

Outline of the first half only

VAULTING

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The story begins in England in about 1130 A.D. There is a civil war between Stephen, the King, and a rival claimant to the throne, the Empress Matilda. The characters in the story see little of the war, but it affects them all the same because it weakens the central government and gives local Lords greater freedom.

Part I

1 Stephen Stoner, 13, is an apprentice stonemason working with his father, Tom. Tom is in charge of a small gang of workmen building a house for William de Clare, 18-year-old son of Baron Percy de Clare. William visits the site accompanied by his sister Ann, 11, a pretty girl on a white pony. Stephen falls in love at first sight. William announces, with casual brutality, that he has lost the house in a ^aw_gger, and all the workmen are dismissed.

This is a grave blow to the Stoner family - father, mother, Stephen and two sisters - for they were relying on this job to keep them going through the winter. Now they must pack up and leave the village to seek work elsewhere. Stephen's mother is sick, and ought not to travel - but she has no choice.

2 Ann de Clare, the girl on the white pony, has no mother, and lives as one of the men in her father's household, going everywhere with the Baron and her brother, seeing everything, watching wide-eyed but saying nothing. Baron Percy is greedy, cruel, sensual and ruthless, and the same faults are budding in his son William.

Percy and William covet the land of their neighbour, Lord Lewis. The Lewis estate is a lot smaller than Percy's domain but contains a profitable quarry and much valuable timber. Lewis has been sheltering supporters of the Empress Matilda, and Percy obtains evidence of this from a spy he has planted in the Lewis household. Percy presents this evidence to the King, and Lord Lewis is summoned to London and jailed.

3 After a long march the Stoner family, on the point of starvation, arrive at the Lewis quarry, where Tom expects to find work. But the quarry has been closed because Lewis is in prison. That night Stephen's mother dies.

4 As the Stoner family trudge through the forest they are watched by a half-naked 11-year-old boy called Jack. He lives in a hut made of turves with his mother, Ethel, 30, a woman who was banished from her village for persistent adultery. They are outlaws, that is to say they have no legal status and therefore are not entitled to justice or the protection of the law.

Ethel is at first inclined to hide from the Stoners, as she hides from everyone, for Tom could rape, rob and murder her without committing a crime. Then she notices that he is a single man with three children - a widower, presumably. This leads her to reflection. Life in the forest is easy but primitive. There is plenty of game (protected by the Forest Laws, which she ignores) but no civilised comforts, and Jack is growing up like an animal. It is time for a change.

She feeds Tom and his family, seduces him, and joins forces with him. Stephen and Jack hate one another on sight. The enlarged Stoner family now head for the village of Kingsbridge, where Tom hopes to get work doing repairs to the dilapidated cathedral.

5 A new Bishop has recently arrived at Kingsbridge: Phillip Fitzjohn, youngest son of a noble French family; impoverished, ambitious and discontented. Bitterly disappointed with the ill-managed diocese and its tumbledown cathedral, he is determined to prove himself to his family by becoming one of England's leading Bishops.

He wants to begin by building a new cathedral, but he is immediately frustrated. Control of the actual building belongs to the monks and their Prior, Remigius, who is mean, conservative and cautious, and points out that they don't have enough money even to repair the old cathedral let alone build a new one.

6 So when Tom Stoner arrives looking for work he is told there is none. The family is once again on the point of starvation. But the monks give them shelter for the night.

While everyone is asleep Jack slips out and goes into the cathedral. Taking a light from a candle, he sets fire to the thatched roof, then returns to his bed.

The monks and the whole village struggle to put out the blaze but to no avail - the building is completely destroyed.

6 Tom Stoner is hired to supervise preliminary work on the new cathedral. To Stephen's disgust, Jack becomes an apprentice stonemason.

Stephen's natural timidity and conformity have been reinforced by the trauma of destitution and his mother's death, and he is now passionately determined to achieve the wealth and station in life that will insure him against such disasters. As a mason he is a careful, accurate craftsman. Jack is wild and undisciplined still, but has enormous charm and is well liked. He is a somewhat lazy and unreliable workman but he shows promise as a decorative carver and he seems to have an instinctive understanding of construction principles. Stephen is constantly infuriated by Jack, and does his best to get him into trouble.

7 Bishop Fitzjohn, triumphant (for the moment) over Remigius, tours the diocese whipping up enthusiasm for the new cathedral, selling indulgences and soliciting gifts. Then he goes to London and asks the King to give him Lord Lewis's lands - including the quarry and the forest - to help build the new cathedral.

Baron Percy is also asking for Lewis's lands, as his reward for unmasking the traitor. And Lewis himself is pleading that they be passed on to his son Richard, who has done no wrong.

The King gives the lands to Percy, but with the proviso that the church can take all the stone and timber it wants for the cathedral, free of charge.

8 Baron Percy dies. His son William goes to the Lewis manor house with a troop of armed men and brutally evicts Lewis's wife and son Richard, 21.

Richard is ruined but not despairing. With his last few pennies he buys a handcart. Many peasants and small farmers around about keep a few sheep and take the fleeces to market once a year. Richard goes from village to village buying the wool, saving them a whole day's journey, and takes it to market himself. He makes a small profit.

9 Bishop Fitzjoh^c announces that forgiveness for sins can be obtained only by voluntary work on the cathedral site one Sunday in four. People come from far and wide, in holiday mood, as spring turns into summer. Work goes on apace. Remigius appoints a master mason to design the new building. An unofficial market grows up at the site on Sundays. The village acquires a cookshop and an inn, and begins to prosper.

Ten years pass.

Part II

1 Stephen and Jack are now both master masons. Stephen is hardworking, acquisitive and ambitious. Jack is brilliant, wayward and eccentric. Stephen is wooing Ann, the girl on the white pony, but she is in love with Jack. Her brother, Baron William, and Stephen's father, Tom Stoner, arrange the marriage despite her wishes. She runs away with Jack.

They hide in the forest and take refuge in the hut where Jack lived eleven years ago. But Stephen guesses where they have gone and, with Baron William, seeks them out. Jack escapes, but Ann is captured and forced to marry Stephen.

2 The village is becoming a town. Richard Lewis is a prosperous wool merchant, but he still hopes to regain his father's lands if and when Matilda wins the civil war. The town's main source of wealth is its Sunday market, which, however, is still unofficial. (The right to hold a market was a valuable asset that could only be granted by the King.) Baron William objects to the Kingsbridge market because, he says, it takes trade away from his market at Shiring, ten miles away. Bishop Fitzjohn, who owns most of the town and is the major beneficiary of the market, petitions the King to make it official. Meanwhile Baron William retaliates by refusing to let the church take stone from the quarry or wood from the forest.

3 Jack goes to France and gets work on a Gothic cathedral, the first he has ever seen. He is enchanted by its pointed arches and flying buttresses, and he sees that these technical innovations are not yet being exploited to the full. He has a vision of a cathedral a hundred feet high, its distant

vaulting supported by incredibly slender piers, and sunlight pouring in through its enormous windows. He is determined to build such a church.

4 The marriage between Stephen and Ann is a disaster. She has a baby but declares it is Jack's. Stephen secretly petitions the Pope for an annulment.

5 Work on the cathedral continues, despite the loss of the free stone and timber, because the chapter is now wealthy enough to buy materials. The east end of the building is now finished but for the roof.

One Sunday at dawn the Baron's men ride in. They break up the market stalls and set fire to them. The fire spreads and engulfs the town, which is all build of wood. Richard Lewis's entire stock of wool is burned, and he is ruined. Because there is no market the chapter is impoverished, and work on the cathedral stops.

6 Jack returns, carrying an ironbound chest. He enters the unfinished church and prostrates himself, begging forgiveness. The whole town comes to look. He reveals that in the chest he has a piece of the True Cross. A cripple who has been begging in the town for the past few days rushes forward to touch this piece of wood, and is miraculously healed. Jack is forgiven.

Jack later meets the "cripple" and pays him off - there was never anything wrong with him. But a few days later a genuine cripple touches the "Cross" and is healed. Jack is devastated by this event.

7 The Cross and the miracles bring pilgrims to the half-built cathedral, and income from them enables work to start again. The Great Wheel is raised prior to starting work on the roof. As this difficult operation is getting under way, something goes wrong. The wheel begins to swing. There is a terrible crash and the wheel falls, bringing with it most of the east end and destroying ten years' work.

The master mason in charge is fired. Both Stephen and Jack apply for the job. Jack proposes a brilliant design with pointed arches. He gets the job, and marries.

8 Stephen does not want to work under Jack. A Jew called Malachi asks Stephen to build him a stone house. Several other wealthy citizens want stone houses, now that they have some possessions worth protecting. Stephen is in business again. The Bishop wants to encourage stone houses, but in order to do this he has to grant the citizens freehold tenure of their land - an important step in the breakdown of the feudal system.

9 The civil war ends in a compromise: Stephen is confirmed as King, but on his death he will be succeeded by Matilda's son Henry. Stephen dies, and now Richard Lewis hopes to regain his father's lands. But Henry disappoints him. He borrows money from Malachi and sets up in business as a wool merchant again.

10 Stephen gets his annulment. Ann is effectively divorced. But Jack, the man she loves, has married someone else. She goes back to live with her brother, Baron William, who rapes her.

Ten years pass.