

Gregory

Father Gregory knelt on the cold stone floor of his room until he decided the familiar pain in his knees was distracting him from the more useful pain of his thoughts. He got up and stared absently out of the window across the kitchen garden, heartsick with the confessions he had heard. How he wished he could just mumble a formula and pass them on to God like unopened packages. But no. He, Gregory, was cursed with the need to seek solutions on this earth.

None of Ramsay's families who had been separated for eight years was truly together again. How could they be? The returned Crusaders, who confessed blithely to murder, theft, and rape, were resentful of the changes in their wives and children. The women, try as they might to make the men's homecoming joyful, were afraid of the changes in their husbands and of a coldness in themselves. They

‡ 32 ‡

had all learned too well to get along without each other.

Then there was Friar Paul, gleefully stoking the fires of discontent. Under the guise of offering a prayer at the end of the homecoming feast, the friar had cursed the women who had taken other husbands, calling their children the "offspring of Satan." Luckily, thought Gregory, few of the children had heard, as they were mostly off playing leapfrog and looking at the new horses.

Gregory shook himself. What of Thornham's Thomas? His big, square fingers, locked through the grille of the confessional, had squeezed the wood so hard they had turned white. His face, what Gregory could see of it, had been streaked with tears. Yet his voice had stayed flat throughout the long confession. It was the voice of hopelessness, almost of madness.

And what of Elenor? Would her joy be lost on Thomas, sucked down in the quicksand of the poor man's disillusion? The fear of it was like an aching in Father Gregory's chest, so strong that he slipped back onto his knees.

"Speak through me, God. Forgive them; help them forgive themselves. Give them strength to help each other. *Kyrie eleison*, Lord have mercy upon us."

‡ 33 ‡