

Excerpt: A Viking for Christmas

As Wolfe approached the docks, something moved in the dark recesses of an open shack used to store nets. He scanned the quay, looking for a fishing boat that might have come in late, but there were none. He peered inside, barely able to make out what appeared to be a lad huddled against the wall. Perhaps a street urchin had decided to seek shelter for the night. Wolfe smiled. At least, *this* was something he could do something about. His mother always welcomed the lads whose home was on the streets.

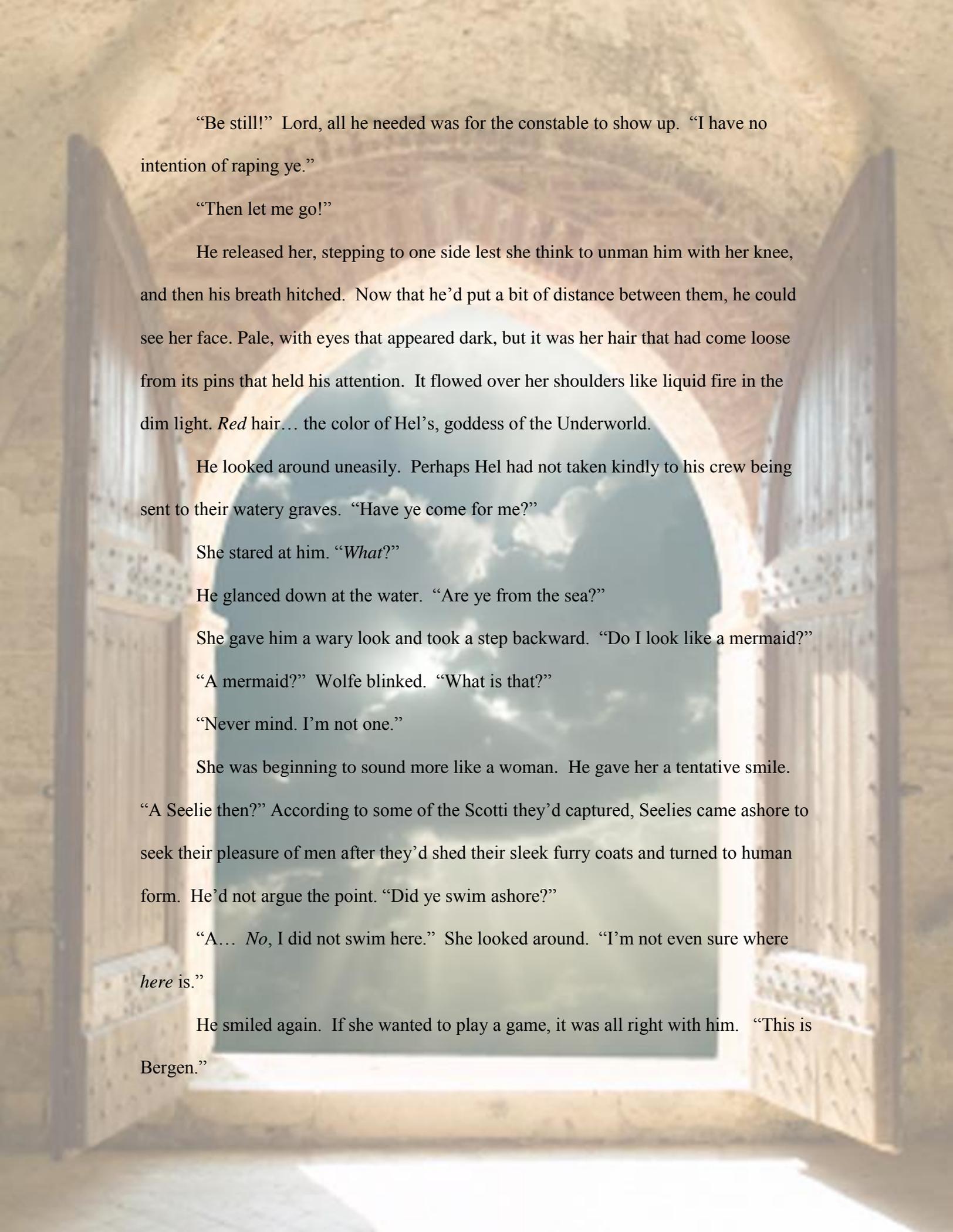
“Laddie, ye can come out.” When the boy didn’t move, he stepped closer. “Come now. I’ll take ye home with me to a warm fire and a good meal. Isn’t that better than a cold night out here?”

He heard only a whimper. Was the lad hurt? In the dark, he couldn’t tell. Nor could he tell if the boy had a knife, but most urchins did. He couldn’t just leave him here. Wolfe wrapped part of his mantle around his arm to shield it from a cut, then made a practiced lunge, grabbed the boy and pinned his arms to his sides by wrapping his own around them. The lad started kicking as he pulled him outside and Wolfe gradually became aware that he was touching something soft and yielding. Something that felt like a ...

“Let me go!” a female voice shrieked.

Surprised, he almost dropped her. Almost. A quick recovery on his part had him holding the squirming woman firmly against him.

“Let me go!” She struggled harder which only served to make him aware that it had been her breasts that had been soft and yielding. “I’ll not let you rape me!”

A stone archway with two wooden doors leading to a view of a cloudy sky. The archway is made of light-colored stone and has a decorative pattern. The wooden doors are open, revealing a bright, cloudy sky. The scene is set in a stone building with a tiled floor.

“Be still!” Lord, all he needed was for the constable to show up. “I have no intention of raping ye.”

“Then let me go!”

He released her, stepping to one side lest she think to unman him with her knee, and then his breath hitched. Now that he’d put a bit of distance between them, he could see her face. Pale, with eyes that appeared dark, but it was her hair that had come loose from its pins that held his attention. It flowed over her shoulders like liquid fire in the dim light. *Red* hair... the color of Hel’s, goddess of the Underworld.

He looked around uneasily. Perhaps Hel had not taken kindly to his crew being sent to their watery graves. “Have ye come for me?”

She stared at him. “*What?*”

He glanced down at the water. “Are ye from the sea?”

She gave him a wary look and took a step backward. “Do I look like a mermaid?”

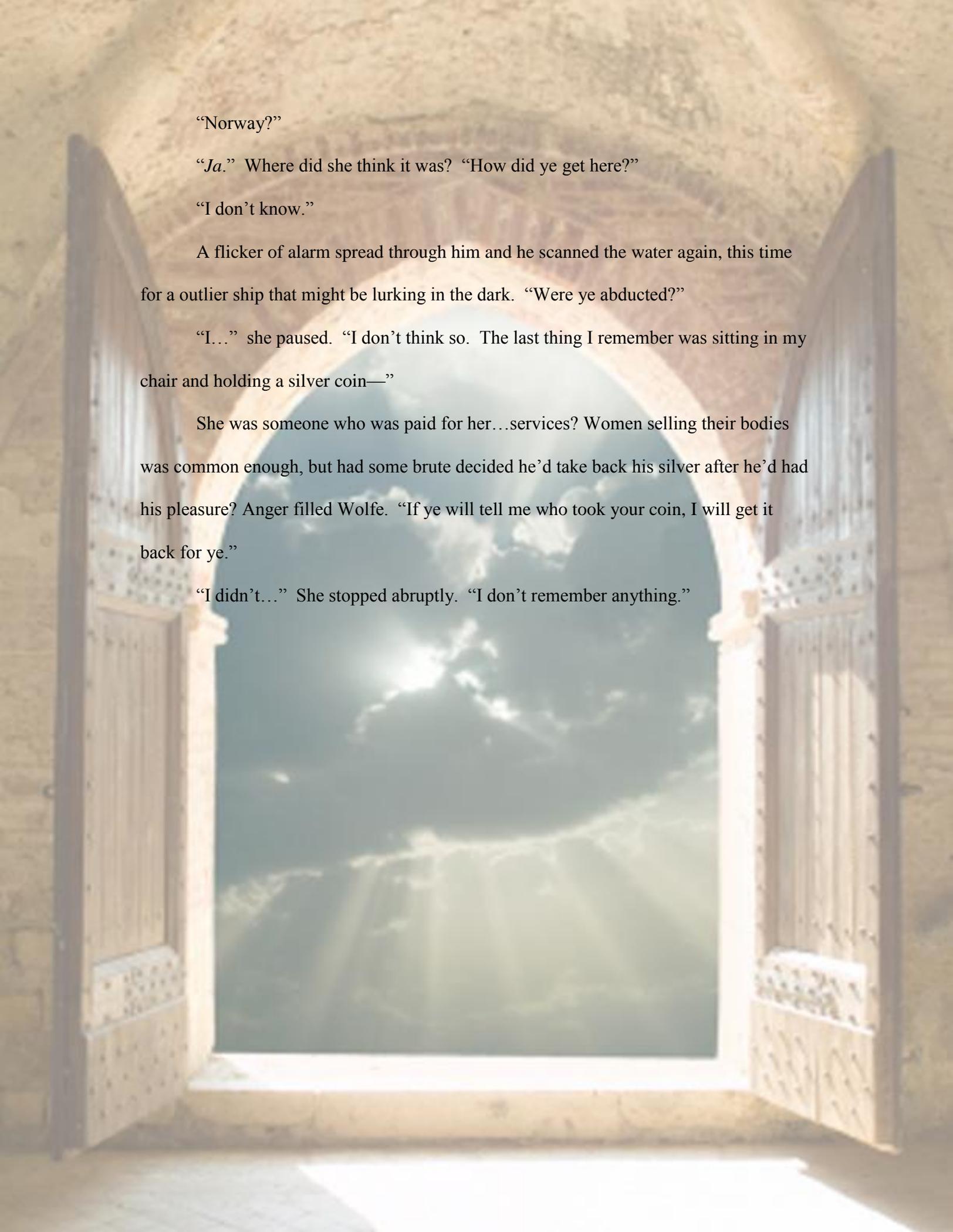
“A mermaid?” Wolfe blinked. “What is that?”

“Never mind. I’m not one.”

She was beginning to sound more like a woman. He gave her a tentative smile. “A Seelie then?” According to some of the Scotti they’d captured, Seelies came ashore to seek their pleasure of men after they’d shed their sleek furry coats and turned to human form. He’d not argue the point. “Did ye swim ashore?”

“A... *No*, I did not swim here.” She looked around. “I’m not even sure where *here* is.”

He smiled again. If she wanted to play a game, it was all right with him. “This is Bergen.”

A stone archway with two wooden doors open, looking out onto a bright, cloudy sky. The scene is framed by the arch and the doors, which have intricate carvings. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the sun is visible, creating a bright, hazy atmosphere. The overall tone is warm and somewhat mysterious.

“Norway?”

“*Ja.*” Where did she think it was? “How did ye get here?”

“I don’t know.”

A flicker of alarm spread through him and he scanned the water again, this time for a outlier ship that might be lurking in the dark. “Were ye abducted?”

“I..” she paused. “I don’t think so. The last thing I remember was sitting in my chair and holding a silver coin—”

She was someone who was paid for her...services? Women selling their bodies was common enough, but had some brute decided he’d take back his silver after he’d had his pleasure? Anger filled Wolfe. “If ye will tell me who took your coin, I will get it back for ye.”

“I didn’t...” She stopped abruptly. “I don’t remember anything.”