

everything according to law and custom. The earl of Leicester, Robert's liege lord, was the only person who held any sway over him. Leicester wouldn't listen to a parish priest. He listened to vassals who paid up, listened only to armed force and money.

If Thomas didn't come back, it would be still worse for Elenor: Sir Robert would marry her himself.

And what of Thomas? Gregory remembered small kindnesses; it was true, like the time all the boys had knocked down a beaver dam, and young Thomas had caught all the baby beavers and put them safely in a new home. But he also remembered Thomas as a big youth, his shaggy dark hair hanging in his eyes, his face flushed with enthusiasm for killing the Infidel. He remembered his voice booming in the courtyard, the crack of sticks and bones as he beat the other boys in practice fights one after another, his big hands on the staff sure and strong and heavy. Gregory remembered that Thomas had not been successful with the beaver kits; they had all died one by one.

Elenor wiped tears off her cheeks with dirty hands. "Father? I'm sorry to blubber. It's just— may I ask you a covetous question?"

"You may try. What do you covet?"

"My neighbor's life, I think."

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"Whose life do you covet?"

"Oh! Elise's. Maude's. Carla's, even. Elise isn't betrothed. She can marry anyone she wants. She can work as a cobbler and never marry."

Father Gregory took his time thinking. Elenor helped a ladybug crawl onto her hand and around her fingers. Finally he said, "Elise may marry only with her father's consent and that of her father's lord, Sir Robert. Carla is a cheerful worker, but she must work hard all her life in the kitchen of another, and then go home and take leftovers to her own children. When she is too old to work, she will live on the charity of her children and neighbors, and will feel bound to do as they say."

The ladybug flew from Elenor's hand. "I'm still envious, Father. Some people do have choices. Men, especially. When Thomas of Thornham was the age I am now, he went galloping off across the world!" She kicked a stone, hard; it skipped and rolled down the hillside.

Father Gregory rose slowly to his feet. He bent over the flower borders of the church, pulling weeds, pinching dead blossoms off the irises. Elenor joined the work. She began talking again, half to herself.

"Friar Paul says that women are to be kept inside and should pray more than men, because they are evil. He says that if it hadn't been for Eve, we

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