

THE INTERRUPTED HULDRE WEDDING

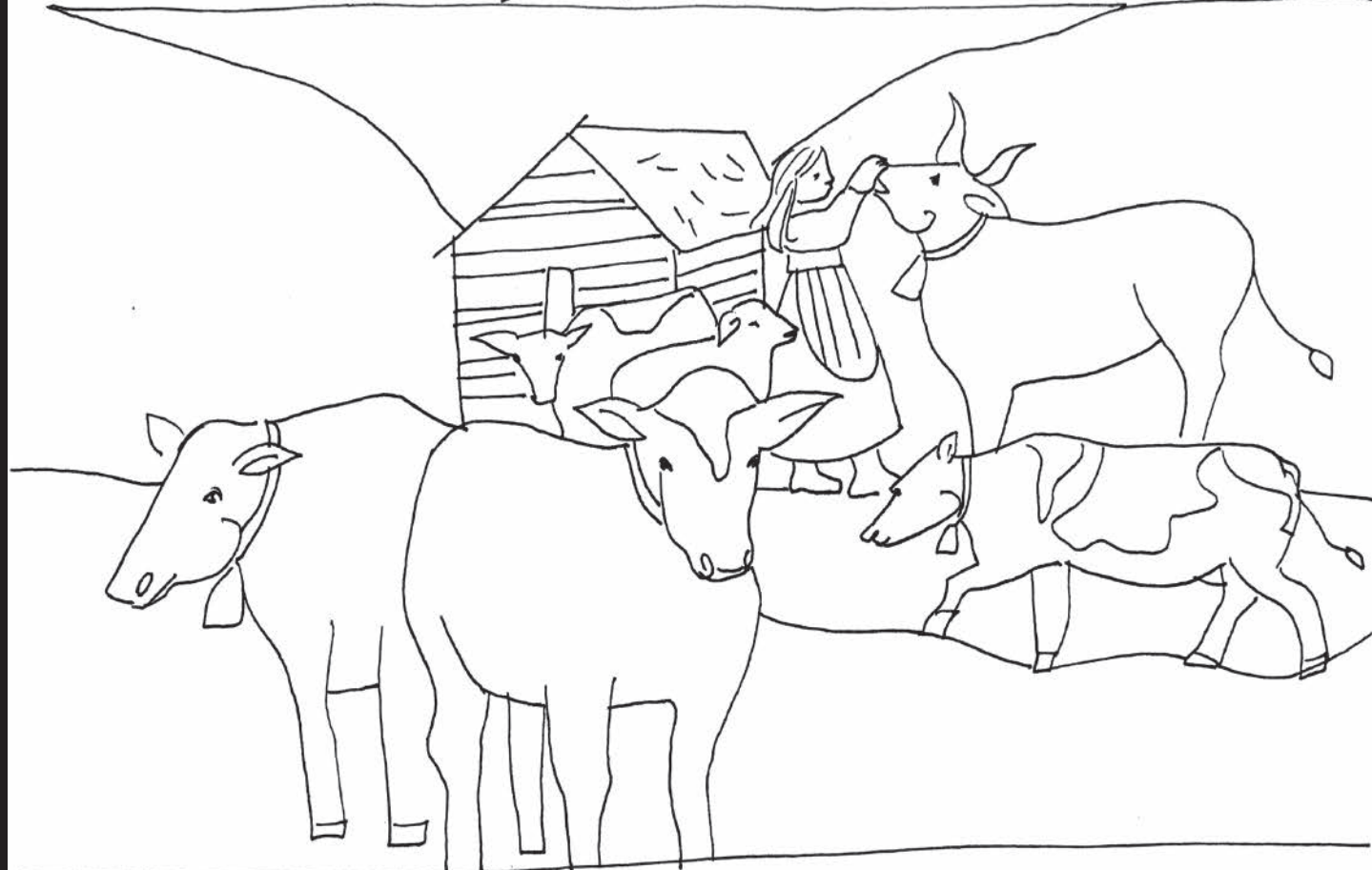
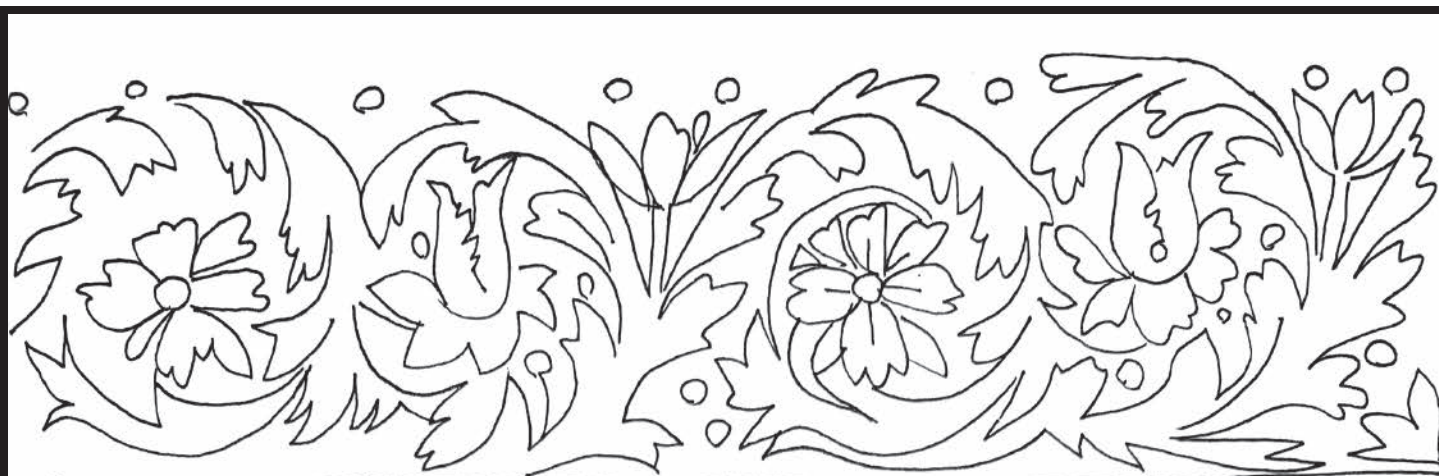


A RETELLING BY LISE LUNGE LARSEN
ILLUSTRATED BY ALISON AUNE

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DULUTH, MINNESOTA

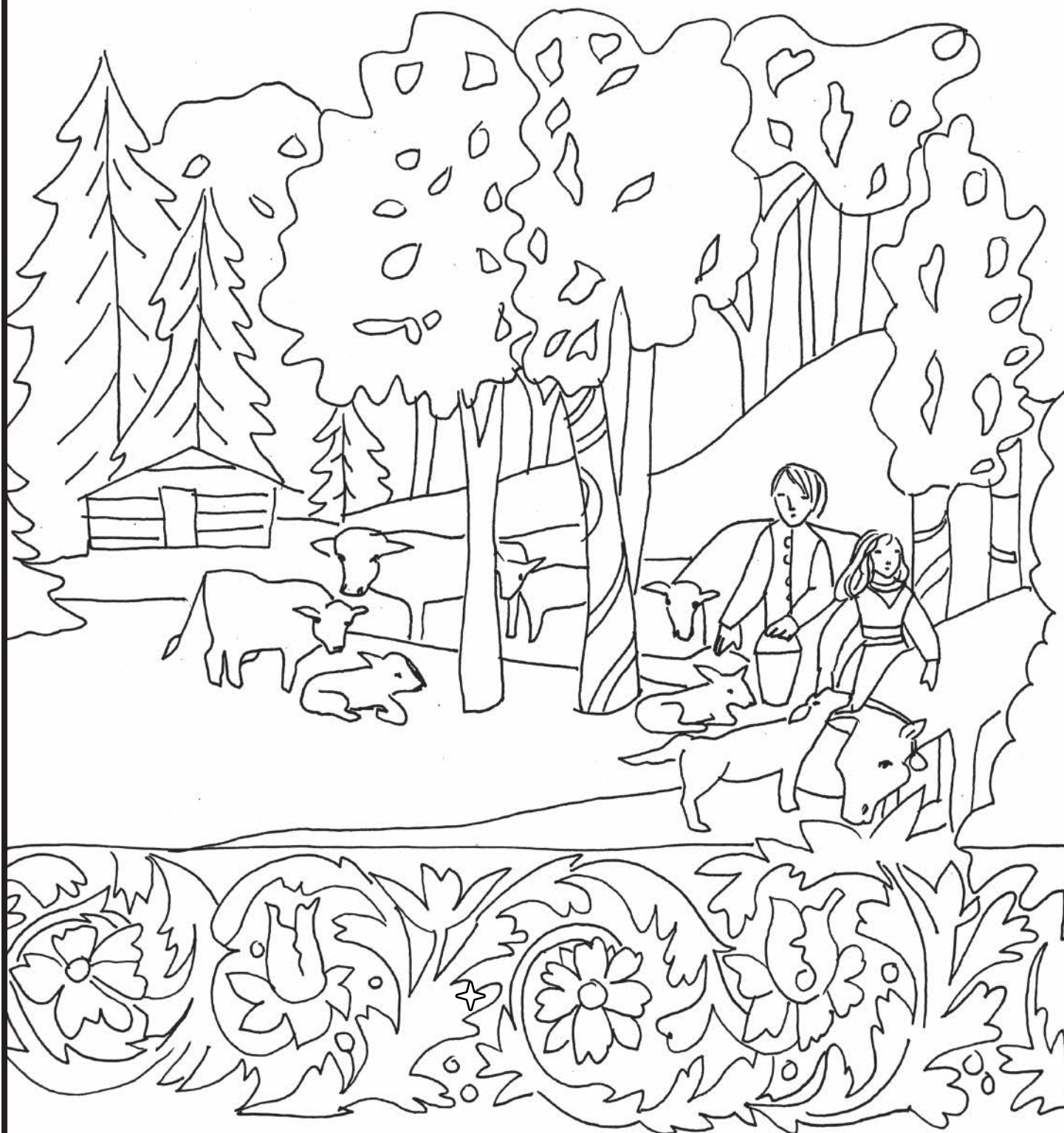
FROM SEVERAL STORIES FOUND IN *FOLKTALES OF NORWAY* EDITED BY REIDAR CHRISTIANSEN 1964



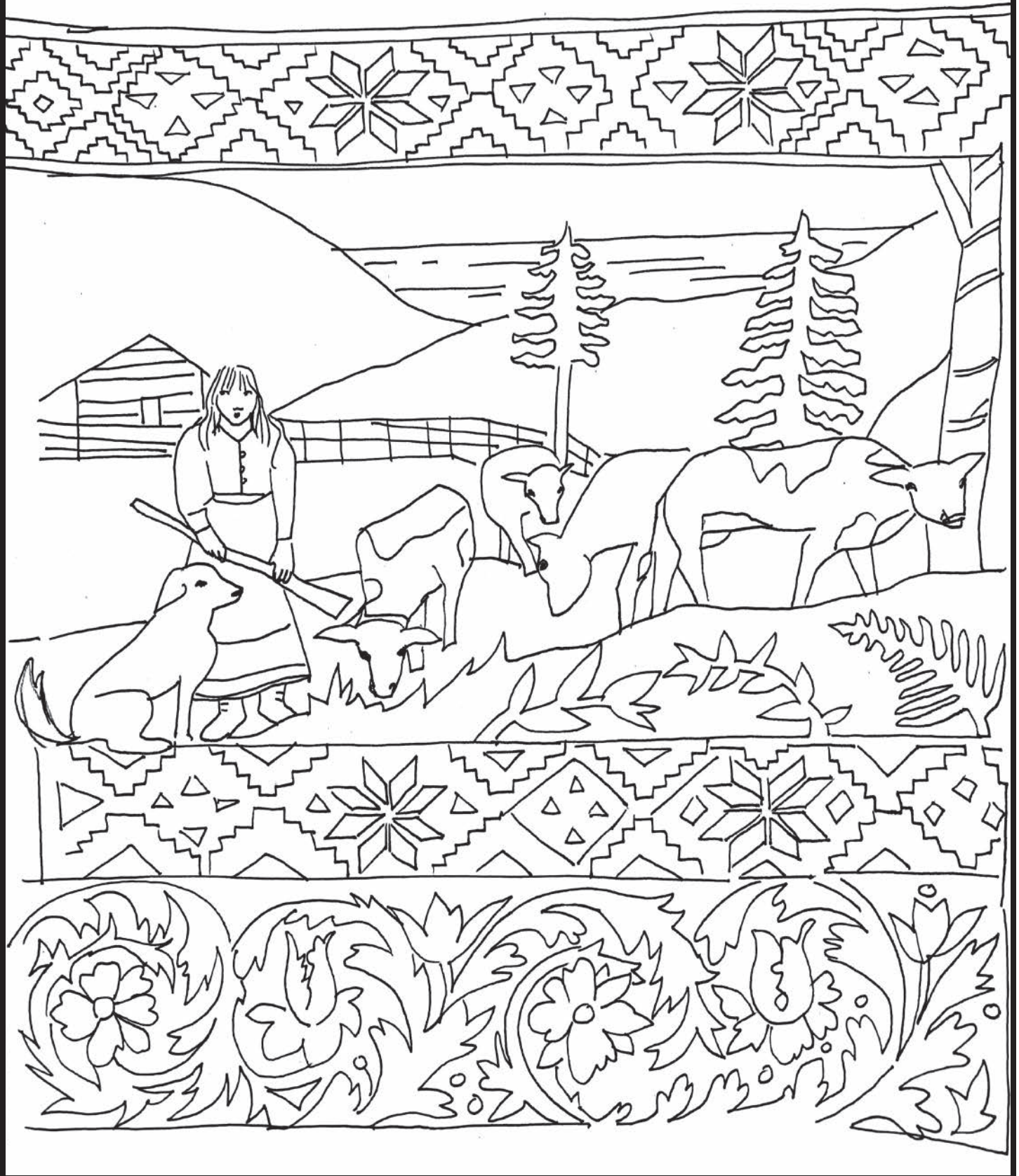
A long time ago it was the custom for dairymaids to take the cows up into the mountains to pasture for the summer. While there, the maids stayed at a seter, a small cottage.



One summer a girl named Elli was the dairymaid at a farm called Norstu. She had just become engaged and sometimes her sweetheart, Lars, visited her at the seter and helped with the cows.



But mostly she was there all by herself except for the company of the farm dog, Rapp and the cattle, of course.



When she wasn't busy tending the cows, Elli liked to weave. One afternoon as she was sitting by her loom, Lars suddenly appeared and sat down beside her.

"I have been thinking about the wedding," he said, "And I don't want to wait till the end of the summer. Let's get married now."

Elli sat very still and didn't say a word. This was strange talk she thought and also she felt so peculiar.

Not only that, Rapp growled at Lars, his neck fur sticking straight up. Usually Rapp loved Lars' visits and wanted him to rub his belly. Now the dog ran to the door, scratching and barking to get out.



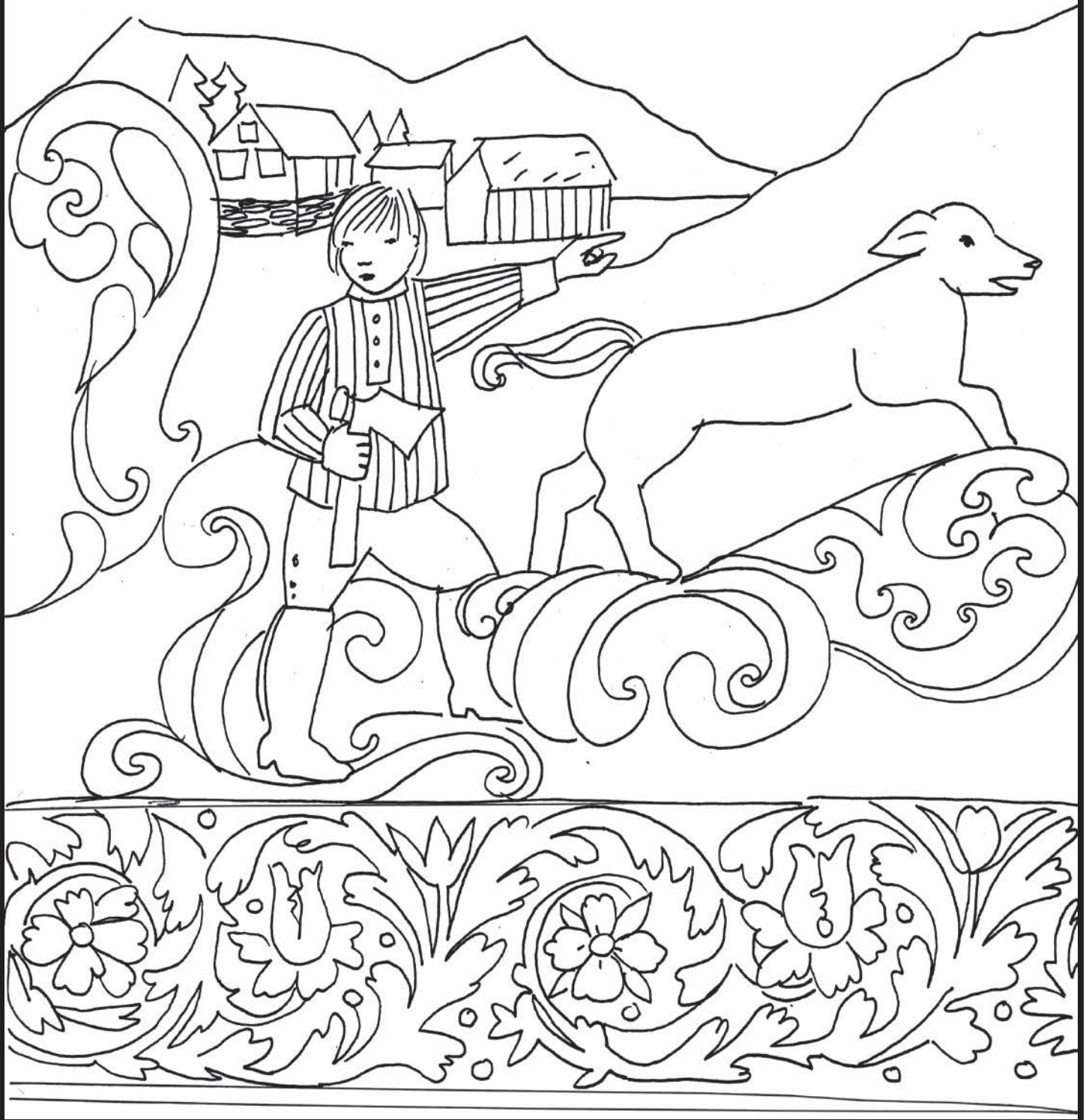
Quickly, Elli opened the door and Rapp dashed off down the mountain and towards the farm. Elli would have liked to follow him, but suddenly people began to come in. She thought she recognized them as women from the nearby farms but she wasn't quite sure. They started setting the table with fine plates, silver and food. Then bridesmaids entered carrying a crown, a beautiful wedding gown, ribbons, brooches and rings, everything a bride needs. Elli felt strange, like she wasn't really there and she could not resist the women who started to dress her. They fitted her into the gown, placed the crown on her head, pinned several brooches on her chest, and put rings on her fingers.

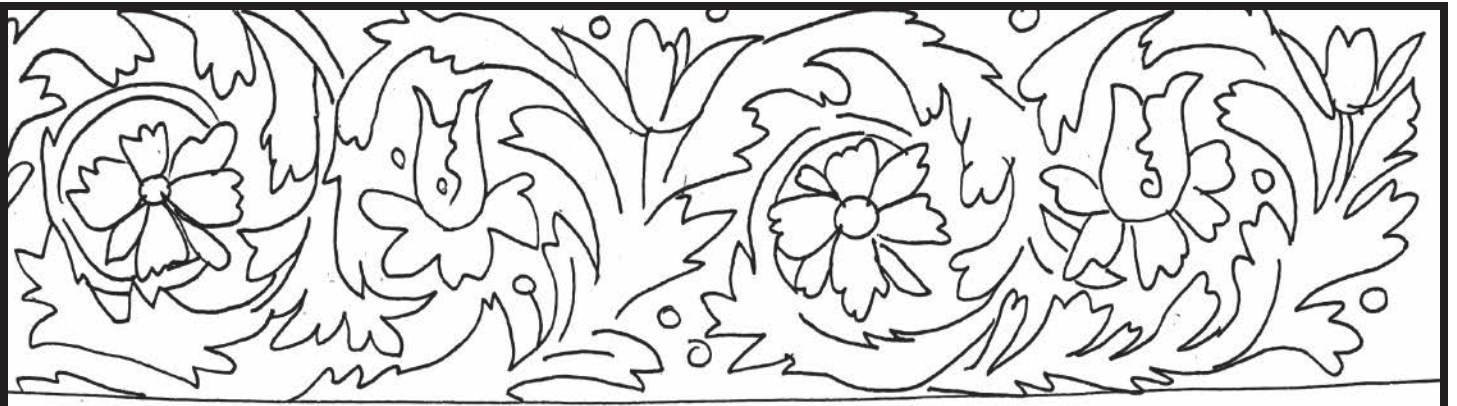


While Elli was being dressed Rapp ran straight to the farm. He barked and whined loudly at the door. When the farmer came out, Rapp dashed inside, jumped up on the sofa, put his paws on the axe, which hung on the wall, and barked with all his might.

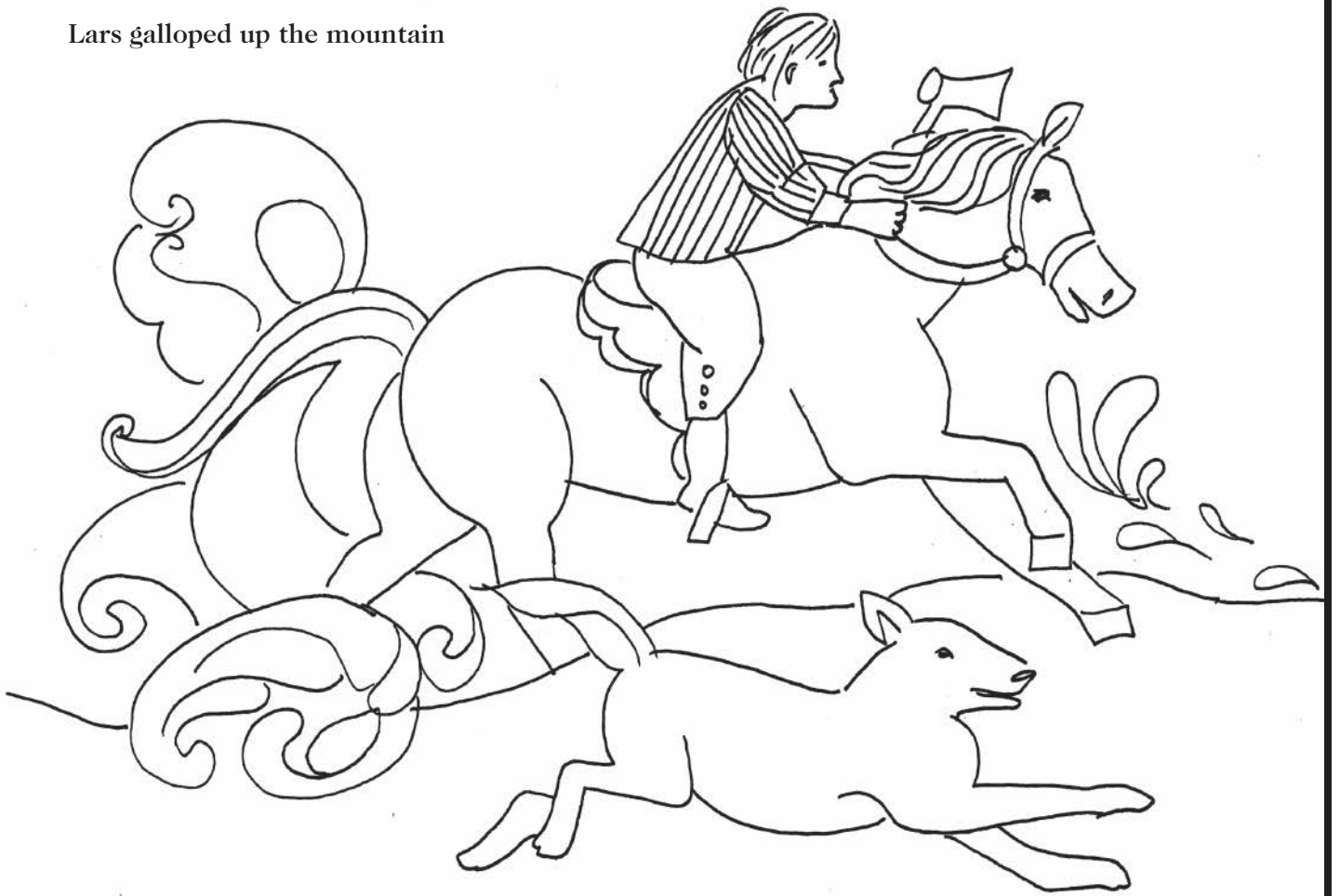
Now the farmer knew something bad had happened.

Grabbing the steel axe, he ran outside and yelled to Lars, "Get on the horse and ride to the seter at once. Take the axe. Something is wrong."





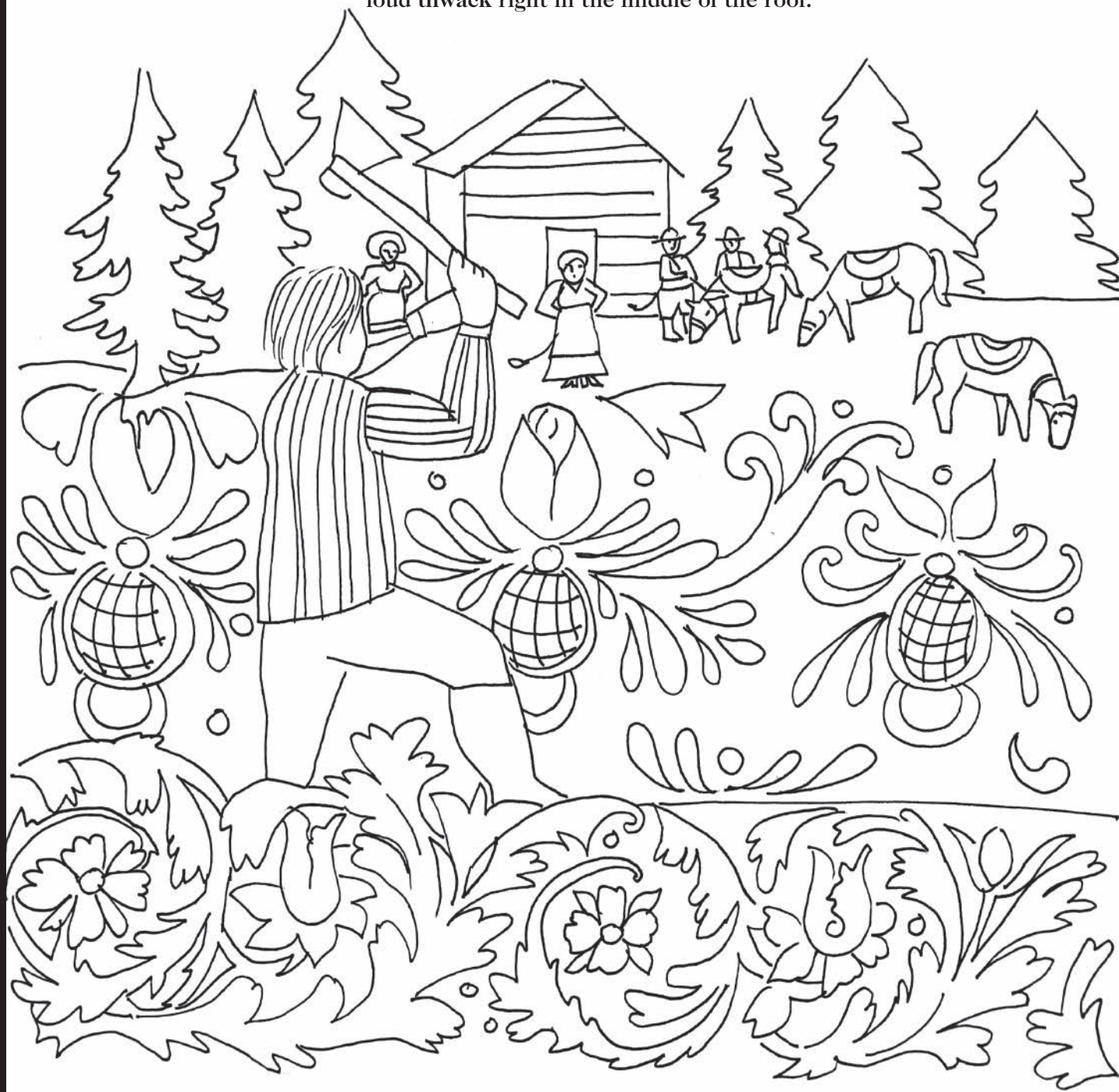
Lars galloped up the mountain





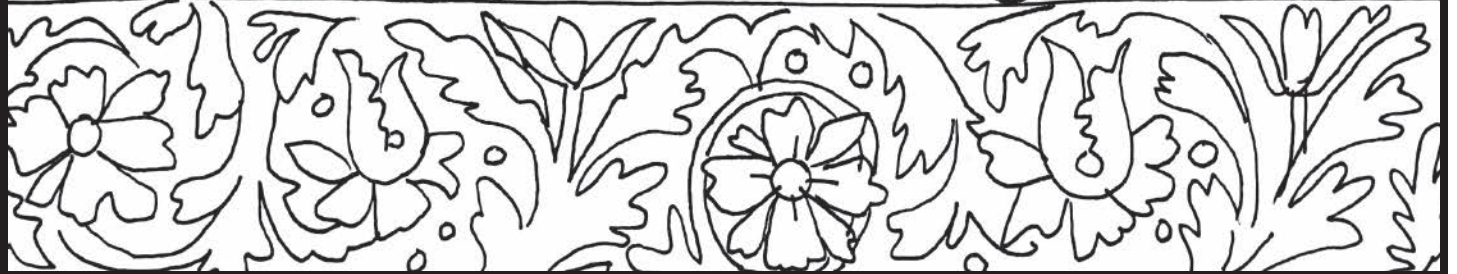
and when he arrived, he saw that the seter yard was full of saddled horses standing around. Quietly, he sneaked over to the cottage and peeked through a crack in the door. People dressed in fine clothes were milling about. They had their back to him and Lars realized that these were not ordinary people but huldrefolk for he could plainly see their tails.

Grabbing his axe by the handle, Lars flung it high into the air. It made an arc and landed with a loud thwack right in the middle of the roof.





No sooner did the axe embed itself on the rooftop than the door flew open and out rolled one ball of grey wool after another. It was the huldrefolk escaping. They had turned themselves into balls of yarn so they could flee quickly and without being recognized. Now they twirled past Lars' legs and sped off into the mountains.





Lars hurried inside. There sat Elli dressed as a bride. He had come in the nick of time for only the ring for the little finger was missing. Had they put that on her, she would have been married to the hulder.

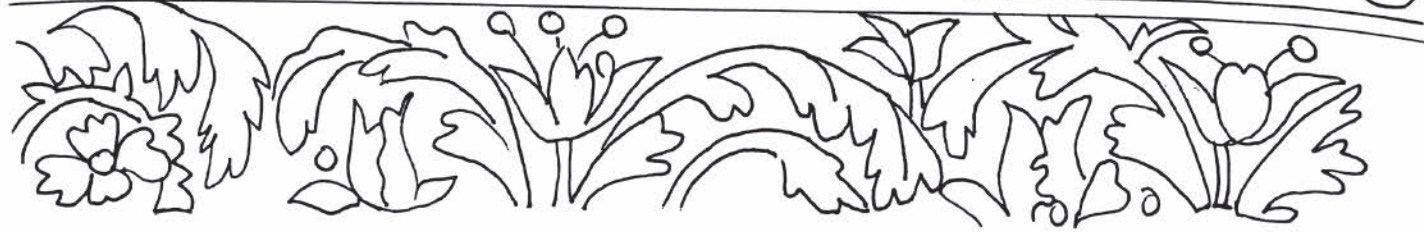
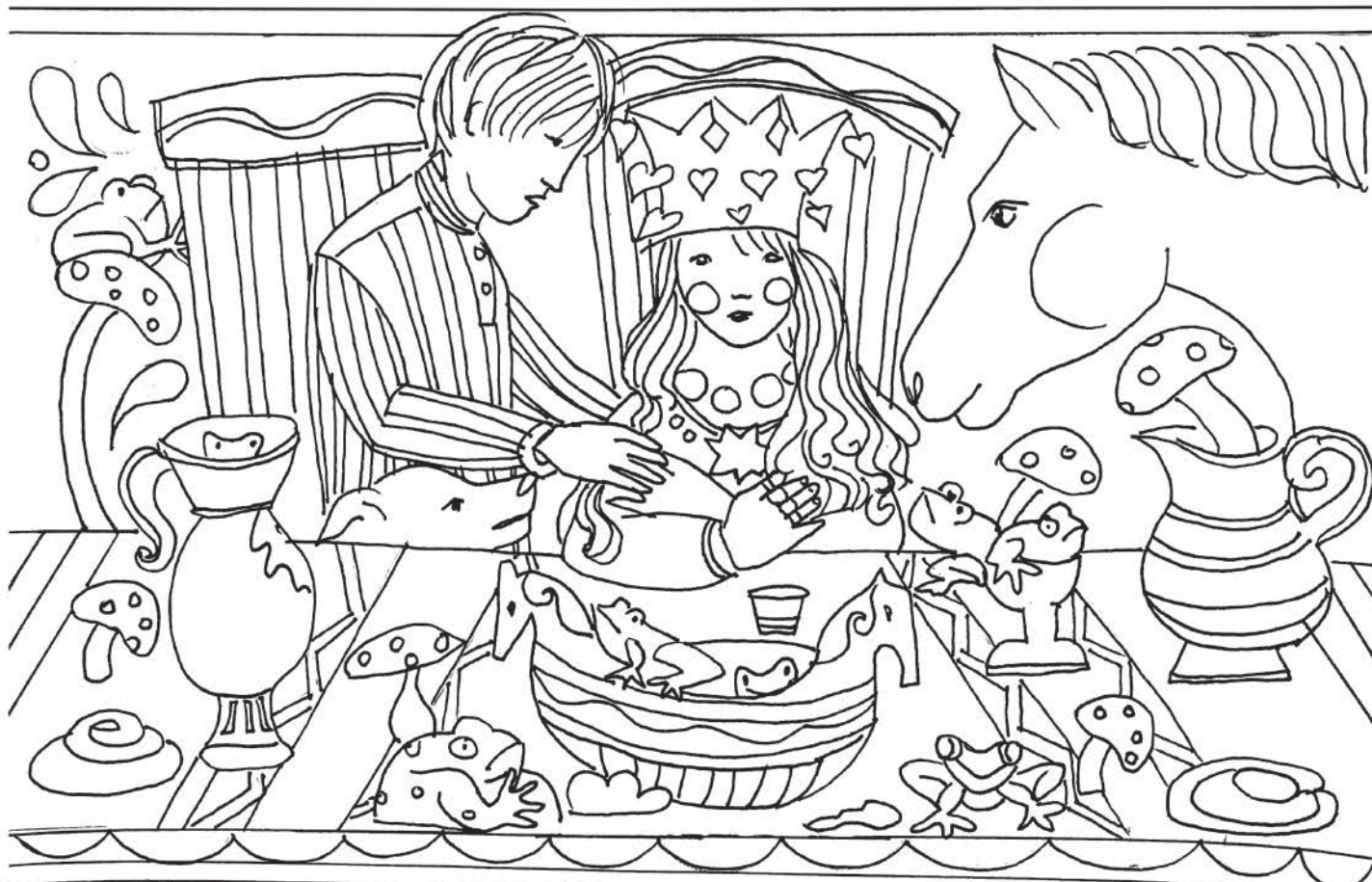
“What in the world is going on?” asked Lars looking around. The silver was still on the table but the food had turned into moss and toadstools, cow dung and toads and other things like that.

“Why are you sitting here dressed as a bride?” asked Lars.

“You should talk,” said Elli. “You’ve been here all afternoon chatting to me about the wedding.”

“No I haven’t! I came just now,” said he. “It must have been someone who made himself look like me.”

Then Elli shook violently from head to toe and after that she became herself again.

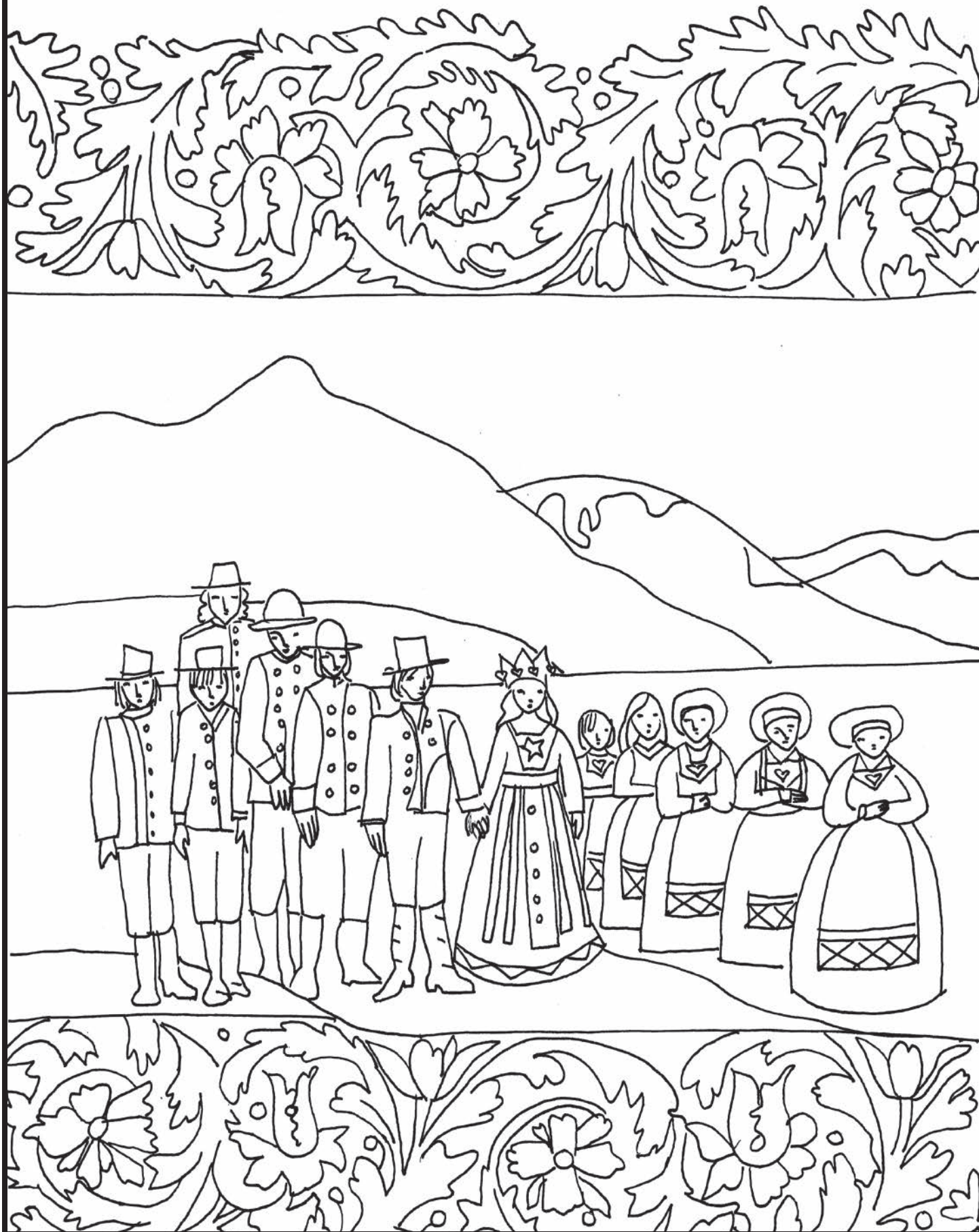


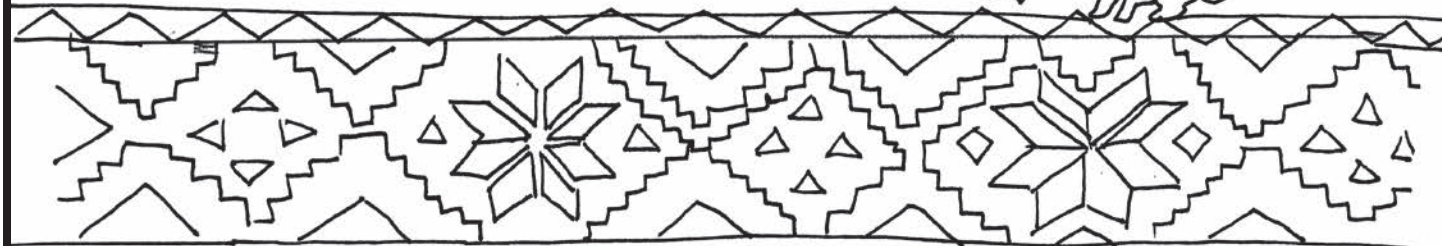
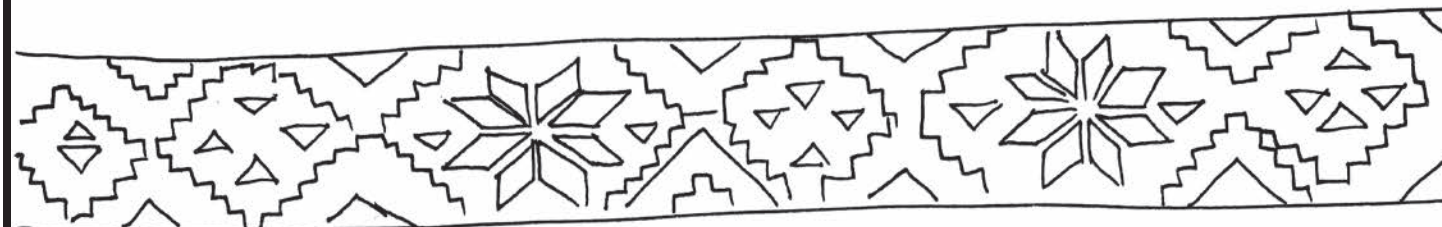


Elli and Lars hurried down to the farm. So that nothing more could happen to her, the farmer and his wife decided they should hold the wedding that very day since Elli was still wearing the wedding finery of the huldrefolk.

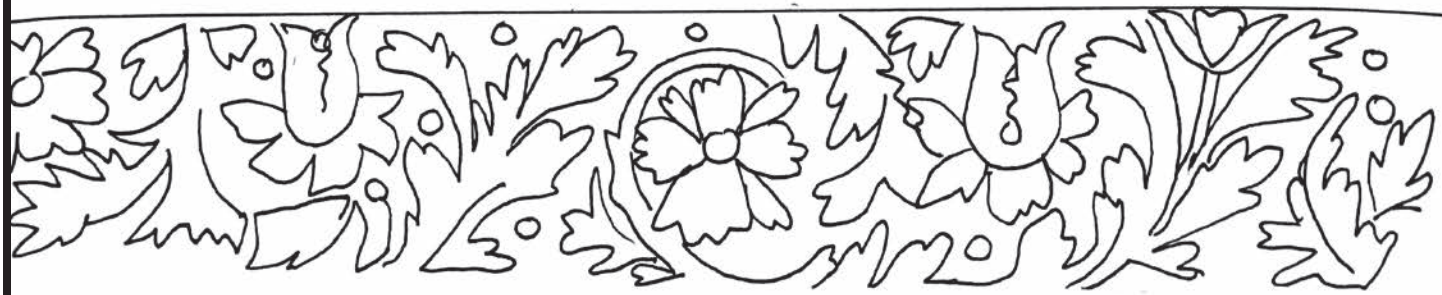


And so they did with many neighbors attending.





Elli looked splendid and afterwards the wedding crown and all the finery were hung up at Norstu farm and the crown is still there to this very day.





BACKGROUND



Huldrefolk is the Norwegian name for a group of beings that live hidden from us. You cannot see them unless they want you to for they dwell deep underground. There they have homes, farms, animals, and live in many ways just like us. They are very rich and own lots of silver and gold and many other fine things. Also, they have the fattest and healthiest cows with glossy fur that's of a deep grey color and give milk so rich that it's almost like cream.

Even though the huldrefolk are smaller than humans, they are incredibly strong, the women too. They also know some magic. For instance, they can make themselves appear to look like someone you know. The only way you can tell it isn't your friend, is if you spot their tails. Some of them have hollow backs, but that can be hard to see since their clothes cover that up.

They do like to try and marry humans so it's important that you carry something made of steel such as the axe that Lars brings in the story. A steel knife or sword works also. You just have to throw it over them and then they lose their power and have to escape as fast as possible. Sometimes they do that by turning themselves into balls of yarn to roll away. A cross, especially one made of silver, is also very protective.

When you talk about one of the *huldrefolk* you say one *hulder*. A boy *hulder* is called a *huldrekall*.

One kind of female hulder is *huldra*. She doesn't live with the huldrefolk but by herself far, far away in the mountains. She is exceptionally beautiful and many young men have fallen in love with her. The only way you can tell that she is not a regular woman is because of her cow's tail which you can see below her skirts, especially if she swishes around. Sometimes she agrees to marry a young man and when they stand before the church altar and say their vows, her cow's tail falls off. She loses some of her incredible beauty too, but she is a wonderful mother and wife. And she keeps her incredible strength.

A *dairymaid* is a young woman whose job it is to take care of the cows and milk them every day.

A *seter* is a special kind of cabin in the mountains. It was used only during the summer when the dairymaids took the cows up there to graze because that's where the grass was nice and green. They stayed up there all summer. Usually several dairymaids lived at the seter but sometimes one maid stayed behind to finish some chores and that's when the huldrefolk might come and do some mischief.

Because people only used the seter in the summer time, the huldrefolk often moved in for the rest of the year. It was common for people when they returned to the seter to sing as they approached and then knock three times on the door and wait a little before going inside just to make sure that the huldrefolk had time to leave! In this way they could have good relations with them.