**On the night that I was born, my father, Marinus, left our home while my mother was in labour and, over the eight hours that followed, slaughtered a dozen infant boys, the sons of our neighbours and friends, each one under the age of two years.
 He owned four swords, including a pair of gladii and an ornamental sica that had been handed down through three generations of our family, but he chose the smallest weapon in his arsenal, a triangular dagger with a wooden handle and silver blade known as a parazonium, to end life. A ruby jewel of considerable value lay at the centre of the quillion, its liquid blush ready to reflect the blood that spilled from the bodies.
 A man of duty, he did not hesitate as he marched from door to door, searching each house for hidden nurslings before plunging his knife into the heart of every boy he found, and while mothers screamed in horror and rained curses down upon his head, fathers stood silently in corners, mute and impotent, knowing that if they dared to speak, the blade would surely find its way across their throats before their sentence came to an end. Older siblings trembled in fear as they watched Marinus go about his dark business, soiling themselves, frightened that they, too, were about to face the judgment of the gods for some unspecified crime, but no, once the babe had been dispatched from this world for the next, my father barely glanced in their direction before making his way to the next house, and the next, and the next after that.**