

*1st draft Outline*  
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**WORLD WITHOUT END**

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*The sequel to*

*"The Pillars of the Earth"*

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### Prologue: 1327

1. Kingsbridge is now a city of 7,000 people, one of the largest in England. For comparison, York has 11,000, Bristol has 10,000, Plymouth has 7,000. London has 35,000 , and Florence is probably the largest city in the world with 70,000.

It is All Saints' Day, 1 November, a Sunday this year. After church, there is compulsory archery practice for all males over 14, a royal command intended to improve the military skills of the population.

The longbow is the stealth bomber of the Middle Ages. Six feet long, it fires a three-foot arrow that can kill a man at 200 yards. It has given English kings victory over Scottish mountain men and armoured French knights.

A group of children too young for archery decide to sneak off into the forest. They are Merthin (11), Ralph (10), and Charis (8). Before they get away they have to shake off Philemon (12), a sneaky boy they dislike. They fail to shake off a stray dog with three legs. Charis names him Hop.

(Other major characters could make brief appearances as children here.)

Merthin, who is extraordinarily good with his hands, has made a longbow and some arrows, and they try it out. Merthin himself turns out to be a poor shot. Charis wants to try, but Ralph, who is a bully, prevents her, saying that girls can't shoot. Ralph proves a natural marksman. He shoots Hop, killing the dog, and is very pleased with himself, not understanding why Charis is upset.

They hear voices. They are frightened of being caught, because it is strictly forbidden for them to go into the forest, and they fear they will be flogged for disobedience. Nevertheless they peep through the greenery, and witness a strange scene.

Two knights appear, both in their forties, richly dressed but—surprisingly—on foot. They stop when they see the tower of Kingsbridge cathedral ahead. The shorter of the two men says: "From here, you can get passage on a barge going down river to Melcombe, where you can take ship to France."

The two men say a fond farewell, kissing passionately like man and woman. While they are embracing, the taller one draws a dagger and stabs the other, killing him.

Then he digs a grave and buries his companion. He also buries his own weapons and

fine clothes. Then, dressed humbly, he enters Kingsbridge.

This scene will haunt the three children for the rest of their lives. But now, for fear they will be punished, they swear a solemn oath never to speak of it.

2. Brother Godwyn, 21, is a zealous and ambitious young monk at Kingsbridge Priory. Exceptionally bright, he is hoping to be sent to study at Oxford, where the masters who teach theology, medicine and law have been incorporated into a company or "university". At present, Godwyn is acting as personal assistant to Prior Anthony, a lethargic and indecisive leader in Godwyn's opinion.

Today Prior Anthony is dining with the prioress, Mother Cecilia. Kingsbridge has become a double community of monks and nuns, more or less strictly separated. Some of the monks are doctors of medicine, and the nuns run a hospital.

The monastery—that is to say, the monks' half of the priory—is broke, largely because of poor financial management. By contrast, the nunnery is rich, having carefully managed the lands and other assets it has been given over the years by pious women. Anthony asks Cecilia for a handout, which she agrees to give him. Young Godwyn is angry that women, who are of course inferior, should have control over such wealth.

Anthony has just returned from Gloucester, where he was present at the burial of King Edward II.

Edward has been an unpopular king, largely because of his "favourites". When he came to the throne, he gave power and privilege to Peter Gaveston, popularly supposed to be his homosexual lover (even though both men were married with children). Peter was disgraced and executed, but others took his place. The king's wife, Queen Isabella, openly took a lover, Roger Mortimer. Eventually, the queen and Mortimer staged a coup. On 15 January 1327, Edward II was formally deposed by Parliament (the first time in English history that Parliament assumed this power). His son took the throne as Edward III at age 14.

In April this year, Mortimer—now king in all but name—moved the deposed king from his palace at Kenilworth to Berkley Castle, near Kingsbridge. Two rescue attempts failed. In September it was announced that the ex-king was dead.

A rumour persisted that he had escaped, but Prior Anthony now assures Mother Cecilia that he saw the body himself.

The ex-king was only 43, says Cecilia; what did he die of? He suffered a fall, Anthony tells her. She has heard a rumour that he was murdered. Anthony assures her there were no signs of violence on the corpse.

Godwyn has heard other rumours. Some say Edward was murdered by a gruesome means that leaves no outward sign: a hollow horn is inserted into the anus, then a red-hot poker is thrust through the horn into the entrails.

During the dinner, a visitor arrives, and we recognize the knight from the forest. Calling himself Thomas Langley, he begs to be admitted as a novice monk. Godwyn can see that Prior Anthony is only pretending to have no foreknowledge of the arrival of Thomas. Something must have been arranged on Anthony's trip to Gloucester. But, he wonders, why is it a secret?

## Part I: Fleece Fair Day, 1337

### *Chapter 1*

3. Charis is now 18 and beautiful. Clever with numbers, she has been educated at the nunnery, and taught to keep financial records by her father, Edmund Wooler, the town's richest wool merchant, and alderman of the parish guild.

Charis is an intellectual rebel, scornful of illiterate priests, lascivious monks, hidebound merchants and spendthrift barons. She is fascinated by heretical theories of the origins of the world. She is as near to being an atheist as is possible in the Middle Ages. The only thing she likes about church is the annual mystery play, a crude but exciting dramatisation of a Bible story. She is particularly hostile to Kingsbridge Priory, having heard her father complain over many years about how the prior restricts commerce in the town.

Her closest friend is Merthin, 21, small, impish, funny, brilliant, the only person in town who is a match for her. She is strongly attracted to him, but horrified by the prospect of subordinating herself for life to a husband (or to anyone else). Her greatest rival is Elizabeth Clark, niece of the bishop of Kingsbridge, who has set her cap at Merthin.

Edmund's business is in crisis. Wool and woollen cloth are by far the most important internationally traded commodities, and the industry goes up and down with the economy of Europe. Today, Fleece Fair Day, a wool buyer from Florence called Bonaventura Dicarolo announces that this will be the last time Italian merchants attend the fair. In future they will go only to Shiring. Edmund fears this will prove the end of the road for his business.

Edmund and Charis go to see Prior Anthony. Edmund and Anthony are brothers. Their father, who started the business, raised his elder son to carry it on and "gave" his younger son to the church. Edmund is ambitious and shrewd; Anthony, though highly educated, is weak and impractical. They are often at odds.

Edmund tells Anthony of Bonaventura's news, disastrous for the whole town. The trouble is that Kingsbridge's facilities for the fair are dilapidated, especially the old wooden bridge that leads across the river to the town gate. Together, they look at the long queue of people and carts waiting to pay their penny toll and enter the town. Edmund begs Anthony to upgrade the fair and build a new, wider bridge of stone. He points out that the increased traffic will bring Anthony more money in tolls. Anthony does not grasp the interdependence

of the priory and the town's merchants. He refuses to build the bridge, pleading poverty.

Charis now proposes that the parish guild pay for the bridge, and be reimbursed by taking the penny tolls.

The townspeople cannot do this without the prior's permission. They are technically serfs of the priory, so do not have a city council or a mayor. The parish guild, originally a religious group that raised money for cathedral ornaments, has become the de facto representative of the merchants. But its unofficial status is crippling, as this quarrel over the bridge will illustrate.

Anthony refuses Charis's offer because, he says, he would thereby lose his income from the penny tolls—not understanding that he will lose it anyway, plus several other sources of money, if the Fleece Fair declines. Charis and Edmund are infuriated by his stupidity.

4. Ralph Porboy, now 20, is a tall, strong man, a bully and a thug. His father was a knight who got into debt and was forced to give his lands to the priory in exchange for subsistence—an arrangement known as a corrody. Ralph is now a squire—apprentice knight—in the household of Ronald, earl of Shiring. With Ralph is his friend Steven, the same age but more fortunate, already a knight and lord of the small manor of Wigleigh.

The earl lives some distance away, at Earlscastle, but has come to Kingsbridge today to meet with Prior Anthony and Alderman Edmund. King Edward III (now 24) has declared war on France, and Parliament has passed special taxes to pay for it. The earl has the task of collecting the tax, and Anthony is his local sub-agent. Edmund has no formal role, but his cooperation is important. Also in the group is the earl's younger brother William, lord of Caster.

While the great ones are conferring, Ralph and Steven go around the fair. Ralph tries to flirt with a voluptuous woman ten years older than he. She rejects him scornfully, wounding his pride. She turns out to be Lady Philippa, wife of Lord William. Steven says Ralph is lucky to have escaped with a tongue-lashing, but Ralph remains angry.

In dangerous mood, he encounters a pretty peasant girl, Annette, 18, from Steven's village of Wigleigh. She is the daughter of Perkin, a prosperous peasant. Perkin is sly and grasping, Annette vain and manipulative. Perkin knows there is no future for his daughter in a

dalliance with a squire, but he cannot chase Ralph away. Furthermore, Annette is not as discouraging as she should be.

Then Wulfric, 16, comes on the scene. The son of another well-to-do Wigleigh peasant, he is informally engaged to Annette. (She has another suitor, Billy Howard, 25, as we shall see—but Wulfric is the favourite.) Wulfric is a simple soul: strong, faithful, honest and determined; but he is quick to anger and always ready to fight in a just cause.

Wulfric and Ralph come to blows. Ralph is shaken to discover that his young opponent is not easily defeated. Wulfric breaks Ralph's nose, an injury that will disfigure Ralph for the rest of his life.

The fight is broken up by John, the town constable (an employee of the priory). Wulfric is in deep trouble for laying hands on one of the earl's men. However, Lady Philippa intervenes, further enraging Ralph, to say that Ralph's behaviour was provocative. In the end, Wulfric is clapped in the stocks for 24 hours.

While he is there, he is brought ale by Glynis, 17—of whom, more later.

5. Merthin at 21 is acknowledged to be the most skilled craftsman for miles around. A master carpenter, brilliant at both carving and joinery, he also has an intuitive understanding of building and architecture. Though he can be charming, he is often tactless, and sometimes offends people unintentionally. He loves to talk to visiting merchants and pilgrims about buildings in London, Paris and Florence. He dreams of designing the tallest building in England.

He is summoned to a meeting at the cathedral. The central tower is crumbling. Recently a worshipper was killed by falling masonry. Parts of the church are roped off, and Anthony has cancelled the mystery play—a big attraction that normally brings hundreds of pilgrims to the town.

Godwyn, now 31, is the sacrist, responsible for the church and all its treasures. Under him as matricularius, in charge of building operations, is Thomas Langley, now 53, who knows something about architecture from his pre-monastic life. The builder who has the contract for cathedral maintenance is Elfric, an unimaginative yes-man who dislikes Merthin.

Elfric recommends rebuilding the arches around the crossing. Thomas agrees. They ask Merthin to build the formwork (or centering), the wooden supports that hold the

stonework in place until the arch is finished and the mortar is dry. He is the only carpenter in town with the skill to do this.

Merthin proceeds to offend the men who are offering him work. First he says no formwork is necessary—the arches can be built without it. Elfric says this is not possible. Merthin explains how it can be done, and adds that in point of fact that is how the arches were built originally. How does he know? Two reasons: a) He can see by the way the arches are put together; b) As a schoolboy here he read a book which described the building of the arches.

Godwyn is interested to hear about this book. Merthin tells him it is a history of the building of the cathedral, known as Brother Timothy's Book, written in the time of Prior Philip, 200 years ago, a period now regarded as the golden age.

Merthin has a more serious doubt about the plan put forward by Elfric and Thomas. He would like to know why the tower is cracking and crumbling. It is not possible to know what repairs are appropriate until you understand the cause of the problem, he says. Repairing the arches will not solve the underlying problem, he says.

But what is the underlying problem? they ask irritably.

He does not know.

6. Glynis, 17, the girl who brought water to Wulfric in the stocks, comes from the lowest stratum of village society: her father, Oran, is a landless labourer. They live in a mean hut on the edge of Wigleigh. Oran gets plenty of work in summer, but in winter the family struggles to survive.

Glynis is a plain-looking girl, with dark eyes set closely either side of a beaky nose. She is strong, with large hands and feet. But she has a powerful sexuality that attracts men despite her homely looks. She is fiercely determined not to lead the life of hardship that has been her mother's lot.

She is in love with Wulfric. He is strong, loyal, proud and unimaginative—the kind of man who will be a tireless provider as long as he lives. But her chances of marrying him are slim. He loves pretty, coquettish Annette, and their fathers have agreed to the marriage.

Today Glynis and Oran have come to Kingsbridge to sell squirrel furs he has trapped. The buyer offers also to buy Glynis and, to her horror, her father accepts the offer. Glynis

protests loudly, and a public argument ensues.

Glynis is supported by a prominent townswoman, Naomi Weaver, who says there is no legal basis for such a sale. Oran is supported by John Constable, who says it is not illegal, and by Brother Philemon, 22, who points out that the Bible appears to sanction selling a daughter into slavery (Exodus 21). Most bystanders disapprove of what Oran is doing, but they have to admit that he has the right to do as he pleases with a child under 21.

So Glynis is tied like a beast and led out of town by her new owner.

7. Merthin is watching people and carts cross the old wooden bridge when, in an intuitive flash, he sees that it is unsafe. A new river wall, built by Elfric, has accelerated the flow of water around the piers of the bridge, and this faster current is undermining the foundations, putting an unbearable strain on the timbers.

He summons Thomas (because the bridge belongs to the priory) and Elfric. Elfric hotly denies any danger. He noticed cracks in the woodwork some time ago, so he braced the timbers; and the cracks have not widened, indicating that the repair was effective.

Not so, says Merthin; in fact, the repair has made matters worse, by rigidifying the structure so that it cannot adjust gradually to the strain, making a catastrophic collapse more likely.

Thomas must decide between these quarrelling experts. He suspects that Merthin is lobbying for a new bridge in support of Edmund and Charis; so he takes Elfric's view and does nothing about Merthin's warning.

8. Godwyn is in the library, reading Timothy's Book. He is just back from seven years at Kingsbridge College, a "cell" or branch of the priory in Oxford, where young monks from Kingsbridge live while studying at the university. He is a zealous reformer, sincere but arrogant. He subscribes to the philosophy of anti-rationalism currently dominant. (In 1277 the university of Paris banned the works of Aristotle and Aquinas, replacing them with conservative texts that base all knowledge on faith and revelation.) He graduated in medicine, though he is mainly interested in the theory, and looks down on the barber-surgeons, apothecaries, and nuns who actually care for the sick.

Since his return from Oxford, he has been quietly talking to the younger monks about

the need to reform the monastery. There is no doubt that its financial management is poor. Godwyn also wants stricter separation of monks and nuns. And he strongly believes that the nunnery should be subordinate to the monastery.

His sidekick is Philemon, 22. As a child, Philemon was an unpopular tell-tale. Now he adores Godwyn and will do anything to please him.

In Timothy's Book, Godwyn finds support for the reforms he wants. Impulsively, he brings it to chapter (the monks' daily meeting). He proposes that the nunnery should become a cell or branch of the monastery and be relocated some distance away.

He is opposed by sub-prior Carlus, who mistrusts him and loathes Philemon. Carlus, a doctor, argues that the monks and nuns must work together at the hospital.

The issue is resolved by the treasurer, who points out that, in the present set-up, the poor monks get all sorts of hidden subsidies from the nuns, such as repair of buildings, which would disappear if the two houses were separated.

Godwyn's proposal is defeated decisively, but he has learned the first lesson of politics: never hold a meeting until the result is a foregone conclusion.

9. Afternoon turns into evening, and the market traders begin to dismantle their stalls.

i. In the forest, Glynis's buyer wants to have sex with her. She decides this is her chance to escape. She pretends to be willing, to lull him. The act itself is loathsome to her at first—then she finds herself strangely excited. Nevertheless, she seizes an opportunity to grab his knife, and stabs him.

He is wounded, and she escapes, but he comes after her. She heads for Kingsbridge. He follows.

ii. Wulfric's family are obliged to leave him and head home to Wigleigh.

iii. The earl of Shiring comes to an agreement with Prior Anthony and Edmund about the collection of the war tax. Anthony walks with the earl to say goodbye at the city limits.

iv. Bonaventura Dicarlo cannot be persuaded to change his mind about returning to Kingsbridge—unless a new bridge is built. With a heavy wagon of wood and an armed bodyguard, he leaves town.

v. Glynis bursts out of the forest at a run, hotly pursued by her buyer, and crosses

the bridge.

As she reaches the Kingsbridge side, the earl and prior begin to cross, followed by Wulfric's family and Bonaventura's cart.

The bridge collapses. People, animals and carts fall among the breaking timbers into the river.

Merthin organises teams of townspeople to remove the shattered timbers and drag the living and the dead from the water.

Mother Cecilia panics, but Charis organises the nuns to give first aid and stretcher the wounded to the hospital.

Steven dies but Ralph survives. Ralph steps over drowning women and children to get to the earl, whom he saves, hoping for promotion as his reward.

Godwyn and Philemon find Prior Anthony mortally wounded, being comforted by Mother Cecilia. Anthony says something about the death of Edward II, but Godwyn, to his frustration, cannot hear the words. Then Anthony dies.

Glynis survives and her buyer dies. She goes to the stocks and releases Wulfric. Together they return to the riverside.

They find all his family dead.

12. The earl of Shiring has the privilege of "presentment", which means he may nominate a candidate. Philemon learns that Earl Ronald is planning to nominate a distinguished London monk who would be an attractive alternative to Godwyn. This is a dangerous development.

Godwyn persuades the earl to nominate someone else, a friar whom all the monks hate and who is certain to be rejected.

This works, but in the long term it earns Godwyn the mistrust and enmity of the earl.

13. The bishop of Kingsbridge is, technically, abbot of the priory, over the prior. However, the fact that the bishop's palace is some distance away at Shiring has always reduced his authority in practice. Nevertheless, he has the right to approve or veto the monks' choice of prior. Furthermore, he is a friend of the London monk so adroitly elbowed aside by Godwyn, so he has become an enemy.

Fortunately, the bishop has a weakness. When he is staying at the priory, Godwyn assigns a young novice to look after the bishop and sleep on a bench at the foot of the bishop's bed. On a pretext, another monk enters the room at night and, as expected, finds the bishop in a compromising position with the youngster.

14. Godwyn is elected. He immediately begins his plan for taking over the rich assets of the nunnery.

i. He builds a new, more secure treasury, with a massive ironbound chest for the priory's charters and title deeds, and concealed vaults under the paving stones for cash and precious jewels. He announces that this is a communal treasury for the monks and nuns.

ii. He offers to have all the nunnery's documents copied in the scriptorium, and persuades Mother Cecilia to let him have them all.

iii. He creates a bodyguard for the priory's rent collectors, and persuades Cecilia that his people should collect her rents too.

Now he has the nunnery's legal documents and its income under his control. Mother Cecilia has to come to him to ask for her own money. At first, she is automatically given anything she demands, so she thinks all is well.

*Chapter 3*

15. Glynis has shocked her father by returning home. Unabashed, Oran proposes to sell her again, as many times as she can escape. She leaves, taking with her the money he got by selling her.

16. Her hopes of marrying Wulfric have improved since he became an orphan. he is unlikely to inherit his father's large landholding for three reasons: a) He is only 16; b) The land is too much for one man, having previously been farmed by three—Wulfric, his elder brother, and their father; and c) There is a hefty inheritance tax, called heriot, which Wulfric cannot afford.

However, Wulfric will not admit defeat. A typical peasant, he sees land as the source of all prosperity and status. He is determined to take over his father's holding.

The question of inheritance is put on hold by the earl's bailiff, Nathan Reeve, while the earl makes up his mind who is to become lord of Wigleigh in place of the dead Steven. Meanwhile, Wulfric tries to prove his competence by getting the harvest in.

It is a Herculean task. He tries to hire help, but this is the busy season and everyone is committed. He reluctantly hires a dubious travelling man who robs him and flees.

Glynis offers to work for him for board and lodging. He knows she is doing it for love, and would like to refuse her offer, for he still wants to marry Annette. But he is desperate, and takes Glynis on.

17. During the long, hot summer, Glynis tries everything she can to seduce Wulfric, without success. But they get the harvest in.

Annette persuades her father, Perkin, to lend Wulfric the money for the heriot. Glynis realises she has gambled and lost.

Then the earl appoints Ralph Porboy lord of Wigleigh (as reward for saving the earl's life). Wulfric is dismayed, knowing that Ralph hates him for breaking his nose. Sure enough, Ralph rules that Wulfric cannot inherit, citing his age.

Perkin and Annette call off the wedding.

18. Wulfric gives in to Glynis's advances, and they become lovers.

Glynis goes to Ralph and begs him to reconsider. She and Wulfric will pay the heriot in instalments, she offers. Ralph demands sex as a bribe. Glynis consents. She finds Ralph revolting but, as happened before, she becomes excited and, to her dismay, she has an orgasm.

Perkin offers Ralph double the heriot to let him take over the land. Ralph accepts, renegeing on his deal with Glynis—but what can she do, complain to her husband?

Perkin takes over Wulfric's land. Annette marries Billy Howard, who works the land. Perkin offers Wulfric a job as a labourer. Proudly, he refuses. Then Glynis announces that she is pregnant. Wulfric marries her and takes the job.

19. When the baby is born, Glynis can see immediately that he is the son of Ralph, not Wulfric. Fortunately, Wulfric suspects nothing.

They name him Sam, after Wulfric's father.

#### *Chapter 4*

20. Merthin produces an audacious design for a new stone bridge wide enough for two carts to pass. It incorporates a chapel, a mill and a defensive gate with drawbridge. Instead of starting and ending in boggy riverside mud, it is ramped at both ends.

Elfric produces a more modest proposal.

Edmund and Charis favour Merthin's design, which would vividly symbolise the town's determination to win back the Italian wool trade. But the decision lies with Godwyn, who favours Elfric the sycophant over Merthin the troublemaker.

However, Thomas knows that only Merthin can handle the complex engineering and water management involved in building a bridge in a fast-flowing river, and this tips the balance.

21. Merthin spends more time with Elizabeth Clerk, the beautiful, intellectual niece of the bishop. Charis is horrified by the prospect that she might lose Merthin to the haughty Elizabeth. She and Merthin become lovers.

But she still refuses to marry him. The woman she admires are independent, powerful—and single: woman such as Mother Cecilia and Widow Baxter, the town's richest

baker.

When Charis misses her period she panics, thinking she will be forced to marry. It is a false alarm, but it scares her enough to break off sexual relations with Merthin.

22. As Elfric carries out repairs to the central tower of the cathedral, Merthin tries to figure out what is causing the damage. The pattern of cracks suggests to him that the tower is inches lower, in relation to the rest of the church, than it was when built. If this is right, and the tower is still moving, it could bring down the entire building.

To assess the speed at which it is moving, he fills the cracks with plaster and waits to see how long it will be before the plaster separates from the stonework.

### *Chapter 5*

23. The new bridge offers hope for the future, but at present the wool business is stagnant. Charis begins to use Edmund's surplus wool to manufacture cloth, with the help of the Weaver family. The business makes a promising start.

Charis takes an interest in dyeing, a process that adds value to the finished cloth. In the kitchen of her father's house, she tries out different methods of colouring cloth.

24. The earl of Shiring tries to prevent the building of the new bridge, fearing it will take business away from his market at Shiring.

Godwyn and Edmund tell the king that without the bridge the city will not be able to pay its taxes; and the earl is slapped down.

Merthin starts the bridge and asks for money. Charis counsels the parish guild not to give him any until they have in writing Godwyn's agreement to let them take the penny tolls. As she feared, Godwyn tries to renege on this deal. In the end they settle on a fifty-fifty split.

25. When Merthin has completed the difficult task of redirecting the flow of the river, and has build the cranes and other wooden machinery required, Godwyn fires him on a pretext and hires Elfric, at a lower rate, to finish the job.

*Chapter 6*

26. Ralph still hankers after Annette. On a visit to Wigleigh, he gets her alone and rapes her.

27. Her husband, Billy Howard, makes a formal complaint that is heard in the earl of Shiring's court. Earl Ronald refuses to take action, giving as his excuse that the incident did not take place on his land.

Wulfric is maddened with rage by this (which does not please Glynis). He persuades Billy to complain to the neighbouring lord, William of Caster.

William's wife, Lady Philippa, hates Ralph, and she persuades her husband to hold a genuine trial. Ralph is convicted, and William sentences him to death. Ralph escapes and flees.

28. Ralph forms a criminal gang in the forest. They live by attacking and robbing travellers. This damages business in Kingsbridge and Shiring. Both towns complain to the earl of Shiring, who says he can do nothing.

In 1339, King Edward III announces a royal pardon for anyone who will join his army for the invasion of France. Ralph and his men join up, believing—quite rightly—that there will be even greater opportunities for pillage over there.

*Chapter 7*

29. Using the book of Timothy as his authority, Godwyn reimposes ancient restrictions on the people of Kingsbridge. He forbids them to have their own mills, fishponds and warrens, forcing them to use the priory's—at a price.

The sorest point is the fulling mill, which is old, slow, and under capacity, holding back the fast-growing industry of cloth making.

Charis learns that the fulling mill was created by a townsman, Jack Builder, an ancestor of Merthin's, back in the time of Prior Philip. According to Timothy's Book, the townspeople have an ancient right to use the mill free.

Godwyn refuses to acknowledge this.

Edmund and Charis appeal to the royal court. Their case seems watertight. But Godwyn argues that the people of Kingsbridge are serfs of the priory, and as such have no

right to appeal to the royal court. He is right, and he wins.

Charis realises the town will never reach its potential until it officially becomes a borough with a charter, and ceases to be the fiefdom of the prior.

30. Merthin proposes marriage to Charis. Now that the bridge project has been taken from him, there is nothing else to keep him in Kingsbridge. It is time for Charis to make up her mind.

She accepts.

She prepares the town's application for a borough charter. (Most English towns already have this, but a few continue to be servile, the most famous being St Alban's.)

Godwyn is enraged by this proposal, which has some chance of success, based on the argument that the citizens will be better able to pay their war taxes if they have the freedom to trade as they wish.

Philemon starts a rumour that Charis is a witch. It is supported by her old rival, Elizabeth Clerk, who still wants Merthin. The rumour gains credence from Charis's experiments with dyes.

Charis faces the water ordeal, which involves drowning the suspected witch, the theory being that if she is a real witch she will float. Either way, the suspect usually dies.

Charis realises she is doomed. There is only one way out. She enters the nunnery.

31. Merthin is heartbroken and leave decides to leave town (much to the disappointment of Elizabeth Clerk).

Before going, he checks the plaster in the cracks. The tower is still moving, though slowly. He predicts it will fall down one day—but he cannot say when.

He joins forces with some Italian wool buyers and heads for Florence.

Elfric follows Merthin's bridge design in all particulars but one. Merthin has specified a large pile of jagged stones, called riprap, at the upstream end of each of the pontoons. Elfric assumes these are no more than a decorative flourish, and leaves them out, saving money and pleasing Godwyn.

**Part III: 1347-1348***Chapter 8*

32. Merthin, now 31, is in Florence, where he is a leading architect, wealthy and respected. He is married to Laura and they have three children. He loves his family, though he often thinks of Charis.

At the end of 1347, Italy is afflicted by a terrible epidemic. In Florence, thousands die. Merthin contracts the disease. The symptoms are red skin blotches, swollen glands, fever, vomiting, coughing blood, and a maddening, unquenchable thirst. In extreme cases, people throw themselves from windows to escape the pain, or jump in rivers and drown in an attempt to quench the thirst. The victim usually dies in five days.

Merthin is one of a small minority who recover. His daughter Lolla, 5, is one of those who do not catch the disease, either because they are immune, or through luck. But his wife and two of the children die.

*Chapter 9*

33. Charis, now 28, is somewhat reconciled to life in the nunnery. At first she was restless, a troublemaker; but she has found a niche. Still a religious sceptic, she has learned to keep her views to herself, most of the time; and the wise Mother Cecilia generally gives her work that permits her to skip services. Charis's business experience, her facility with numbers, and her strength of character make her a formidable administrator, and she is in one of the very few places where a medieval woman can employ such talents. At present she is guestmaster, in charge of entertaining visiting noblewomen, and of the hospital.

She misses Merthin. A beautiful young nun, Mair, falls in love with her, and Charis experiments with lesbian sex; but it does not really satisfy her. She wonders where Merthin is, and what he is doing. She does not expect ever to see him again.

34. The hospital needs to be rebuilt and expanded. Charis learns that a pious noblewoman left a large landholding to the nunnery to be used for the maintenance of the hospital. She goes to Godwyn and asks for the money.

Godwyn is building a palatial new prior's house—essential, he says, for the prestige of

the priory. Elfric is the builder. Godwyn says the money cannot be spared for the hospital.

Charis says this is not for him to decide. The money belongs to the nuns. Godwyn denies this, and Charis is not able to prove it because Godwyn still holds all the nuns' charters and title deeds.

Charis asks Mother Cecilia to make her treasurer. She begins to collect rents herself, pre-empting Godwyn. He appeals to the bishop, who takes his side, and orders Charis to stop.

35. Undaunted, Charis begins a programme of assarting—clearing woods and draining swamps to create new farmland, a common way for medieval landlords to add value to their holdings, and something Godwyn can hardly object to.

To attract tenants, such lands are usually offered for cash rents with free status.

*The modern concept of land ownership did not exist in Norman law. Instead, land was "held" by tenants and sub-tenants who owed obligations, rather than money, to the lord.*

*The king parcelled out the country to earls, who in turn distributed it to knights, who allocated portions to peasants, in a branching tree of obligations. Earls had to raise armies when the king declared war; knights had to fight in the army of their earl, equipped with horses and armour at their own expense; and peasants did the work that maintained them all.*

*Peasants had complex sets of obligations, called customary dues. Typically, they had to:*

- a) Give a portion of their harvest to the lord;*
- b) Work one day a week on the lord's personal land;*
- c) Perform a variety of miscellaneous duties such as carting the lord's produce to market;*
- d) Pay in kind a number of taxes including heriot, the inheritance tax, often the best beast.*

*In addition, they were serfs, which meant they needed their lord's approval for most major life decisions, such as to marry, to build a house, to travel, and to move to another village.*

*Whether the system outlined ever existed in a pure form is debatable, but certainly by the fourteenth century it was under pressure from the growth of alternative, cash-based relationships. Increasingly, knights demanded wages to fight, and the king had to raise taxes*

*to pay armies. Peasants were keen to transform customary dues into cash rents. And more and more serfs were gaining free status, which meant they did not need their lord's permission for everything they did. The peasant's dream was "copyhold"—a written rental agreement. The conservative aristocracy and clergy fought fiercely against all these developments, which lie behind much of the conflict in late medieval society, and in this story.*

Charis's assarts attract as tenants mainly, though not exclusively, landless labourers from villages already under her control. Godwyn has succeeded in diverting rents from these villages into his own coffers, but he cannot deny Charis the right to control the serfs. He is angry but finds himself outmanoeuvred.

### *Chapter 10*

36. Glynis, now 27 has two sons, Sam (8) and David (6), the latter named for Wulfric's dead brother. Sam is big and strong and a bully, like his real father, Ralph Porboy (who is now lord of Wigleigh). David is small, dark and shrewd, like his mother. The boys quarrel a lot.

Wulfric loves Glynis and the boys, but flirty Annette can still make a fool of him any time.

Most of all, Wulfric longs to win back the land he lost when his father died.

The harvest of 1347 is poor, and the village of Wigleigh faces a hard winter. Perkin warns that he may not be able to continue to employ Wulfric as a labourer. Then Glynis hears about the assarts being offered by Charis, and persuades Wulfric to apply for one.

Wulfric is a serf, so he may not leave the village without permission from his lord, Ralph, or—since Ralph is away fighting in France—from Ralph's bailiff, Nathan Reeve. But in practise many people run away. The new landlord is often willing to turn a blind eye, and for the old landlord there is not much benefit in chasing a runaway: there is no shortage of labourers. So Wulfric and family simply disappear one night.

They work hard on their new holding. Wulfric is happy and free, and Glynis is glad to get him away from Annette.

By bad luck, on New Year's Eve they are seen by Nathan Reeve. He accuses them of running away. Glynis takes an aggressive line, asking him how he will keep them from starving if they return. Nathan agrees to do nothing, and Glynis thinks they have got away with it.

*Chapter 11*

37. Early in 1348, Merthin is approaching Kingsbridge, accompanied by six-year-old Lolla. He has left Florence and is returning home. He longs to see Charis again, and wonders how she may have changed in nine years.

At the brow of a hill, the road forks. Merthin observes that most travellers head for Shiring, which is visible in the distance. If only one could see Kingsbridge Cathedral from here, he muses.

As soon as he reaches the city, he seeks out Charis. She is shocked and thrilled. They regain their old rapport instantly. He begs her to renounce her vows and marry him.

She hesitates. The priory is her life now. Despite the frustrations, she is totally engaged by her work. And when she meets Lolla, the old horror resurfaces of a life subordinated to others.

She asks Merthin for time to think.

38. Merthin finds the town more prosperous, but still held back by the priory. The wool business continues to stagnate, but cloth manufacturing is a big new industry, and could grow faster if the town had more fulling mills. Edmund is dead, and Elfric has become alderman of the parish guild. He offers no opposition to Godwyn.

Merthin rejoins the parish guild and sets himself up against Elfric, supported by Elfric's old enemy, Mark Weaver, now a wealthy man.

Merthin and Elfric clash immediately over the stone bridge. Cracks have appeared in the stonework, and Elfric blames Merthin's original design. Merthin says his design was not followed, and demands that the drawings be produced. Godwyn says they have been lost. But Charis finds them and gives them to Merthin.

Merthin points out that Elfric failed to install the riprap. Elfric admits this, but scorns the idea that the omission of such a decorative detail could be the cause of structural weakness.

Merthin says that without the riprap the fast current has scoured out the earth from under the foundations (as it did with the wooden bridge, though only Merthin understood this). He predicts that a hole as big as a man will be found under the upstream end of the

central pier.

Two boys are sent to dive the river and check. They report exactly what Merthin forecast.

The hole is filled, the riprap installed, and the cracks are mended. This issue having become symbolic, to everyone, of the conflict between Merthin and Elfric, Merthin now becomes alderman of the parish guild.

39. Mark Weaver comes back from a trip to Melcombe, the nearest port city, and falls ill. Merthin recognises the symptoms: he has the plague. He is taken to the nuns' hospital.

Based on what Merthin says, Charis recommends that the entire Weaver family be quarantined for forty days. Godwyn, the university-educated doctor, says this is not the plague, and quarantine is unnecessary.

Mark dies, but several weeks go by without anyone else falling ill, and Godwyn appears to have been proved right.

40. There is a partial collapse of the central tower of the cathedral, killing worshippers. This finishes off what little was left of the pilgrim traffic.

As Merthin predicted, Elfric's repairs of 1337-1339 were inadequate. Nevertheless, Elfric proposes further patching. Merthin examines the cracks and says the tower will fall down in the next ten years, bringing the entire church with it. He proposes digging a deep pit alongside the north transept to examine the foundations.

Thomas Langley, now 63, backs Merthin.

Merthin and a team of labourers dig a huge pit, using elaborate cranes. They pass the foundations of Prior Philip's church, the foundations of a previous church, and the foundations of a much earlier building that could be a thousand years old. Then they come to a layer of stones and mortar reinforced with oak beams. Below this is only earth. Merthin realises that the church is not built on bedrock, but on a concrete raft that floats on soft earth. Amazingly, this foundation lasted a thousand years—but the tower of the cathedral proved too much for it. Now, the foundations of the tower have pushed through the concrete mat and are rapidly sinking into the earth.

Merthin digs further and discovers that the bedrock is only fifteen feet deeper. He

proposes building a new tower founded on this bedrock.

41. In September 1348, all the Weaver family fall ill with the plague and die.

A pretty widow, Bella Brewster, falls for Merthin. He pressed Charis for a decision on his proposal. She sees the plague coming, and refuses to desert the nunnery at a moment when she will be so badly needed.

Merthin marries Bella.

42. Merthin designs a new tower high enough, with its spire, to be seen from the fork in the road. The townspeople are excited by this, as it would bring business, and the parish guild offers to share the cost.

Elfric argues that it is impossible to build a tower that high. Thomas confirms that it would be the highest building in England. Merthin says there are taller churches in Florence. The final decision rests with Godwyn, and he says No.

### *Chapter 12*

43. The war in France comes to an inconclusive standstill after almost a decade of fighting. Ralph Porboy, now 31, comes home wealthy and respected, though missing three fingers and walking with a limp.

Ronald, earl of Shiring, has died in the fighting, and Ralph hopes for the earldom, as a reward for his service in France; but there are many hoping for similar rewards. The king picks Ronald's younger brother, William, lord of Caster, as earl; but Ralph gets the lesser title, Lord of Caster.

He marries a niece of the late Ronald, called Tilly. Although she is only 13, she becomes pregnant right away.

Nathan Reeve tells Ralph about Wulfric and Glynis running away. Out of sheer malice, Ralph orders that they be forced to come home. They have just brought in their first harvest when they are dragged back to Wigleigh.

### *Chapter 13*

44. In October, one hundred Kingsbridge residents die; then, in November, a thousand.

Merthin is immune, as is everyone who has caught the disease and survived.

Godwyn prescribes bleeding, which does no good. Charis, listening to Merthin, quietly advises people to stay at home and avoid all contact with others.

The nuns continue to care for the sick as best they can. Mother Cecilia tells them they have nothing to fear from death, which is only the longed-for reunion with Christ. Charis does not believe this, but all the same she continues to run the hospital.

Charis's lover Mair dies. Several monks die. Mother Cecilia, dying, tells Charis what Prior Anthony said on his deathbed: That the body buried at Gloucester was not that of Edward II. Charis does not know what to make of this.

Charis is the nuns' unanimous choice as the new prioress. Godwyn is bitterly opposed to her. Everyone assumes the bishop will side with Godwyn.

In December another thousand die, including Merthin's new wife Bella. New graveyards are consecrated. At this rate, all Kingsbridge will succumb.

The bishop comes to Kingsbridge on Christmas Day. When he arrives, he and Charis find that Godwyn is nowhere to be seen. He has fled in the night, with his sub-prior, Philemon, and all their closest cronies, taking with them food, wine, and the contents of the treasury.

**Part IV: 1349-1350***Chapter 14*

45. The bishop has a problem. Clergy are dying as fast as everyone else, and he cannot fill the vacancies. He appoints Charis immediately.

Dramatically, she refuses—unless her conditions are met. Anything, says the bishop. She demands control of the nunnery's assets, and she insists on having this in writing.

However, Godwyn is still prior, and he has taken with him the nunnery's charters.

46. Godwyn and his cronies go to the isolated cell of St-John-in-the-Forest (where the great Prior Philip began his career two centuries ago). They take possession and lock themselves in. Visitors are refused admittance remorselessly.

Despite these precautions, one of the monks falls ill with the plague. He is mercilessly expelled.

47. Charis is summoned to Earls castle, where William, earl of Shiring, is dying of the plague. Merthin goes with her.

There is little Charis can do for the earl. Merthin comforts Lady Philippa, telling her of his own bereavement and survival.

The earl dies.

48. Charis learns of Queen Philippa's gift to the priory, and how it was conditional on Thomas Langley's being accepted as a monk. She wonders what this reward was for. Clearly Prior Anthony was involved in some kind of dishonesty over the death of Edward II. But she recalls the murder she witnessed as a child. Was the victim one of Edward's murderers? Or was he perhaps Edward himself?

The monk from Lynn pays his annual visit, and Charis discreetly questions him. He shuts up like a clam. Charis realises she is on dangerous ground, and wonders whether she has stirred up something she may regret.

49. No one dies of the plague in January and February, and Charis begins to hope it is over.

Before they can begin, Charis needs to know what Godwyn's intentions are. Will he surrender her assets to her, or will he fight the bishop's ruling?

Charis and Merthin travel to St-John-in-the-Forest. They find the place deserted. Unburied bodies lie around the monastery. In the graveyard is a row of new tombstones. One of them is Godwyn's. Other monks appear to have fled.

They find the treasure chest. It contains all the charters of the monks and the nuns. It also contains a fortune in cash. For the moment, Charis is rich.

52. Back in Kingsbridge, she begins by dealing with the labour shortage. She converts much of the priory's land from labour-intensive cereal cultivation to low-maintenance pasture. In order to attract what labour she can, she offers higher wages.

She retains her tenants and attracts new ones by freeing them from customary dues and allowing them to farm as they choose. Many turn to profitable cash crops such as hemp, flax, and orchard fruits.

Charis's activities trouble Lord Ralph, whose tenants begin to demand the same treatment as Charis's. He and other conservative landlords persuade Parliament to pass an ordinance in 1349, followed by a full Statute of Labourers in 1351, forbidding anyone to demand higher wages than he received in 1347, and making it obligatory for villages to work for their immediate landlord, unless he specifically dismisses them.

Charis and other progressive landlords ignore this law.

53. Charis rebuilds the hospital, dividing it into wards, introducing a new emphasis on cleanliness, and welcoming back the barber-surgeons and apothecaries scorned by Godwyn. She encourages dissection of human corpses for education and research, and commissions a new, practical medical handbook.

### *Chapter 17*

54. Merthin encourages Kingsbridge cloth manufacturers to switch from labour-intensive coarse cloth to capital-intensive fine cloth at higher prices. He builds windmills and watermills for fulling and other industrial processes formerly done by hand with cheap labour.

He applies again to the king for borough status. This time he can claim the support of the prioress. There is no prior, but he wins the backing of the bishop by promising to rebuild the cathedral tower.

55. Life begins to return to normal, but some things are changed forever. The established church has lost respect, and there is a new emphasis on individual piety. Clothing fashions are extravagant, with pointy-toed shoes and plunging necklines. Epicureanism develops in food and wine. Crime is permanently increased. English begins to be used in place of French and Latin in courts, Parliament and books.

56.

Just when everything is going well, Philemon shows up.

It turns out that he fled the cell when everyone was dying and escaped the plague. He is now the senior monk at Kingsbridge, and the bishop makes him prior immediately.

He tries to retrieve the charters, but Charis builds her own treasury and locks everything away.

Philemon insists Charis and Merthin cease their fornication. In this, he has conventional morality on his side, and they are forced to concede. Once again, Charis has to choose between her work and her lover. Once again, she chooses to stay in the priory.

He also opposes the granting of a borough charter. He fails to block it completely, as Merthin has made a good case and won the bishop's backing. However, Philemon succeeds in persuading the royal court to weaken the provisions of the charter, and in particular to keep the townspeople subject to the prior's court, rather than having their own municipal court.

57. Merthin demolishes the central tower and begins work on what will be the tallest structure in England.

Parted from Charis, he begins an affair with Lady Philippa, widow of the earl of Shiring.

### *Chapter 18*

58. Wulfric and Glynis again flee from Wicleigh and take highly-paid work on one of

Charis's landholdings. But Lord Ralph enforces the Statute of Labourers with characteristic brutality, and brings them home to work for the wages they got in 1347.

However, Wigleigh has been depopulated by the plague. Perkin and most of his family have died, leaving Billy Howard and Annette to manage a large landholding. They cannot keep it up, and Ralph is forced to offer Wulfric the half that used to belong to his father.

Wulfric is overjoyed. Glynis counsels him to drive a hard bargain, but he is so happy that he accepts the landholding on the old terms, with customary dues and servile status. Glynis is so angry she almost leaves him.

He soon finds out that she was right when he is forced to bring in Ralph's harvest before his own.

59. Ralph gets a clandestine visit from Gregory Longfellow, a lawyer close to the royal court. Gregory asks Ralph to kill Thomas Langley. He will not say why, but it is something to do with Queen Isabella. He promises Ralph that as his reward he will be made earl of Shiring.

60. Ralph kills Thomas. This is a scandal, of course, and both Charis and Godwyn immediately protest to the bishop of Kingsbridge. At first he is equally indignant, and promises to denounce Ralph to the king; then, strangely, he backs off. Charis concludes that someone at court wanted Thomas dead, and she has a dreadful suspicion that her questioning the monk from Lynn about Thomas may have caused the murder.

61. Ralph marries Lady Philppa and becomes the earl. He knows that she loathes him, but this increases his pleasure at having her in his power. For a while he enjoys forcing himself on her sexually, but this eventually palls. He resumes his old habits with servant girls, although he likes to fondle them in front of his wife.

### *Chapter 19*

62. Eventually Philippa resumes her affair with Merthin. Although in her early forties, she becomes pregnant. She realises that she must convince Ralph that the baby is his. Therefore she has to seduce him.

She cannot pretend to desire him because he would be suspicious. So she lets him see her naked, as if by accident, then says: "Don't touch me." This provokes him to prove that he can touch her any time he likes, and he has sex with her. She puts up with it, knowing that this will make her baby safe.

She has a boy.

63. To advertise the regeneration of Kingsbridge, Charis produces a new mystery play about the martyrdom of St Catherine, complete with a sensationally realistic beheading scene devised by Merthin. It is an instant success, and attracts thousands of pilgrims.

**Part V: 1361***Chapter 20*

64. A hooded figure emerges from Kingsbridge Priory at dusk. It pads through the darkening streets to a large stone house and slips in through an open door. The house is richly furnished. Inside Merthin, now 45, waits by a blazing fire. Food and wine stand on a table. No one else is there.

The figure pushes back its hood. It is Lady Philippa, (54). They kiss passionately.

Philippa is living at the nunnery, officially making a religious retreat (as great ladies often do). Now that she is past childbearing age, she is not obliged to live with Earl Ralph. Her son, now 10, has been taken away from her and is being brought up as a warrior by Ralph.

65. Kingsbridge is thriving. The cloth industry has boomed under the leadership of Charis and Widow Weaver. A large dyeing industry has grown up alongside. Merthin continues to build the tower and is also the leading architect in England for castles, palaces and bridges.

His daughter, Lolla, now 19, is a talented dyer, apprenticed to Naomi Dyer. However, Lolla is disobedient and rickety, and stays out all night and runs around with the wrong sort of young man.

Merthin has a confrontation with her about her behaviour, after which she runs away. He is distraught.

66. The new central tower is almost finished, but for the spire, which will be visible for miles around, and make it easier for pilgrims and traders to find their way to Kingsbridge.

No one can figure out how Merthin is going to make the centering (the wooden supports) to hold up the spire during construction, nor how he can raise the timbers to that height. He announces he will build the spire without centering. Everyone thinks this is impossible. Only Charis believes he can do it.

*Chapter 21*

67. Glynis's younger son, David, 20, is shrewd and determined, like his mother. He decides

the townspeople).

But Charis reminds the bishop of his ambition to have the tallest cathedral in England, and he turns Philemon down.

73. Charis converts the nunnery's tenancies to written leases with cash rents, giving her a stable money income (instead of a proportion of the harvest, which varies from year to year).

Tenants of other landlords demand the same treatment, and Charis gets into trouble with the aristocracy.

Ralph persuades the bishop to forbid Charis to do this.

### *Chapter 23*

74. Glynis's elder son, Sam, 22, is a violent bully, like his real father, Earl Ralph. He kills a man in a fight.

75. He is accused of murder in the earl's court. He is found guilty. Earl Ralph sentences him to death.

76. Glynis goes to Ralph and pleads with him to pardon Sam. Ralph refuses. Nothing could please him more than to execute the son of his old enemy Wulfric.

In desperation, Glynis tells Ralph that he, not Wulfric, is Sam's real father. Ralph relents and pardons Sam.

Glynis begs Ralph to keep the secret of Sam's paternity, as Wulfric does not know the truth. This plea will turn out to have been a bad mistake.

77. Ralph demands sex with Glynis. No woman has ever excited him as she did all those years ago.

She refuses. He threatens to tell Wulfric the truth about Sam's paternity. Glynis gives in and submits to Ralph. To her horror, she again finds it thrilling.

### *Chapter 24*

78. The plague returns.

Charis immediately imposes the 40-day quarantine restrictions recommended by Merthin (and originally developed in Florence). The older generation of doctors have been discredited by their failure to deal with the plague last time, and she gets her way.

Fewer people die this time (20% of the population of England, rather than 50%). Those who do succumb are disproportionately children, and Charis speculates that people who survived the first epidemic acquired immunity, but did not pass it on to their children.

(Those who never contracted the illness may have a different kind of immunity, which is heritable. And some people may just have been lucky.)

79. The bishop dies. Philemon immediately puts himself forward as a candidate. Charis opposes him with all her might.

80. Philippa dies. Merthin is heartbroken. Charis cannot help a pang of hope.

81. As earls of surrounding counties die off, there is a shortage of candidates to fill vacancies. Ralph, now single again, proposes marriage to the widow of the Duke of Monmouth.

To prevent this, Charis renews the accusation against him of the murder of a monk, Thomas Langley.

Ralph admits killing Thomas, but says Thomas himself was a murderer; in fact, he says, Thomas was the murder of King Edward II. To prove it, he proposes to dig up the body in the forest.

Charis, too, believes the body in the forest to be that of the former king. But, in fact, the skeleton is that of a short man, and Edward II was tall, like his father.

The identity of the dead man remains a mystery. But Ralph becomes Duke.

82. Lolla comes home.

### *Chapter 25*

83. Annette's husband, Billy Howard, dies of the plague, leaving no sons, just a daughter, Angela, who is in love with David.

Ralph, desperate for tenants, offers Billy's land to David. David accepts on condition

he can have it for cash rent with free status—and only if he may marry Angela.

Ralph overrules the parents and lets them marry.

David has got everything his father wished for.

84. Lolla settles down.

85. Philemon becomes bishop despite all Charis's efforts. He cancels the spire and begins to build the new guest house.

## Part VI: Fleece Fair Day, 1381

### *Chapter 26*

86. Bishop Philemon, now 66, has been away from Kingsbridge for more than a year, latterly on a visit to the papal court at Avignon. (This is the time of the French popes.) Now he is returning. Approaching the town, he pauses on the brow of a hill where the road forks. To his astonishment, he can see the spire of Kingsbridge Cathedral.

He is furious. The spire has long symbolised his conflict with Charis. He triumphed over her decisively twenty years ago. But she must have built the spire in his absence.

There is going to be trouble.

87. Also approaching the town are Glynis, now 61, and her sons Sam (42) and David (40), with their wives and teenage children.

They are all angry about taxes. The young King Richard II is continuing the war in France started by his father. To pay for it, he has imposed three poll taxes in four years. The latest is enormous: a shilling for every man or woman aged 15 or more. Glynis's family must pay nine shillings, which represents all that remains of their savings.

They thought they had evaded most of the tax by lying about the ages of the people in the household. But almost every family in England did the same, so that the tax did not raise the sum anticipated. The royal treasury has appointed tax commissioners to enforce the tax, and the local representative is Duke Ralph, now 64.

Glynis is determined not to pay.

88. Merthin (65) and Charis (62) are admiring the just-completed spire. Charis gave the go-ahead the day Philemon departed, and Merthin began the next day. As promised, he built the spire without formwork, creating a self-supporting cone, circular in cross-section, with a light cladding to make it appear octagonal. (This is how Brunelleschi built his dome.)

They are still in love.

89. News comes from London of riots against the poll tax. The men of Essex and Kent have marched on the city and set fire to the palace of John of Gaunt. There has never been an

uprising like this in all English history.

90. Ralph is approaching Kingsbridge, determined to clamp down. He ignores the advice of his more reasonable son, John, earl of Shiring, age 30 (and in reality the son of Merthin).

91. Philemon confronts Charis, accusing her of directly disobeying the orders of her bishop. She admits it. She resigns as prioress and renounces her vows. Before she goes, she warns Philemon that the monasteries will be destroyed if they continue to fight against the progress of the towns.

92. Duke Ralph opens his inquiry. A series of defaulters are summoned. Their neighbours, friends and relatives denounce them. They are all ordered to pay up or their goods will be taken.

The watching peasants and townspeople grow more restive with each case. Finally they become violent, and Duke Ralph is forced to withdraw to the safety of the priory.

The mob follows and lays siege to the priory.

93. Charis and Merthin are in the garden of his new house, built in the suburbs. This is where they plan to spend the rest of their lives.

They hear sounds of rioting, and Merthin realises that both Lolla and John are in the city.

94. The mob storms the priory.

Charis saves the life of Philemon.

Merthin rescues Lolla.

Sam kills Ralph, his own father. Glynis sees this.

John kills Sam.

**Epilogue: 1382**

95. Gregory Longfellow comes to Kingsbridge at the behest of King Richard II to exhume the body of Thomas Langley.

The uprising of 1381 has scared the aristocracy. Although King Richard instantly reneged on his promise to Wat Tyler that all men should be equal, he has abandoned the poll tax, and landlords generally have realised that they cannot ignore the aspirations of peasants or townspeople. The new prior and prioress at Kingsbridge accept the town's borough status. Ralph is dead, and the young earl John of Shiring prefers his tenants to be free men paying cash rents.

The skeleton of Thomas Langley is examined and proves to be that of King Edward II.