

long, yellow teeth. Then she narrowed her eyes, pointing at her with her nose.

"Ain't you the little lady from out at Ramsay castle, the one that's to marry Lord Thomas, him that's away so long in the Holy Land?"

Elenor managed a nod, but she pulled her cloak tight around her again and turned away to cut the conversation short. Let the woman mind her own chickens.

Elenor caught a whiff of roasting chestnuts. A sooty girl was stoking coals under a pan. Closing her eyes, Elenor could feel the heat of the coals on her cheeks, her eyelids glowing. She untied a halfpenny from the corner of her shawl and pressed the coin into the girl's hand, reaching past the smaller children who hovered near the hearth. The vendor scooped hot chestnuts into Elenor's shawl, and she hugged them against herself so that the warmth shot through her vest. She scanned the bleachers, saw Father Gregory, and careful not to lose her shoes, climbed toward him.

The old priest, sitting on the top board, lifted his head. He held open the side of his cape for her, and she crept in.

They peeled the chestnuts, munching the sweet white meat, scattering the hot shells. The sun shone bravely but the wind blew cold. The makeshift curtains on the stage billowed and flapped, and

‡ 4 ‡

Elenor glimpsed frantic preparations backstage. Farmwives in homespun and blue caught at their market-day coils, yanking them back into place and tucking in wisps of hair.

Three loud thuds and the play began. Two child jesters in tights and tunics pulled back the curtains, shimmied up the side supports to tie them, slid down, ran to center stage where they bowed in every direction, and in high, shrill voices proclaimed:

"Welcome, welcome

One and all

To the story of Adam

And his fall!"

Then the jesters stared at each other, bowed deeply, and hurried offstage.

Elenor leaned her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands.

The stage was decorated with plants and branches to represent the Garden of Eden. Beneath it, red devils draped against the stage supports withed and groaned, chanting monotonously:

"Eternal remorse, eternal remorse

The song of the damned is eternal remorse...."

High above, perched on the edge of the bell tower, an angel tried to look serene while pieces of

‡ 5 ‡