly.

Reaching the front porch, he tied Xanthos to the post, and stepped up the wide stone steps. Reaching a hand out to the dull brass knob, the weathered mahogany door flew open, spilling light into the darkness. Framed in the doorway, was an eccentric looking man. The aging man had a thin face, framed by fluffy silver hair streaked randomly with greying black, misty blue

eyes, and stained black lab coat over a fraying nightgown. He was barefoot and holding a curious instrument, looking like a cross between scissors and a scalpel.

Lycaon barely noticed his erratic appearance though, as the loss of blood and exhaustion had made him faint. He sunk to his knees and collapsed on the porch, the world fading away as he sunk beneath the waves.

For the next three days, Lycaon tossed and turned, locked in a feverish state, struggling to keep his head above the water. Snarls and hisses interrupted his dreams, the wolves snapped at him and tore him apart from inside out and gnawed his legs. As he drifted in and out of consciousness, new faces would appear in between the wolves; sometimes a girl with long brown hair and sometimes an old man with a cloud around his head and a wide grin. Lycaon drifted in and out of this hazy state, visions passing through his mind and leaving him with only vague feelings. He dreamed that his hands turned to claws, his mouth morphed into a snout and he ran through the forest, with a craving for blood and human flesh. He felt himself sink his teeth into-- his eyes snapped open suddenly. As soon his eyelids opened, the memory of the dream faded, but his heart still raced for reasons he could not describe.

It was the fourth morning, and he had no recollection of the past three days. A young girl with light brown hair and crystal clear blue eyes sat next to him. She looked familiar but Lycaon could not remember where he had seen her. She was changing a bandage on his arm. He hardly recognized it as his own. It was swollen and shiny, with long red lines blistering open. He flicked his finger, startling the girl, to make sure it was indeed his own. The young girl looked at him and said something Lycaon did not comprehend. She got up and left, leaving the room silent save for the nervous beating of Lycaon's heart. His eyes flickered around the room. He became aware that he was lying in a plush, four-poster bed. The walls were lined with red velvet and adorned with portraits of stern thin-nosed, watery eyed men and women. There was a

vanity with a wide mirror on the wall across from the bed, on the left a tall wardrobe and a bookcase full of broad backed volumes. On the left side of the room, tall windows stood framed by more bookcases. Through the glass, Lycaon saw the dark swirling clouds roll over the hills towards the manor. Recollecting the night three days ago, Lycaon was surprised to find that the interior of the manor, or at least his room, did not reflect its gloomy exterior.

After waiting a few minutes, Lycaon inferred that no one was not coming for him and sat up, grimacing at the pain in his hands. He looked down at himself. His left calf and foot were completely mummified under the bandages. His hands and fingers were wrapped in gauze, as was his chest and stomach. He could feel the bandage on the right half of his face and his right eye felt swollen.

Pressing his bare feet against the cold mahogany floor, he shuffled across the room to look at his face in the vanity mirror. Staring back at him was a face he could hardly see under the gauze. Gently, he began unwrapping the tight bandage from his face and underneath was a ghastly site; slashed from the roots of his hair, down the through his right eye, across the bridge of his nose and turning down the left side of his mouth, were three dark red lines, standing out vividly against his pallid skin. The once handsome Lycaon now had the appearance of a gruesome mask, except this was real. His lively dark eyes stared back at him, mourning the loss of the person he used to see in the mirror. His inky black hair was unkempt and matted with sweat. Wishing for bath, he called the maid back into the room. She came and prepared a bath for him. He stripped off his foul bandages and scrubbed the blood, dirt, and sweat from his skin. Afterwards, he went to find more bandages but strangely enough, found his wounds to be much more faint that he had first seen. Only an hour ago they had been the deep red of an infected wound but now they were the faint pink of a scar. Even his face had subsided its swelling and

turning his head side to side, Lycaon decided maybe the scars would fade some more; it might not look so bad.

Lycaon dressed in clothes from the wardrobe and was looking through the curious volumes with titles in languages that even well-educated Lycaon had never seen, when a butler walked in and announced that Lycaon was requested to attend dinner with the master of the house. Lycaon, eager to meet this man and thank him for his generosity, followed the butler at quick clip down the wood paneled hallways of the manor. He was taken down a grand staircase, into the entrance foyer where a magnificent chandelier shone from the ceiling. They turned left and entered through double doors into long room. Inside the room was a long table, set up to entertain a dinner party of sixty but only three people sat at the other end.

Lycaon walked towards them apprehensively, overwhelmed by the big room that yet only held a few people. Seated at the head was a tall man with brown hair greying at the edges, a wiry build and spectacles. On his left was the old, bizarre looking man that had opened the door for Lycaon. He grinned widely, wearing a white stained shirt with an lopsided checked bowtie. Seated across from this man was the girl that had been changing Lycaon's bandages. Long brown hair spilled across her shoulders, and she looked at him with stern sky blue eyes.

"Young man," said the gentleman at the head of the table, "Please come sit down and have dinner with us." He gestured to the empty seat next to the white-haired man. Lycaon drew out the chair and sat down stiffly.

"My name is Ovid and this is my daughter Irvine, and this is Aldwin," Ovid said, peering at Lycaon through his glasses. "So tell us. How did you come to be here?"

So Lycaon told them his story, of visiting friends, of trying to take a shortcut and getting attacked, to stumbling here. The three listened and ate while he talked and when he finished they sat in silence until supper was over.

Just when Lycaon was about to leave the room, Ovid turned around suddenly and spoke to him.

“Before I forget, I am afraid I have some bad news for you. We, unfortunately had to put your horse down. He was badly injured I’m afraid and quite violent. Wouldn’t let any of us get near him without biting our hands off. I’m terribly sorry about that.” Lycaon was appalled. His faithful friend was death because of his blunder. Not only had he lost a companion, he had lost his transportation.

“I’m afraid I have no way of getting home now. Would you let me stay a few extra days,” Lycaon said, “until I sort out arrangements for getting home.” Ovid agreed and they parted ways.

With a heavy heart, Lycaon trudged up the stairs and was led by the butler through the labyrinth of halls back to his chamber.

As he fell asleep, he recalled Ovid saying Xanthos had been particularly foul-mannered, which was very uncharacteristic of his usually timid horse. Before dwelling any deeper into the matter, Lycaon fell into a shattered sleep.

The storm had finally reached the manor and the rain pounded on the windowpanes, demanding entrance. The wind whistled across the roof and the trees scratched the siding. Lycaon dreamed and drifted, hearing screaming. He saw flashes of red and the pain of a young girl.

Startled, he awoke in the morning, almost as tired as when he had slept. The sun was high in the sky and he was aghast with himself at sleeping the day away. He dressed quickly and walked around the manor, looking for Ovid and the others. He finally found his way to the entrance staircase again, where he stopped, looking down at the scene below. Lying on the floor was Irvine, eagle-spread and glassy-eyed. Her torso was torn apart and her hand lay on

the floor, five feet away from her. Her brown hair was torn in chunks from her scalp and her face luridly deformed. Aldwin sat on the floor, staring across the room at Irvine with as blank a stare.

Lycaon waited at the top of the staircase until the police left. They took her body with them and the maids came in to clean the blood from the marble.

“Oh Ovid, Aldwin, I’m so terribly sorry,” Lycaon said, and he was. He felt cold thinking about his dream with the screaming. Ovid patted him weakly and walked away without saying anything.

The next day they held her funeral. Lycaon attended out of respect. He still had not found a way to get home and he planned on going to town after the ceremony to arrange a ride. So later in the afternoon he walked down to the same village, scraping rust-colored dirt from under his fingernails as he went, annoyed that they had become dirty again. He pondered the unusual and horrific events that had happened while he was here.

Once in town, he searched in the stables, the tavern, the pub, even the bookshop but found no one who could provide him with a horse. Disappointed, he headed back up the hill, bowing his head against the icy sleet.

Over the course of the next two weeks, Lycaon dreams worsened. He heard screaming and saw people being mauled to death by a vicious beast. He would awake late the next morning, to find Ovid or Aldwin talking about a death in the village. Late night wanders bitten and chewed to death, bleeding over the cobblestone streets, making the gutters run red with blood. Lycaon became more and more agitated as the details of these gruesome deaths began to match up more closely with those in his dreams.

One night, he dreamt he was walking down the path to the village from the manor. Except something was off. It didn’t feel like his body. His hands were elongated into claws, his tongue could suddenly taste the night air like a dog, and he felt his back hunched over, urging

him onto four feet. Lycaon drifted along in a trance inside this creature, not seemingly being able to control its movements but experiencing all the sensations and thoughts it did.

The creature crept into the village, slinking the shadow and masking its fetid scent by sticking to the garbage. Slinking along like a wolf in a wolfish man's body, Lycaon caught the scent of midnight wanderer. The man hurried along the sidewalk, well aware of the dangers of the night after the recent murders. Lycaon crept out of the shadows, into the man's line of view. The man stopped, frozen in fear, staring in horror at the creature that was Lycaon. Lycaon registered his reaction but did not comprehend it, did not realize what was happening and did not try to stop it. Lycaon slinked across the street, striding towards his victim. The terrified villager turned his back and ran the other way. Lycaon pounced, sinking his teeth into the neck and tearing at his flesh. The man's feeble struggles soon faded away. After chewing through his shoulder and eating his arm away, Lycaon left the village as quietly as he had come.

Sometime on the walk up the manor, Lycaon's brain caught up to what he had done. He ran to the manor, his hands back to normal and his snout a nose again. He flew up the stairs and locked the door to his chamber and passed out on the floor.

When he awoke, he found himself still covered in the blood of the man he had murdered last night. His stomach was still full of the human flesh he had eaten. His teeth, a bloody mess and his face smeared and scarred.

Horrified at what he had become and done, he knew he couldn't control himself. He would only put others in danger. Killing poor Irvine, the young mother, the bartender, the groom, and now the old man, Lycaon despised himself. He flung himself across the room at his meager bag of belongings that was all he had with him. In it he found his hunting knife. As frightened as he was at this prospect, he loathed himself more for the crimes he had committed. Unsheathing

the knife and taking it with two hands, he plunged the steel dagger into his heart. Crying out in pain, he slumped to floor and drifted into darkness.

The butler found him later that day, shocked to look around the empty room and then look down and find Lycaon dead on the floor. Ovid and Aldwin were distraught; they had become quick fond of this young man that had fallen into their midst and been so kind to them when Irvine had been killed. Not knowing who his family was or where he had come from, they gave him a small funeral, attended by many staff who had seen him around the house. The ground was too cold to dig, so they left his coffin in the basement cellar until a grave could be dug.

Lycaon, however, had not died. Just as he had not died after being attacked by wolves when he could have bled to death. Trapped inside the coffin, he yelled and clawed at the inside of the casket to no avail. No one could hear him. But night come soon enough and Lycaon's body transformed into the wolf man he hated so much. In rage, he raked the casket's inside and pushed off the lid, breaking the hinges. He broke out of the cellar and ran down to the village, eager once again. He quickly found easy prey, spotting a small child on the street.

Halfway through ripping apart the young boy, a mob appeared at the end of the street. The townspeople had gotten together a party, determined to catch the wild animal causing so much destruction. They saw Lycaon and roared in anger over the death of such an innocent child. Lycaon fearing for his life, fled the village, with the villagers on his heels.

He eventually lost then as he ran deep into the dark forest. He wandered further, no longer afraid of the wolves who had once attacked him. Even they stayed away from him. Unable to fight his craving for human flesh, Lycaon continues to terrorize the local villages. Realizing that a human bitten by himself but not killed will turn on other humans as Lycaon did,

he began creating others to be his companions. They too succumbed to the desire for flesh and Lycaon and his lycanthropes become one of the most feared creatures in human history.