

Excerpt: One Midsummer's Knight: A Misty Knight

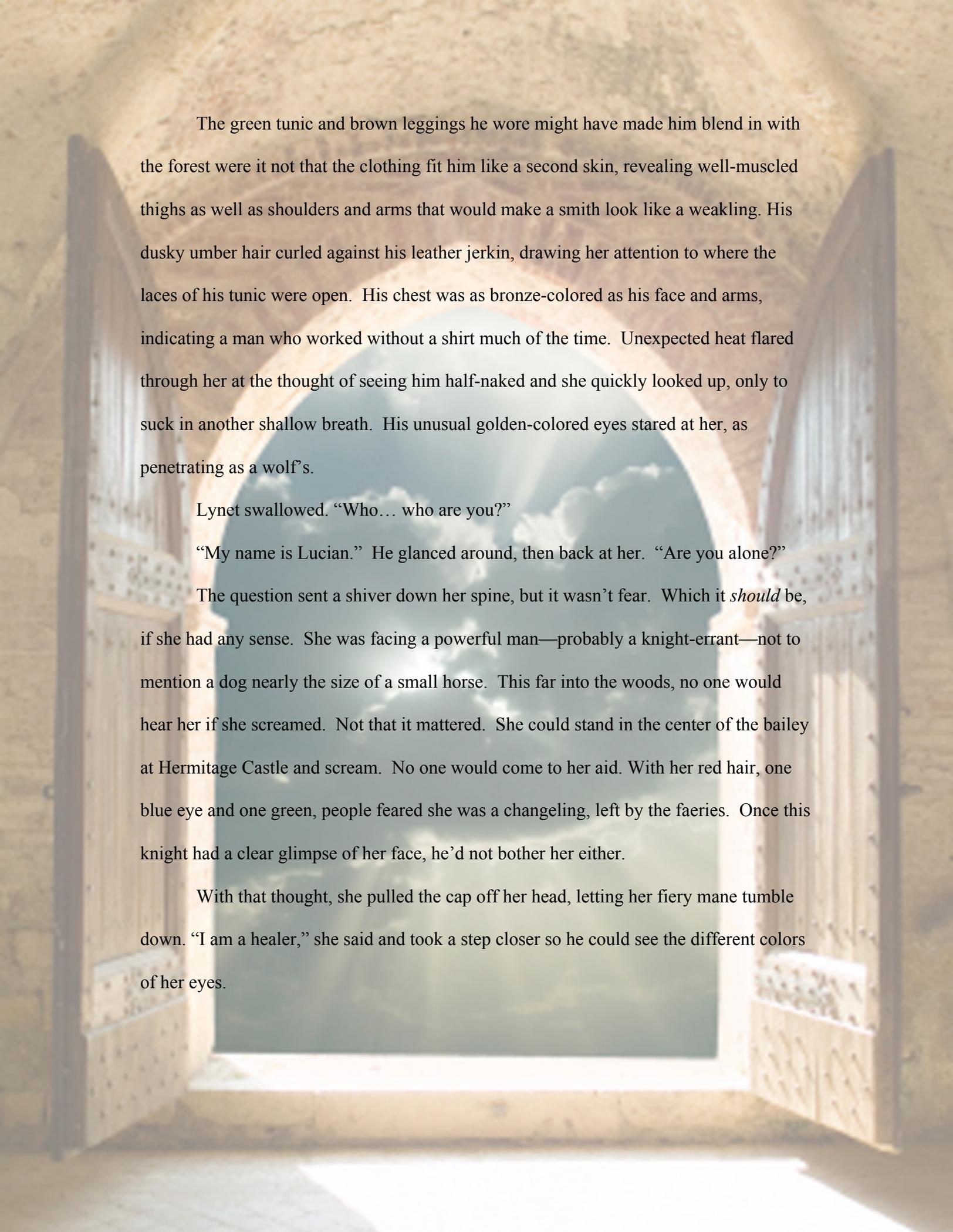
Lynet moved further into the forest. It seemed the water bubbling over the rocky bed had taken on a musical quality. For a moment, she fancied she heard singing and then grimaced. She was being as silly and addle-brained as the village girls. She blinked, though, as tiny sparkles of color caught the periphery of her vision and then shook her head. Next thing she'd be imagining faeries dancing in the air. Those lights were will-o-wisps weaving among the trees. Nothing more. Still, the gloaming was closing in and she'd do well to fetch her herbs and be out of the forest before night fell.

As she rounded a set of boulders, the burn came into view. To her delight, she also saw primroses growing at the base of an oak tree as well as near an ash near at water's edge. Odd that she'd never noticed them before, but they were quick-growing and she hadn't been this far into the woods since early spring. At any rate, she could use the petals for Garth's tea. As she bent to pick them, a greenish light began to glow around her and, for a moment, she stood mesmerized. And then it faded as something large crashed into the water.

Lynet whirled, fully expecting to be facing a wild boar. Relief swept through her when she saw it was a white hound. A large hound, to be sure, with reddish-pink eyes and ears, but he seemed more curious than dangerous as he approached.

"Halt, Aengus!"

The beast dropped to its haunches. Startled at the deep, timbered voice behind her, Lynet turned. A small gasp escaped as she stared at the man who stood there. In all her one-and-twenty years, she'd never seen such a beautiful specimen of man.



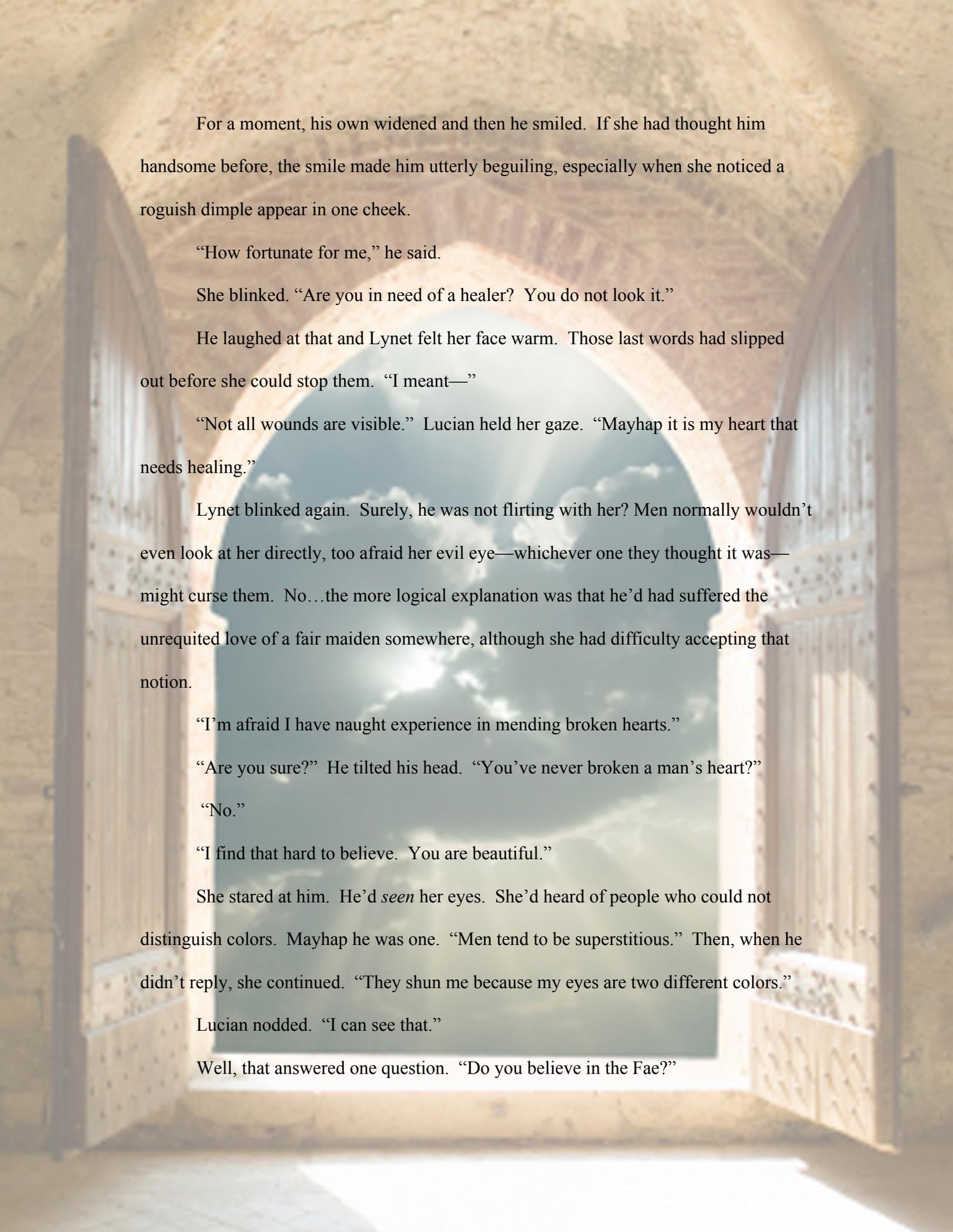
The green tunic and brown leggings he wore might have made him blend in with the forest were it not that the clothing fit him like a second skin, revealing well-muscled thighs as well as shoulders and arms that would make a smith look like a weakling. His dusky umber hair curled against his leather jerkin, drawing her attention to where the laces of his tunic were open. His chest was as bronze-colored as his face and arms, indicating a man who worked without a shirt much of the time. Unexpected heat flared through her at the thought of seeing him half-naked and she quickly looked up, only to suck in another shallow breath. His unusual golden-colored eyes stared at her, as penetrating as a wolf's.

Lynet swallowed. “Who... who are you?”

“My name is Lucian.” He glanced around, then back at her. “Are you alone?”

The question sent a shiver down her spine, but it wasn't fear. Which it *should* be, if she had any sense. She was facing a powerful man—probably a knight-errant—not to mention a dog nearly the size of a small horse. This far into the woods, no one would hear her if she screamed. Not that it mattered. She could stand in the center of the bailey at Hermitage Castle and scream. No one would come to her aid. With her red hair, one blue eye and one green, people feared she was a changeling, left by the faeries. Once this knight had a clear glimpse of her face, he'd not bother her either.

With that thought, she pulled the cap off her head, letting her fiery mane tumble down. “I am a healer,” she said and took a step closer so he could see the different colors of her eyes.



For a moment, his own widened and then he smiled. If she had thought him handsome before, the smile made him utterly beguiling, especially when she noticed a roguish dimple appear in one cheek.

“How fortunate for me,” he said.

She blinked. “Are you in need of a healer? You do not look it.”

He laughed at that and Lynet felt her face warm. Those last words had slipped out before she could stop them. “I meant—”

“Not all wounds are visible.” Lucian held her gaze. “Mayhap it is my heart that needs healing.”

Lynet blinked again. Surely, he was not flirting with her? Men normally wouldn’t even look at her directly, too afraid her evil eye—whichever one they thought it was—might curse them. No...the more logical explanation was that he’d had suffered the unrequited love of a fair maiden somewhere, although she had difficulty accepting that notion.

“I’m afraid I have naught experience in mending broken hearts.”

“Are you sure?” He tilted his head. “You’ve never broken a man’s heart?”

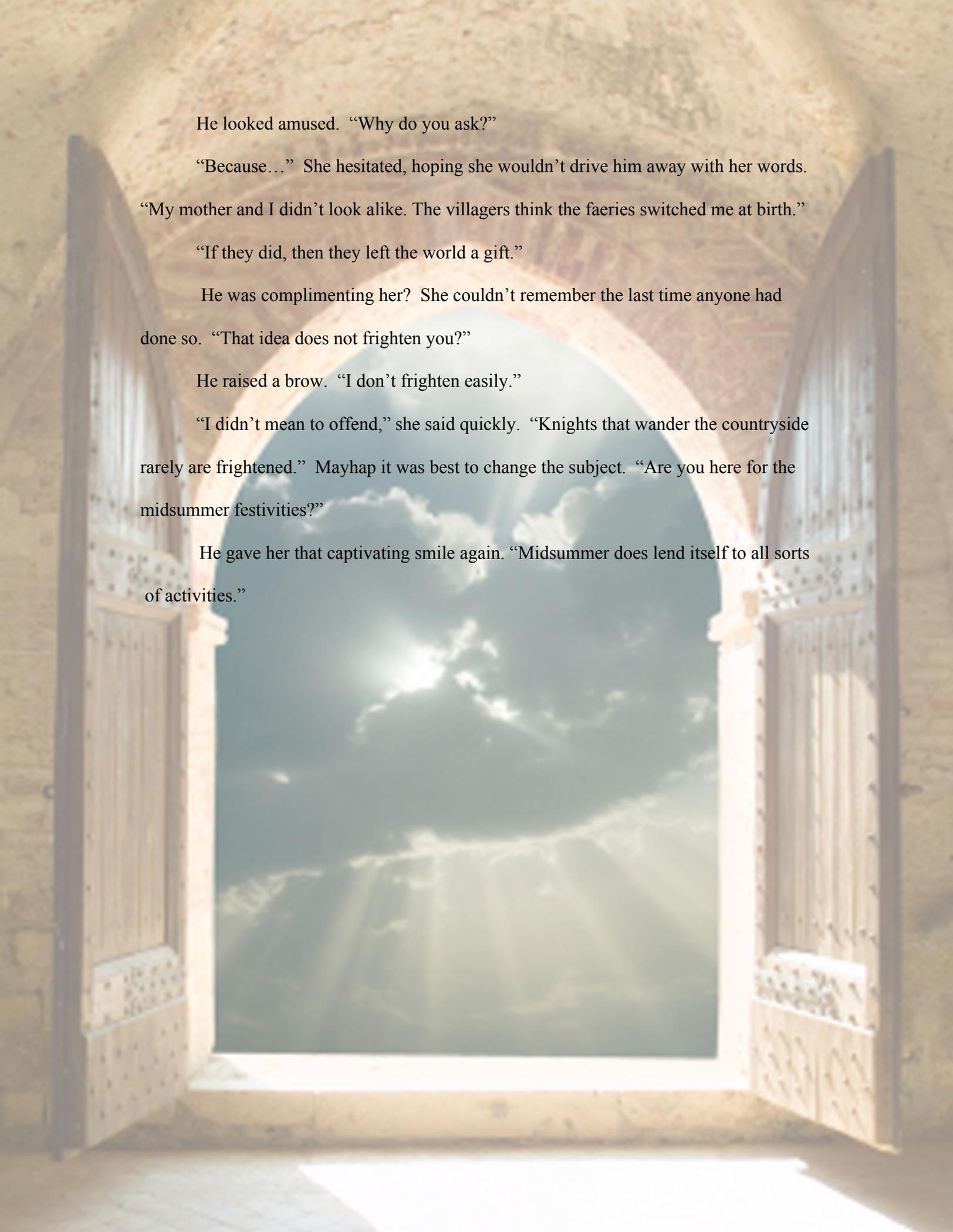
“No.”

“I find that hard to believe. You are beautiful.”

She stared at him. He’d *seen* her eyes. She’d heard of people who could not distinguish colors. Mayhap he was one. “Men tend to be superstitious.” Then, when he didn’t reply, she continued. “They shun me because my eyes are two different colors.”

Lucian nodded. “I can see that.”

Well, that answered one question. “Do you believe in the Fae?”



He looked amused. “Why do you ask?”

“Because...” She hesitated, hoping she wouldn’t drive him away with her words.

“My mother and I didn’t look alike. The villagers think the faeries switched me at birth.”

“If they did, then they left the world a gift.”

He was complimenting her? She couldn’t remember the last time anyone had done so. “That idea does not frighten you?”

He raised a brow. “I don’t frighten easily.”

“I didn’t mean to offend,” she said quickly. “Knights that wander the countryside rarely are frightened.” Mayhap it was best to change the subject. “Are you here for the midsummer festivities?”

He gave her that captivating smile again. “Midsummer does lend itself to all sorts of activities.”