

The Exiled Roman Poet Ovid Contemplates the First Winter Storm in Tomis on the Black Sea

I know that after six more months of winds
howling like wolves celebrating a kill
on blood-pooled snow, I will loathe, fear
these blizzards flung down in huge fistfuls
by northern demons who laugh when men freeze.

But, tonight—if it is night, the sun gobbled
by the great white bear of snow—I feel only
the peace of a rich man counting his hoard:
Luka stitching some essential garment,
Magir asleep, after watching the storm.

We laughed over the many beasts I formed
with my fingers on the wall, the hearth's flames
making silhouettes: healthier hauntings
than the Roman revels my wife and I
would attend in nude, delirious lust.

But thinking of those nights, I feel every
fang-mark of wind and snow, and the coming
raids of vicious Scythians, each winter
no different, until the ice breaks: natives
claiming the bears that sleep beneath the river
have awoke, to drag laggard riders down.

Rome, suddenly I miss your climate, mild
as a mother's loving good-night embrace.
Luka glances from her sewing, and knows
without a word said how it is with me.
She lays down her thread and skins, and holds me
as if I were Magir, flung from nightmares.

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