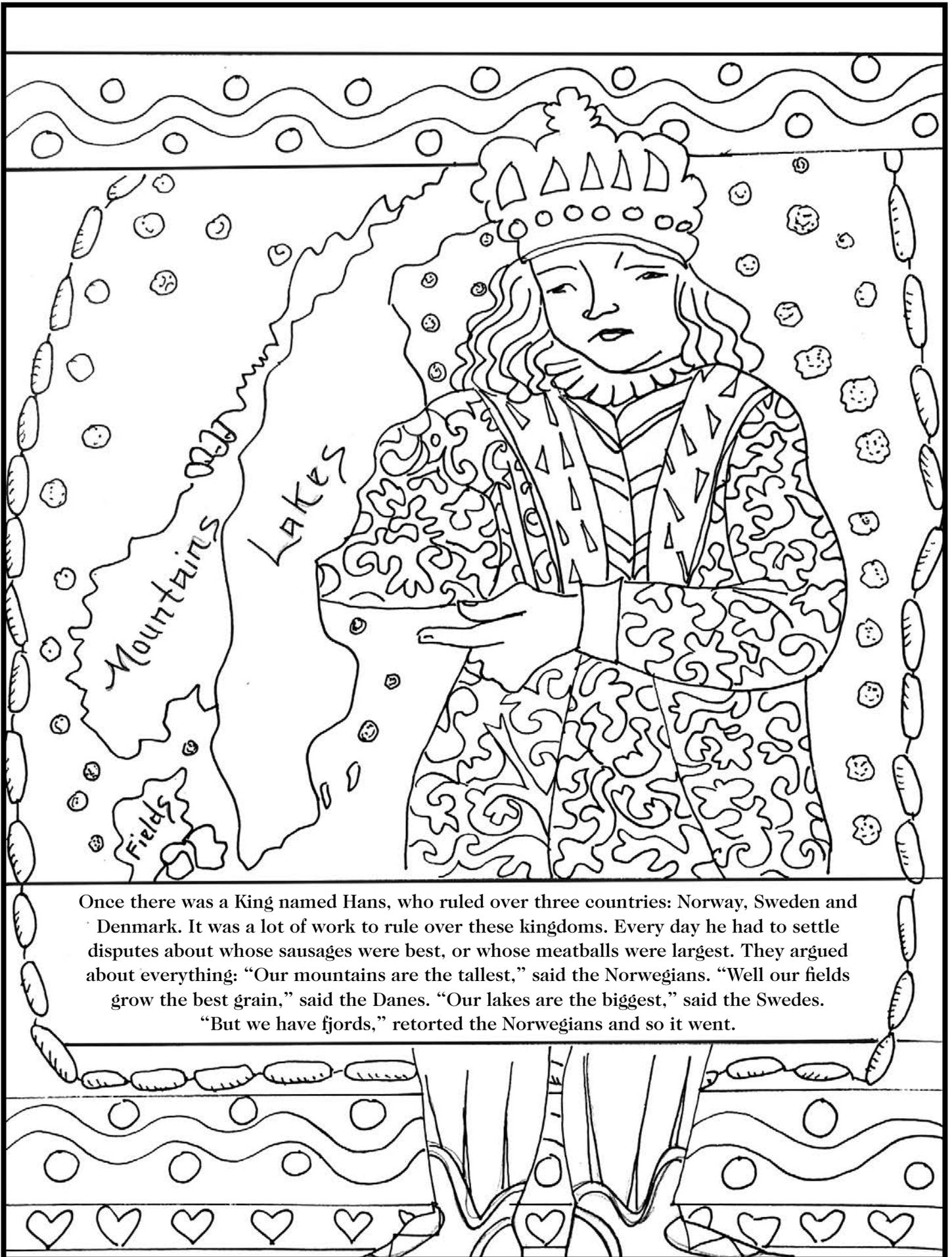


THE GRUMPY KING

TOLD BY LISE LUNGE-LARSEN
ILLUSTRATED BY ALISON AUNE

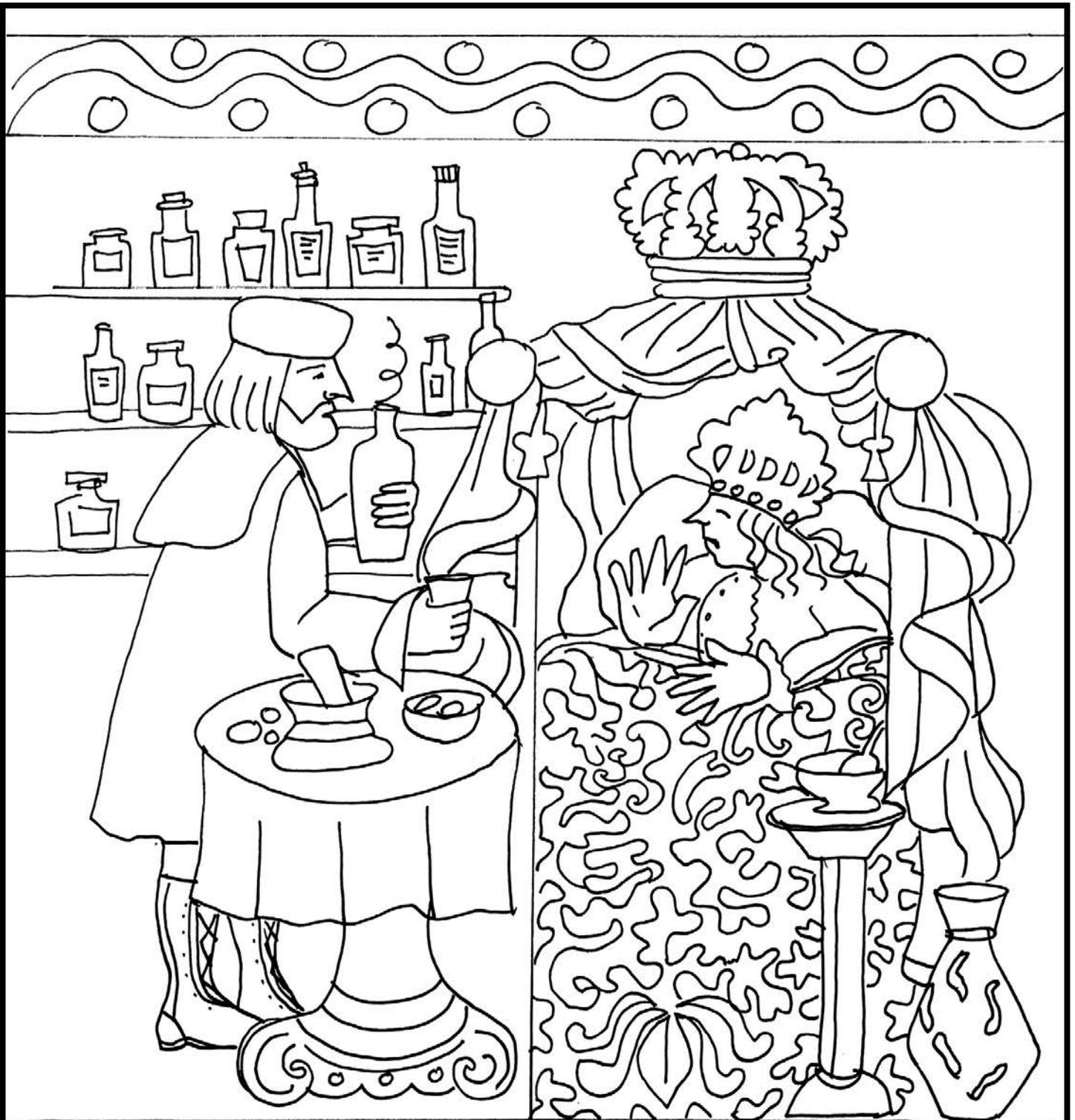




Once there was a King named Hans, who ruled over three countries: Norway, Sweden and Denmark. It was a lot of work to rule over these kingdoms. Every day he had to settle disputes about whose sausages were best, or whose meatballs were largest. They argued about everything: "Our mountains are the tallest," said the Norwegians. "Well our fields grow the best grain," said the Danes. "Our lakes are the biggest," said the Swedes. "But we have fjords," retorted the Norwegians and so it went.

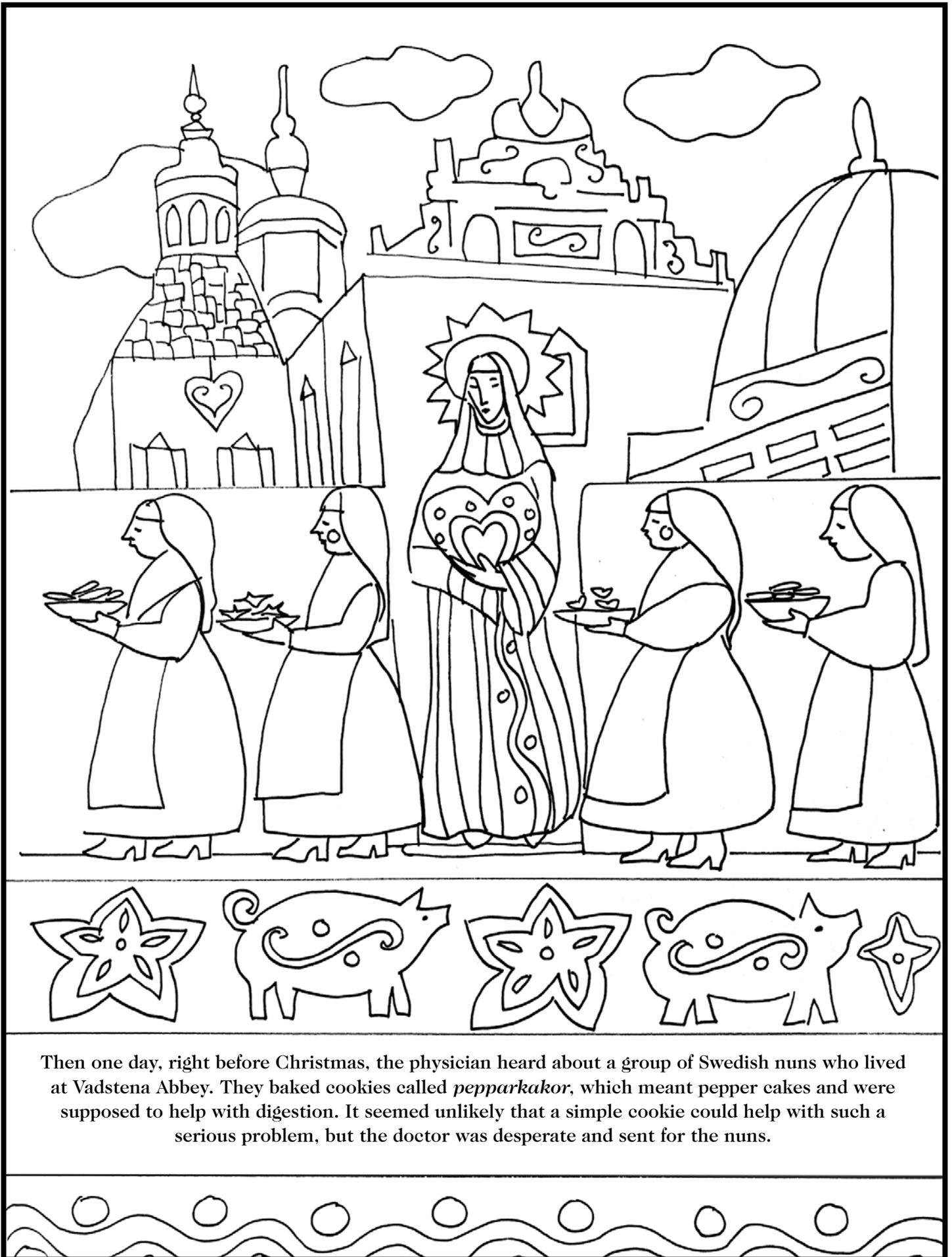


King Hans also had to preside over the court and people came day in and day out with complaints. It made him cranky. But what made him really grumpy was his stomach. It churned and growled and hurt so much that he was always in a bad mood. Some days he lost his temper completely and yelled at his minsters, snapped at the Queen, and sent the royal dogs packing.



Getting angry didn't help of course. The King's stomach grew worse and worse. Finally, it got so bad that King Hans locked himself in his bedchamber refusing to get out of bed till somebody found a cure.

The King's doctor had tried every remedy he had heard of: lotions, potions, fasts, soups, bloodletting, leeches, magic stones, charms. Nothing worked.



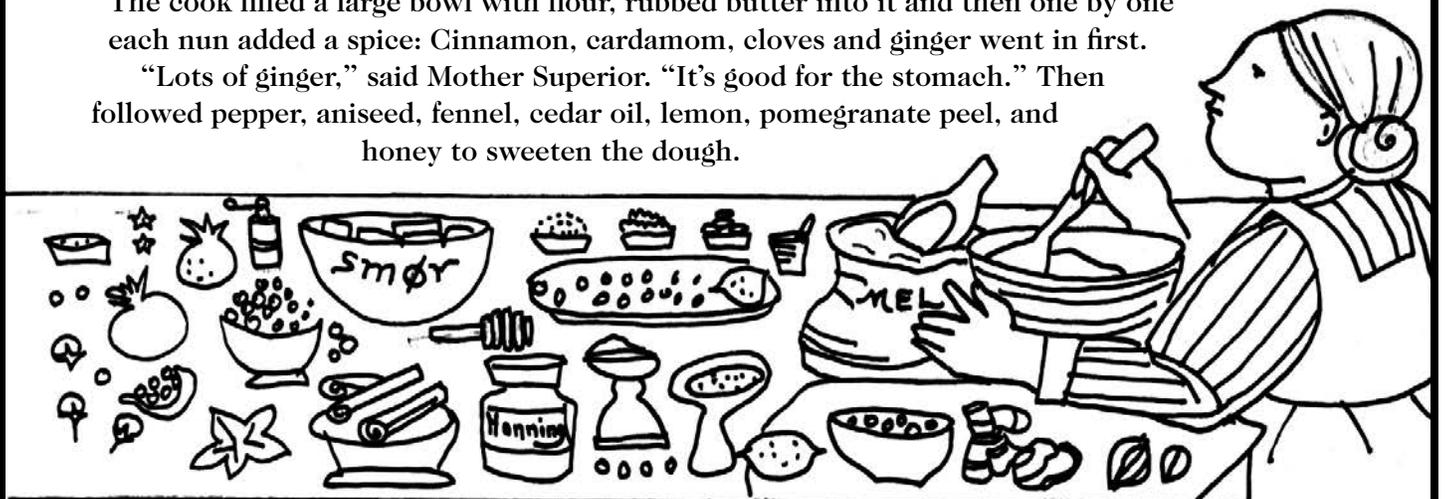
Then one day, right before Christmas, the physician heard about a group of Swedish nuns who lived at Vadstena Abbey. They baked cookies called *pepparkakor*, which meant pepper cakes and were supposed to help with digestion. It seemed unlikely that a simple cookie could help with such a serious problem, but the doctor was desperate and sent for the nuns.



They arrived carrying baskets of spices and herbs and strange smelling things. The cook watched in amazement as the nuns put their bags on the kitchen table. The Mother Superior smiled and said, "I see the oven is hot. Now all we need are bowls, flour and butter. The rest we have brought ourselves."

The cook filled a large bowl with flour, rubbed butter into it and then one by one each nun added a spice: Cinnamon, cardamom, cloves and ginger went in first.

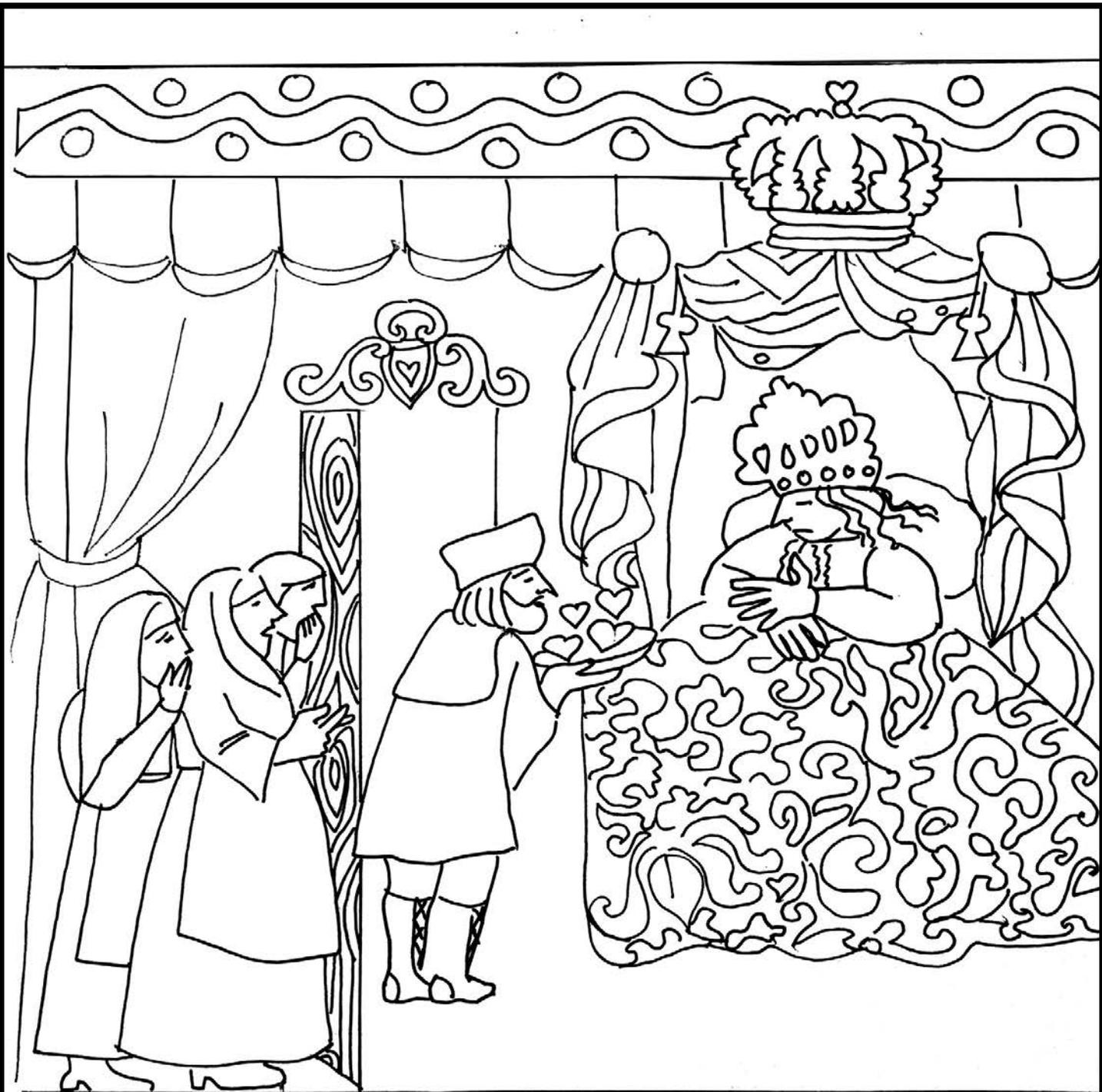
"Lots of ginger," said Mother Superior. "It's good for the stomach." Then followed pepper, aniseed, fennel, cedar oil, lemon, pomegranate peel, and honey to sweeten the dough.



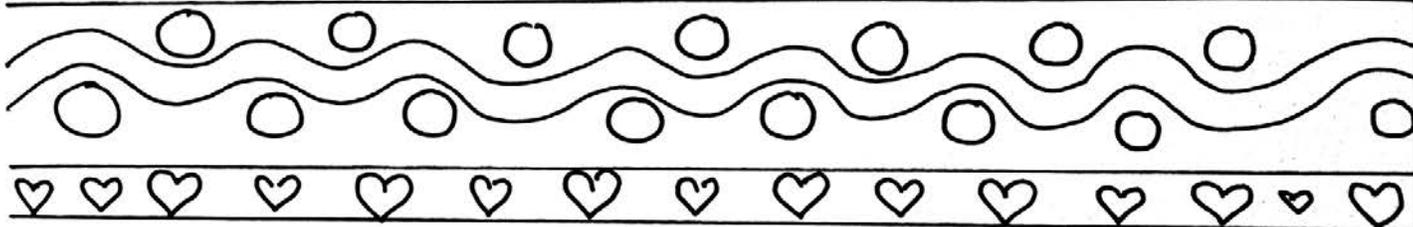


Once it was ready, out came rolling pins and wooden cookie molds. The nuns rolled the dough into huge sheets and cut out the shapes of pigs, goats, hearts, stars, men and women. They even made a special cookie that looked a little like King Hans himself.



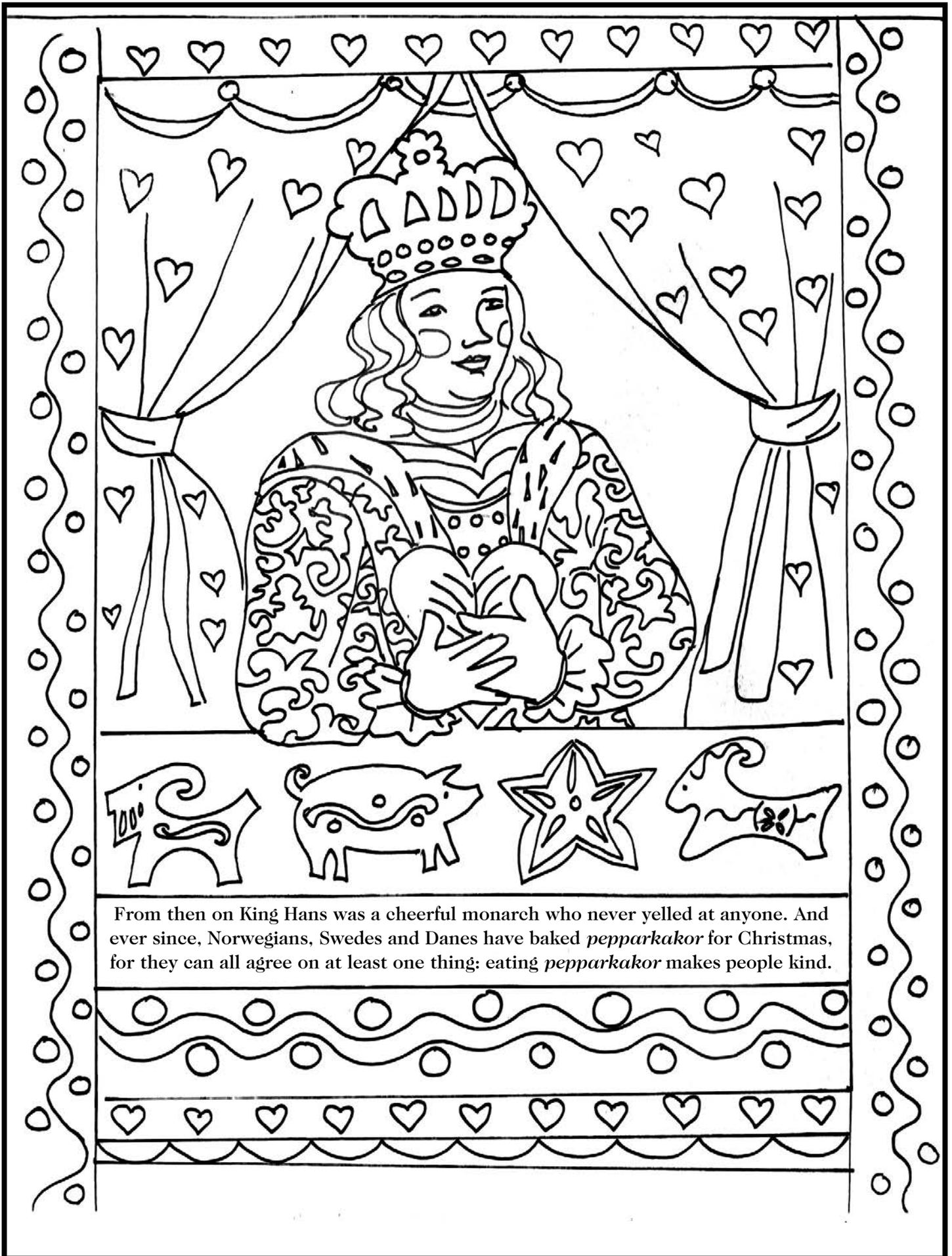


At last the *pepparkakor* were ready. But would they help the King? The doctor carried a tray to His Majesty's bedchamber and the nuns followed behind and hid beside the door to see the King's reaction.





King Hans sniffed and took one bite. He chewed slowly and swallowed. A smile spread across his face. These cookies were delicious. The King took another bite and another. Soon he had eaten several. He rubbed his belly. The rumbling had stopped, the cramping ceased. He hadn't felt so good in years. The next day his stomach was completely well. There were no aches, no pains, just one happy King. It was the best Christmas present he had ever received. King Hans declared that *pepparkakor* should be baked every Christmas so that all his subjects could enjoy a happy, healthy holiday season.



From then on King Hans was a cheerful monarch who never yelled at anyone. And ever since, Norwegians, Swedes and Danes have baked *pepparkakor* for Christmas, for they can all agree on at least one thing: eating *pepparkakor* makes people kind.

Gingerbread History :

There is a very long tradition of making, eating, and decorating with gingercookies and gingerhouses in Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Finland). Why? Spices like pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cardmom, cloves, and nutmeg came to Germany from the Middle East during the 12th Century. That is one thousand years ago! Then, German traders brought the spices and gingerbread cakes to Scandinavia. German gingercookies, Lebkuchen, means: bread of life.

Pepper in cookies? Yes. During the Middle Ages monks and nuns baked spiced cookies as medicine! They added honey and sold them to improve people's health and stomach aches, too!

During the 1440s, Birgitta nuns of Vadestena, Sweden, were famous for their honey gingersnaps.



