

MANLIO
CASTAGNA

MIDDLE AGES

FROM



TO



ILLUSTRAZIONI di
ALICE
GUIDI

il castoro



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Leggere per crescere liberi

Manlio Castagna - illustrations by Alice Guidi
Middle Ages from A to Z

English working translation by Gerry Guarino

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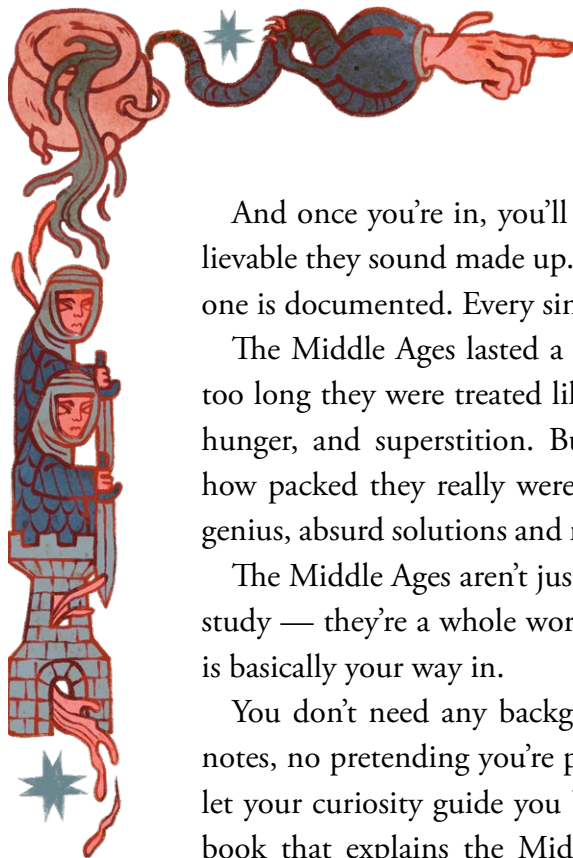
INTRODUCTION

Step a little closer,
come on in. You're about to
enter a Middle Ages like
you've never seen before!

I won't promise you brave knights or damsels in distress (though don't worry — they will pop up every now and then). Instead, I can offer something far juicier: a Middle Ages that's messy, bizarre, and eerily magnificent.

A world where locusts were officially kicked out by the Church, where murderous pigs were put on trial, and where football matches got so rough that someone didn't always make it home. A time when going to the barber could cost you an arm — and a lot of blood — and when the recommended cure for a toothache was, I swear, kissing a donkey.

This book is an invitation — a big, creaking door swinging open and calling you inside.



And once you're in, you'll find real stories — so unbelievable they sound made up. But they're not. Every single one is documented. Every single one actually happened.

The Middle Ages lasted a thousand years, and for way too long they were treated like a black hole of ignorance, hunger, and superstition. But in these pages, you'll see how packed they really were with weird ideas, flashes of genius, absurd solutions and moments of genuine wonder.

The Middle Ages aren't just a period you're supposed to study — they're a whole world to explore. And this book is basically your way in.

You don't need any background to start. No prep, no notes, no pretending you're paying attention in class. Just let your curiosity guide you because this isn't the kind of book that explains the Middle Ages the way adults do when they're trying to sound serious. This one allows you to jump right in — into crowded workshops, filthy prisons, battlefields, and courtyards where people played ball games while seriously risking their heads.

You'll run into saints with comic-book-level powers, barbers who belong in a horror movie, witches, exorcisms, rotten teeth in fashion, and kids putting roosters on trial.

You'll laugh, you'll be surprised, you might even cringe a little. But most of all, you'll find out that learning — when it's done right — can actually be exciting.

Because some things change the way you see the world. And after reading these pages, you won't look at a football



field, a barber's sign, a pork sandwich, or a church on a hill in quite the same way again.

This book is also a lens — a way of looking at the present with different eyes, the way travellers do when they come back from far-off places.

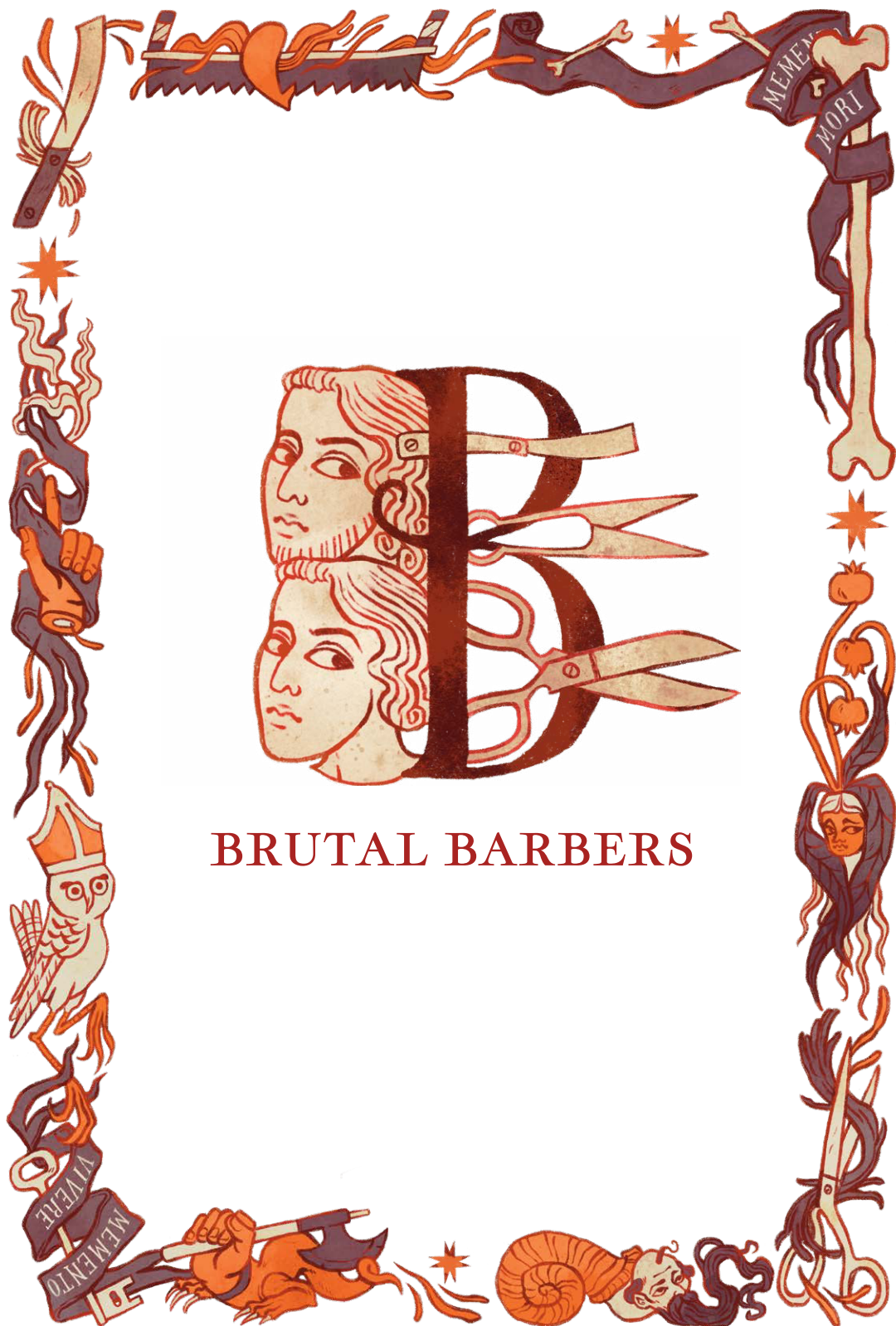
So: get comfortable, buckle up (they had massive belts), and get ready to step into the Middle Ages like you've never heard them told before.

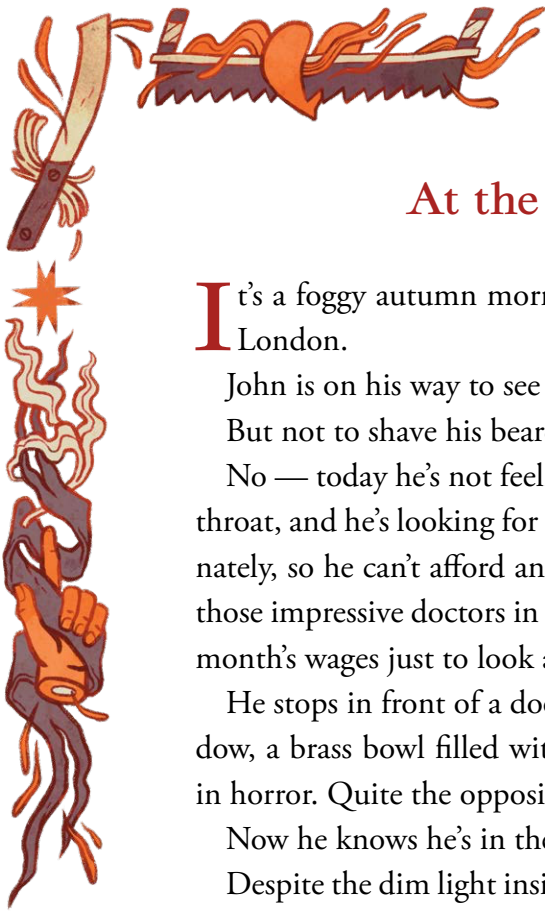
And if you were to suddenly feel like kissing a donkey... well. That one's on you.





BRUTAL BARBERS





At the Barber's

It's a foggy autumn morning in late thirteenth-century London.

John is on his way to see a barber.

But not to shave his beard or trim his hair.

No — today he's not feeling great. He has a fever, a sore throat, and he's looking for a cure. John isn't rich, unfortunately, so he can't afford an academic physician — one of those impressive doctors in long robes who charge a whole month's wages just to look at you.

He stops in front of a door and notices, beside the window, a brass bowl filled with blood. He doesn't run away in horror. Quite the opposite.

Now he knows he's in the right place.

Despite the dim light inside the shop, he can make out a collection of teeth hanging on the walls. Before he can step in, though, a scream smacks him right in the face from the doorway.

John enters carefully. There are three chairs. Two are taken.

In one, a man sits while the barber's apprentice wipes pus from a freshly cut boil.

Next to the other chair, a gentleman is crying, while the barber looks proudly at the forceps in his hand. Clamped between them is a black, rotten tooth. It belongs to the poor man who screamed a moment ago and is now



Do you know the true story
behind Assassin's Creed?
And that cats were once used
to predict the weather?
Or that babies were hung from
the ceiling in floating cradles?

From the origins of soccer to
the bloodstained practices of medieval
barbers, and the most bizarre professions
ever conceived by humankind, this book
reveals the Middle Ages as you've never
read it before: gripping, ironic,
surprising— and with just the right
shiver of fear to keep readers
glued to the page.

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