

You know, it's a little funny the way things turned out. It's not like I expected to end up befriending and joining the group of raiders that originally kidnapped me. But in a weird sort of way I don't think I had much of a choice. Let me start from the beginning...

My name is Frodo. Okay, well, it didn't start that way. My REAL name is James Sarno and I was originally born in Venice in 1094. My father, a wealthy merchant from the Holy Roman Empire entered into a marriage with my mother, the daughter of an older even more wealthy Venetian merchant. Shortly thereafter, I was born and we moved to Florence where I would grow up under the tutelage of countless tutors in every subject imaginable. Everything from banking and finances, to philosophy, and, for a brief period in time, an Arabian scholar who taught me their medicines and mathematics. I grew up in the lap of luxury surrounded by servants and never wanted for anything. Though I'm guessing you find that it isn't entirely true. How else would I end up in a bang of Vikings?

Skip ahead to my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday or so. I have been sent from the house to do a tour of Northern Europe. I was to study with Monks in England and France and return home with a better appreciation for religion and mercantilism. But here's the thing; when you set loose an intelligent, educated son of a noble on northern Europe, he's bound to start doing things his own way. And wouldn't you know it I did just that. Instead of staying in a nice, quiet monastery/collage I took to the streets and started helping people I could. Growing up as I did, I had never seen squalor and poverty to such an extent. I went from door to door and eventually town to town treating injuries and minor illnesses as best I could. I would teach farmers in the country side new ways of cultivating soil (a process called crop-rotation). It was in a coastal fishing village that I was the lovely northern savages.

It all happened in a flash. Steel of axes and swords cutting through bodies with ease. Innocent people running and screaming away from the village. Others being drabbed kicking and screaming back to the long boats the savages came in. houses being torched and food stores being plundered. And then they came to me. Shouting in a rough language with some German dialect, they called someone over from the other side of the street. A shorter, stocky looking man with a well trimmed beard came over and the rest of the savages backed away. The man knelt down next to me where I sat.

"Do you understand me?" he asked in rough German. I nodded slowly.

"You are of noble birth, are you not?" Again, I nodded. I already didn't like where this was going.

"You are German?"

"No. Well, not completely."

"Darker skin... Accent is not entirely German. Where are you from?"

"Florence."

"Italy. Excellent. I need something that bears your family crest. A ring, or necklace." He held out his hand and waited for me to put something in it.

"You wish to ransom me?"

"That's the idea. Coin buys provisions in the long run. And you will bring a nice, bountiful ransom."

I couldn't help but laugh. "You really think he's going to pay? Or even care for that matter? Look at where I am. What son of a noble ends up in a fishing village on the English shore treating injuries and teaching astronomy? I'm not wanted by him. Not anymore."

"Than what good are you?" with that he held his ax to my neck and pulled back to swing

“I CAN TEACH YOU!” I shouted out as I flinched and turned away. He paused, his ax still raised. I look around at the man and other savages.

“I can teach you mathematics, astronomy, modern anatomy and medicines. I can be useful. I may not be worth money, but I’m worth my knowledge. I’m not asking you to set me free, I’m asking you to spare me.”

There are some pauses that just seem to last. Like when you ask a father for his daughters hand in marriage. When your father calls you into his study because you have disappointed him yet again and he’s just staring at you. And then there’s this pause. That one where everything is magnified. You can see the individual hairs on the man’s face, the grains in the iron hatchet being held above your head, can feel the sweat coming out of your pores. Eventually he lowered the ax. He reached out with his free hand and helped me up.

“We have a deal.”

Ever since, It’s been treating wounds, teaching the women and younger men medicines, acting as the occasional financial advisor, and anything else that my tutoring can be of use. Of course, teaching doesn’t pull a lot of weight around the village, so I took up the sword and shield and haven’t looked back since.