

# GUDRID THORBJORNSDOTTIR

## VALERIE LEGGE

*"She felt her body enter the land; her lap became a smooth hollow, her knees and elbows rounded stones, her fingers alder twigs."*

Joan Clark, *Eiríksdóttir*

When father's fortune ran low,  
he sold his lands, loaded his ship  
and abandoned Iceland.  
The good winds which filled our sail  
the first few weeks soon subsided;  
we fretted like flotsam on a sullen ocean.

To add to our troubles,  
a strange plague racked half the crew;  
And Halldis, the wise woman  
who taught me the mysteries of magic and witchery,  
died. Bereft we buried her in a cloth boat,  
while father cast the darkness of her days  
in runes to be planted in an empty grave —  
should we ever reach land again.

\*\*\*\*\*

Years after that disastrous voyage,  
I sail under the protection  
of my husband Thorfinn and his northern gods  
away from the ill luck of another land,  
bearing for better fortune  
nine moons stitched in the hem of my cloak,  
a Christian cross, and the bloodsong  
of my father's Viking heart.

When the tide runs high,  
we steal quietly out to sea

with full cargo of timber and grapes.  
But we are chased by fugitive winds and apparitions  
so I shelter my infant son  
as the frightened helmsman charts our course  
by the cold light of the Polar Star.

Now the ship catches the current,  
and I lean into Vinland's mist  
for a last glimpse of meadows  
still blue with iris and willow.