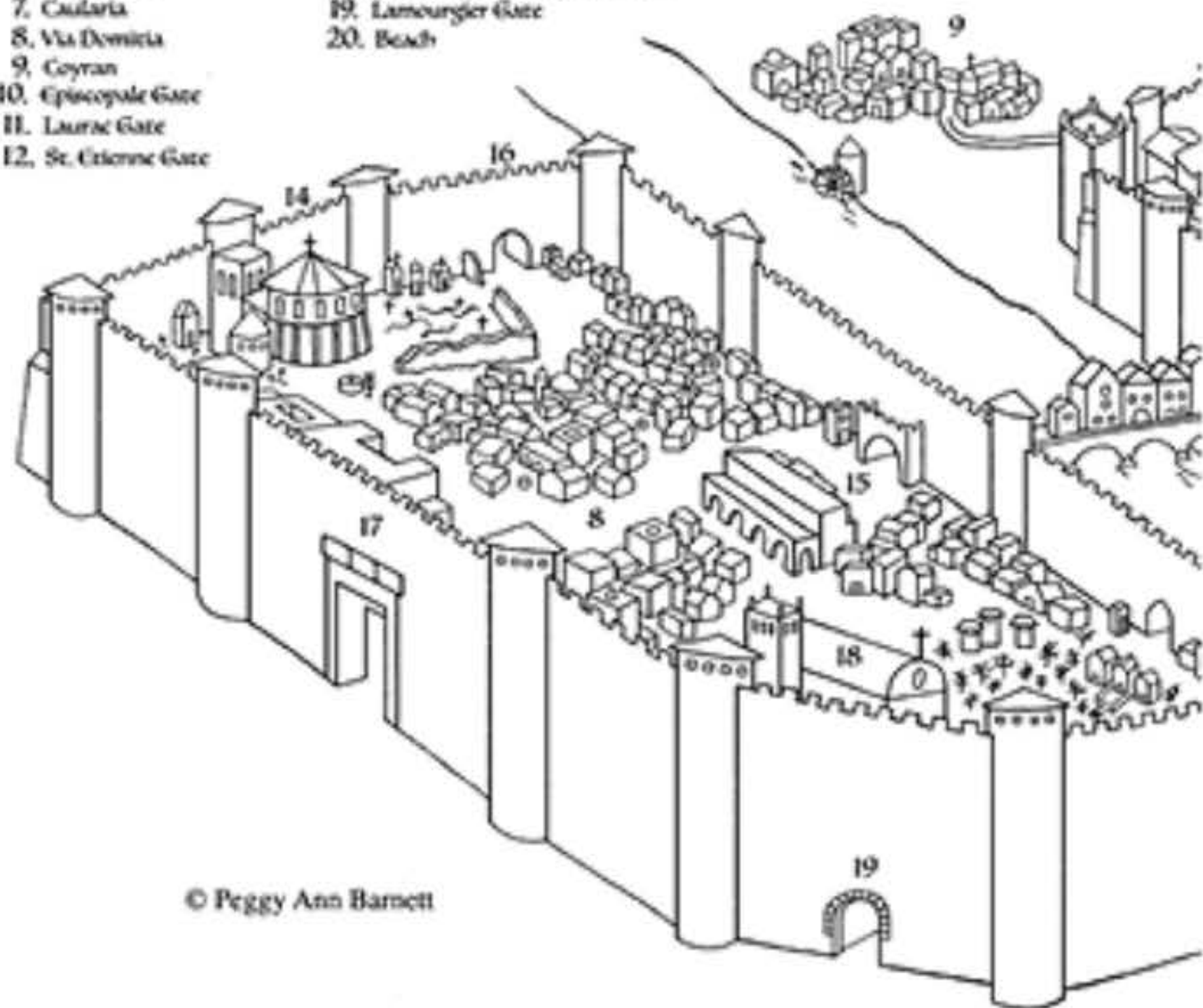
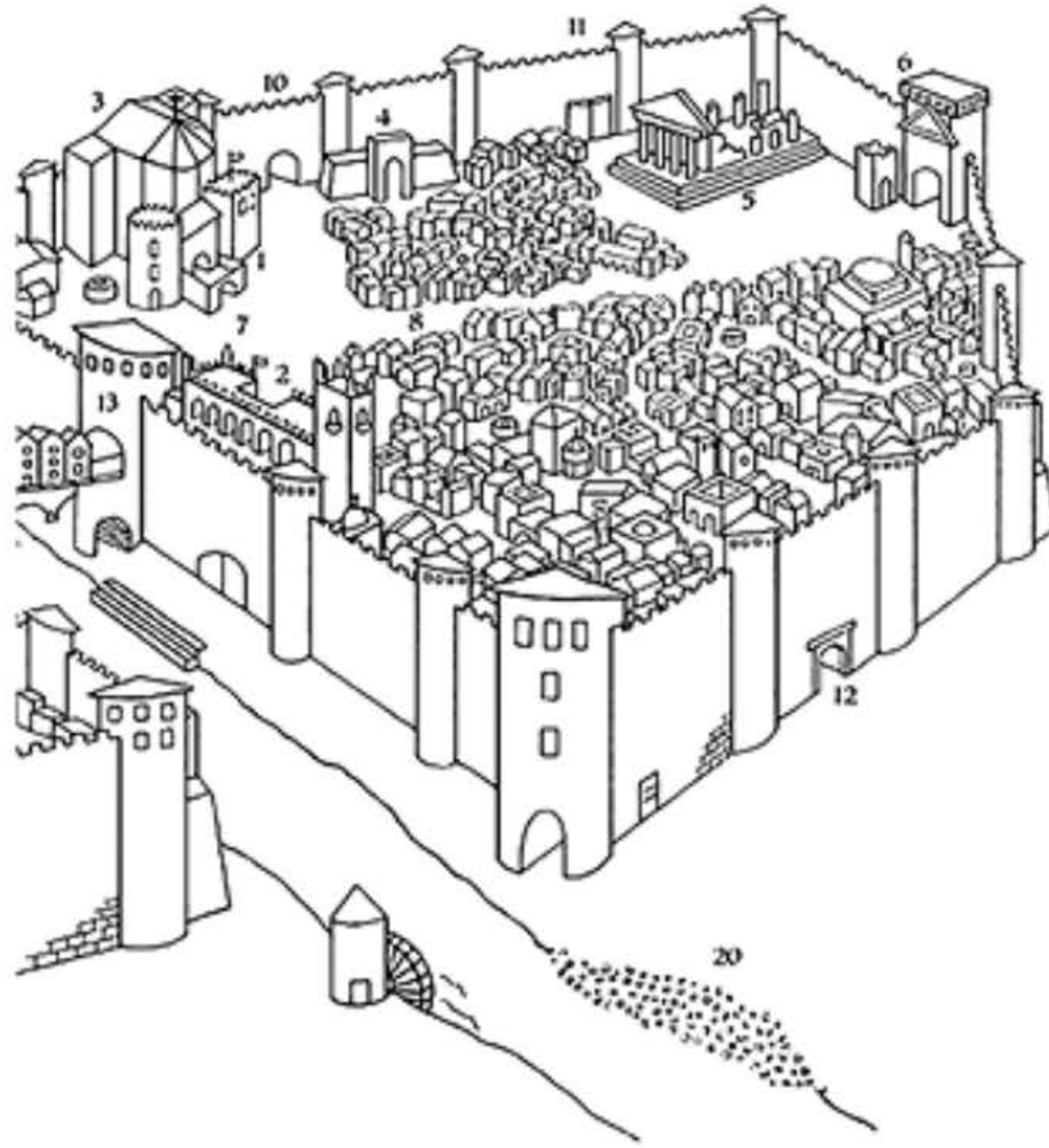




Narbonne 1152

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Archbishop's Palace | 13. Water Gate |
| 2. Ermengard's Palace | 14. Basilique St. Paul-Serge |
| 3. St. Just Cathedral | 15. Bourse |
| 4. Horreum | 16. Raymond-Jean Gate |
| 5. Capitol | 17. St. Paul Gate |
| 6. Royal Gate | 18. St. Marie-Lamouurier Church |
| 7. Caularia | 19. Lamouurier Gate |
| 8. Via Domitia | 20. Beach |
| 9. Coyran | |
| 10. Episcopale Gate | |
| 11. Laurac Gate | |
| 12. St. Etienne Gate | |





HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

ERMENGARD, Viscountess of Narbonne, born Narbonne 1129?—1196

ROGENVALDR KALI KOLSSON: Earl of Orkney, Scotland, Born Norway, 1103?—1158

BISHOP WILLIAM: Bishop of Orkney, Scotland from 1135–1168

EINDREDI UNGI: Norwegian sea captain, Rogenvldr's cousin

ASLAK: A young nobleman Rogenvldr is charged with protecting

SEAMEN IN NORSE FLEET (AS PER ORKNEYINGA SAGA): Magnus, Gudorm, Oddie, Thorbjorn, Swain, Gimkel, Blian, Armod, Thorgeir, etc.

BISHOP PELAGIUS: Bishop of Orviedo, Spain from 1102—1156

CANON HUGON: Abbot of Prémontré Monastery, Kingdom of France,
from 1131—1161

BISHOP BURCHARD: Bishop of Cambray, France, envoy of Pope

ARCHBISHOP PIERRE D'ANDUZE: Archbishop of Narbonne from 1150
—1156

BERNARD D'ANDUZE: Archbishop Pierre D'Anduze's older brother

ABBOT DON ESTABON: Abbot of Fontfroide, a Cistercian Monastery

HENRY THE MONK: A Bons Hommes Parfait, a heretic preacher

BERNAUTZ DE VENTADORN, JAUFRE RUDEL, RAIMBAUT, D'AURENGA:
Troubadours, mid-twelfth century

FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

COUNTESS BEATRITZ DE DENT: Ermengard's dependent, a secret
heretic, a Bonne Fille, Cathar, Ermengard's investigator

THIBAUT DE PLAIGNE: Ermengard's liege knight, an older man in love
with Beatritz

ALAIS: Countess de Dent's thirteen-year-old daughter

SANCHA ESPAZA: Woman in charge of entertaining Norsemen

BATHSHEBA: A slave, Princess of Begwena, a descendant of Bathsheba

SIGRID ERLANDSDOTTIR: Aslak's kidnapped sister, now named Nila

PETER DE BRUEIL, PETER RAYMOND: Advisors to Ermengard

MAURAND DE TOULOUSE: Part of Ermengard's court, a heretic, a Bons
Hommes

BARALA BEN TODROS: Jewish banker in Narbonne

ARNAUD GERARDI: Has stone quarry and two daughters, Ermessend
and Gauzia

GUILLIAM MAURS: Templar Knight employed by Archbishop D'Anduze

BROTHER RAMON: A monk whose life is devoted to music

BROTHER GILBERT: A monk whose life is devoted to olives

RAYMOND AND AZALAIS d'OUVELHAN: Parents of Garsend, heretics,
Bons Hommes

GARSEND: The heretic Azalais d'Ouvelhan's thirteen-year-old daughter

PONZIA de COMIC: Widowed seamstress to Ermengard, Fabrisse's
mother, a heretic

FABRISSE: Ponzia de Comic's thirteen-year-old daughter

GODFREY: Hugon's soldier monk, servant

FROTARD: Jailor in D'Anduze's dungeon

GOMBAL: Jailor in Roman prison

ESCORALDA: Herbalist, keeper of the Mysteries

ABBOT RAMON: Abbot of Ganagobie Abbe

PRELUDE

*And I looked, and behold,
a whirlwind came out of the north,
a great cloud,
a fire engulfing itself,
and a brightness was about it,
and out of its midst
as the color of amber, the fire.
—Ezekiel 1:4, King James Bible*

JANUARY 1150, COAST OF THE NORTH SEA, NORWAY

A narwhal died. But the Virgins of the Night, the flames of their luminous green skirts crackling and flickering in the black sky, were too busy dancing above the North Sea to care. Pierced by stars twinkling like diamonds, their glowing, transparent veils streak down to the horizon, then flame upwards with outstretched arms. Red sea foam crashes against icebergs flashing like cracked emeralds floating on a black mirror.

The ice would always thicken as winter turned more frigid, but this year the freeze arrived later than usual, deceiving the pod of twenty-two narwhals feeding in the sea depths. Sharp ice crystals slowly formed under the waves. As the cold water sank, warm water rose, and the thick slush, sensed by each narwhal's long tooth, alerted the pod that it was time—at once—to leave for warmer feeding grounds. The quiet, round black opening in the icy field over them was closing fast, leaving only a ten-foot-wide rivulet leading to the open sea. Whistling and trumpeting high-pitched warnings to each other, mother narwhals surfaced to swim the shrinking passage, frantically attempting to herd their

calves to other feeding grounds in the west.

A flash of silver had caught the eye of a hungry young male hunting in the cold darkness below. Diving after it into deeper waters, he slowed his heartbeat and made his excited clicking as silent as possible to avoid alerting his prey. His need for a fat, oily meal made him lose control, and soon he was clicking so fast and loud that the fish always knew where he was, constantly evading him. But eventually his prey tired, at which point he stunned the flapping cod by hitting it on the head with his tooth. Sucking the slippery pleasure into his throat, he devoured the whole fish in one greedy gulp. The narwhal never even heard the frantically calling voices of his pod.

Hearing the loud crack of the passage snapping shut, the narwhal panicked. Heart pounding rapidly he aimed for the surface, though, when he arrived, it was only to thrash frantically under the cold white wall above him. There was no escape. The narwhal's heart, beating slower and slower, gave out as he drowned.

Morning sunlight streamed through the ice to light up his mottled, white underbelly bumping up against its frozen prison. Cold currents gradually pushed his bulk towards land.

The receding tide left him lying on the black stones of a curved beach, a silvery glinting dot at the end of a massive fjord, its snow-speckled mountains reaching out to the sea like a lover's arms.

...

Thornson couldn't breathe. His heart was a clenched fist pounding against his ribs. As far as he could see on the high plateau were the corpses of dead reindeer—his reindeer herd. Hanging over rocks, legs sprawled out over the frozen ground, fur singed,

the carcasses were already being fought over by wolves, foxes, and a white spirit bear. Bloody pieces of meat hanging from antlers were being snapped at by eagles that screeched down, then swerved upwards to avoid snapping jaws. Heavy, yellow-nosed vultures bent down the lower branches of dark firs, waiting for an opening to join the frenzy.

Last night's terrible lightning storm had stolen his winter food. *There is only hunger in my future*, he thought.

Over and over the giant hammer of the thunder god Dierpmis had crashed down on the mountainsides, sending thunder rolling down into the valley. The Sami had never seen anything like those flashes lighting up the world.

"I fear Dierpmis will slay the sacred reindeer Meandash tonight," Thornson had whispered to his wife as they huddled around the tiny flame flickering in the drafts of their small stone hut, tightly holding their trembling sons. The great, golden-antlered reindeer spirit, with its silver coat, black head, and burning eyes ran all over the mountains to escape the lightning-arrows of Dierpmis' bolt-thrower.

Thornson was worried. *Perhaps Meandash was killed last night. Is that why all my reindeer are dead? I must consult a Noaidi.*

The Noaidi shaman understood, nodding his head. "I will go to speak with your reindeer spirits and ask them." Chanting, beating his drum, the shaman turned himself into a raven and flew away. He returned from the journey with a message for Thornson sent by the animals' spirits.

"It was necessary for us to be sacrificed," he said. "Winter has come early, and many animals are dying from hunger. Sometimes death is the only way to continue the cycle of life. You will be blessed for this sacrifice."

Hunger is a blessing? Thornson hung his head in shame at the

selfish thought.

...

Pushing aside the layers of sealskin that held in the warmth of his hut, Thornson stepped into the dim dawn of day. The yellow sun was just under the horizon, rays glowing under a pale blue sky. He gazed upwards. The Virgin Dancers were still shimmering lightly, but he could see they were going to sleep. This was good. The paler they were, the less dangerous they were. He didn't want to attract their attention—people had been carried away, or even worse, had their heads sliced off.

"Sussu, I'm going to find amber to trade for food," he said over his shoulder, brushing the powdery snow that tumbled down from the birch branches on the roof from his wiry beard. His sons were still wrapped in deerskins, curled around the fire pit stones with their mother. Eles' thin, bony arm stuck out from the furs. Sussu's eyes were daily growing larger above the cheekbones of her thinning face.

Yes, see how blessed I am, he thought. Sighing, he turned to head toward the beach, where amber often washed up on shore.

Ailo, his black-eyed sturdy ten-year-old, popped out of the hut. "I'm coming with you." Thornson looked at him affectionately. In his brown, furry suit and hood, mittened hands on hips, he looked like a walrus standing on its tail. "No, stay here and help your mother."

"I'm just as hungry as you are. And I want to help feed the family."

Sussu, still wrapped in her reindeer blanket, came out. "Why not take him along? He's got better eyes than you. Go. May the gods bring you luck."

They kept their eyes lowered in the frigid North Sea wind. Salt-encrusted, round black stones crunched beneath their boots as they walked carefully, hoping to spot the orange glint of amber. All around them the frozen day was black, white, gray, and noisy. Screaming black petrels, cormorants, and gulls, wheeling in the air dove hungrily into frothy waves pounding the shore.

An eagle, spotting the tiny red and blue spots of Thornson's and Ailo's hats against the snow-capped peaks, decided they were not edible, and curved away on an air current.

"Remember, Ailo, you must be very respectful of amber. After all, each piece is a tear shed by Beaivi the Sun Goddess, who is overcome with fear every time she travels through the dark ocean at night. Even down in the deep, her tear-rays shine through the waters, and she cries until the time comes when she can rise up into the sky again. Amber is her frozen tears washed up on the shore."

"I found a tear!" Ailo bent down, eagerly snatching up an orange crescent glinting in a crevice between two black rocks. The child examined the triangular piece of amber sitting in the palm of his hand, then held it up to the sky at the bright spot where the sun was shining just below the horizon. "Look—there's an animal in it. So strange. How did it get there?"

Thornson grabbed it from him. A clear black silhouette of a tiny bird was frozen in the golden jewel. Thin wings spread out in flight, stick-like feet with claws curled up against its chest, its narrow little beak, floating in glowing sea of bubbles. Thornson had a sudden sense of panic, as if a god was watching. It was a seiwo-neidoh, a magic bird—a god child!

Snapping his arm back, he quickly threw the glowing stone out into the sea, as far as he could beyond the first line of breakers.

“Here, it is returned. You see, we rescued it,” he cried. “Don’t punish us!”

Firmly grabbing Ailo’s shoulder, he turned to walk away. “Never keep amber with an animal in it. Never! Some people who find one sell it for gold. Bad things always happen to them. Remember Gávgu the fisherman? He found a stone with a worm in it and sold it to a trader. The very next day Gávgu’s boat was smashed by a grampus whale. Nearly ate him.” Amber was valuable, yet it had its dangers.

Walking along, busily kicking rocks, Thornson raised his eyes and couldn’t believe what he saw. “There, ahead!” he cried, pointing. “A narwhal!”

The narwhal looked just like the bloated corpse of a drowned sailor. It was lying by the water’s edge at the far west end of the fjord. Thornson ran over to claim it: not just for the meat, but for the wealth a long twisted alicorn tooth in perfect condition could bring him when he gave it to the King down south in Trondelag. It easily measured the length of his widespread arms. With calloused hands he examined the brown, twisted tooth carefully, searching for any chips, cracks, or splinters. “It’s perfect! Thank you, magic bird. Or is it Máilmi’s reward for my reindeer?”

“Hah!” he shouted, laughing as he spun Ailo around and around in the air. “Fetch Eles and the sled!”

The carcass was huge, the size of a bull reindeer’s torso. Panting, pushing, and pulling, the heavy weight threatening to break the wooden runners, the three dragged the narwhal home.

Sussu had already started a fire outside the hut. “Put it near the hot stones to thaw. I have to cut the tooth out.”

Skilled in these matters, Sussu carefully began to detach the horn from the narwhal’s mouth by pulling out the teeth sur-

rounding it. Using a stone flint she cut into the gray flesh all the way up to the skull. Then came the most delicate part of the work. With her fingers and a sharp ivory knife, she snapped off the tooth without damaging its wide base which, Sussu saw with satisfaction, was at least the width of her palm.

She then put the dead narwhal's fresh liver into a clay jar to save for its life-giving oil. The bones would be carved into tools, and the rest of the animal was cut up and buried in a hole in the frozen floor for future meals. A prayer was offered as she burned the remains and scattered the ashes back into the water to appease the narwhal's spirit and thank it for so much wealth.

Then, Sussu melted snow to make warm, fresh water. Chanting, she ritually bathed the horn, cleaning it of blood and sand to purify it. She then wrapped the alicorn horn in the soft, white fur of a spirit bear, and tied the bundle tightly shut with a deer gristle lanyard. Thornson was preparing to set out on the four-day journey south to the King. Sussu heated up some pine resin and wiped the bottom of his pinewood skis with it.

"May the goddess Máilmi keep you safe," she prayed, using a finger to draw a circle with deer butter on his forehead. "It is a cold time to travel. Beware the white spirit."

Pushing on his poles, he set off on the journey to Trondelag. To remain unseen, Thornson dodged between thin, black-branched birch trees, skiing on mountain snow well inland of the coastline. Snow scraped his face as he flew down rocky slopes.

The night was bitterly cold. Afraid of thieves, he didn't make a fire and slept in a pine tree. By morning his legs had turned deadly white and wouldn't move. Pushing himself out of the tree, he fell in a heap. After punching his thighs and hitting his boots against the tree trunk, enough feeling returned to enable him to

hobble onto his skis.

Thornson drank some of the stomach-burning fermented fish oil his wife had tucked into a jacket pouch. Gasping and coughing, ignoring his dizziness, he struggled to stay upright and go further south.

Snow packed itself heavily on his shoulders. The next two days sped by in a blur of black trees, white ice, and grey unending rocks. Skimming over the tundra he skirted the edges of fjords to avoid hungry white spirits following his movements. Digging holes in the snow, he slept hidden under its blanket.

Eventually, from the crest of a high ridge, Thornson could see the jagged brown ramparts of Trondelag on the next mountain top. Trudging down into the valley and up the slope ahead, he finally arrived at the gate.

He must have collapsed for he didn't remember being carried in. The warmth of a fire and the smell of hot reindeer stew woke him up. Clutching the white bundle of fur to his chest he ate, fell asleep again, and woke in the morning, still grasping his precious horn. The guard by the door put down his ale and stared at him as he approached.

Thornson demanded, "I must see King Haraldsson. I must see the King. It is my right." After arguing with two other guards, he was grudgingly taken over to the king's meeting hall.

Upon entering, heat from the blazing fire pit hanging from a ceiling beam hit him full in the face. On the walls flickering carved animal spirits bared their blade-sharp teeth alongside double-edged battle axes and brightly painted wooden shields. Wearing cloaks that left one arm bare, sporting heavy gold torques around their necks, warriors lounged beside fur-wrapped women whose jeweled necklaces reflected the flames. When they

saw Thornson standing there, everyone stopped talking and stared. A low laugh rippled through the room.

The King of Norway, Sigurd II Haraldsson, stout, strong and obviously annoyed, was restlessly pacing around the room barking at the 'jarls' who served him. Turning his blue-eyed, bushy-haired head to see what everyone was staring at, he found a battered-looking Sami fisherman down on one knee.

"Well?"

"My Lord," Thornson began, then realized he didn't know how to speak to a King. "My, my King."

"Yes, yes," Sigurd II impatiently encouraged him. "Speak!"

"I am Thornson of the Sami people." Not knowing what else to do, he reached out to hand him the long, now filthy, fur bundle.

Sighing, the King handed it to his wife who took a small silver knife out of a pouch on her belt. Standing up, she carefully cut the gristle lanyards and unrolled the bear skin. Smiling, she handed the horn to the King.

Sigurd's eyebrows went up to his forehead. Examining the horn from tip to base, he finally said, "It's perfect."