

Elenor

Elenor clutched her too-long cloak around her, wrapping her fingers in its edges to keep them warm, and stood on tiptoe in her borrowed shoes. The sound that filled her ears was so piercing and sustained it seemed to be coming from inside her head. She wanted to make sure it wasn't.

Between the shoulders of the crowd, Elenor caught a glimpse of a beggar-musician, a mangy cat perched near his head. Crouching, she wriggled her way past bellies and elbows. The sound grew louder. Yes, it was the man's hurdy-gurdy, badly rosined, and its screech was devilish. The man's eyes glittered, hypnotic as a snake's, as he cranked. "It's a sin," Elenor heard one matron whisper to another.

"Not natural," the other muttered, shaking her head, transfixed.

The man's dog crouched on a stool in front of