

him. His cat sprang onto the dog's back and turned in slow reluctant circles, its whiskers quivering. Its fur stuck out, tense and uneven. As the punishing sound of the hurdy-gurdy rose higher, a mouse scampered from the beggar's hand and skittered up the leg of the dog and onto the cat's back, where it cowered, trembling.

*Do something*, Elenor told herself.

A sudden commotion broke out at the cheese stall nearby. The beggar stopped his playing for a second, craning his neck with the curious crowd. Elenor stuck out a toe and jostled the stool. She jumped back, delighted, as cat, mouse, and dog sprang in opposite directions and disappeared among people's legs. She backed quickly into the thick of the crowd, stamping her feet to warm them.

Four times now, Carla had let Elenor make the long walk into Peterborough market with Father Gregory. This time was best of all: Michaelmas, last festival of the year before Advent, in the last year of the century, 1299. Excitement and fear were in the wind.

"We're all trying to be good this year," Father Gregory had told her, "to impress God."

"In case it's the end of the world?" she had asked, expecting reassurance.

"That's right."

‡ 2 ‡

She wished he had added "but don't worry." He hadn't.

She tried to imagine the end of the world. Even the end of Peterborough market. What would happen to all these boisterous, jostling people? The big stone Peterborough Cathedral, newly built? The pink-cheeked child just now dragging his mother toward the food stalls? The barrows of carrots and onions and turnips, the pig snouts and limp bunches of chickens, the cooks imagining winter stews, the farmers hoping to trade for wooly socks? The beggars, musicians, tumblers . . . could they just disappear?

At the end of the world came Judgment Day. How could people be judged, when each was as full of surprises as a king cake? She, Elenor, was not yet fourteen, still freckled and wild haired, just starting out; she had no idea what might be in her of good or evil. . . . She tucked the fear of judgment a little deeper. Peterborough market was a rare treat, a rare adventure. Tomorrow she would worry about the end of the world.

A rickety wooden stage stood lashed to the portico of the cathedral.

"Which guild is giving us the play?" Elenor asked a farmwife selling chickens nearby.

"Weavers," the woman answered. "They'll make us forget the cold." She grinned at the girl, showing

‡ 3 ‡