

Elizabeth Trepanier

## Portent

Old hands stained with ink shuffled through pages of swirling script, separating them from the remainder of the unwritten stack. My hands, once soft and flush with vigorous youth now seemed as thin as the parchment I dedicated my life to. The veins in my wrists stood starkly against the pale skin in the waning light, a traceable map of the life coursing within me seen through the shell of my corporeal body.

The empty pages sighed and scratched against one another, anxious to be filled with the truth. With a weighted breath, I paused to stretch back against the rickety chair. Aches and strains from writing inveigled my withered body, making it impossible to move quickly or deftly as I once had. My mind remained fresh with a youthful determination despite a deteriorating frame, paying homage to events long since passed. This winter had not helped my frail condition, though; the harsh season only solidified what I already knew. I had lived a full life, rich with experience. My time had come.

Standing, I shuffled quietly to the open shutters, leaning against the rough ledge. Through the dormer, the sea thundered against the high rock wall far below, echoing up into the air around me. Foam tinged with the ocean's green and gray under belly sprang skyward with a seething his as stygian waves crashed together in a near deafening rhythm. I closed my eyes for a moment, feeling the pressure in my bones and the silent reverberations hum through my chest.

My arms felt heavy draped across the stone ridge and I closed my eyes. A chill wind curled through my loose hair, tickling my ears and cheeks. I took a deep breath and focused on the pungent air; salty rain and damp earth filled my tired lungs. The thick smells sent goose bumps ripping down my bare arms. A storm was coming, indeed. I opened my eyes and glanced briefly toward the setting sun. Inclement weather loomed gravid along the horizon and swirled sluggishly out of sight, like a fog-tinted window pane, frosty and gray.

I thought of the many distant lands and peoples I had known, and my mind began to wander through the window-paned history of my soul. The knowledge of Alexandria and the peoples of the desert lands in Egypt. The intrigue of the Orient trade routes, and of those who journey the endless roads to barter with Musselmen, Indians, Chinamen, and farther still. The Viking *berserkrs* who poured from dragons' bellies into the foreign lands rich in wares and slaves. One could almost envy the lifestyle of the sea-faring adventurers: they were well equipped to sail wherever they wished and take whatever they wanted, despite the devastating means through which they gained their wealth.

The ghost of a woman's nightmarish scream made me shudder in memory, pressing back the retrospection. Instead, I focused once more on the task at hand as I looked out into the dark liquid sapphires before me. The allure of wandering nomadically through uninhabited expanses of the earth had overwhelmed much of my youth.

*What more was there to find?* I wondered intensely.

*Everything,* a small voice answered.

The swollen sun began its leisurely descent into the depths of its nightly

womb. The wind blustered upward, and I took another deep breath to calm my nerves. I remained at the window a little longer before turning against the wine-soaked sunset. The sea soothed my ravaged mood and I felt a little less tired, but no less settled, still caught in the tangled vines of my past.

I wrapped the thick shawl tighter around my shoulders to cut out the frigid evening air, hooking two fingers through the thick woolen knitting absent mindedly. Returning to my chair, I tried to clear my mind of the haunting melancholia and cloying mists as I dipped the dry utensil into ink once more. The lunette at my back called to me, wafting the scent of reminiscence through the open bay.

My mottled hand began again as the briny waters whispered my memories, unwilling to staunch the images as they flowed from mind to hand to page. Soon, there was no one left alive who would know. Time had become a finite enemy, imbuing the deeper wish to relive the events again in reality rather than from the cloister of my small, dusty room. But soon all that would remain of history were the words penned by those desperate to remember, those willing to search through the windows of history. And I would not be shuttered.

-Excerpt from *Sea of Wolves*