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All Shall Be Well: Julian and Bartholomew

by

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BA (Comparative Literature)

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Master of Arts (Writing)

Faculty of Education and Arts

Edith Cowan University

July 2011

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Abstract

The creative content of my thesis has been developed from a personal experience that became the catalyst, and source material for the creative part of the novella *All Shall Be Well: Julian and Bartholomew*. The essay, and the preface to the creative side, situates the thesis as a work of reflection and memoir combining with creativity, and proposes that threads of beliefs and feelings, represented in the social, and the cultural life of the English fourteenth century, are also relevant to, and for those to be found in contemporary society. This applies particularly to the importance of compassion in society, and emphasises the reality of what it is to be human.

The reflective essay contains my own personal experiences, and an alignment, with two characters, their discovery, and the impact that it has had on my own life and beliefs. Wrought in coincidence, it also connects with a childhood life in the county of Norfolk, England, where my two authentic characters are found to be living in close vicinity to one another, at almost the precise time. The anchoress Julian of Norwich lived in a cell attached to the church of St Julian in the city of Norwich, in the latter part of the fourteenth century, and some fifteen miles south east of Norwich lived Bartholomew Edrich, Lord of the Manor in the village of Thrigby.

Edrich, my own patriarchal surname, was an ancient Anglo Saxon name, commensurate with the longevity of the Edrich family. As yeoman farmers they have lived in this area throughout the centuries and to the present day. Bartholomew is authenticated by my discovery of his silver seal in the Norwich Castle Museum in 1978. I came to Julian of Norwich, anchoress at the church of St. Julian, in a dance included in the Sacred Circle Dances group, of which I was a member. I was further inspired by her writing, and those who wrote of her, in books bought in subsequent visits to her reconstituted cell. The recovered writing of her book the *Revelations of Divine Love*, various wills of the period in which she lived, and a reference made, in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, to a visit made by Margery to Julian in her cell in 1415, establishes her authenticity.

In the essay I have observed and written of medieval living conditions, noting the dramatic weather and health changes that caused much loss of life, and with great human suffering. This has been the background for the meeting of two historical personages, Julian and Bartholomew. An accompanying fictional story draws on their roles, as people caught in a violent situation, where there is the need for a listening ear, and prayerful response; for such was the role of an anchoress, or anchorite, of that period. It has recently been suggested that role to be similar to contemporary counselling, even that of psychotherapy.

Implicit in this thesis is the conclusion that suffering engenders compassion, the feeling that one suffers with another, in understanding and love. This is, I feel, an important thread connecting the medieval, and, a contemporary society. For a population suffering immense changes today, as in the medieval period of the fourteenth century, implies that Julian's message, of the motherhood of God, His love for his creation in His understanding and compassion for sin, and His message of hope, is proof of her popularity and of a recognised need of the contemporary human.

I acknowledge a sense of pride that my family name existed then, and can be found in the same area today, and that they are a vital part, that recognises in the story unfolding, a continuity of the name, and of the family's genetic qualities.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief;

- i. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institute of higher education;*
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Acknowledgements

Individual people, and groups, have assisted me in my writing endeavours in the past eighteen years. Firstly I wish to express my gratitude to my friend and mentor, the late Western Australian author, Julie Lewis OAM. Without her encouragement it is doubtful whether I would have ventured into the exciting, and engrossing world of the word-smith. Secondly I am grateful that Julie's encouragement led me to become a member of the Northern Writers Association, later to become the Peter Cowan Writing Centre, based in Edith Cowan House on the campus of Edith Cowan University. It was here that I became an apprentice to the art of writing in different genres, and learned the pleasures, and the pains of writing.

I wish to express my gratitude to Edith Cowan University for allowing me the opportunity to partake in a part-time research and writing thesis. My supervisor, Jill Durey, deserves my heartfelt thanks for encouraging, and leading me through the process, with a firm and gentle hand. It has been such a pleasure working with her.

My daughter Jo has offered me invaluable help with computer work, and has had patience with my mistakes. I am grateful that she has taken time from her own studies to constantly assist me, to critique my work, and to be a willing driver, and helper, when I have had meetings at the university. I could not have continued without her assistance.

At home I have the support of Philip, my husband, who, I am sure, wonders what has become of his traditional wife of yore, yet is delighted with any success that I achieve.

So many thanks to Lizzie, our Sacred Circle Dance leader, who, in 1992, introduced me to Julian in the dance, *The Bells of Norwich*. I might never have taken the path to Julian's cell, nor been imbued with her philosophy, had I not danced with Lizzie. I add a thank you to Carol, with whom I have spent countless hours in discussions, ranging through spiritual, and philosophical, meanings. They are both lovely younger companions who lighten my ageing heart, and who delight me with their company.

I am grateful to be able to retire to the retreat centre Milmeray, in the hills north east of Perth, in a setting where beauty and peace are a constant. I meet with a group of Wise Women in a ritual gathering of sharing, in which our ongoing stories are the focus. I hope they have forgiven me for questioning the wisdom aspect of our naming, and that they realise it is not theirs, but my own wisdom, to which I refer. I am glad that they have accepted my warts and all self, and my sometimes outrageous behaviour, and hope they realise that it is symptomatic of a teasing quality that is often found in Norfolk people.

It has assisted me to have had such an intimate knowledge, and love, of the area in which my characters were immersed. Such knowledge has been enhanced by research, but more by the book which has given me an important grasp of the fourteenth century: *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England*, by Ian Mortimer. I offer to him my sincere thanks for his inspirational work, his portrayal of Edward 111, and to his words, which have taught me that the English character was birthed in the fourteenth century.

To Karen Armstrong, author of innumerable books on important religious, philosophical, and spiritual aspects of world history, I offer gratitude for opening my mind. Now the patron of *The Charter for Compassion*, her book, *The Great Transformation* introduced me to the origins of compassion. This has inspired my writing.

In 1378 I made a discovery in the magnificent Castle Museum in Norwich. Here I stopped at a show case, and viewed the small silver seal that was to be the catalyst for further interest in my subject. I am grateful to the museum, who, on request, forwarded on a wax facsimile of Bartholomew Edrich in medieval dress, and wearing a shovel hat.

I have become totally entranced by the story of two characters that have emerged in my medieval story. There have been days when I have felt myself to be back in the place, and in the time with them, and in the city that I know so well. The sounds of the Norfolk dialect, vibrant in remembered hearing, become as real.

I dedicate this work to my grandfather, Harry Edrich, a true Norfolk gentleman.

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Reflective Essay

I place my two characters, Julian of Norwich and Bartholomew Edrich, in an accompanying novella, *All Shall Be Well: Julian and Bartholomew*, in the latter part of the English fourteenth century. To understand the characters, and their living conditions, I have studied the period in which they lived, to the degree that I feel I have a good conception of the life style of that period.¹

It was a time of immense physical distress, when population declined dramatically in the aftermath of famine, plagues and war.² The beginning of the One Hundred Years War, intermittent battles with Scotland, a revolt by the peasantry, and the introduction of a new philosophical, and theological religious fervour, all contributed to great social change.³

The brutal social stratum of virtual slavery, known as villeinage, imposed after the Norman Conquest by the conquering warrior knights, displaced the lesser feudal system of lord and vassal, an interactive and supportive system. However, villeinage was being challenged. Lack of labour in the production of food, due to loss of life during the plagues, gave peasantry greater power towards the end of the century, and was the catalyst for the Peasants' Revolt in 1381.⁴

As if to emphasize the beginnings of a move to a more powerful peasantry, language was being written in English, and not only in the French and Latin of governing classes.⁵ Together with the burgeoning wool trade, new religious ideas were being brought in from Germany and the Low Countries, and can now be seen to be preceding the religious

¹ Martin, Rhona, *Writing Historical Fiction*, second edition, pp.18-23, London, A&C Black, (1995).

² Principal texts: Goldberg P.J.P., *Medieval England, a Social History*, Great Britain, Hodder, (2004).

Dyer, Christopher, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, 1200-1520*, England, Cambridge University Press, (1998). Mortimer, Ian, *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England: a Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century*, Great Britain, The Bodley Head, (2008).

Mortimer, Ian, *The Perfect King: The Life of Edward 111, Father of the English Nation*, London, Jonathan Cape, (2006). Whittock, Martyn, *A Brief History of Life in the Middle Ages*, London, Constable & Robinson Ltd., (2009).

³ Cox, Michael, *A Handbook of Christian Mysticism*, pp. 97-98, Great Britain, The Aquarian Press, (1986).

⁴ Goldberg P.J.P., *M. E. a S. h.* p.96, (2004).

⁵ Mortimer, Ian, *The T.T.G. to M.E.* pp. 283-288, (2008).

Reformation of the fifteenth century. The great power of rulers was lessened with the further development of Parliament in the reign of Edward 111.⁶

These are the historical facts. What is more appropriate in the composition of this essay, and the creation of an historical story and its characters, is the practical social, and living experience of medieval people, and a story that lies behind facts – the beliefs, values, pains, anger, fear, joys, and wonder – the feelings of ordinary people. In the creation of characters that fit the period accurately, close research is essential. The decision, then, is which literary genre to employ.

Literary genre is a form of classification of fixed artistic types, in which certain applied rules impose a specific structure of subject matter, style, and effect in the writing of the narrative, and the poetic forms. These forms include, amongst others, the biography and autobiography, the essay, the article, the poem, and the novel. In the latter, subject matter may include other elements in the story line, such as romance, mystery, fantasy, epic, and history. The historical novel, in turn, is divided into categories. Of these the most popular are the romance, the family saga, the crime or detective, and the straight historical. Each one of these has a popular following, and each is dependent upon a structure, a plot, a theme, characterisation, dialogue and narrative.

Romantic medieval legendary stories such as the Arthurian epic, *Morte D'Arthur*, and other traditional stories which contained chivalrous action, and unrequited love, were popular reading forms of the medieval kingly courts and the aristocracy of that period. Written in more recent times, historical love stories are a popular form of the romantic genre. The story-line develops real, and sometimes, fantasy characters, within an historical context, and follows a formulaic plot line in which a good, and somewhat naïve, young woman, desirous of finding happiness, is involved in an emotional crisis. Through the course of the story, in which various personal conflicts emerge, she is eventually rescued by a hero, with whom she finds love and happiness. The very popular romantic novels of Georgette Heyer, set mainly in the late eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, are typical of this structure.

Romance writing has recently become more sensual, allowing the inclusion of sexual scenes which were previously absent. In a recent trilogy, *The Innocent, The Exiled*,

⁶ Goldberg, P.J.P., *M. E. a S. h.* p.147, (2004).

and *The Beloved*, the author Posie Graeme-Evans, exploits this fashion in a love story based on the fifteenth-century characters of Edward IV and Anne Bohun. She employs her own personal characterisations of the hero, and heroine within the mandatory plot, and in a researched historical context.

The historical mystery, or detective novel, is presently enjoying popularity. The Owen Archer Mystery series, and the Dame Frazer Medieval Mystery series, are also dependent on the structure of applied rules which follow those of the modern crime novel. While the main character is the same in each novel, the theme – the success of good over evil – is the main motif of the stories. The hero, a man, or woman, of unusual intelligence and unique capability, almost immediately faces a conflict, generally the murder of an innocent person. How he, or she, interprets, and succeeds in unravelling the mystery, while facing great personal challenges, follows the orthodox story-line, as in the romantic historical novel, that is not necessarily imbedded in history.

The historical family saga is also popular. Edward Rutherford has used this category in his novels, *Sarum*, and *The Forrest*, to follow a family through centuries in a particular part of England in a sweeping overview of time periods. Historical character connections are made, but minimally. The theme follows family experiences and outcomes, while being situated in one particular area of England.

Thus, modern historical romantic and mystery novels follow accepted, and modern, generic constructed storylines, within applied rules. A less rigid research of period, social and historic issues, dress and habits is usual. It is essential to understand, that both generic types may follow their typical plot structure, while the historical context is the personal choice of the author. In other words, the same romantic or mystery construction may be placed, not only to within an historical period, but in any time frame.

This does not apply to the form of the straight historical novel, where real historical persons live in a particular period. Psychological application and researched societal issues assist in an author's conception and formation of characters. In the development of main characters it behoves the author to observe his, or her, own character and ask: how do I think, speak, act and behave? What, or who do I like or dislike? Why do I have certain beliefs and values that are important to me? Where are my main interests? Am I kind, selfish, or envious; a negative or positive person? One can apply these same questions, in

creating the historical characters that become an important focus of the story, as to how those characters think, act, and live, according to the set period.

I am impressed by the way that Hilary Mantel has characterised Thomas Cromwell in the recently published novel *Wolf Hall*, and, while I do not deem to emulate her style, I see it as an inspiring example in the setting of a person within an historical situation. In an early twentieth-century novel, *Remarkable Creatures*, Tracey Chevalier characterises two historical women amateur archaeologists, in a remarkable story of specimen recovery. She has acknowledged their historicity, the inspiration that their story brought to her, and the part that various libraries and museums have afforded her. I feel that these novels are true to the characters, and to the times in which they are set.

Such historical novels develop characters in a particular period that is historically relevant for them. The reader becomes able to imagine them imbedded in their own real environment. In contrast, in the writing of historical romantic and detective novels, more emphasis is placed on the formula plot rather than on a truthful construction of the reality of the set period – the story could be placed in any time frame. My intent when writing the novella is to develop characters sustained by historical research, characters living in the relevant historical, and social context, allowing the reader to embrace, and be embraced by history. It is my hope that I can produce a piece in which the inspiration that those historical characters I have researched, and who have inspired my interest, will fulfil my aspiration.

In my novella, a cataclysmic fourteenth century is the societal period that brings two historical people together. Julian of Norwich, in her revelation writings, and her prayerful and empathetic counselling work as an anchoress, espouses a love that is a deep spiritual compassion; as she implies that suffering in a person, and in a society, is an enabling source for the growth of compassion. Bartholomew Edrich lived in the same area, and at the same time as Julian. A farmer, who bears my own pre-marriage surname, he represents a working, or yeoman farmer of that era. My story will engage with their meetings within historical context, and through the force of circumstances that existed then. Threads growing together with past, and present connections, are important motifs in this, and a continuing story. A more important theme is the experience of love and compassion.⁷

⁷ Toynebee, Arnold, *Mankind and Mother Earth*, pp. 176-183. London, Granada, (1978).

*But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when
old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break
forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost,
new country is revealed with its wonders.*

Gitanjali; Rabindranath Tagore

1911 English Language Version.

XXXV11.

It is spring in Australia; the 25th of September 1970, Philip's and my wedding anniversary. But we are not celebrating. Instead I am lying in a hospital bed. Around me tubes stretch. They emerge from both sides of my body, ending in plastic bags filling with a watery blood solution. A catheter implanted in my urethra removes urine, directing its yellow contents to yet another plastic bag. This is an unsought situation, and the result of a medical procedure during which my ureter had been cut, and unsuccessfully re-joined. I am in pain. My requests, often voiced, are for the pink solution the nurses tell me is 'morph/asp'.

The family try to visit daily. Philip comes in, followed by Judy, now nineteen, the housekeeper for Philip, co-carer of the other two children, Philippa, twelve, and Jo, ten. Jo cuddles up against me on the bed, and asks me again, and again,

'When are you coming home, mum?'

And I answer 'Soon, love, soon.' Not knowing when that will be, but hoping every day that the tubes will be free from blood, indicating that healing has taken place.

A friend visits, and leaves in tears. That is when I am frightened by the reflection of the woman, with straggly hair and white face that I see in the wash basin mirrors; she looks sixty six, and not my age, twenty years younger. Will I ever get better? Three weeks have elapsed since the operation, and still blood is there in the plastic receptacle.

Of course I did get better. It took my removal to another hospital, where, under the authority of another doctor, I was able, ten days later, to witness the removal of tubes and catheter, and celebrate with the glass of champagne that had been absent from the occasion

And, Armstrong, Karen, pp X11-X1V, *The Great Transformation: the World in the Time of Socrates, Confucius and Jeremiah*, London, Atlantic Books, (1998).

of our wedding anniversary. A period of recuperation occurred, but not without much psychological disorder.

As time passed, I discovered in myself a more socially conscious character, one that had been hidden beneath a conditioned persona of family life and social gatherings. I felt I was a different person. On frequent meetings in Perth with my first neighbour and friend in Australia, Norma, I divulged certain intimate feelings. One of these was, not only my feelings of discomfort with this new person I had become, but that, in the process I had experienced, another discomfort was troubling me; I had fallen in love. It was causing me excitement, a growth, a sort of renewal of youth and wonder, but also disquiet. Unsought, unwise, and outwardly unacknowledged, it disrupted my emotional life for sometime.

In retrospect, however, it was a part of certain psychological understandings that I would follow in the coming years. In the beginning I sought the religion of my childhood, Church of England, now Anglicanism in Australia; I discovered Jungian psychology, became, after a year-long course, a resource and counselling volunteer working in the district of Wanneroo, where I lived, took part in many New Age teachings, matriculated, gaining a place at Murdoch University where I received a BA, and developed my own writing.

It is now the present time, and I am finding difficulty in developing a theme that will meld patterns of practicality and feelings, as well as combine research with the novella that will become the other part of my studies. The novella is a fictional story, based on the lives of two historical subjects living in Norfolk, England, in the latter part of the fourteenth century. The first, Julian of Norwich, author of an autobiography depicting her visions, or 'showings', in unknown writing which was recovered after centuries lodged in private libraries.⁸ Julian has become a figure of renown, because of her acknowledgement of the femininity of God, an aspect that has found favour with contemporary feminist groups, and her emphasis on the importance of love, both aspects of which were divulged during the visions, and expressed in her writings.⁹ The second subject is Bartholomew Edrich, a medieval figure bearing my patriarchal surname. Both subjects are real. Both

⁸ Upjohn, Sheila, chapter 1 *In Search of Julian of Norwich*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd, (1995).

⁹ Spearing, Elizabeth, p.125 Translation of: *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*, London, Penguin Classics, (1998).

lived in the county of Norfolk in the same period – the latter part of the fourteenth century.

To assist in further knowledge of the period, I have studied many related books on the subject of Julian and the medieval period. Yet I cannot find the means of expressing what I feel to be the essential theme, that of the importance of the development of compassion in a human being, as a result of physical and emotional suffering, a development of empathy through a similar experience. It is, I feel, a psychological manifestation that occurs in both past and present time spans, and is as relevant in contemporary society as it was in the medieval period. As a human experience, it also searches for a meaning to life – the how, why and what, of our existence, in which the comfort of a belief in God, and further, of God’s love for humanity, plays an important part. This is nowhere more apparent than in the belief that Julian’s words express.

Where to begin? My mind feels unable to grasp a method or means. Recent ill-health has depleted any confidence in my own abilities. I read Jane Gallop’s *Anecdotal Theory*, and begin to have an inkling of the approach I will take, but, how to find the essential theme that my work must contain? How to apply the ‘knot’ that embraces, and entwines past with anecdotal present; not as a denouement, a narrative end, but as ‘the whole story’?¹⁰ Then I have two dreams.

In the first dream I am meeting Norma in the customary manner of the past. Although facially this person does not resemble Norma, yet I know it is she. She comes wearing the New Look, the fashion that evolved after World War 11, popular at the time of my marriage with Philip; she also wears a hat that covers her hair. With Norma is a little boy. He is blonde and very beautiful, but not her son, who was killed in a horrific road accident when in his teens. Norma had also lost another child, a girl, through suicide, and carried the sorrow of that daughter’s children which were subsequently involved in an accident, leaving one boy mentally disabled. During the years she had suffered greatly, but in all the time I knew her, she was a caring and loving person. In my dream, I am also

¹⁰ Gallop, Jane, *Anecdotal Theory*, p.85, Durham and London, Duke University Press, (2002).

trying to find clothes to wear so that I may go and meet Norma. I look through a bag of discarded clothes, almost rags, and select some. I really don't like them but I know they are all I have. I own no money, but feel sure that Norma will provide.

On the following night I have the second dream. This time I am taking a present to Elaine and Richard, my neighbours. Richard, an English migrant, is also interested in the English medieval period. The present is food – soup and a beef pie; what my mother, in her Lowland Scottish accent, would have called a 'beef patty'. I arrive, but leave the present in the boot of my car. I am concerned that it will deteriorate in the heat if I leave it there. Then, I am walking through passages that seem to be of wooden constructions: passages that go in and out, but not to Richard's house.

Why do I feel that these dreams are important or even, in a certain way, an opening to my understanding of their meaning in connection with my work? How do I begin to search for that meaning? I feel that they are both rich in metaphor, which is, as the dictionary tells me: 'a word or phrase applied to an object or action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance'. I think that I can reach the essence of their meanings in the manner taught in the psychotherapy I have experienced in the past. That method uses dream images, and emphasises those appearing in the dream to be applicable to the dreamer. Connections evoke understandings of archetype and myth, part of the dreaming self. I feel this to be most apparent in the first dream.

The introduction of the mediaeval context in the second dream constitutes an opening in establishing a theme, a theme that contains the knot of the matter – the integration of past and present in my own life: the dreams, my work, and in the relevance of the subject matter – the birth of compassion.

The New Look, in capitals, was an important element in my life. It was a female fashion, arriving after a period in England, when there was a lack of clothing and food during a particularly brutal war. Much suffering was endured then. At last came a period when clothes, in a full and flowing fashion, could be bought. In my dream Norma does not resemble the Norma I knew, yet I know her as being of the essence that was Norma – both in her suffering, and in her loving, caring nature. Could she also represent Julian, I ask myself? She brings a child, a beautiful boy. But the boy is not her son as I had known him.

Neither Norma, nor the boy, is physically known by me, but a metaphor whose meaning has many levels.

The dream,' writes Mattoon, 'is not a disguise, but a set of psychic facts available to the conscious mind through recognition and integration'. It is toward this that I am drawn – toward archetypes as: 'that which comes from the heritage of humanity'. Represented as a universal or collective unconscious, it appears in dreams as though from another level of the unconscious. Such dreams may stand out for years like 'spiritual landmarks.' These are the 'big dreams' that contain some 'extraordinary message', or figures such as the Primordial Mother, the Child Hero, or the Old Wise Man, and others.¹¹

I consider my first dream to be archetypal. It is also compensatory,¹² as it is relevant to my work in the extraordinary message it contains. There are at least four levels in the images of Norma and the beautiful boy. Firstly, it directs attention to this being a new look at what is contained in the figures of mother and child. It is not the contemporary emphasis placed on love between woman and man, and the sex act; this love is different – a new look at the subject of love. Secondly, the images represent the universal archetypal Primordial Mother and Hero Child, death and rebirth.¹³ It also contains a religious motif, that of the Madonna and Child, loss, suffering, and resurrection. The latter is so visually expressed in Julian's visionary writings, and her theology;¹⁴ the dream also points to the importance of a universal love, and the femininity of God.¹⁵

I am represented in the first dream as without clothes and money, my only covering to be taken from a bag of rags. This shows my lack of confidence in the present situation. I am a penitent, and totally dependent on the money that Norma will provide, the means to meet the new look in which Norma is clothed – her meaning of love. She will give me the means to understand the message. This is extraordinarily prescient.

The second dream, following almost immediately during the next night is, in the Jungian concept, a complementary dream. It balances and compares different data and points of view.¹⁶ The word present is the operative word. It is both a gift and a time period.

¹¹ Mattoon, Mary Ann, pp. 48-49, p.18, p.65, *Understanding Dreams*, USA. Spring Publications Ltd, (1986).

¹² Mattoon, Mary Ann, *U. D.* pp.119-130, (1986).

¹³ Freke, Timothy, and Gandy, Peter, *Jesus and the Goddess*, p.125, p.139, London, Thorsons, (2002).

¹⁴ Okulam, Frodo, *The Julian Mystique*, Chapter 5, Long Text, USA, Twenty Third Publications, (1998).

¹⁵ Spearing, Elizabeth, *J. of N., R. of D.L.*, Chapter 59, (1998).

¹⁶ Mattoon, Mary Ann, *U.D.*, p120, (1986)

I am taking a present to a friend who has a similar interest to mine – that of the medieval period. I am taking food, soup and a meat pie, food both of the past, and of the present. Food that is, on one level, edible, but may also be food for thought. The car in which I journey represents me on my journey. Thus the food for thought may be left in the back of my mind, and might deteriorate. And finally my going in and out of wooden, not solid, passages, represents moving in and out of the present and past. The fact that the passages are not solid shows an ease of movement and thought, but not with physical effort. This dream connects with the medieval period and Bartholomew.

I work with these two dreams. Then, three weeks later, I dream again. My father has ‘come to stay’. Again there is no resemblance to my father. This man is tall, is middle-aged, and has an air of authority. I remark to the people around us that he is young, yet I know that he is also middle-aged. Words are significant, such as middle-age, another way of referring to the medieval period, and ‘come to stay’, placing this dream in context with the previous dreams.

It is possible that there is an archetypal context – that of the Wise Old Man who, by now appearing, becomes a part of the dream sequences. There may also be a further connection, and one that relates to both Julian and me; it introduces the Trinity to the dream sequence, a very important part of Julian’s theology. But it also connects with my own spiritual beliefs that have tended toward a more personal, and silent, practice of meditation, contemplation, and belief in the Immanence of God. While my memories of childhood religious experience, grounded in faith, and centuries of family worship in a parish church, are very dear to me, yet I no longer participate in church services. This Father comes as wise perception, and stays as a vital part of the Trinity, and of medieval devotion.

The last, and fourth, dream in the sequence appears ten days later. Another old man appears, and this is very definitely my father-in-law, now dead. I see him standing in his last home, in familiar place and attitude. Then I am in a reception area, at a wedding, and I follow my husband around, shaking the hands of those present who are sitting in a circle around the room. I indicate my pleasure that they have come, as does my husband.

While this dream seems to be purely personal with regards to my husband and me, the relationship that I had with my father-in-law was always mutually tentative, with elements of criticism on his part. Yet his image brought a sense of great compassion in me

as I watched his loneliness. I had probably not consciously wanted to accept that need in him. I had only experienced his criticisms. But the father, my father of the third dream, and the father of the fourth, has all the elements of balance, integration and completion; and was a pleasurable and compassionate conclusion.

During the time, the 1990s, when I was researching and writing, the family history that finally became my autobiography, I enjoyed another interest; I joined a local Circle Dancing group. It had been composed after a visit by the American priest and author, Matthew Fox.¹⁷ In 1992 one of the dances presented to the group was entitled *Bells of Norwich*, containing the words attributed to Julian of Norwich, an anchoress alive there in the fourteenth century. I became interested, because of the connection with my well loved city, Norwich, and became drawn to Julian, the woman that the song and dance represented. I visited the church in 1993, and lit a candle, in Julian's reconditioned cell, for my eldest brother, Eric, now dying of cancer.¹⁸ In the book shop there, I bought books: the translations of her fourteenth-century Middle English work, comprising the Short Text and the Long Text, writings that she had entitled *Revelations of Divine Love*, and biographies, telling of the re-discovery and her work. I have returned there on three more separate occasions.

It was the poet T.S.Eliot who, in his *Four Quartets*, brought the words, most often attributed to Julian of Norwich, to his poetry. In the last stanza of *Little Gidding* he incorporates Julian's with those of his own:

*All shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well (Julian's words)
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one (Eliot's words).*¹⁹

Those words are significant. They suggest the way that Julian's words have enlivened the imagination, and the spiritual needs, of many contemporary people.²⁰ While Julian remains a mystery, without a known name, except the one she assumed on becoming an anchoress, she looms large in the literary world, as the first woman to write a book in

¹⁷ Fox, Matthew (priest), Website www.matthewfox.org/

¹⁸ Norwich was bombed in World War II, and the church and surroundings were damaged.

¹⁹ Eliot, T. S., *Four Quartets*, p.59, London, Faber and Faber, (1974).

²⁰ A reference to world-wide interest, and groups of: Friends, Companions, and Julian Meetings.

English in the fourteenth century. This was the time when Chaucer was also writing in English. She wrote an autobiographical account of her visions in 1373, which were, as she writes in chapter two: 'at the point of death'. It has been assumed that she did so shortly after the experience. A longer and more theological work, based on the shorter version, was written, according to chapter fifty one, Long Text: 'For twenty years after the revelation except for three months',²¹ and has also been assumed to have been completed during her anchor-hold.

It is, however, not only the mystery of her life, but the significance of the important period during which she practised, that is also notable. Norman Tanner recounts the number of anchoresses attached to different churches in Norwich, at the same time as Julian's enclosure, and he ventures the possibility that she may have influenced other women to become anchoresses.²² Grace Jantzen proposes the probability that Julian was in the vanguard of psychotherapy: 'The ministry...could be compared ...with that of a modern psychotherapist or professional counsellor, offering time, understanding and prayer... listening and accepting tales of sin, sadness and brokenness and helping the person to find a place of healing.'²³

The fact that her work was only publicly discovered, from where it had been buried in private libraries, and translated into modern English in the early twentieth century, adds another dimension to the story. Within this context, coincidence plays a large part both in the past and present. The fact that words written in her hand have never been discovered, but only those of the scribes who copied them, adds to the mystery. And those works are few.²⁴

Julian was enclosed as an anchoress in a cell attached to the church of St Julian in King Street, the year unknown. This is a long street running from the Castle in central Norwich, to the area where the church of St Julian was situated. At that time Norwich was second only to London in importance, due to its availability as a port for the trade of goods,

²¹ Colledge, Edmund, and Walsh, Fr James, *Julian of Norwich, Showings*, p.270, Great Britain, SPCK, (1981).

²² Tanner, Norman, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532.*, p.XV11, and, p.63, Canada, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, (1984).

²³ Jantzen, Grace, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, p.22, p.47, New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press. (1988).

²⁴ Upjohn, Sheila, *I. S. of J. of N.*, pp. 1-9, (1995).

and especially wool, and the woollen industry.²⁵ The street ran parallel to the river Wensum, on which goods were carried by river boats, unloaded and loaded with new goods at the farthest end of the street, the area that later became a centre for trade. This is where the church of St Julian was situated. It would have been a lively and bustling street, for there, also, were two friaries.²⁶

As an enclosed anchoress, Julian would have been allowed a maid, or even two, to attend to her needs, and a cat to keep down the rats. Her cell would be adjacent to a parlour and a cooking area, virtually a suite of rooms. While she would never leave to mix with people in public, it is possible that she had a small herb garden, and that she would have been allowed visitors, according to the recommendations of *The Ancrene Wisse*. She remained there until 1416. We know this because her name is mentioned as a beneficiary in a will of that year.²⁷

It is not known when she was enclosed, but general opinion puts it as some time after her visions in 1373, when, as she records in her autobiographical writing, she was thirty years and a half. Her writings have been called the 'short text', and the 'long text'. The short text, an autobiographical account of her visions, is thought to have been written shortly after these; the long text, which develops the longer and more theological understanding, is believed to have been concluded in 1393,²⁸ and possibly during the years of her enclosure.

In her book, *In Search of Julian of Norwich*, Sheila Upjohn comments on the discovery of Julian's work as a mystery unfolding, and as a detective story, in which history comes to play a part. She recounts that, in the time of Henry V111, two hundred years after Julian, under the orders of his Chamberlain, Cromwell, Roman Catholic monasteries in England were dissolved. The dispersal of their contents, the ecclesiastical regalia, silver and gold chalices, jewellery, including the beautifully illuminated books, and many ordinary manuscripts, were removed from their libraries, and became the property of the king. However, private collectors were also able to buy manuscripts, and among the many books that survived is one copy of the ST, now in the British library. It is not the

²⁵ Whittock, Martyn, *A B. H. of L. in the M.A.* pp. 67-68, (2009).

²⁶ Tanner, Norman, *Religious Institutions in Norwich 1370-1532*, Map 1, (1984).

²⁷ Okulam, Frodo, *The Julian Mystique: Her Life and Teachings*, p.4, USA, Running Press, Book Publishers, (1998).

²⁸ Colledge, Edmund, and Walsh, S.J., *Julian of Norwich, Showings* p.22, New Jersey, Paulist Press, (1978).

original manuscript, but one copied from an original and dated 1413. The scribe mentions that the author of the work is Julian who is still alive at that date. There are three LT manuscripts, two in the British library, called Sloane 1, and Sloane 2, and one in Bibliothèque Nationale fonds anglais, in Paris, and called P.

From this latter manuscript Upjohn tells us that a certain English monk, serving as a chaplain to a convent of Benedictine nuns at Cambrai, France, in the seventeenth century, found the Julian manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, edited it, and published the ‘first-ever’ printed edition of Julian’s book. This was reprinted in 1843. And then again, in 1901, it was translated by a student of the Edinburgh Association for University Education for Women, a certain Grace Warrack. Her edition was translated from one of the Sloane manuscripts of Julian’s work; that edition has been constantly reprinted ever since. It would, without doubt, be this edition that Eliot read, and from which his inclusion of Julian’s words, in *Little Gidding*, were taken. Julian’s book is considered to be one of the great world-wide spiritual classics.

Julian’s reality as a living person is ascertained through certain bequests in wills of the time, and was more recently confirmed by reference to a meeting with Julian by Margery Kempe, whose autobiography, considered to have been dictated to a scribe, was recently discovered by an American mediaevalist.²⁹

Colledge, Walsh and Leclercq, editors of *Julian of Norwich Showings*, believe, as do others, that Julian was a nun, not only because of her belief, but because she would have needed an education to have been able to write her work. They believe that convent education would have provided this. Goldberg, writing in *Medieval England*, proposes another way of learning, that daily readings of the *Book of Hours*, a popular devotional text of that period, would promote interest in learning construction of words, and promote further learning.³⁰

More recently, another interpretation has been introduced – that she may have been a wife and mother. Each year, on the date of the visions, and what Julian called her ‘showings’, May 8th, a festive midday Mass is held in St Julian’s church, followed by lectures, given by those people who have an interest in Julian, be it spiritually or

²⁹ Colledge, Edmund, and Walsh, James, *J. of N., S.*, p. 18, (1978).

³⁰ Goldberg, P.J.P., *M. E.* pp. 266-269, (2004).

historically. During that time, a series of lectures are held, and one of them, in 1988, entitled *Reconsidering Julian*, was given by Sister Benedicta Ward SLG, a lecturer in Church History and Spirituality for the Theology faculty of Oxford University. Sr Benedicta suggests that, rather than a nun, Julian had been a wife and mother before her enclosure.³¹ This possibility points to the period in which Julian lived, and certain evidence displayed in her writing.

‘The surest source for information about the author’, Sr Benedicta writes, ‘can be learned from the Revelations themselves, especially the *Short Text*’, her date of birth, and place of birth as possibly Yorkshire. Her silence on her identity, and her age at the advent of the first plague, all point to her having been of marriageable age at a time when, after great disasters, the instinct was to procreate.³² Furthermore, Julian is described as a recluse and a devout woman, and not a nun; and most likely to be associated with the evidence of other women solitaires of that period. It is only in contemporary society that her rediscovered writings have led her to be recognised as a mystic. This lecture with its historical, and to my mind, practical approach, brings a more realistic possibility to the question of Julian’s origin, and her pre- anchoress lifestyle. It is this approach that I will follow in creating my own characterisation of Julian.

I am drawn to it because it brings a different perspective, one that leads me to respond to the image of a woman, portrayed as a saint, but more nearly seen as, firstly, a woman. Her spirituality is expressed in the mother image of God,³³ and God’s love, and shown in her concern for the surrounding people in prayer and counselling; this adds and brings another dimension to her character. It is a response that would more nearly come from a wife and mother. Sr Benedicta calls it the ‘solitary condition’, where men and women, with no experience of monastic training, chose to lead a solitary, prayerful lifestyle.

To come to this conclusion leads to an understanding of Julian of Norwich as a woman sharing the troubles of that cataclysmic period with the people living in the parish of St Julian, and probably of a larger populace, of which Bartholomew is one. It is this connection that will lead to their meetings in the following novella.

³¹ Sr Benedicta, *Julian Reconsidered*, p.17, England, Fairacres Publications 106, (1988).

³² Sr. Benedicta, *J.R.*, p. 22, (1988).

³³ Spearing, Elizabeth, *J. of N., R. of D. L.*, chapters 52, 58, 59, (1988).

*Edrich, from the medieval male personal name Edrich (from Old English Eadric literally wealth, power). Bill Edrich 1916-1986 English cricketer; John Edrich 1937-, English cricketer cousin of Bill.*³⁴

In presenting the characterisation of Bartholomew Edrich, I have considered my own connections, both to the name that was mine before marriage, and to the area where both medieval and modern Edrich families have lived, and still live.

Unless one has the experience of living in a certain area, and under similar circumstances, it would be difficult, for a modern person, to envisage life in an English village of the Middle Ages. My early days, eighty years ago, were spent in a Norfolk village where certain physical characteristics of those far-off days still existed. It was probably no farther than five miles cross country from the village where my character, Bartholomew Edrich, lived. Agriculture was the mainstay of both periods; six hundred years later most village workers were still employed in that industry. The old methods of working the land were used, but with some modifications. Horses drew implements, unlike the oxen of yester-year. The only exception was a machine called a 'binder' to cut corn, and when, at the time of threshing it out, a huge steam engine was employed.

Villagers held fewer religious celebrations than in medieval times. Christmas and Easter were still observed in worship in the large and imposing church, with its square Norman tower. Whitsun and August Bank holiday were secular holidays, but Sunday was always the 'day of rest', and possibly religious observance. 'Harvest home', a ritual gratitude for corn safely gathered, played an important part; farmers had a feast for workers, and the church was filled to capacity with fruit from orchards, bread made from corn gathered, and flowers from many gardens. Mayday in Upton, that village of my childhood, was probably the closest to a medieval celebration; a maypole was erected on the village green, a fiddler played, and there were many stalls and competitions available to the thronging villagers.

My school years seemed to embrace a medieval village quality. I remember the romance of ancient British historical stories: Alfred and his burned cakes, Canute telling

³⁴ Ayto, John, *Encyclopedia of Surnames*, p.102, London, A&C Black Publisher Ltd, (2007).

the waves to stop, Hereward the Wake, and King Arthur. I read Langland's *Piers Plowman*; sang, in round, the ancient 'Summer is a-coming in', and danced to the sounds of a piano playing unusual music, a circular dance, hands entwined, and feet tapping. It was redolent with the past, and is maybe why I would love Circle Dancing so many years later.

The village Upton of my childhood, and the Thrigby of Bartholomew, are situated in the Broads area of Norfolk, which are the fresh water remains of ancient peat diggings, or, as the dictionary writes: 'A group of shallow navigable lakes connected by rivers' In contemporary times this area draws visitors to boat and fish. It is renowned for the beautiful clear light experienced there, light that attracts painters, and birdwatchers. The various local water fowl, like the Grebe, a diver of unknown origin, and the Bittern, with its booming call, are two important indigenous species. Ordinary varieties of water birds, herons, swans, and ducks and geese, are also found there.

Broad Norfolk dialect, with its 'peculiar turn of local grammar and turn of phrase', its difficulty with the pronunciation of vowels, and its 'maltreatment' of consonants, all spoken in a slow drawl is, like other English counties' local dialects, unique to the area.³⁵ It is said that, even if one gains a different accent, a Norfolk person will still find difficulty in the round 'o', and say 'I hoop' instead of 'I hope'. Some of the words such as 'bor' for boy, and 'mawther' for girl, may be related to Anglo-Saxon, but Mardle writes that words such as those are Old English, in which inclusions of words are gathered from the Roman invasions, the migratory settlement of Angles, Saxons, and Vikings/Danes, and are included in Chaucer's writings. Similar Dutch words have also been incorporated due to geographical proximity, and the medieval wool trade. Such is the word 'dwile', meaning a floor-cloth, which retains the same meaning in Holland as 'dweil.'³⁶ Much can also be gathered about settlement from the ending of place names.³⁷

My childhood, surrounded by so many familiar faces, and places, was idyllic. Brought up in a family of four elder brothers, destined to become renowned for their sporting abilities, I have always retained my love of Norfolk. It remains a piece of land that I still feel to be my place. Norwich, to which I had returned in wartime service, brings back many happy and nostalgic memories.

³⁵ Mardle, Jonathan, *Broad Norfolk*, pp.13-19, England, Norwich, Wensum Books, (1973).

³⁶ Mardle, Jonathan, *B. N.*, p.13, (1973).

³⁷ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L. in the M.A.*, pp.5 & p.14, (2009).

My mother was a great teller of stories. They were many, and most were tales about the two large families that had conjoined in her marriage with my father; he was the eldest of thirteen children, my mother was the eldest of eleven. One day she told me that the Edrich family had been concerned that the name would die out before the birth of my grandfather, Harry. As a child, I could not understand that just an ordinary farming family would have such concerns. It was not until later, when I became interested in my own family history, that I realised the importance of genealogical connections, and their historical and biological significance. I have inherited, as did a female cousin, the crooked little finger of my grandfather, Harry. English names may be personal, based on a person's occupation, his familial connections, or the place or area of domicile.³⁸

Family origins are deeply held in oral knowledge, and I learnt that a certain Edric (pronounced Edrich) the Dane, had been falconer and ship's captain to Edward the Confessor. Edric had been given huge swathes of land in Norfolk before the Conquest. In my research in Norwich Records Office, where I studied Bloomefields History of Norfolk, I learned that he had been dispossessed of his lands, and exiled, after the Conquest. Another Edric, a 'legendary Saxon' known as 'the Wild', fared better. A 'thegn', or lord, he held manors in Shropshire and Herefordshire; he revolted against Norman rule but finally made peace with William before his death in 1072.³⁹

Bartholomew Edrich, now established as a real person, becomes the second character in my novella. I was delighted to find the silver seal of Bartholomew Edrich in the Castle Museum in Norwich while visiting Norfolk in 1978, although I had no indication of the interest it would further engender in me. He was Lord of the Manor at Thrigby, a small village close to the coast of Norfolk, in the year 1370. He is pictured in the seal with long hair under a shovel hat. He wears what appears to be a smock, holds either a long stave or a longbow, and carries a shield, on which the Norman Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity shield of three crowns is displayed.⁴⁰ His clothing places him as a yeoman or working farmer. Due to the proximity of place, the possibility of a connection with Edric the Dane/Saxon exists.

³⁸ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L. in the M.A.* pp.172-176, (2009), Reference to personal names.

³⁹ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L. in the M.A.* pp.220-22, (2009).

⁴⁰ Gardiner, Rena, and the Dean, and the Chapter of Norwich Cathedral, *The Story of Norwich Cathedral*, Dorset, England, Workshop Press, (1977).

The background to my story, and the drawing of personal characters, almost demands an understanding of the history that took place, three hundred years before its eventuation. One hundred years after the tenth-century unification under Wessex kings in England, the descendants of the original British, invasive Romans, immigrant Anglo-Saxons and Danish settlers, lived in a wealthy country with a well organised rural society, and an interactive system of landlords and working peasants. While under the power of the landlord, the peasant was also sheltered and supported, showing allegiance to his lord. Before the Conquest, one third of the land was church owned; within it were celibate monks and nuns, and secular priests, who, being married, lived in family units. This Christian society was deeply religious, the Church was the centre of community life, and would remain so after the Conquest.⁴¹

By 1066, with the coming of the Norman Conquest of 1066, ‘an occupying Power had control of the national resources’. Four thousand five hundred Anglo-Saxon aristocrats were replaced by Norman lordship; only two remained. Below these were about one thousand, four hundred Anglo-Saxons who had owned land, and six thousand sub-tenants, who, now being land-less, were the labourers called villeins – virtually slaves. With all conquests, after violent dispossession a positive element remains. Romans built the roads crossing the land from north to south, and east to west; Normans researched and wrote the *Domesday Book*, gained access, and brought the English population under one power, delivering organisation.⁴²

Three hundred years later, kingship in England had become Anglicised. By naming his son Edward, Henry 111 introduced a symbolic return to the Englishness of Edward the Confessor, whom he revered. By the time Edward 111 came to the throne, in 1327, English was again being spoken at court, certainly with additives of French and Latin, but now formally accepted.⁴³ The century evolving was to see a climate change, extreme weather conditions, which resulted in the death of 30% of the population during the years 1315-1321; the ensuing three plagues of 1348, 1361 and 1369 caused catastrophic deaths,

⁴¹ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L. in the M.A.*, pp.10-12, (2009).

⁴² Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L. in the M.A.*, pp.27-33, (2009).

⁴³ Goldberg, P.J.P., *M.E.*, pp. 266 -267, (2004).

numbering approximately half of the already reduced populace; disputes with France, over ownership of land, caused continuous war, and more suffering in the populace.⁴⁴

Ruling powers form a background to life in the fourteenth century. Four kings ruled. The reign of the first, Edward 1, ended in 1307. Both Edward 11 and Richard 11 met untimely deaths, allegedly in the first instance in murder, and in the second by starvation. Neither allegation can be proven. Their reigns were controversial, and in the case of Richard, a severe tax load on the populace at large became a catalyst for the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, in which was included a demand for the end of villeinage. It was a revolt against a tyrannical reign.⁴⁵

Edward 111 reigned for fifty years after the alleged death of his father in 1327. Unlike his father Edward 11, he was popular with the English people. His rule had all the elements of the written romances of the mythic King Arthur, whose exploits, read avidly by king and court in the popular "romances" of the period, were seen as lived in the legend-like quality of a loved king. His vision of monarchy was to promote 'leadership, spirituality, chivalry, patronage, dress, propaganda, and parliamentary authority'.⁴⁶ The development of Parliament, participatory government, is seen as one of his greatest achievements.

One cannot ignore his sense of fairness, shown in an enactment that men be tried in their own language, English, rather than French or Latin; English was the language he both spoke and read. He encouraged a vibrant and lucrative wool trade, and the immigrant Flemings' contribution to the weaving industry; it was this that made a wealthy nation.⁴⁷ Edward's wartime leadership should also be acknowledged. His people loved him for his courage, and ability as a wartime leader. He encouraged projectile warfare, the use of the longbow; this was a method which revolutionised wartime encounters.⁴⁸

While Edward led an opulent lifestyle he did not lose sight of the importance of the common man. Tournaments and jousts, open to the populace, and in which he fought as a common knight, showed his courage, and inspired his own fighting men, many of whom joined his army from English villages, having gained the use of the long-bow. His deep

⁴⁴ Goldberg, P.J.P., *M.E.*, chapters 11 and 12, (2004).

⁴⁵ Goldberg, P.J.P., *M.E.*, chapter 13, (2004).

⁴⁶ Mortimer, Ian, *A.P.K.*, p.395, (2006).

⁴⁷ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L. In The M.A.*, pp. 68-69 (2009).

⁴⁸ Mortimer, Ian, *A.P.K.*, p.243, (2006).

religious belief, and his loving marriage and family life, became a model for his people. Edward has been described by Ian Mortimer in *The Perfect King* as a ‘man of grace’, and, tells how Edward’s name came to represent a golden age.⁴⁹

History informs us in dates and names of kings, wars, and in percentages the number of deaths during plagues; these are bald and impersonal historical data. In conjunction with this historical appraisal, how is the period understood as a social history? How is it possible to provide to a twenty first century person a description of the way people in the fourteenth century lived their day-to-day live? Implicit and correct detail is supplied by archaeological and anthropological discoveries, but images depicting life style, and the considerable trauma the fourteenth century people faced, are those that evoke understanding. Many people survived those traumas, but what were their pleasures and pains, their joys and sorrows, their beliefs and values. What are the feelings they held and expressed, those that can demonstrate the very act of living?

In *The Time Traveller’s Guide to Medieval England*, Ian Mortimer employs ‘investigation into the sensations of being alive in a different time’ by using the narrative present tense, and five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, a very effective method in writing a story line to enrich the imagination. Martyn Whittock uses a social context for issues faced by people in a historical setting, in order to put the reader ‘in touch with the lives of people in the past’. Other writers, Dyer and Goldberg, give a more statistical, political and analytic record of the period. All four writers, and other historical avenues, have provided a balanced approach for my research into what was a remarkable period in English history.

Whittock writes that sewerage disposal was the major problem of that period.⁵⁰ The first thing noticed in any city would be the smell emanating from dumped sewerage, and other garbage.⁵¹ A modern person would find the sight of beautiful buildings and colourful sights an amazing contrast to that smell. This was a period of urban development,

⁴⁹ Mortimer, Ian, *A.P.K.*, p. 392, (2006).

⁵⁰ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L. in the M.A.*, p.104, (2009).

⁵¹ Mortimer, Ian, *T.T.T.G. to M.E.*, pp. 6-7, (2008).

when townships and cities boasted growth around industries, particularly the wool trade; cheek by jowl with skinning, tanning, and dyeing works were other associated industries. Butchers cut up the meat of the skinned animals, and the bones were discarded, generally on the street. Bakers cooked a type of pastry, and meat. Spinners spun. And weavers wove their wear. Food was sold on the streets where different people thronged, the wide variety of colours of their dress denoting their status.⁵² Horses and carts trundled through dusty or cobbled streets, where different sounds of conversation, selling of wares, and people at work would show this to be a vital society, one, however, without the same capability of cleanliness of a modern society.

Survival came first. This was an agrarian society, dependent on produce from the land; a society of peasants and farmers whose main earning industry focussed on the wool trade to the continent. Villages and hamlets were connected by rough tracks, muddy in winter, and rutted in summer. On these tracks an agricultural worker, or carts carrying produce, would be met, and occasionally pilgrims travelling on their way to a shrine, of which there were many, for pilgrimage was popular in this highly religious society.⁵³ Tracks wound through a countryside, in which there were massive irregular fields, fields that could be up to twelve hundred acres, depending on the population of the area. They were composed of strips of land, each one belonging to an individual owner or tenant. Indeed, it might be possible to see peasants working, clothed in their short smock-like shirts, hoods, and long leather boots.⁵⁴ Surrounding countryside would contain rough pastures where many sheep would be grazing, for the woollen trade was the most important industry of the time. There would be few actual forests, for these were owned by the king and aristocrats for hunting purposes, and not the place to be found searching for food if you were of the peasant class.

A large Norman church would dominate the scene encountered in a village; this, the most apparent sight, indicated the importance of a country person's religious and social life. The place, where the village priest led daily mass and numerous celebrations, occurred during the religious year. A manor house, possibly of stone,⁵⁵ with surrounding farm

⁵² Mortimer, Ian, *T.T.T.G. to M.E.*, p.9, (2008).

⁵³ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L in the M.A.*, pp.92-97,(2009).

⁵⁴ Mortimer, Ian, *T.T.T.G. To M.E.*, pp. 115-117, (2008).

⁵⁵ Barber, Richard, *A Strong Land & a Sturdy: England in the Middle Ages*, p.35 photograph, (1976).

buildings would be a part of other straggling and much smaller, wooden and thatched houses. There would be a mill using water or wind, the former dependent on flowing water. Generally, a bake-house, and a brewery, or ale-house would be found, according to the size of the village. Ale made with malted barley was the drink mostly consumed then. Sewerage contaminated water was not for personal use, and although most villagers would have a rain tank attached to their house, water from this would be used only rarely.

The village was a self-sustained unit of production, food to feed the inhabitants, the main produce being wool, and as with labour, this was the means to earn money. Cereal crops, oats, barley, wheat and peas were harvested, stored, milled, and cooked in pottage and baked in bread. These were the main source of sustenance. Meat was eaten, but only if an animal had outlived its usefulness. Mutton could be found on the table in November when the flock was culled; chickens were eaten when their laying days were over.

According to where the village was situated, other food was available, such as rabbit (introduced to England by the Normans), and hare. The latter was caught with care, as a fine could be imposed if found with one. In river or coastal areas fish was also a common food, while the killing and curing of pigs, running and foraging in the common area of the village, was a yearly event and the source of meat when it was rare in winter. Depending on whether the villager had a cow, and generally this applied to the richer peasant, dairy food and cheeses were also available, made by the woman of the house.⁵⁶

Food was cooked slowly over a constant fire set centrally in the poorer houses, creating a smoky atmosphere. Spices were expensive, but herbs grown in nearby gardens were used. Salt-making was a minor industry throughout the country, and particularly in coastal areas, where tidal salt water penetrated river systems.⁵⁷ Chimneys were usual only in the richer households. The modern separate kitchen was a thing of the future, found only in palaces, castles, and manor houses.

This would not be a modern picturesque village. This would be a place of work where men, women and children all had their daily tasks: a smith at work, the peasant and farmer at work on the land, women spinning and weaving clothes for their family to wear, at work in their gardens, their orchards, or with their chickens and small animals in pens.

⁵⁶ Mortimer, Ian, *T.T.T.G. to M.E.*, pp. 169-174. (2008).

⁵⁷ Website, *Salt Association, History, Anglo Saxons*, pp.2-3, (2008).

Village children were put to work guarding sheep, whose wool was a very important part of a family's earnings, or in the fields, keeping birds from taking the planted seed. They were an important part of the family work force.

Schools were for the few whose family could afford the fees, but maths and writing were necessary for a trade such as building, and clerking. 'Dame' schools with a limited teaching capability were occasionally available. Land work was the essential industry for a villager, but it would not be unusual to see a woman, or a man, beating children or animals, or indeed, a man beating a woman, as it was considered usual at that time.

This was a violent society where most men carried a knife for protection. William White (1864) writes of the Peasants' Rebellion in 1381 that the leader of 'the 50,000 Norfolk rebels was a certain John Litester, a dyer of Norwich'.⁵⁸ He and the insurgents were overthrown by the Bishop of Norwich, Henry le Spencer, Litester was arraigned for high treason, and condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered; his bodily parts were to be suspended, one part over his own house, and the other parts at a city gate, and in other Norfolk towns. It was a most barbarous sentence, with the person being still alive as his entrails were removed. A not unusual sight was that of criminal heads, impaled on stakes at city gates.

Sounds of birdsong, church bells, voices in conversation, the clop of oxen hoofs or horse shoes, the creak of leather equipment, and workers' voices upraised in shout or song would be heard, unlike the ubiquitous traffic sirens and loud music of today. There would be no sound of clocks, for, although the king had incorporated this new invention in his palaces, it had not yet become common. On Sundays and feast days, of which there were many,⁵⁹ village bells would ring, and from the church organ music, chanting, and singing would be heard.

There might be a football match to watch, not at all similar to the modern skilful football game. This took a more violent form. The game would include most of the village men in competition with men from an adjacent village, when a hard leather ball would be run, or kicked, in a way that resembled a fight without weapons.⁶⁰ A form of bowls was

⁵⁸White, William, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory Of Norfolk*, England, William White, Fulwood Parsonage, Sheffield, p.150, (1864).

⁵⁹ Whittock, Martyn, *A.B.H. of L in the M.A.*, chapter 11, (2009).

⁶⁰ Mortimer, Ian, *T.T.T.G. to M.E.*, p.261, (2008).

played, and it is also quite possible, a form of bat and ball game. Archers practising their skills on the village green would not be an unusual sight, for this was not only a sport, but an important practice encouraged by Edward 111, in order that an army was created to take part in his battles against the French. It has been considered the reason that the battle of Crecy, in 1346, was won by the English longbow-men.⁶¹ Medieval life was very practical; everything had a purpose.

There were no card games, but chess and a form of draughts were played, and, in some houses reading aloud, mostly of devotional texts was practised. This asks the question as to whether my character Bartholomew was literate. White informs us that there was a 'chantry' grammar school at Norwich cathedral in 1325;⁶² the chantries taught chanting of masses for the dead, but also basic grammar and mathematics. It would seem more than probable that he had been educated, and even, in Norwich. His family may have been part of the prosperous freemen of that period, when, after the three plagues, an ambitious peasant could take advantage of the shortage of labour. Ambition would certainly encourage a need for education.

While no daily newspaper would grace a table in the village there is no doubt that news travelled slowly, carried by word of mouth with travelling horsemen like merchants, pilgrims, and men at arms returning from serving the king, both abroad and in England. The king and his retinue spent much time travelling the counties, jousting in tournaments, to which the public was allowed, and to other necessary meetings and ceremonies. The countryside would have more than a little opportunity to observe the splendour, hear court gossip transmitted by word of mouth, and either approve or disapprove.⁶³

In such a village Bartholomew Edrich lived. He was a working yeoman farmer and lord of the manor, in the small village of Thrigby, a Broads-land area five miles north west of the port of Yarmouth. Maps I gained from the Sites and Monument Record at Gressenhall, Norfolk, in 2003, show few houses and a mill in Thrigby in 1824. It can safely be assumed due to the small village acreage, that its size would have changed little since

⁶¹ Fraser, Rebecca, *A People's History of Britain*, pp.194-195, (2004).

⁶² White, William, *H.D. and D. of N.*, p.223, (1864).

⁶³ Mortimer, Ian, *T.T.T.G. To ME.*, pp. 254-257, (2008).

medieval times.⁶⁴ There was no village when I visited Thrigby in 1978, only the Hall which had become an animal sanctuary. According to his seal, Bartholomew was there in 1370, shortly before Julian wrote of her visions. The Edrich name has been found in the Broadlands area for centuries – they were yeomen farmers, like Bartholomew. I have formed my Bartholomew character from my knowledge of the Edrich men with whom I grew up, their love of sport, and their very human strengths and weaknesses. I have added to his family a certain Mathilda Edrich, who was known to have bought land in Walsingham in medieval times.⁶⁵ It may be doubtful that she was related to Bartholomew, but I have used poetic licence in order to include her in my story.

Unlike Bartholomew, Julian has no known place of living. We know her only through her writing, and it is there that she mentions that St John of Beverley, in Yorkshire, was a neighbour.⁶⁶ I have taken this to be a place she has known, and I have chosen to make Cherry Burton, a village close to Beverley, her home. As was the way of naming I have also used de Burton to be her surname, and father (fictitious) Roger de Burton, a breeder of sheep. Following the possibility of her marriage, as proposed by Sr Benedicta, and the proposal by Grace Jantzen that the tactical aspects of her writing show an understanding of textiles, I have ventured to say that she was married to a wool and textile merchant whose surname was Mercer. I have gleaned attributes of her character from her religious beliefs, values, her theology, and her philosophy of life, recorded in her writings. As I have written earlier in the thesis, Norman Tanner and Grace Jantzen have supplied an entrée into a deeper understanding of her commitment as both counsellor, and therapist.

It invites a novelist to bring together the threads that comprise the knot of these two people from the past, and the relevance that elements of the past have for people in the present. I have taken up the challenge, and I have used alternate chapters that tell the story of both Bartholomew Edrich and Julian of Norwich from 1378 through to the early fifteenth century, incorporating two important meetings. In so doing I have used third and first person narrative, to which I have added different fonts in order to bring differentiation, and a sense of the masculine and the feminine “voice”.

⁶⁴ White, William, *H.G. and D. of N.*, pp. 419-420, (1864). Thrigby village comprised 575 acres, 45 inhabitants, and was 7 miles from Yarmouth.

⁶⁵ Hearsay: brother views a deed of sale at Walsingham, Norfolk, in 1938.

⁶⁶ Colledge, Edmund, and Walsh, James, *J. of N. Showings*, p. 243, (1978).

The two aspects of the human condition, love as compassion, and the femininity of God, are emergent themes in the novella, as are the everyday life of ordinary people. An overarching motif must include how such elements unite as threads in the knot of experience.

On a previous page I spoke of coincidence, or synchronicity, as Jung coined meaningful coincidence.⁶⁷ The story, almost the mystery, of the discovery of Julian's work, *Revelations of Divine Love*, has a further significant coincidence for me. It is amazing in itself that a medieval woman wrote an autobiographical account of visions she experienced, and that the few that were hidden in private libraries were discovered, printed, and have become a source of inspiration for contemporary poets and writers. There are world-wide prayer groups; a Friends and Companions network; and continuing theological and historical interest in Julian's identity and her cause, and, in a service retirement village in Western Australia a chapel that has been built and dedicated to Julian. It is significant that the retirement village is called Cambrai, and not surprising, given my interest in Julian, that its proximity has allowed me to visit there on several occasions.

In 2009 while on a cruise holiday, my husband and I were seated at a table composed of two couples and ourselves. While introductions took place, we learned that the couple opposite, Frank and Robin Pimm, lived in the retirement village, Cambrai, in the next suburb to us. During the course of our conversation we learned that Frank had not only been involved in the building of the chapel, but had been a main researcher of the historical Julian. He was, also, in contact with the Julian chapel and bookshop in Norwich. Cambrai, being a veterans' retirement village, is also connected with the French city of Cambrai, where one of the great battles of World War 1 had taken place. And this is where, in an earlier period, the rector of a Benedictine convent printed a translation of Julian's work. It does seem that the angel of coincidence is at work.

In further conversations with Frank, and in the written account of the origins of the chapel which he wrote for me, I learned that the Royal Australian Air Force Association

⁶⁷ Mattoon, Mary Ann, *U.D.* p.25. (1984), an acausal connecting principle.

provide chapels for Christian worship in their retirement villages, and it was to this end that, after a residents' meeting, a proposal was submitted to RAAFA management for funding to build a chapel and a community centre, on the same block. The original committee was representative of various Christian denominations who would worship in the chapel, for it was to be ecumenical. It must, they felt, have some connection with armed service, and/or Cambrai, in France.

First, however, a name must be found. It happened that one Cambrai resident was reading a book about Julian, and the connection with the printing of Julian's writings by a Cambrai monk was established. Of eighteen names proposed by residents, nine included the name Julian. At a committee meeting on September 2002, the name Julian was adopted. The chapel of Julian of Norwich was established.

Following the tradition set by the World Christian Churches gathered in Norwich cathedral on the six hundredth anniversary of Julian's revelations, ecumenical worship is practised in the chapel; regular days are set aside for each participating Christian denomination. Julian is known affectionately in the village as 'our Julian'.

The committee has worked tirelessly with fundraising to cover the exquisite, but expensive, stained glass in some of the windows. Residents have been very generous with donations, and one person, Brian Thompson, has been singled out as contributing inspiration, and time, to make other stained glass windows, saving the committee a great deal of money.

Set away from the main village thoroughfare, the atmosphere in the church is one of silent contemplation. On a table near the entrance, folders and booklets containing a historical biography of Julian are on show, and a visitors' book, close-by, holds names of visitors, many from Australia, and some from all over the world.

*'As truly as God is our father, so just as truly is he our mother.'*⁶⁸

In 2009, shortly after the southern hemisphere spring Equinox, seven mature women join together on a pilgrimage. In the sharing of their stories, during years of support and

⁶⁸ Translation made by Members of the Julian Shrine *Enfolded in Love; Daily Readings*, P.35, (1980).

gathering together, they have shared spiritual growth patterns in the exchange of their continuing life stories. Now they journey to the Chapel of St Julian, to come together to share in a ritual of the honouring of their mothers. In this time of balancing light and dark, they wish to express their understandings in a celebration of God, as both father and mother, and in particular, to celebrate motherhood.

They gather together at the Chapel of St Julian, in the Cambrai retirement village in the suburb of Merriwa, Perth, Western Australia. In the quiet chapel, surrounded by the delicate, and beautiful, stained glass windows, they hold a moment of deep contemplation as they listen to words chosen from her writing in her 'showings'.

'From the time it was shown I desired often to know what was our Lord's meaning. I was answered in inward understanding, saying, 'Would you know your Lord's meaning in this? Learn it well. Love was his meaning . Who showed it to you ? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show you? For love. Hold fast to this and you shall learn more about love, but you will never need to know or understand about anything else for ever and ever.' Thus did I learn that love was our Lord's meaning'.⁶⁹

These are the words that were spoken, the words used to open feelings, in the act of sharing their memories, the words that engender both a celebration, an understanding of their connections with their own mothers, and with universal mothering.

For one woman, whose mother had recently died, it was a true celebration of love, an acknowledgement of that aspect she saw as constant throughout human experience. She said it is her belief that, by acknowledging Julian, her love, and her compassion, we honour our mothers and the sisterhood that supports us. Our own mother's physical presence may be lost, but the presence of her love endures.

Strength was the aspect of her mother that the next woman celebrated. It was a strength that enabled her mother to come to Australia as a refugee, and to develop a new life for her family. It was a strength that drew other women to her mother, inspiring their own strengths, one that she remembered as evident in the other women of her family. This was an aspect she, herself, had gained from those women. Inspirational strengths were celebrated this day.

⁶⁹ Translation made by Members of the Julian Shrine *E. in L; D. R.*, p.59, (1980).

Another woman regretted her mother's lonely death, the 'rawness' she felt that she had not been with her. 'I still feel a silent scream inside myself', she said, but recalled the words of a woman of renown, who had expressed the view that a true and lasting transformation occurs only through suffering. She spoke of loving memories, of a Mum who was such fun, and who, when she was well, was full of the joy of life, a Mum who could create 'magic' with her nimble fingers.

'How we danced the "Bells of Norwich" and sang the words of Julian, "All shall be well, I know"', said another. She remembered the symbol of the daffodil coming through the snow, in the words of the song, as a metaphor for the renewal of hope in people, as in the rebirth of natural life after a winter death. Through the words of Julian, we celebrate and honour our own mothers.

The importance of the acknowledgement of God the Mother, or the feminine in the Divine, was important for the next woman. She knew that it was difficult for some women to show expressions of physical love to their children. She saw, however, that feminine support, and sisterhood love, was a spiritual essence to be celebrated, and acknowledged. She grasped the importance of that essence as it applied to womanhood.

She loved seeing older women making the transition from active involvement to a slower pace, said the next. It was, and she expressed her feelings in these, her words: 'a hollowing out of old age which allows more space for the spiritual'. A wonderful expression of wisdom! She felt the message of hope, through difficult times, to be an important Julian message; for it mirrors our coming together, and the support it gives us, in trusting that we can share our own intimate feelings.

From America an email told of the gentleness of a mother, who sang, in a beautiful voice, songs that the daughter still remembers with joy. Her mother had introduced her to the wonders of the natural world in the countryside where they lived; each plant, each animal, the changing seasons, the wet and the dry, all were celebrated.

Two other members were unable to be there, but, as with the one so far away, were held in the circle of Julian's words.

And one held in her heart, but did not tell, how she had had to leave her mother at the point of death, who was able to say slowly, for her speech had been affected, 'I am so

glad you came back.’ She knew that the love that they had both treasured, endured for them, and indeed, endured universally, a feeling existing without words.

In their coming together, the women listened to Julian’s words of love, and contributed their own understanding of her message in the aspects that they shared. There was compassion and support, inspirational strength, transformation through suffering, a symbol of rebirth, Divine femininity, wisdom, celebration of the world around, and the endurance of love. This was a circle complete, one that remains truly meaningful; threads that intertwine and resonate in the present, just as they did in the past. A twenty-first person is as subject to the same feelings as those of the fourteenth century, and this, this is the knot that contains ‘the whole story’.

The knot also contains strong threads of a sense of the continuity, not only of our feelings, but of our genes – our physical immortality. Words resonate as inspirationally today as when they were first written, read and heard, by those seeking help and relief, and they awaken our spirit. Old tracks may not be lost completely, for they may become new when given the understandings that history shows us. We have much in common with the past. While we may be better educated, eat better, and live longer, we have successes, we make mistakes, and, essentially, we are all human as were those people of the past.

More often than not, we need assistance to lead a meaningful life. We need understanding for our misadventures, our weaknesses, and our human needs, but above all, we need a full-of-care-love to ease the passage of our days. That is: understanding and compassion for our own needs, and for another’s, with also a concerned consideration for the world of people, and of the world of nature, that surrounds us.

Julian explored philosophical, theological, and human qualities. She wrote inspiringly of God’s love for His creation, and the meaning of His love. She wrote in a way that has relevance for contemporary woman, of the motherhood of God. She wrote of how she had questioned the reason that sin existed in the world, and was told that it was necessary, for sin is the cause of suffering, and of pain, and pain ‘purges and makes us know ourselves, and ask for mercy.’⁷⁰ I would add that our own pain helps us know, and understand the pain of others, as though we too were suffering. Thus compassion is born. It

⁷⁰ Colledge, Edmund, and Walsh, James, *J. of N., Showings, Long Text: the Thirteenth Revelation*, p. 225, (1984).

helps us to form a different, a more deeply philosophical understanding of the world, in which there is a vital, and a hopeful, place for Julian's powerful words:

*'...but all shall be well,
and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.'*⁷¹

⁷¹ Translation made by Members of the Julian Shrine: *E. in L. D. R.*, p.15, (1980).

Novella

Miscellany of strands and sources for understanding

We might eat differently, be taller, and live longer... but we know what grief is, and what love, fear, pain, ambition, enmity and fear are. We should always remember that what we have in common with the past is just as important, real and essential to our lives as those things that make us different....what it is to be human.

The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England. Ian Mortimer. 2008.

... in 1381, a body of some 50,000 rebels assembled in Norfolk... under their leader John Litester, a dyer of Norwich... in the same year these insurgents were completely overthrown at North Walsham by Henry le Spencer, Bishop of Norwich, who took Litester prisoner, and after being arraigned for high treason, he was condemned to be hung, drawn and quartered, – one portion of his body to be suspended at his own residence, another over one of the city gates, one at Lynn, and the other at Yarmouth.

History and Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk. William White. 1864.

Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and thought and belief have to impart; *the salvation of man is through love and in love.*
Man's Search for Meaning; an introduction to logotherapy.

Victor E. Frankl. 1984.

Suffering is the key to opening the door of understanding.

Ciara's Gift. Una Glennon. 2010

Setting and Characters

Thrigby is a hamlet and parish 7 miles N.W. of Yarmouth, containing only 45 inhabitants and 575 acres of land...The church (ST Mary) is an ancient structure, with nave, chancel, and square tower with one bell.

History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Norfolk, 1864, author: William White.

Village characters living in Thrigby, beginning 1378

Lord of the Manor:	Bartholomew Edrich (authentic) Wife, Margery (fictional) Daughter, Mathilda (authentic) There is hearsay evidence that a certain Mathilda Edrich bought land in Walsingham in medieval time. Son Henry (fictional) died of plague.
Vicars:	1381, Peter de Heyam (authentic) 1392, Nicholas Swetying (authentic) 1392, John Howesby (authentic) 1392, Thomas de Lodne (authentic).
Farmer (60acres):	Roger de Bacton (fictional) Wife, Elizabeth (fictional) Sons, Adam and John (fictional) Daughter, Joan (fictional)
Yardlander (30acres)	Henry le Miller (fictional) Wife, Mary (fictional) Son, Nathan (fictional) Daughters, Eve and Isobel (fictional)

Half-yardlander (15acres) William Freeman (fictional)
Wife, Anne (fictional)
Son, Richard/ 'Dickun' (fictional)

Famuli/Villani Thomas Woodman, Bartholomew's Reeve (fictional)
Wife, Audrey (fictional)

John le Shepherd (fictional)
Wife, Agnes (fictional)
Daughters, Alice, maidservant (fictional), Anne (fictional)

Harold Thatcher (fictional)
Wife, Mary (fictional)
Sons, Hal and Stephen (fictional)

Richard Baker (fictional)
Wife, Margaret (fictional)
Sons, James and John (fictional)

William de Upton (fictional)
Wife, Mary (fictional)
Daughter, Ellen, maidservant (fictional)

Widow Maud Alewoman (fictional)

Cutha de Filby, unmarried, labours for manor (fictional)

Godric Saxon, unmarried, labours for manor (fictional).

Authentic characters living in Norwich and Norfolk, beginning 1378

Bartholomew Edrich, Lord of the Manor of Thrigby 1370. His seal may be found in the Castle Museum, Norwich.

Julian of Norwich, anchoress, is confirmed as living in a scribe's writing in 1413. Also confirmed by Margery Kempe in her book, that refers to her visit with Julian in 1415.

Julian's maid Sarah, who is, in a will, left money and named as Julian's maidservant

John Litester, dyer, is confirmed as the leader of the Norfolk leader of the Peasants' Revolt by historians (see Goldberg and White).

Bishop Henry le Spencer, is confirmed as Bishop of Norwich by various historians.

Margery Kempe lived in Lynn, and wrote of a visit to Julian in 1415 in her book: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, thus confirming Julian's authenticity.

William Southfield, Carmelite White Friar, is referred to in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Margery Kempe visits William Southfield who, in 1415, advises her to visit Julian.

Mathilda Edrich. A deed of sale, referring to land bought by a Mathilda Edrich, was shown to my brother in 1938 by Lord Walsingham. Unfortunately I have not been able to find the reference, possibly due to a fire in the Records office. It was at an early period, and thus, I have presumed to make her Bartholomew's daughter.

Preface

The idea for this story came from a time in 1978, when I spoke a fervent prayer asking for strength to help me in the undergoing of an unpleasant task. The need of my parents to be taken into care had brought me from Australia to England, to help take them from the small flat they occupied in my cousin's farmhouse, and into an 'old people's home.' While it was necessary, the process that was begun, with the assistance of my cousin, Elizabeth, was causing them much pain, and I felt rather desperate about my part in it. Soon I would have to return to Australia and my family, and the days of preparation for their move became short.

In Norwich cathedral I knelt in prayer, to plead for that strength. Later in the day I was rewarded with what was initially a pleasure, but became the catalyst for further discoveries, many coincidences, and the basis for one of the characters in this novella. I found evidence for Bartholomew Edrich (my own maiden surname) in the shape of a silver seal, in the Castle Museum there. The date was 1370.*

I returned to Australia. The years that followed became full of discovery. While I had always had an interest in history, there was a strong desire to understand more of religious and world faiths. I began to read widely, and one of the books I purchased was *The Cloud of Unknowing*. I was unaware of the influence it would have, for the concepts I found therein I found difficult to comprehend then. I purchased other books which were to be important, and after receiving my BA from Murdoch University in 1986, began to write, with the help of an authorial mentor, and friend Julie Lewis, and within the classes I attended at the writing centre – the Peter Cowan Writing Centre, based in Edith Cowan House on the campus of the Edith Cowan University in Joondalup, WA. It seemed similar to an apprenticeship.

And then in 1992, after the visit of Matthew Fox, American priest, author and founder of Creation Spirituality, I joined with a group who danced Sacred Circle Dances. One of these was called *The Bells of Norwich* and brought me to Julian, for here her words were incorporated – 'all shall be well again, I know.' Subsequently I visited her

* I have recounted this fully in my autobiography *Girls Don't Play Cricket*.

reconstituted cell four times, each time bringing back, from the bookshop there, many books on the subject. One was a booklet called *Reconsidering Julian*, a rendering of a 1988 lecture given by Sr Benedicta Ward during the yearly May 8th Julian celebrations in Norwich. It had a significant bearing on how I later felt I could characterise Julian.

Julian experienced her revelation in 1373, and Bartholomew lived in 1370. They were both in Norfolk during one of the most interesting periods in English history; what has been termed a cataclysmic period, of a famine, three plagues, a One Hundred Years war with France, the birth of a wool industry, the suspect death of two kings, the beginning of religious reformation, and the birth of the concept of an English identity. It demanded a story.

I have always felt, in studying Julian's writings, that she was a very human person who expressed loving beliefs of compassion and hope, very much in the anchorite eremitic tradition of the Desert Fathers. And so, in writing of her, I have tried to portray those beliefs in such a way that they are true to her own period, but understandable for a modern reader. It is my hope that I do not offend those who hold her to be a near saint, for I believe that it is possible to be both saintly, and human.

Bartholomew and Julian, two historical characters, meet in this story. There are other authentic characters, Bishop le Spencer, John Lister, Mathilda (although she may have been in a different century), the vicars of Thrigby, and Sarah, Julian's maid. The village people are straight from my imagination, but I have given them a place so as to provide some sense of a medieval village, and to name them in the medieval way.

One of the greatest coincidences, and there are too many to recount, was finding a Julian chapel at the Cambrai service village in Merriwa, only two kilometres from my home. There, her history is placed on a table, a window portrays her and her cat, and I felt that Julian's message lives on in Western Australia.

My story has been conceived and born from my research, my knowledge and love of Norfolk, and my own spiritual beliefs. Bartholomew, my familial connection, has a desire for continuity, one that includes my own feeling of the importance of continuity within the strength of the genes – our immortality. Julian's words show her deep sense of compassion for her fourteenth-century companions, and the need for future hope in the words 'all shall be well', repeated in poetry, and found constantly in modern writing.

Two people lived in and close by Norwich at the same historical moment; one of the fourteenth centuries great Christian mystics, and a yeoman farmer. I have brought them together in a fictional story, the catalyst is my discovery of Bartholomew's seal, and the words the web, warf, weft and woof, a weaving together of the times and their characters. I feel myself to be there in each one of them.

All Shall Be Well: Julian And Bartholomew

ONE

Bartholomew, 1378

He would remember that day. Hold in his mind the sunshine that played on the elm tree leaves as he strode the length of King Street in his leather boots, bought only yesterday after he had sold his goods of wool and salt. They were newly tight, but had brought him walking gladly from his lodgings at the *Adam and Eve* in Bishop's Gate, close to the cathedral, along Tombland, and past the Norman Castle standing high in the centre of Norwich. The castle, he thought, is like the lords and ladies of this land who look down on me, and many others. Yet, in his heart he is happy, for the sun has put on her summer hat. It is a fine day.

He had left behind the streets where the stench of leather hides tanning in the sunshine, the noise of the saddlers, and cutlers at their work, the soft sound of spinning and weaving, and the guttural shouts of 'pies for sale', had tempted him to ease his hunger. He still holds the taste of the meat pie in his mouth. It seems to complete his feeling of well-being.

The streets he follows are full – many a lad bowling a leather ball along, a merchant with a load of this or that, finely dressed men in colourful clothes on horseback, and maidens, their hair covered, intent on hurrying to their next job of work, and the barefoot children who are always present. As he walks folk tip their hats to him with a 'God be with you, and 'a goodly day to you, Bartholomew'. There are many he knows, for his youthful years had been spent at the Chantry school at the College of the Carnary in the cathedral grounds, where not only Latin and adding had been taught him, but he had also gained a love of singing with the monks at the cathedral.

The trees give him shelter from the sun as he turns into King Street, and for now they bring a welcome shade. His steps follow the long street, past the Franciscan Priory of the Greyfriars, and the Carrow Priory, to a merchant's stall, to buy from his goods brought from faraway, a small length of silk to wrap his wife Margery's neck – a colour that would match her brown eyes. And for his daughter, Mathilda, red ribbons to deck her plaits. The wool gleaned from his goodly flock of sheep had yielded him a wealth of money for his

purse, and joy in the thought of taking home gifts for his loved ones. And there was still the cloth to be picked up from his friend, John Lister the dyer, later in the morning.

The days of the terrible sickness that took the life of his only son, Henry, are over. And while his heart still bleeds from the loss, and still not a sign of another child, yet the delights of this day fill him with a certain joy. It is so in life, he thinks – that, even while my heart still feels sadness, there are also those pleasures in a day that a moment such as this brings.

He turns to the clatter of a horse's hooves on the street's hard earth. A strange sight meets his eyes. It is my lord, the Bishop le Spenser clad in vestments, riding his white stallion, as though to be attending a service. A small group of church wardens follow, and in their midst a woman, wholly clad in brown worsted, and barely a sight of a face that is framed in hands raised in prayer, though it does seem comely enough.

'What shall this be?' he murmurs. And his question is picked up by a bystander. 'Tis a woman to be enclosed,' he was answered. 'For she will be there for the rest of her life, an anchoress in her cell by the church of St Julian', and he indicated the church with a round tower, standing a fair step up from the street, and on a grassy rise.

Bartholomew follows, joining at the end of the small group. Something directs his feet, and he knows not what, or why.

There is little sound, only a suppressed cough now and then, and the shuffle of boots moving slowly, mounting the rise to where the church, with its round Saxon tower, stands. The group are bareheaded and he takes off his shovel hat, for he would not want the bishop to notice him. Holding it to his chest with one hand, he tucks away the small packet under his jerkin with the other, then smoothes the length of his hair down, and bends his head in the likewise manner of the others. He walks behind the group, his eyes resting on the back of the swaying skirt of the woman before them.

His mind questions the reason that someone would take herself away from life thus, to be shut away forever. This woman did not appear to be old. Of course he has heard of other anchoresses in Norwich, and being a good churchman himself, he knows the value of such women and men who pray for people in need. But it amazes him. He feels that life, even though it holds many sorrows, is still worthy of being fully lived.

They move slowly up the rise. At the archway of the church the bishop dismounts, his sombre robes rustling around him, while sunshine mounts a frame of light around his ruddy face. The colourless tone of his robes foretells a solemn service. This man is no clerk that sits behind a desk. This, as is known by all in his diocese, is a man of action, one who takes on a warrior role both in life, and in his religious authority.

His voice rings out: 'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord...', and he turns to the open door, walking slowly through, his boots making a clopping sound on the tiles. '...he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live...' the small group, with woman foremost, file into the darkness of the small Saxon church, lit only by the two large candles glowing softly on the altar, as he continues, '... and whosoever believes in me shall never die.'

Bartholomew places himself in a pew, the farthest and darkest from the altar. His thoughts are in a tumult. He knows that he must remain apart so that the bishop does not see him, for he is a man of a sharp tongue for those who do not follow his wishes. And it would not be wise that he brings on the bishop's anger, or anything that would endanger his connection to the diocese, or the rental he pays there.

He watches the bishop, wrapping a piece of cloth loosely around the woman's neck, light in texture, and white in colour. For a moment it glows as though reflecting the candle light. But it seems that glow stems from the face itself. While in the shadow of the darkened church, yet he can now see her oval shaped face fully. It is not beautiful, although with eyes closed, and mouth in gentle line, her whole being appears peaceful, as though she is in deep prayer. Her hands take hold of a robe, brown in colour; she places it over her head, draping it further over the wimple and enclosing her body. Her hands turn outward, under her breasts, like the petals of a flower. It is the way of woman's prayer.

For a moment there is deep silence, and only the sound of the guttering candles, their waxy scent mixing with the air. The bishop intones further prayer. Bartholomew knows those words well, for those were what he had said over the body of his child, when even the Thrigby vicar had become one lost to the disease that had befallen all of England once, yet again, and again. 'Come ye, blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you...'

His heart moves. It tightens with a desire to weep, for such are his feelings. Again he enters the time of deep despair, of losing the one who had become both his pride and joy. For a short while he allows memories of Henry to invade his mind, memories of times that, at this moment, enhance his grief and loss. He had been gay, and happy to be alive only a few moments before, and looking forward to returning to family, friends, and the village with all its intentions and interests. Now the full depth of sorrow overcomes him. And yet, and at the same time, he feels a sense of wonder that he could witness such a sacred moment, and feel such strange and differing feelings flooding his body.

The woman turns and takes deliberate steps toward the open church door, her hands still placed beneath her breasts. She moves outside, followed closely by the bishop dropping ashes behind her as she goes. The group follows, walking slowly behind the two, around the church walls until they reach a wooden door in the wall of a small attached building. The bishop opens it slowly for her to enter, while scattering more ashes on her head and intoning the words of the Extreme Unction.

The door closes with a heavy clang. The sound rolls like a thunder clap in the silence, or, even, a death knell. To the world she is now dead. There is no whisper afterwards, no sound – it is, indeed, the silence of the dead.

The lord le Spenser speaks further: ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us evermore.’ He leaves suddenly. His vestments move in the flurry of his swift and heavy footsteps, around the church to where his horse has been held, awaiting his return. Its animal smell permeates the air, its hooves beat a patter and a clatter as, with a loud hr-rumph through its nostrils and the bishop astride, it gallops away. The group, preceded by the vicar, slowly follow shuffling over the grassy sward, and down to King Street.

He watches them from his place at the back. The sight he has beheld, and the feelings he has experienced, have brought tears that he would wish nobody to see. I would calm my feelings before I meet with other people, he thinks. And the day’s business pulls his mind back to the moment. There were hooks to pick up from the cutlers, and hemp string with which to tie the sheaves, for harvest time would soon be upon them. And not before time, he thinks. Every year brings this same problem for them, the problem of the past year’s harvest of wheat, barley and rye in the barns, lasting until the ripening

brings more. He dreads that the weather may be wet, and the corn spoiled; so much depended on a good harvest. All of life depended on it.

There were leather strips for mending saddles, and making shoulder capes, to pick up, and any leather over for a ball for the young ones. He would not forget the large wax candles for the church, nor the Book of Hours that he and Margery wanted, both for the household's daily prayer, and for teaching Mathilda, and the village children, some kind of reading skills. Above all, there was the length of cloth, green in colour, to bring from the dyer, John Litester. He knew that Margery would be eagerly awaiting it to make a gown for Mathilda and herself, and a jerkin for him. How long, he wonders, before we are allowed to wear the bright colours with which lords and ladies deck themselves.

It had always been his pleasure to walk by the river when he came to Norwich, and this is the way he would return; some parts of it wet and littered with bones and all the rubbish that had been thrown out from where saddlers, cutlers, dyers and butchers plied their trades. Generally, however, household shit is emptied in the smaller creeks outside the city's wall; the smell, most foul, permeating the parts closest. It is a shame that more can not be done to clean up such a beautiful city, but it is always thus where many people live so closely together. At least in their small village we are able to breathe more cleanly, even while surrounded by animals, and their manure heaps.

But the stretch from King Street to the cathedral is the river's cleanest. Here he will watch barges bringing merchandise to Norwich from the ports of Yarmouth and Lynn. All the wonders that are contained therein – silks and laces, glass and pottery from Italy, spices from the east, and all those things that he, as a farmer, is unable to buy. Maybe one day. For now it gives him much pleasure to see the gulls settling on the water, the swans gliding by, and fishermen working the waters.

Water had surrounded him from the time of his birth in the village of Thrigby, where his father, having survived the fearful illnesses beginning in 1348, was to live as a wealthy freeman, and thus leave Bartholomew, his son, sufficient money to pay the fee and gain the position of lord of the manor there. Some said that the wide and long stretches of water with its rushes, its wild fowl and bounteous fish-life, were left after long ago peat diggings. There was still peat to be dug there, and the cut rushes served to cover both floors and roofs of the dwellings of people living nearby.

There was a time when another Edrich, falconer to the Confessor, and captain of his ship, was gifted much land here, as his father had told him when speaking of the past. It spread from the north, just below Lynn, south to Happisburgh, and west to Norwich. Then it was that the Edrich family was rich, but stripped bare of fortune by the rampaging Normans and made poor peasants. It is a tale oft told in the safety and quiet of home, for it is wise not to anger the ruling Normans.

His footsteps take him to Bishop's Bridge where he has heard that a tower is soon to be built, a tollhouse that will soon take more money from people passing over it. If it is not the government with taxes that our kings may continue their wars in France, it is the city with more, he thinks. And it is said that things will get worse now that we have a young king with his uncle in control. Some say that Gaunt is not the son of our newly dead king; whether that is so, he is a man to be feared, and not at all like his brother and father were. Enough of that! It is best to keep such thoughts to myself, he thinks.

He strides quickly now, for there is much to do, and he must be on his way shortly after noon. Into the cathedral Close, down Tombland and into Elm Hill and to the Adam and Eve where he had spent a night not to be remembered with pleasure, what with the scratching from bed bugs, and the coughing and farting, and the sound of staggering footsteps finding their way to the privy. But it is all he can afford. One penny and a half penny for the night's bed, two and a half pennies for meals, a penny for ale, feed and stabling for the horse, and lodging for the cart; with tips he would be lucky to have any coins left from three groats.* And he would also need bread and cheese for the journey, another penny or two.

'God be with you, Mistress Inman,' he says walking into the inn hall, across the earth floor, to where the innkeeper's wife is at work spreading fresh rushes. From under the hat, and the wimple surrounding her throat, she turns a flushed, round face to him. Her sleeves are rolled, and her skirt hoisted up, for the heat of the late morning is now upon them. Her hands move swiftly to roll down her skirt. He marvels once more at her face, its roundness and the tip tilted nose, give it a look of monkeys that aristocratic women carry around these days. But she is a kindly woman who makes him welcome when he

* Three groats: monetary value 12 shillings.

visits Norwich.

‘Ah! Master Edrich. God be with you. Has your business been done with yet?’

‘Some, mistress. But there is still much to do. Hooks and scythes, for harvest will soon be upon us. Leather, candles, and things for the home, too.’

‘It is always so, Master Edrich. Your visits to the city are few. No doubt your wife will be awaiting those things.’

‘Indeed she will. And it is my wish to be home before sunset.’

‘Would your need be for food for your journey? Should it be so, I have a new cheese, fresh out of muslin, and bread newly from the bake-house. Will I wrap a piece of both for you?’

‘I would be pleased, mistress, and an ale, if you could bring me – for I have a thirst on me just now.’

‘Gladly,’ the word spoken, a bustling figure, her leather slippers rustling the rushes, she moves quickly away.

‘And I would see your man if he is here – to make payment for my bed and food, and the stabling of my horse,’ he calls after her, and she waves a hand of acknowledgement as she disappears through a door in the farther end of the hall.

He pulls a stool toward him from where they are stacked at the side of the hall with trestle table on which his meal had been served the previous evening. There was time now for a moment, to sit and recall the morning, and to contemplate the coming journey. It was a fair way, but this time of the year, with only dust a problem, he would be able to make good time and be home before sundown.

The door opens. In strides the innkeeper. He is all movement and bustle. The morning is never long enough for this man, for he would tell the world that his inn was a busy place where travellers were many, and there was much work to do. A startling mop of white curls tops a surprisingly thin face, long nose, and equally long chin. The opposite of his wife, Bartholomew thinks. But he is glad that the innkeeper hurries for he is eager to be on his way.

‘I would pay you for the night’s meal and bed, sir.’ He says.

‘Aye. And ‘tis the stabling as well. I would you give me eleven pence, master Edrich,’ comes the rejoinder.

Well! Bartholomew had thought twelve pence, and so it would be for tips, but of all the inns in Norwich, this is the cheapest, and he could always rely upon mistress Inman to give him a full plate, and full quart of ale. He undoes his purse from his belt, and opening the drawstrings takes out three groats, handing them to the innkeeper.

‘I would that this is to your liking, and keep something for yourself.’

‘God keep you, Master Edrich. And I wish you a fine journey home, and no meeting with robbers,’ the words come as rapidly, as his wife re-enters the hall. She bears in one hand food wrapped in a piece of cloth, and a jug and pot in the other. I wonder if he approves, thinks Bartholomew. Would he have had me pay more? I know where the kindness lies in this household. But the man is straight, though mean.

‘Ah! But I am ready for this, mistress. God be thanks,’ and he takes the jug from her and pours the brown liquid into the accompanying pot. His parched throat welcomes the coolness and sweet sharpness of the foaming ale.

‘Now I can begin my business before I start on my journey.’

His horse watered and harnessed, a farthing for the tousled haired boy in the stable, and he is on his way. He feels more able to see the world here from his seat on the cart as he wends his way briskly through the streets. He sees the different signs of the wares for sale showing what is to be bought. His first stop must be at the scribes’ hall, for it is his desire to purchase a book of hours, one that also holds an alphabet and is written in his own language. It is his wish, and Margery’s also, that they would give readings to the village children. Time that Mathilda learns to read; they both think that she must be able to take care of herself, should another disease come to them.

At the sign of a book and quill, he halts his cart. To a boy standing at the doorway he calls, ‘A farthing for you, lad, if you will hold my horse for a while. And call me should there be any trouble.’ He sees the bare feet, the tousled hair and knows that this will be most welcome – a meal for the lad, for which he looks in need. It is possible that he stands waiting for such as me, he thinks. Throwing the reins to the boy, he strolls into the hall, where he finds two figures at work seated at a trestle table drawn into the centre of the large room close to a central fireplace holding the evidence, and the raw scent of smoke from a recent fire. Their quills in hand, they look up to him.

‘What can we do for you, sir?’ enquires one man. This, the elder of the two, looks up from under a shock of dark hair, his eyes from behind wire rimmed glasses show impatience, a look of one who does not wish to be interrupted at his work.

‘I would wish to buy a book of hours, if it should be that you have such, master,’ Bartholomew replies.

The scribe stands up, stretches and rubs white hands together. ‘What is your wish? There is one that has been written on vellum, but,’ and he eyes Bartholmew’s clothes, making a close assessment, ‘I think that you will be looking to buy one in parchment, sir?’

‘I think that would be as I would want. But, tell me sir, would you have one that is in English, and that has the alphabet inscribed therein?’

The man turns to his younger companion.

‘Bring out the one that you finished yesterday, William.’

The younger man stands, pulling down a brown jerkin as he does so. His tights are ruckled over soft leather pull on slippers. He moves slowly, laying down his quill, straightening his back, as though stiff from his sitting position, and moves toward a chest in the corner of the room.

‘This would be the one you wish for, sir,’ he directs his question to the older man while holding out parchment pages loosely gathered together, placing it into Bartholomew’s hands.

‘Aye. That’s it.’

‘And what payment would you ask, sir?’ Bartholomew asks, glancing down at the loose pages of parchment in his hands.

‘That would be a half noble, sir, and a good price for it is the work of this young man.’ The older man places an arm around his companion.

A half noble - forty pence. So much money. And yet, it was his and Margery’s wish. He stands in hesitation, thinking, and adding up the precious gold and silver coins in his purse; could he really spend that much?

‘And would you lessen the price should I bring you some salt on my next journey here, master scribe?’

‘Aye, that might be so, sir. But when will that be? How will I know that I can trust you to bring it and if you will bring it? And, sir, how much would you be able to bring me?’

‘I will need to return in September, master scribe, after harvest. And, if it please you, I will bring two pounds of salt.

‘Then, maybe we could say seven groats, sir. And while I would like to trust you, is there some means by which you may assure me of your intent?’

‘Well sir, if you would bring me only a small piece of parchment, I will write my willingness to bring you that much, and seal it with my seal.’ He holds his purse, and pulls the strings. Somewhere in the bottom, underneath coins of different size and values, he will find the precious object. Aye, there it is, as small as his little finger.

‘Bring me a piece no bigger than my hand, young man, and also wax and a taper’ the scribe addresses his young companion, who, after a moment or two, emerges from another room with a rather ragged, almost dirty piece of parchment, obviously left over from another job. He lights a taper from a candle on the table, waiting for Bartholomew to dip the quill in a bowl of a brown substance in a pot standing on the table and write:

‘I, Bartholomew Edrich, lord of the manor of Thrigby, do hereby give my solemn word to the scribe, he looks up at the other man, who says: ‘Roger Scrivener’...’ Roger Scrivener, that I will deliver to his door a bag of salt weighing two pounds on my next visit to Norwich in September; signed, Bartholomew Edrich, his seal.’ He presses the seal head onto the wax now dropped underneath his name, remembering at the same time his pleasure and pride on seeing his name and image impressed on the parchment. For, in his heart he knew that he was no gentleman, but a hard-working farmer who had, yet, attained such a position.

He hands over the parchment and encloses a smaller hand in his own. With the handshake, the deal is confirmed. His eyes are drawn to the pages he holds. The writing is plain. No coloured figures for they were not necessary. The words and their meaning were the important part for him, an eagerness that was growing to open the pages up, and share the written words with others.

‘Would you have a small piece of hemp, Master Scrivener, with which to tie these pages?’ he asks. ‘I would not want to lose even one.’

‘Be advised to keep those pages close to you, if you have further business to do,’ the scribe said, ‘for there are many who would take it if they could.’

‘I will.’ He opens the neck of his jerkin, and places the precious parchment inside, besides the gifts there above the leather belt. ‘But I must be about my business. I give you thanks, Roger.’ And with a further handshake, he moves outside and to where the lad, his head laid on the horse’s muzzle, is standing ‘There, lad!’ and presses a farthing into the eager hand.

At the end of the street he turns a corner and halts at another shop that shows a knife drawn on a brown background. Here he enters with a ‘Good day to you, and God be with you, Master Cutler.’ He opens his purse once more, dropping the precious coins into the eager hands of the owner, and hoists the hooks awaiting him onto his shoulder. Three pennies in all! His hard earned money is quickly disappearing, but these are a necessity, if the harvest is brought in when it is ready, and as fast as possible, to avoid any loss.

Farther on, he eases his cart, and into a yard where the tanners work. Hanging on lines and surrounding walls are the skins in process of tanning. Small and large, they are not unlike the hangings, although not as colourful, as those he has seen in the rooms of the bishop. Admittedly without figures woven into their surface, but shapes that in themselves form a picture of a type, they are of the different sort of animal that has been slaughtered. He notices small calf forms, the leather that is the softest and supplest, but most expensive and really only for the wealthy.

He lifts a bag onto his shoulder and walks into the building where he sees dried blood on the floor, the brownness of it spilling, dry and crusted, the smell of alum, and the taint of salt. Skins are being treated. It is a stench that he would escape as quickly as is possible. The shop front faces the street, but it is in a farther room that he finds the owner, and where he brings the large bag of salt he carries. His leather is awaiting him there.

‘Ah! Bartholomew!’ he is greeted by the seated figure, his legs spread beneath him on a stool, his large hands placed on a trestle table, where a pot of ale stands. The owner lifts a florid face. ‘God be thanked, and you have brought my salt. A busy morning deserves a glass, think you? Will you join me?’

‘Tis good of you, Richard, but the day hurries, and so must I, if I am to return by sunset. You’ll forgive me?’ These two are old friends, for many are the times that he has come here.

‘Aye, then, the leathers are here,’ and he indicates a pile neatly folded. ‘And the hemp you asked for. No payment, for I am grateful to you for the salt. You will find plenty here for your needs, and also strips – they’re for the balls you will make for your village games. Summer evenings are good for a kick around, or a stretch of a bow.’

‘Indeed, and I thank you.’

‘But, Bartholomew, I would be happy could you bring me even more salt on your next coming to Norwich,’ the tanner says. ‘My good woman tells me that we are low, and though I have to find other than that you bring, it is a need for me in the business, as you know. There has been a lack of it for sometime.’

‘When that will be, I know not for sure, Richard. But I am hoping that, after harvest, there will be a need to return. What is the payment you need from me?’

‘The salt is enough, good friend.’

A hand roughened with work, and split with salt is thrust out in handshake. Salt eats into the skin, he thinks, looking at his own hands that frequently work in salt-making. ‘I can’t stay longer, Richard,’ he says. I have yet two more places to go.’

‘Next time, then, Bart, and we will share a pot of ale then. What say you?’

‘That would be to my liking, Richard,’ he says, over his shoulder, as he lifts the leather and returns to the yard where horse and cart are tethered. He tips the bundle onto a strip of rough cloth, tying it loosely with a length of hemp, now to the chandlers for the precious candles.

Here he spends little time, although it is one shop that he finds pleasure visiting. The smell of bees-wax, and the soft looks of the shop’s mistress are tempting. There would be much pleasure in remaining here. Bartholomew is sure that mistress Mary le Chandler would not be averse to that. He is aware of his own liking for a pretty face. It is the way that the Edrich men have always been. He would like nothing more than to spend moments here, take a glass of ale, served with smiles that come often. But he knows that there is neither the time, nor the sense in it. His dropping of two pennies into a soft hand for the purchase of four large candles, with a ‘God be with you’, and then leaving, is brusque and

rapid. For he would not have Mistress Mary know his feelings, nor would he wish to be caught by temptation.

His eyes lift to the skies. Already the sun is high. Time is short. But his next visit is the one he most enjoys, for John Litester has been a friend since his early days in Norwich. They learned together, and indeed, lived together, for it was in the Litester household that he had lodged when he was at the chantry school.

John has been a man who welcomes the science of his trade, and a constant search for colours to enrich the cloth he handles. There are always, by his vats, a table that holds many a different flower, stone, and heaps of other strange elements, like ironwork, whose rust has brought a brown colour to the russets. And, though Bartholomew wonders that anyone could wish to colour their hands and arms the way that John's are coloured, he also knows the fascination that this trade has for his friend, and his wife. The disease that had brought so many deaths has not struck their family, for which John has given endless thanks to God. This, Bartholomew knows, and while there is in him a certain envy when he sees John's growing lad, William, in his heart he carries a gratitude that the Litester family has been spared.

He draws his cart up at the sign of a coloured cloth draped over a line, and calls one of the lads from inside the shop to mind his horse and cart, and the goods therein. He enters the door leading through the shop front, and then to the back, where all the work is taking place. The smell is overwhelming, a smell of wet cloth hanging and dripping there. It is many times stronger than the shed where Margery washes, and indeed does her own form of dyeing. A bitter odour brings on a sneeze. He knows the smell will infiltrate his clothes, and remain in his nose until he has left the city. How can John bear it, he wonders?

'God be with you, John,' he calls as he enters a room where an opening in an outer wall lets in bright sunshine. Vats of different sizes dominate the large room, and beside one he sees the figure of his friend, a full leather apron enveloping his body. There's a paleness to John's skin, and a lank-ness to his hair, for much of his work takes place in this area of dyeing. But he turns a smiling face to Bartholomew.

'And to you, my friend,' comes his reply, as he moves toward Bartholomew, wiping his stained hands on a piece of cloth, and striding forward with arms outstretched. 'I wish

that I could feel God is with us all.’ Ah! Bartholomew thinks, John has something on his mind, but forgets that thought momentarily as the pleasure of greeting his friend takes over.

‘How are you, bor? * And your two mawthers?’ * John lapses into their Norfolk way of talking. Even though he has dealings with wealthy people, merchants and those of the aristocracy, he is more comfortably placed with ordinary people. This, Bartholomew knows. It worries him for he also knows John to be more forthright than would benefit him. He realises that it is sensible to walk the middle line, and has found this the only way of acceptance. Sometimes, to keep quiet and hide angry feelings is the only way.

‘Mathilda grows. Margery keeps me busy – and herself, too. There is always plenty to do,’ he replies, as John leads him through to the inner hall where his wife is at work, sweeping the tiled floor and spreading fresh rushes.

‘A jug of ale, Martha,’ he slips an arm around his wife’s ample waist, playfully slapping an equally large bottom, to a ‘give over!’ in laughing tone, and looking over to Bartholomew, a ‘God be with you, Master Edrich,’ from underneath a slipping wimple. Had he ever seen her in anything but good humour, Bartholomew wondered. This was a woman of large girth, and equally large kindness.

‘Now tell me, Bart, how has the year been with you? Is the harvest looking well? ‘T’is fine weather we have had, God be thanked. You will also be thankful for that, I’m sure.’ He strips off his apron, pulls up two stools to the trestle table and leans his stained arms and hands on its board, ‘and your village people, how have they managed the toll? You mark my words, Bart, now that Gaunt is in power there will be more money to be found to fund his Frankish war.’

Bartholomew slides his legs underneath the table, places his hands flat, observing them as though he was totally interested in their shape, the strange little misshaped finger, the weather-darkened rough skin. He always feels so much larger than John. Larger, and darker. His mind works more slowly, rather as a man riding a walking work horse alongside a warrior charging in a gallop. John’s mind is actively concerned with all that

* Bor: the universal Norfolk form of address to males.

* Mawther: woman or girl. Shortened version is Maw.

happens around him. His shop is an area in which certain problems are aired, certain royal gossip brought forward; the people who enter here are many, as many as the colours he mixes. Servants tell much. So this is it, he thinks. This is John's concern, as always – a concern for how authority is treating the poor.

'He is not the king, John. There are others that surround the lad.' He takes a breath, 'My folk? My folk are managing. We work together, you know. And I help as I can. All right, we have lost our great king, but Richard is king now.'

'A mere lad! The whole lot around him are rotten, according to the words that come to me. Ever since that woman, de Perrers, came to power over the king – I mean Edward – there has been nothing but trouble.' John accompanies his words with a strong movement – hands, fisted and banging on the table.

'We cannot change things, but must hope and pray that all will settle down, and things are not as bad as you seem to think. But, I pray you pour me a pot of ale, that we may be together more comfortably, for I cannot spend long with you today.' A conciliatory tone is the best way to temper his anger, Bartholomew thinks.

'I don't know about prayer, Bart. Maybe it needs more than that,' John responds, as Martha returns with a jug and two pots.

'Go easy on the pouring, John, else I'll sleep on my way home. As it is, I've already partaken of a quart at the inn. I would tell you 'ere I go of the strange sight I witnessed this morning. At the church of St Julians in King Street, there was a woman being enclosed as an anchoress by our bishop, and...'

'He might be your bishop, but he's certainly not mine.' The interruption came loudly. 'What sort of bishop is the one who rides rough shod over his people? He is no man of God, Bartholomew.'

'Aye, I know that this is so. But, don't forget that I am indebted to him for rental of the manor land. I would need to be careful of the words I use. But, John,' he would change the way their conversation was moving, 'there was something else that I would tell you. At the Master Scrivener's shop I bought a book of hours. I promised Margery I would purchase a book of hours that contains the alphabet, so that we would teach Mathilda, and some of the village children to read. Margery has it in her mind, as have I, that this is something good that we could do, for, our vicar is no teacher, and not inclined either.'

See...’ as he pulls the parchment out from his jerkin. ‘It came cheaper, because it is plain, and was written by his boy.’

John lifts his pot, tips his head to take a swallow, wipes his mouth and his beard, takes up the parchment, unwinding the hemp and looking at the writing before he answers. ‘Aye, that is good. Now, have a good harvest and you will be able to buy more. ‘Tis said that there are many parchments there. It is my wish to purchase one that I have heard many people are reading together just now. There is much thought that has arrived with the Flemings and the writings they bring from the Low Countries, apart from their weaving skills. It is said also that Wycliffe has helped write a new bible, in our own language, not that of the monasteries, and that a woman has written of her own visions.’

This is how I like it, thinks Bartholomew. Just sitting here, talking to my friend without any anger, without any sense of being caught up in a storm of words. It was as though those early days of learning together had never ended. It was comfortable, and the temptation to linger was great. In their village, small as it is, there is nobody to whom he can speak of events, government, or a whole country’s doings. There was no doubt in his mind that he loved his home, but he certainly missed the cut and thrust of interesting talk, such as he always experienced with John.

‘You know, John, I cannot stay with you long,’ he says, draining his pot. ‘Next time I will find more time to be with you all. But I have never asked – how is that boy of yours?’

‘He will never be a dyer. A clerk methinks, or maybe he will take on the law courts. Who knows? But he is now coming to the age when he should think of settling down. He’s been too happy with his bow and arrow, and the days of practice with his friends. The last thing I would want is for him to be taken into Gaunt’s army.’

‘Aye, well that is always a fear, is it not?’ says Bartholomew. ‘But now, I would gather the cloth and be on my way, John.’

He stands and stretches, then returns the parchment, newly tied by John, into the neck of his jerkin. He could already feel pleasure in the thought of returning to the countryside, the sound of the two wheels turning and his horse’s hooves clopping, the scent of grass and trees, and the songs of the birds – the spiralling lark, the songbird thrushes, the chortling blackbird, and, if he was lucky, the cuckoo’s call with, in the distance, the waters spreading out behind rushes – the clean smell of it all.

John pushes himself up from the board, and moves into the shop area, emerging with a bundle in his arms, saying: 'You'd be interested in this – I have discovered a beautiful dark blue, Bart. I mix ground lapis with the cornflower, and mash it well and boil it with urine and alum. And some of the cloth coming from the Flemish is so fine that it makes a goodly sight dyed with that mix. Maybe I will dye some for your good lady, if she pleases.'

'And that she would, I know, John. Just depending, I suppose, on whether we are able to wear other colours in the clothes we wear. Although they do say that there are more people who are choosing brighter colours without fear.'

'Just see these, though – these of yours – see how the colour has come up such a deep leaf green. It will hang proudly on you all.' John says with obvious pride, as he lifts the cloth over his arm for Bartholomew's eyes.

'Indeed it will, and it will pleasure my good wife,' he says, running his hands gently over the cloth, lifting it and admiring the colour in the folds, 'but, my friend, how much have I to pay you? You must make it fair for both you and me. I do not want your work to go to naught.'

'Five groats will do, Bart.'

'Tis true you always do me kindly, John. And because of that I have something for you,' as he places the small bag he had carried in on the table 'This is for your good lady,' presenting the salt that it contains into the hands of his friend.

'God be thanked. Now my food will taste the better.' The words said with obvious pleasure. 'So, that's well done,' said with a gathering of the weighty bundle of cloth into Bart's arms.

'Hold still, Bart, while I wrap it for you, else it might pick up some dirt, and I wouldn't have your dear wife take her anger out on me. Martha... Martha ... bring me some of the rough material strips to wrap Bart's cloth,' he calls through the doorway, and in a moment the bustling figure comes into view with a bunch of white cloth strips hanging from her hands.

'Wrapped up well, Master Edrich,' she says with a smile as she removes the bundle from his arms, placing it on the trestle board, and smoothing it flat, while gathering the wrapping cloth around twice. 'Mistress Edrich will be pleased with this, I do know.'

‘That is true, Martha. She will, most assuredly, be pleased to receive the cloth and greet my return,’ he rejoins with a bow before turning to John. ‘Well, and now I must be on my way. I will see you next time,’ giving his friend a firm embrace, hurriedly gathering up the cloth from the trestle, and making his way outside to his waiting horse and cart, the farewells echoing in his ears. He gathers up the reins from the waiting lad. He leans his head for a short moment on his horse’s head, before climbing up to take his place on the cart once more.

Into St Andrew’s Street, along Bank Plain, past the Cathedral Close, and over Bishop’s Bridge again he goes, before the wide track on the other side of the river opens up before him. ‘Well, old boy, we are on our way,’ he says.

TWO

Julian, 1378

The door closes heavily, and I am in the parlour of my new home.

'Mistress, come in,' the voice of my loyal Sarah greets me. And with the strangeness of my surroundings, new stone and wood, and the scent of a closed space fresh in my nostrils, I am guided into the parlour which is now my home. The ashes fall in a haze of dust from my head and shoulders. My steps, indeed my whole being, are unsteady with heightened feelings, as a tree tossing in strong winds. I welcome the hand that brings a calm support to my body, and in myself I feel assurance for the rightness of what I am doing. I am still shaken by the strong and necessary ritual of my coming that has accompanied the gift that I have been given, and accepted, and the physical effort of the long walk through well known streets, here to my place of choice. And I know without a doubt that, no matter how long my life may be, this is where I will remain. For, my lord Jesus has served to show me how his own suffering was made for the good of all mankind; and indeed, that my own human suffering, bestowed as it has been on me, has shown me the wisdom of a place to serve, both in prayer and in love.

Behind Sarah, little Mary, she with the name of our lord's own mother, hovers in the background. These are the two who will be my companions, my maidservants in the coming years. And, what is it that she bears in her arms? A cat! A cat of mottled grey and black snuggled into her chest. They are both so little, the cat little more than a kitten, and the girl, only a child. Mary walks over and places it in my arms.

'See, mistress. This will keep those old rats and mice away,' her childish voice tells me. And I take the little creature in my arms.

'What will we call her?' is my reply, knowing that it will please the lass.

'Maybe, mistress...maybe... little mawther? Maybe...just Puss?'

'Puss it shall be, Mary. And you shall be the one who cares for her,' I say, as I place the little cat gently back in her arms. 'But now, I would repair to my cell, for I would take this blessed time for prayer. My mind is set on that, before food, drink, or aught else.'

I turn to the door behind me. My hand finds the handle, and while it is stiff at first, it finally responds, and gradually swings open. There before me I see the image of my dear

lord on the cross, and there also is the small altar, bare except for a candle burning gently, for here in my cell there is no hint of movement. A wooden stool stands close-by. All is still. For a moment I stand in the silence, a silence that seems to be waiting for my murmuring voice in prayer, soon making me a part of this blessed place.

I bend my knees and kneel.

'Kyrie Eleison, Kyrie Eleison, Kyrie Eleison'...the words that spell out my main intent.

Already at Mattins my prayers have risen. Now, at Prime, I speak the words of the Pater Nosters in the way that I have been taught by the Ancrene Wisse:

'Almighty God, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, as you three are one God, so you are one power, one wisdom and one love; and yet power is referred to you particularly in the Holy Writ, you precious Father, to you wisdom, blessed Son, and to you love, Holy Ghost. Give me, one Almighty God, threefold in three persons, these same three things – power to serve you, wisdom to please you, love and will to do it; power so that I can do it; wisdom to know how to do it; love so that I wish to do always what is dearest to you. As you are full of each good, so there is no good wanting where these three, power, wisdom and love, are joined together: may you grant me them, Holy Trinity, in your honour.'

I say Ave Marias. I do not count, because my heart knows when I must stop. The candle sways, as though my spoken words are moving it, much as a breeze. I have such a thought that embraces me with a fervour and a sense of content...I have come home. I have come home, to where I have longed to be since the loss of my family, and many of those I loved. Home, and home, as contentedly as I was in the past homes I have known.

The candle casts a glow as with a bright sunset in the dusky gloom of my new home, and in my thoughts I am, once again, more than thirty years ago, returning to my old home, where a window holds a candle burning to light me, and my father back after our long walk. My father's longer legs stride over the pathway, preceding my shorter, child-like ones, striving to catch him up. It has been the long way back from Beverley to our own village of Cherry Burton, and I am so tired. So tired that I could lie down on the very ground we walk on; so tired that I feel my eyelids beginning to close, my feet dragging, and a sense of giving away all knowledge of being alive.

'Come on, lass,' his words are loud in my ears, his right hand, with its remaining two fingers, grasp my hand impatiently, for he is eager to enter and greet my mother. He will show her the money earned in the sale of wool from our little flock of silky haired sheep, and I, I will not tell her, but I will hold in my heart the wonder that became my companion at the end of our long walk home. Was it that I touched the relics at the shrine of St John in Beverley? That they brought a feeling of sacredness that has remained with me? Returning again and again over the years; for it was at that very moment of coming home, in the dusk, and with the candle glow in my eyes, that quite suddenly it was as though that same warm glow surrounded me, and was within me, and that I was full with golden light, and a sense of joy and wonder; that the whole world was alive and glowing in me. It filled me with a fullness of being, and I felt heaven to be near, without and yet within.

And too, it seemed that I heard, yet did not hear, certain words. They sprang as knowledge of what was real, and known to be so. It seemed that I, a child of so few years, was given delivery of knowledge of what was to be, of what was to come to me. That there would be a time when I would suffer as great a suffering as that of our dear Lord, and it would bring me to what was the right and proper place for me to be; that it would come in an illness next to death, but it would not be for many a year. Then I would know its meaning, and its truth. And though this feeling lasted for a short moment, it seemed that it lasted forever – that there were no boundaries to what I had been given to see.

That wondrous moment stayed with me throughout all the years of childhood, youth, and marriage. It never dimmed, but was made greater by moments of a feeling of oneness with God when I was in prayer. Here in this enclosed space, in the dimness and the glow of the candle, the feelings that moment brought have once more returned. When was it again? I was, as near as I can remember, eight years old – my birth time in December – nearly eight and a half then, for it is June of a warm, early summer. Much as it is at the present.

Through the years, when yet a wife and mother, I still clung to the message it brought, that wondrous moment of inclusion in God's wisdom, and the grace given me to know it. Though that life brought me much joy, and much sadness, it also brought me this wisdom to understand that it was through my visions of Jesus' suffering, and my own at

that time, which brought me to be at one with others' feelings and sufferings, and, in so doing, released my own love and compassion for them.

I remember that my father, mother, and I had worked hard at shearing our flock of sheep then. It was a time that we missed my brother John, now dead those four years after the great pestilence. Each year my father had cursed that time and the loss it brought us, as much as he cursed the French soldiers, who cut off his two bow fingers after the battle of Crecy, in their hatred of the English bowmen, who, by their skilful use of the bow had caused the French loss.

'God damn those rats that brought the death of John. God damn those French bastards who brought me to this state and need of help,' he would say. And my mother would shudder as she listened to his blasphemy.

'You can be like that, wife', his words came angrily. 'You have four fingers and a thumb on each hand.' He never got used to it, and it was so until his death, a death that would come too soon for his own liking. For in the autumn of the year 1357 my father took to his bed with yet another illness, and not the great pestilence. It was one that took him with much sweating, as though his body was at one moment hot as a raging fire and on the next, cold as the winds which blew so ceaselessly, and all the time streaming as a river in full flow.

I ease myself up from my kneeling position, for my limbs are losing their strength and are numb. Now, sitting on the stool I stretch my legs, and allow myself a moment to return to those days. And memories begin to stream in, of other people, and another home, and how it all came about. I tell myself that I am being self indulgent, that my place, my intentions and beliefs, my service, should all be in prayer and counsel. Just for the moment, I let myself sink into the past, and tell myself that I will confess all and take penance for that later. But here, in once again reliving the past, I will, indeed, be able to say farewell to its hold on my feelings, and yet accept the understandings that it has brought to me.

Images arise. It is the year 1356, and I am a maiden of thirteen. Our home is on land that my father rents from the lord of the manor at Cherry Burton, and our flock of fifty or so sheep graze on the hilly lands that surround, and are called the Wolds. Though small in stature, our sheep are known to have wool of a thin and soft quality, and, because of that, my father has merchants call to buy his wool after the time of shearing. So it was that

a man came riding his horse to our house; a wool and cloth merchant, he led a loaded packhorse, and behind him a small cart followed, tended by a servant, and partly filled with purchases.

At the gateway to our yard he halted. He was no wealthy man, and yet his dress of good cloth, in the darkest of red, almost purple, and his felt hat of the same colour, showed him to be a man of some standing. As he threw back his mantle I could see a scabbard at his waist, as also with that of his more modestly clothed servant. They must have travelled far, for weapons are necessary for defence should robbers be met, particularly should you be a merchant travelling on long journeys; and, if you are holding money and goods, the more so.

‘Would this be the farm of Master de Burton?’ he had called down from where he sat in his saddle, a seemingly large figure for not only was he be-cloaked, but he carried different bags alongside himself. At a nod and a ‘God be with you, sir,’ from my father, he continued, ‘And God be with you and yours, Master de Burton, I have been told that you have some fine wool. And if you have some for sale, would it be to your liking for me to see it?’

Standing beside my father, I shielded my eyes against the sun, and looked into the face of the man, now halted there. His eyes it was that drew my attention. Firstly focussed on my father, they turned in my direction, and I saw dark eyes that greeted me with a smile that matched his lips. As he doffed his hat, I noticed his face to be kindly; a cheery face that complemented the smile, a face of good humour. But there was a difference that I noticed also; he had a darker skin, and hair of darker hue that I found unusual, being used to the blue-eyed, fair skinned people that surround me. I touched my own, light coloured hair, as it fell around my shoulders, as though confirming this difference in my mind.

‘As you wish, sir,’ my father replied. ‘You know my name, it seems, but I should ask how you found this, and where is your place of business?’ He watched the man dismount and walk toward us. I noticed, also, that this man’s walk seemed to be that of a seafarer – as one who rolls in his walking as though with the motion of his boat.

‘My name, good sir, is Roger le Mercer’, the words spoken in a firm, but deep voice, with a small trace of a different accent. ‘Your name was given me in the town of Beverley where I have lately been. My place of business, and my home, is in Norwich, in

the county of Norfolk, and my dealings are in wool, and woollen cloth. Norwich is a fine place for the weavers, as you may well know.'

'Aye, it has been told me thus,' my father hastened to reply. 'But, sir, I would ask you and your servant, to enter my home, to partake of a glass of my wife's newly brewed ale, before I show you the wool we gathered from our new shearing.' And my father placed his arm around my shoulder in showing my own part in that work. I wondered that my father should show such trust so soon, as the two were with sword, both. And then, I thought that my father had travelled, and had met many men when he had served under our king Edward, and surely he learned also when, and how, to trust his own knowledge.

The two men followed my father into our small house where, my mother, having heard what was said, had prepared three stools by the trestle, and had brought a jug and three pots there. It was then that they spoke together, Master le Mercer and my father, of the wool we have and how the chalky land, and my father's method of breeding, had lessened the size of our sheep, and in so doing brought us a fine and silken wool. And my father told how while fighting the French, he had seen such sheep, and first thought to breed the same here. Master le Mercer spoke of the wool and cloth trade in Norwich, and how the newly arrived Flemings had improved the weaving of cloth. He was, he said, always looking for finer and softer wool to bring to them, so that they would weave a thinner, and more costly, cloth. This was good for trade with the wealthy, and to export to France, and the Low Countries.

After much talk between them, Master le Mercer agreed with my father to look first at our wool fleeces, and if an agreement could be reached, he would take as many as could be loaded on his cart. As he rose, he looked in the corner of the room, to where my mother and I carded and spun with our spindles. He spied my weaving frame, and asked if I had woven the gown I was wearing from our own sheep's wool.

'Indeed, sir,' I had replied. 'But,' and indicating its lack of colour, 'I have not, as yet, found time to learn to dye, for there is much work to be done with father looking after the sheep. It is, however, a fine piece of cloth. On that you must agree?'

I wondered then if I had been too forward, for I saw my father frown, but it seemed it did not disturb our guest, for he smiled, and said 'On that I do agree, Mistress Burton,' and we spoke together of weaving, and my own weaving skills, for a while. And I spoke to

this man of my own desires, not only to learn more of the woollen industry, but also that I might learn of the world, and my place in it. That, above all it was my greatest desire – to be more able to read, a skill that I had yet to learn. And I felt most comfortable doing this, because Master le Mercer was very easy to talk to, and listened carefully. He seemed to be a thoughtful man, and for this I felt as though I had made a friend.

And so, after our guests had looked at the fleeces in the barn, an agreement was made with my father. Many of our fleeces were wrapped, and tied down in the cart, and he took his leave, with a promise that he would return after our next shearing. It was then, while my father spoke of his business with the merchant, and the good price that our wool had fetched that he told us, that, like our own family, our visitor had lost both his wife, and his only son, in the great pestilence. It seemed to help my father in some way, and certainly because of our own loss, to feel closeness with the man who had just left.

In 1357 Master le Mercer returned. This time he wished to take more fleeces, and spoke of his happiness with the cloth produced from that that he had taken before. This time he and my father took time to talk away from mother and me, and we wondered if my father was asking for more payment, for their heads seemed close and their voices low. But when he returned to us, it was to tell me that Master le Mercer had asked him for me to be his wife. My father said, looking at me closely, and seriously, ‘daughter, he has told me that he desires that it be your wish also. That, even if I say yes, it must be for you to feel happy to be his wife.’

This was hard for me, for, although I had a consideration of his greater age than my own, I did indeed have a liking for the man, even though we had known him for such a short time. If I was to be married, it would be my wish to have a husband who I felt would be kindly, and who was of a way of life that would benefit me, and my mother and father. Yet, it was many miles away, and I wondered how it would be with my father if I was not there to help him with his work. So I said this to him, and he assured me that Master le Mercer, or Roger as he was known by his born name, would find someone who lived near to help him. My dowry would be that of a number of fleeces arranged between the two of them.

I wondered, I said, why it was that he had chosen to ask me, who was so young, to be his wife. Father said that Master le Mercer had told him that he had seen how I had a

good knowledge of wool, it's spinning and weaving. That he thought well of my active mind, and that I would be of much help in his business. He was, he told my father, desirous of children to replace those he had lost. 'He can give you a comfortable life, for he is well thought of in the community of Norwich, and has a home that you would find a fine place to be. You would want for nothing.' And I told my father, that if this is his and my mother's wish, then it was also mine.

There was no reason, Master le Mercer said, that if this was my wish we should not be married immediately, and that I should join him later in the year to be his true wife, possibly at the time of the Christ's Mass. He would prefer, he said, that I should reach the age of fifteen before I took on my wifely duties, and that some attention should be given to my mother joining me to help with my household duties, for I was still young and would need my mother's advice. My father, of course, must first be consulted about how this would be arranged, but he felt that it was something that would not present difficulties.

Thus, I went with Master le Mercer and my father, first to the lord to ask for his consent on my marriage, and to talk how the marriage fine would be placed, and thence to our vicar, to state both the time and day for our marriage, and pay there the fee for marriage. During this time I found my liking for this man growing, for his kindness was constant. Within a few days I found myself standing alongside him and my parents, at the doorway of the church of St Michael, with our vicar before us. And there we said our vows to be joined as man and wife. It was a quiet time, for few people came to be with us, to see my new husband, and to give thanks that I had been so fortunate to marry such a one.

I stand and stretch. I walk around my cell. Here is the opening in the church wall through which I will take the comfort of communion in the times accorded me. There, the heavy woollen curtain covering the window through which I will hear and respond to those who will come to seek my intercession in prayer for wrongs, or loss, or illness. I touch its coarseness, and put my face against it, renewing in myself the scent that has been so much a part of my life – the smell of the living sheep that it still retains, even after dyeing; that smell that was for so many years such a part of my life. And it is still feels to be a living part of myself, and of those years.

My life, as I had known it, was changing. It changed as I knew it would, but to a degree that I could never have imagined. In my marriage, and the difference in stature it

brought, and in the wondrous visions that have further brought me to this place, and my desire to fulfil the wishes of our lord, and to be his servant in all I say and do; all this has wrought much change from the young creature that I once was.

Those days before I left to join my husband were spent in preparation for our departure, my mother and I. It was decided that we should leave at the end of autumn, and before winter came. Before that day came there was much spinning and weaving, and a visit to the Beverley dyer, so that we could wear gowns and mantles more in keeping with my new station. There was a need to build a yard of hedging closer to the house, so that when autumn and winter came there was shelter for the sheep we were left after we had paid the fine to the lord. This would ease my father's work.

The summer weather helped us with this work, so that by the time the weather sharpened, we had made our gowns and under-gowns, our hooded cloaks and mantles, had boots and light shoes made in Beverley, and were ready for the return of Master le Mercer with his cart, to transport us and our few belongings to Norwich.

We were not, however, prepared for my father's sudden fall to disease and death, for it came like the dreadful plague, suddenly, and with such a fierceness of sweat and cold that was impossible to fight. Nor were we prepared for the sadness that we felt held around us, like the clouds of mist that sometimes envelops the rolling hillsides of the Wolds. My father was not always an easy man, for there was in him a deep anger at how he had been left by the French, but he was also a man who found such pleasure in our animals, and in our rather lonely life in the place that he loved.

*The days before my husband returned seemed long and difficult, as there was a payment to be made for my father's burial for which we were unprepared. It was fortunate that the sale of the remainder of our little sheep brought sufficient money for this, and to keep us until my husband returned. We paid the heriot * fine to the lord of the manor for the release of our fee, and to the vicar for three chantry masses to be sung for my father's soul at St Christophers'. For, he said, he had known my father little, but he had liked him fully. It was all he could do.*

** Heriot: a form of death duty imposed by the lord at death and dereliction of rental.*

'Wife,' my husband had said, 'there is much travel to be done before you reach your new home, and there is much also that you will need to learn when you come there. Although you will have the help of your mother, yet this will take up your time, and I would that you are comfortable with our life together, and, with God's blessing the children we will have. I will not come to your bed until such time when it is right and proper, and you are ready to receive me. And in this we will heed your mother's consent, for, while I have been a husband, I do not know the ways of women.' My mother said that it was right to be of an age when woman is ready, and this was thought to be of the age of fifteen. To have children too soon was not wise, as it could bring distress to both mother and child.

So it was that, after my husband's return, we began our journey to Norwich. The wagon held the few things that were our belongings. First, however, we made soft places to sit when the wooden wagon floor and sides became uncomfortable. We used off-cuts and unusable wool to make bundles, and these were our seats. My husband had told us that our journey would be longer than a week, and we must be prepared to be cold also. Therefore we would need to be warmly wrapped when the weather became colder.

We would stop to stretch our legs and eat when needed, but, because it was a long journey, we must try to make twenty miles a day. We would spend nights at inns along the way, and, as he had taken this road before, he had thought that the better places for nightly stopping would be in small towns, where there was less chance of robbery. But we must be aware that there were robbers on the roads, and he had provided for our defence. We must not feel fearful, for both he and his servant, Tom, would be riding alongside, and were armed with swords and knives.

The way was indeed long, and fortunately, although we were at times joined by pilgrims and other travellers, nothing untoward happened in all our time on the road. I had never left our small Yorkshire village, and, although there was much dust from the roads and tracks, for it was yet not a wintry wet, I found much pleasure in the land as it opened before our eyes. Each inn in which we stayed was only a place to sleep, and many were not very clean, but the days passed in eager conversation, and sometimes wonder, wonder at the different sights of great rivers, lengthy marshes, different people speaking what seemed to be another tongue; the endless track that led us onwards; the seemingly eternal smell of horse-flesh; the sound of the iron wheels as they turned round and round, and the constant

feeling of unseemly stiffness. But when we reached the town of Lynn, and saw in the port the many trading ships, I felt a sense of the world opening and widening.

I remember my first feelings when we came into Norwich through the gate of St Benedict, and entered the beautiful city with its great castle standing like a bright sentinel over the leaded roof of the cathedral, and the many coloured roofs of the houses. I awoke further to pleasure when we finally pulled up at my new home – a large house set in green grounds that reached down to a river. There was a wide pathway where men, pushing barrows containing bundles, were moving along from barges to a barn just inside the yard.

‘The river Wensum,’ my husband’s voice came loudly as I leaned from the cart, as if to draw attention to the scene, ‘and my goods are now being unloaded.’

The house had stalls of goods in the forefront, and behind those it leaned out into the street, and high to three storeys. My husband indicated, by further words and a wave of his hand that behind this was his storage barn. Our cart made a noisy clattering sound as it rolled into a large courtyard. Here a tall hall on the right, and further wooden buildings before us indicated that this was both a busy, and a large living place. I thought of our own small house in Yorkshire and for a moment felt over-awed. I would have many new duties to perform, and was most thankful that my husband had thought it necessary that my mother should be with me, and there to help me for my first days in a new home. And that she would always be with us, for my husband was happy to have it thus.

Our arrival in the early days of October saw the leaves beginning to fall from the trees, and the cold easterly wind beginning to blow. My husband had warned me of these winds that blew ‘straight from the sea’. But our entrance into the large hall was warmed by the fire that burned there, and the kindness of the servants, for they came swiftly with ale to quench our thirsts, and a warm potage to fill our empty stomachs.

I had been eager to see the other parts of my new home, and, while my husband attended to business with his servants, I, and my mother were led by a maid through passageways and rooms. The hall was large. While we were eating I looked around. There were painted wall hangings, and coloured cushions on side benches, both of which showed the interest my husband had in the cloth trade. A fire was lit in the central fireplace, and smoke lingered on sunshine falling through thick green glass, and on motes and dust floating there. I became aware of the importance of its appearance to my husband, as it

would be here where much of his business meetings would be held and at his table where there were jugs and pots of pewter set out, ready to welcome such people.

I caught the servant by her hand, 'tell me your name,' I asked her. I found it hard to understand her answer, and then realised that it was an exaggeration of the difference I had noted in my husband's speech. Then, I thought it sounded like Sarah, and so it was the name that I called her.

'Sarah, we would like to see our living quarters,' I had requested, and realised that she must also find it difficult to understand my own speech. I pointed to the further door, and indicated my mother and me. It would be necessary to learn what appeared to be a new language, which, although English had strange inflections and meanings.

We were taken first to one of the wooden buildings at the end of the courtyard. This was the parlour, a room much smaller, and more comfortable than the hall. It contained benches, stools, chests on which stood large candlesticks, and a fireplace, the like of which I had only seen in the house of our manor lord at Cherry Burton. Books lay on the chests. I could hardly wait to hear their content.

As we left the parlour we were further taken into bedchambers. There seemed many. In one, 'The master's,' was what I finally decided Sarah had said. Here a feather bed covered the large bed frame. I had never known a feather bed, and I touched it briefly. How soft! Two smaller bedrooms were attached with smaller frames, and feather beds. There were tiny bedrooms for the servants who lived in. I discovered later that most lived in at their own homes. Most bedrooms were furnished with chests on which stood candlesticks, stools and painted wall hangings. A chapel was attached, and here was a plain altar on which crucifixes and a vellum Bible lay. Outside, a small walk away, was the privy. A look inside showed me a clean earth closet with earthen floor covered with sweet smelling straw. This was surely a great luxury.

My husband was to tell me that he paid a rental of twelve pounds yearly for this grand place, but that he leased the shops in the forefront to stall holders. Both my mother and I exclaimed that the rent was more than six families in our village would have earned in a year. I had been fortunate indeed. And here began the life that memory enlists; the years of pleasure in learning, joy in the wonder of love, and pain in its loss. Shortly after my birth date in early December, I was taken from my small bed-chamber, and thence to

my husband's. There I learned the ways of man and woman, as my mother had told me. And there I learned another side of my husband's care and kindness, for it was most gently that he took me to himself. He spoke softly after, and said that I should now, in the privacy of our room, call him by his given name – Roger.

It was with much joy that, when winter was at its coldest, and the bitter Norfolk winds were blowing their hardest, that I had discovered that I was with child. And so, in the early days of September, with my mother at hand, and a midwife in attendance, I was safely delivered of a little girl. We called her Bethany. I was filled with the joy of motherhood that was given me; never could mother have been happier, and although I knew my husband would have liked a son to share his business, I knew that he was overjoyed also.

The years that followed were full, full of the pleasures of family and more, of learning and understanding. Our days were made comfortable for we had maidservants to make them so. Our evenings held the promise of being read the writings of many fine religious writers, like Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle, but also books from the Low Countries that Roger visited on business during the year. There were also Langland's Piers Ploughman, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, and the Book of Hours – my constant companion during the day. In the evenings my husband would sit in his large chair, and we would surround him, mother and me and some of our friends, (for there were many of like mind) on stools or benches. His was a keen mind, and he encouraged my growth in knowledge, taking pleasure in teaching, and including me in much of his woollen business, as my reading and adding skills improved.

And thus my life had continued, my learning increased, my interest and involvement with my husband's business was furthered, but above all my joy in my little Bethany was the most wondrous. It seemed that pleasure abounded. Thus it was until Bethany's third year. And then the great pestilence returned to Norwich, but this time in a form that attacked the children of Norwich, and with a retching cough that brought on a most dreadful flux of blood.

My mother had taken it upon herself to care for our little Bethany, saying that I was much taken up with my husband's business, and that she would be more able to keep both herself and 'the child' away from the disease. She spent much time watching Bethany's

often wandering steps, for now she would demand to go to the garden, and thence to the water, and the barges constantly charging and discharging their goods. For a time, indeed until the winter cold was changing to spring in 1362, we all thought that we had gone past the time of fear, but it was then that the pestilence struck, and my child died most dreadfully.

And then, with her body, so ill used by the disease, held in our arms, mine and my husband's, I lost all sense of belief in my God as a loving father. For a time my despair held me in its grip, in a slough of despond, and I could not believe that He would allow such pain to be brought to those little ones who died so. My days were filled with such a weeping and wailing that those around me knew not what to do.

I was able after some months to return to the bountiful life that we enjoyed, but for all of us, myself, my husband, and my mother, indeed for the whole household, there was an empty space. And it was never filled. While my marriage contained all that a loving marriage should, no other child was born to me. In its stead there was now a companionship of the mind, in which I learned more, and not only how to read, but also how to write. It was I who kept account for the purchases and sales, and helped with buying of wool, the weaving mostly through the Flemings, and the dyeing. It helped me, assisted my husband, and brought me a degree of pleasure. But, joy was absent.

My husband began to age, and, when seven years later, yet another disease came and wrought many more deaths, and once more bodies lay dead in the houses and streets of Norwich, it was my concern that he or my mother were in danger. Yet it was not a disease that took him, but a storm on one of the sea voyages taken regularly from Lynn to Antwerp, from which he never returned. Not only were our goods lost, but also the man who had entered my life and had been my husband, and had taught me, and brought me such a wealth of knowledge and understanding. There was never a kindlier man, and I felt his loss greatly. Nor was he there to oversee the buying of wool, and the development of the goods that he brought back from the Low Countries. But, although our business was thus diminished, I felt my place had still to be in Norwich, in the place where we were known.

There were the fees to be paid after my husband's death, for, although we had not his body, yet it was known, by word brought us, that the ship he was on had foundered. It was then that I knew that it would not be possible to stay in our home, but that a house

which suited our lesser trade must be found. In Elm Hill we found a smaller house, one that had a barn, in which to house the wool we were purchasing from farmers and peasants in the land around Norwich. From there I ran, with my mother and a man servant, Simon, a trade in buying wool, carding and spinning it on the place with paid help, taking much of the yarn to be woven with the Flemings, and having it dyed with the dyers in Norwich. Our cloth was now more for the local market. And we lived in a manner that was lesser than before, but still well.

It seemed that, while I was fully busy, I found my spirits beginning to lift. Suffering had given me an understanding, and a feeling of belonging with those who also suffered, in their many ways, around me. I had for a time lost the wondrous being with God feeling that I had had as a child, but now, again, it returned, and it returned as in its message I remembered. In May of 1373 I was brought to bed with the suffering that I had been told to expect. After five days of bodily sickness, that brought with it pain and fear, a renewal and acknowledgement of my deep belief, and finally, the wonder of the Grace was given to me. It was after that I felt the need to write of this belief, and to share this with other women I knew.

Not until after my mother's death did I think to be one who would bring succour to those who suffered, and needed prayer and a listening heart to intercede for them. It was then that I had gone to my lord the bishop, and asked his permission to be enclosed as an anchorite. And I asked that it would be at the church of St Julian's in King Street, for I had been there so many times with my husband and mother, and these were the people who were my even Christians. This would be the name that I would take – Julian. My own known name and title, Mistress Mercer, would now no longer be mine.*

In the suffering of our Lord that I had felt during my showings, and the words that God spoke to me again, I realised my own sufferings had been the means by which I have been brought to know, understand, and, thence, bring comfort to my even Christians. Love is the reason, the beginning and end, and without love there can be no meaning. This was the message I should bring in comfort and hope, and all would be well.

And so I say farewell to the past. Once more I bend my knees, and I bring my

** 'even Christians', Julian's written expression. It is the archaic meaning for emphasis.*

father, husband, beloved child, and dear mother into the prayers I offer for their souls

Now is the time to bring my prayers and intercessions for my even Christians to God, as I once more dedicate myself to work in prayer and intercession for the good of those who find their way to my window, even as our Lord had dedicated his life: to bring a deeper understanding of a loving God to those who lived around him.

THREE

Coming Home, June 1378

His way is east. The track runs by the river until he reaches sight of the newly built city walls. He leans back on the cart front. His horse begins to move quickly. It is clear that he is glad to be out in the open again, and going home. Their way is populated by people on two wheeled carts, pack horses, and walkers with bundles on their backs, moving toward the city, while there are also people like himself, on their way home after they have conducted their business.

As the city walls come into view he pulls to the left on the reins, and takes the northern track now before him. Firstly it runs upwards, through open land where sheep graze, then levels out farther along and into a lightly wooded area. Here there are many bushes of hazel nuts, and sweet chestnut, a popular area for the young to hunt in autumn. The silver birch with bark of its name, the aspen with quivering leaves, and the bushy alder, its white flowers heralding the succulent berries to come; and flying and landing among the different leaves, a tweeting of small birds – sparrows, wrens, chaffinch and the odd blackbird.

This road leads to the road to the Field of Blows, where it was some years ago, when, only a boy, he had watched his lord, the king, on his huge Destrier overcoming all comers in the jousts. What a day that had been. How the colourful clothes of the lord and ladies had created a field brighter than any garden of flowers. The reds, blues, yellows, gold and silver of the clothing, with many a jewel emblazoned on it; the trailing silken robes of the ladies; the sun shining on bright armour, almost dazzling the eyes; the smell of the horse's sweat, and their shit littered everywhere, and above all the sound – clattering hooves, the crash of the joust, and the roaring shouts of the crowd, calling for their king to win. It was then he felt a sense of true love for his monarch, the handsome look of him, and the bravery of the man. He was more than a man in Bartholomew's eyes, an idol almost. And there the field is. He halts momentarily to gaze at its stretch of level ground, while far beyond the village church rises high, surrounded by flint stone houses with their thatched roofs; flint was most favoured for building here because of its availability.

He looks up to the sun. Mid-afternoon. He clicks his tongue, rattles the reins, ‘come on, old boy’ as he hastens the horse. A good horse, he thinks. He likes his manner, and his colour – the soft orange of the Suffolk breed. Many a person would have offered him money for his horse. He does not name him, but ‘old boy’ or ‘c’mon, bor’ was his general address. His horse was not for work in the fields, oxen did that. His horse was there to transport Bartholomew to market at South Walsham, to Yarmouth to the markets, or for fish in the herring season, as a packhorse, or to pull the cart with goods for sale. He travels along more swiftly now as the road levels out. A mill’s sails move in the distance, fields open on either side, with all the strips of growing corn, barley, oats, rye, and some wheat becoming ripe, alongside the grazing sheep and cattle.

He thinks: Burlingham next; ‘tis a big village, like all those in this area. And the cart makes good distance until he reaches the outskirts, and drives through. People are moving about. Children run after his cart. He sees the ale-brush out at an ale house. The women have been brewing. Ah! Fresh ale! How he would like a drink. His throat is dry, the dust getting at his throat. But he will wait to see if the ale brush is out at Acle before he stops for a drink. There he will give the horse a drink from the river, a graze, and he will eat the bread and cheese that Mistress Inman wrapped for him.

He begins to feel drowsy. The sun is warm. The motion of the cart rocks him and adds to this feeling. But they are making good way, and before too long he sees the Acle church standing beyond the water where he will rest himself. The street shows the welcome sign of the brush standing out in front of an ale-house, and he pulls the cart up outside.

‘Mistress, an ale, if you please,’ he calls. He stays where he is for he will not leave the cart with its precious contents.

A face appears at the door, and an old woman comes out through the doorway.

‘What would you wish, sir’

‘A jug, if you please, mistress.’

‘That will be a farthing, sir,’ and she hobbles away inside.

Bartholomew fumbles at his waist for his purse, and draws out the coin. He is eager for the drink. Hurry up, good woman, he thinks, and feels much relief as she comes toward him, jug in hand. He holds out his hand to take the jug, and places the coin in her outstretched hand.

'I'll drink it where I am if it pleases you, mistress,' he says, while she stands at the side of the cart.

'Where is your journey to, sir?'

He gulps at the ale, 'To Thrigby. I will make my way along the river and take the Stokeby ferry, then the back road.'

'That be the best, sir, at this time when the water is low.'

'Aye, and the quickest, for I would be home before sunset.'

He looks up to the sun. How fast it moves when you are eager to return. First, though, he will find a place by the river and eat the cheese and bread the good wife gave him, and let the old boy drink at the water, and graze the grass there. He swallows the last drop.

'I give you my thanks,' as he hands back the jug to the old woman.

'God go with you,' she replies, as Bartholomew picks up the reins, and with a 'come on, boy', urges the horse forward, and down the street to where the church stands close to a dyke that flows from the river. He pulls up close to a willow, hanging the reins forward and jumping down. Firstly his horse must be watered, and he leads him to the dyke bank, being careful that the cart holds back. The horse drinks deeply, while Bartholomew takes the bundle of food from its place in the cart, un-wrapping it eagerly, and guiding the horse back to the grass. He seats himself on the grass by the willow trunk, and leans against it. It has been a busy day and there is much to set his mind remembering. The cheese, he finds, is very good; the bread, fresh and light, as it comes in the city. He watches a dragonfly mounting the air as it glides, floats, and flies along the water, the iridescent wings a bright flash of colour, in sunlight now beginning to throw small shadows of the cart on the ground. But they will rest for a while until his hunger is satisfied. His eyes begin to close, and, for a few moments he dozes.

A dream awakens him. Again he sees the woman anchoress, her hands held in prayer as he had seen her in the morning. There is a look of such kindness in her eyes, as though she understands the pain he had felt, as though she knew. It awakens him with a sense of wonder. He allows the feeling to soak into his senses. It is a feeling unknown for this man of the soil whose life has its roots in farming, a man whose worship follows the path that many of his fellow Englishmen follow, the right way, the way of regular church

and community belief. This is a man who seldom dreams. Yet this dream awakens him – stays with him as he pulls himself upright, walks over to take the trailing reins and lifts his horse’s head from the lush grass, then takes his seat on the forefront of the cart – time to go, old boy.’

They follow the dyke that winds through the village until it meets another dyke running alongside the river. The track follows the river, past Acle mill on one side, and Stokeby mill on the other until, after a broad sweep, and in a bend he sights the ferry, its broad wooden structure pulled up at the side he is reaching. The boatman stands by the side, pole in hand, watching something in the water. Fish? Eels? Possibly eels, for there would be plenty in this slow-moving water. Flat land does not strengthen water’s movement.

‘God be with you, Simon. Would you be ready to take us across?’ The water picks up the sound of his voice in echoes. The boatman starts, and turns.

‘That I will do, Master Edrich. Be you a-coming back from Norwich then, bor?’ You would not say that this is the finest figure of a man, thinks Bartholomew, as he approaches the unkempt figure. Yet he knew that river work was wet and muddy work, and not paid well, for few people passed this way, preferring instead the wider track that ran through Billockby and on to Yarmouth. For himself this was the shorter way back, through Stokesby, and then a straight, flat road, to Thrigby.

The horse and cart eases onto the flat ferry, the boatman starts to pole it across. Bartholomew is grateful for his quiet horse. He has known other horses shy, and kick out at their owners when being forded. Not his old boy – the years of travelling over this ferry had made him used to the motion, and he is easily managed.

They reach the farther bank. He presses a halfpenny into the boatman’s hand, takes the reins, slowly moving the cart onto the bank, and with a ‘God be with you’, starts off down a small track that runs past the long village of Stokesby. Off to the right he sees sheep grazing, a goodly flock whose wool has been recently shorn, and, farther along, the summer sheen on ripening corn. This is fertile land. Good land. He would be nowhere but in Norfolk beside the waters, and with the sea breezes from the nearby coastline.

Off to his right, a hilly outcrop signals the small village of Hillsborough, and, as if he senses homecoming. The horse breaks into a trot. The sun at their back is throwing long

shadows before them. In the far distance, the four pointed waters of Filby can be seen, and over to his right, Thrigby mill, his own mill. A turn to the left and there is the village – thatched stone houses of flint in a line, and farther on, the larger flint stone manor house, his home, surrounded by demesne buildings in a huddle of wooden byres and barns; and standing above, as though guarding the village, their church of St Mary's. To Bartholomew, it is all the sweetest sight imaginable. For this is home.

As his cart, with its iron wheels rattling, makes its way through, he sees the village at evening rest. There children are running around, boys playing touching tig*, others flexing their bows and arrows on the farther green by the church; girls at work the gardens with their mothers; women gossiping over their fences; and some at work on their shuttles as they sit outside in the evening sunshine. Men, one or two still out in their strips, or now at rest after a day's work, sitting outdoors with their women, some drinking their evening ale at Mistress Maud's ale house, where the brush is out.

The fields spread away, where to the left he sees the small home of the farmer Roger de Bacton. Farther on to the left, corn bends golden in the evening light, caught by a light breeze, and in the distance he sees his own sheep grazing on the farther common fields. Spread before him, the village looks peaceful, but he knows that tomorrow, he with his reeve, Thomas Woodman, must gather together the village famuli;* for there is much they must talk through, and many preparations for the coming harvest. God rest that the fine weather holds, he thinks.

He spies Thomas at work on a broken cart, repairing one side where the wood has begun to rot. Already preparing for harvest, Bartholomew thinks. He's a good man, a man who has no children, having lost both in the last disease, but who works hard for the good of the village, and spends much time in aiding the skills of the young in archery. Although, knowing battle as he must surely do having once been in the King's army, Bartholomew often wonders that Thomas should, by dint of that aid, encourage any young man to enter into the terror, and the pain of war.

* tig: chasing game. One player chases others to catch and touch one, who then becomes the chaser.

* Famuli: middle English name for servants.

‘Hoo, Tom,’ he calls. ‘God be with you and your work. A moment, bor.’

A weather-beaten, sweaty face, looks toward him. Tom lays down the tool that he is working with, surely master, I’m ready to do that,’ he says, for a pot of ale would be good right now.’

‘I’ve not time for that just now, Tom. I wanted to catch you before I reach home. Can you get the miller, John, Will, Cutha and Godric together tomorrow early? I am thinking to look at the grain in the barn, see what is remaining, and have it milled before any more is lost to those dratted rats. I can’t have us going hungry before we bring in the harvest. So, we’ll need a gang for that, with a cart and bags for a days work.’

‘Aye, master, I’ll haller* them along. And to the manor, or mill, you say?’

‘The barn first, Tom. That’ll be the best – to account for what is left, I think. And then, with harvest about, we’ll need a meeting of all the workers together, to see that the knives are sharpened, how the carts fare, and that the women and children are ready to do the sheaving, and gleaning, and where first to start. I would like to talk over how we store, and how we limit the loss of our corn. So, a get-together one evening at the manor house, soon, would be good. Just find out from them what evening, and let me know, Tom.’

‘Aye, that I will do, master.’

‘Right, Tom. Now go slake your thirst’, he says as he shakes the reins and moves on. To find out how much corn, and how much is held by each family in the village, and whether there will be enough to take them through until the milling of the grain from the coming harvest, is the first task. The miller, Henry, will judge this, and if sharing will be necessary, for he must be assured that no family will go badly hungry. A new bake-house built in his demesne, would be a welcome addition. It would surely make for less waste. This he will bring to John, and ask his thoughts on the matter.

He will say, when they meet, that he thinks more thought should go to the control of the thieving rats that consume more grain than he would wish during its time of storage. In the time before winter sets in, it may be that each villager looks to gathering reeds and broaches, to re-thatch roofs, so that these pests have less chance to nest and roost. He had

* Haller: Norfolk vernacular meaning to shout.

thought that more little ratting dogs, and cats, also, would help in rooting out and killing rats. His concerns are to provide through the time of little food.

With Tom he will bring forward the plans for harvest time, and see that each person will know how they are to work, and with whom. But he will also want to know how, and in what way the toll tax has affected them, for this thought has been much in his mind on his way back, since talking to his friend. The possibility of another toll concerns him greatly, for his people are not only poor, but have other village payments, too. He sees the children of his villani without shoes, and thinly clothed, and wonders why the king, with his warring intent, should so take from these poor people. For, though he has not knowingly seen the king's extravagances, he has seen the rooms and garb of my lord, the bishop, and can only guess at how much greater would be those of the young king.

He will, he thinks, talk to the vicar Peter on this subject, for he is a man of wisdom, and has much thought for the village people, and their well-being. Maybe it would need for more leather to be bought and made into light shoes, and more making of yarn and cloth to be made into clothes for those with little. Margery would know women who weave.

But there are other more pleasant things to bring to the village, he thinks. Light summer evenings will enable his idea of reading to the young, and those of the older people who would like to join in. It is his intention to bring other writings, those whose stories will bring pleasure; but first – the *Book of Hours*. Then there's the cutting of yew branches for the making of bows, Thomas will see to that. The women and girls will stitch leather balls, and fill them with off-cut wool, both to kick and to hit. He has thoughts of a game of hit ball – not with the hand, but with a piece of flat wood. And there is always his greatest pleasure, the playing of music for dancing; the times of harvest-home, and thanksgiving at Christmas when this takes place and there is a time for being lazy.

He moves the horse on with an eager shake of the reins – 'come on, old boy' – who obliges by trotting, clicking the cobbles, into the entrance of the yard and up to the very door. His shout of 'Hoo – Hoo, Mistress Edrich. Where be ye? Should you wish for a present, come and greet your husband, here waiting.' Bursting out of a lower door she comes – Margery, her hat removed, and brown curls loose, bouncing on her shoulders, hands lifting her skirts; behind her the small figure of Mathilda trips and tumbles on the cobbles in her eagerness, calling:

‘Da! Da! What have you brought for me?’

‘Ribbon for your bright hair, my little maw’, he says, jumping down and catching her up in his arms, and turning, ‘where are you, mistress? T’was a fine visit I had. A good few coins to take us through to the next time, and some other goods that I know will please your eyes,’ as he gathers her up with gusto. ‘Now, prepare a jug of ale for your tired husband and a dish of what you have waiting, for I must first stable my good horse before I bring them in.’

He turns to the horse, leading him across the cobbles, first to the cart shed where he removed harness and reins, and then across to the pond. The horse drinks deeply, his feet in the muddy forefront. Bartholomew watches a scattering of the brindled ducks swimming away into green covered frog sperm water, and long rushes, sees the long shadows cast by the evening sun falling across the bushes, low on the ground surrounding the pond, and turns to the horse, ‘come on, boy, I’m ready for my drink, too.’ Then, he leads him across the yard to the stable.

The horse shakes himself with vigour as Bartholomew divests him of trailing leather reins, and thrusts his head into the bin, where a welcome bundle of hay and a small handful of oats, awaits him. He hrumps, farts loudly, depositing a large dropping of shit, the smell rising potently around them. Bartholomew slapped his hindquarters ‘you might have waited for that, bor.’ He was not put out. Animals knew their privy was everywhere. Anyway, it would be fine to take to Margery’s rose bush, in the morrow.

He patted his chest where the presents for his girls nestled, and where the precious pages of his book lay, closes the stable door, and walks across the yard back to the cart shed. Lifting the bundle of cloth from the cart, he leaves, closing the door. He would unload the rest in the morning. For now he was ready to rest. Yet, he thought, not too tired for some things he had an appetite for – but food first. He walks slowly across the yard, the bundle heavy in his tired arms. The sun’s rays pick up the smooth flints, bringing a pink overall haze to the house. It seems to glow, very like my feelings, he thinks. Is there ever a better feeling than coming home? Through the open door he goes, and in the hall puts down the cloth on the trestle, removes the packets and book from his jerkin, and places them beside the cloth, sits in his chair.

‘Come, Mathilda, help your old father to remove his boots, for they are newly bought, and tight around my feet.’ She kneels before him, pulling first at one boot, and then the other. He stretches his legs before him, wriggling his toes. Bless me, but that was better. Across the hall he can see Margery at the fire where the cooking pot hangs, piling food onto a pewter trencher*. Its smell makes his saliva run.

‘God help me, wife, but I’m ready for this.’

He removes his hat, and smooths his long hair back. Mathilda brings a bowl of water to his side, and he turns to wash his hands, drying them on the cloth she holds.

‘Da! Da! I can’t wait to see what you have brought.’

Margery places the trencher before him with a thump, and places a spoon by the side. Is she impatient? He turns to take the knife from the scabbard at his waist, ‘Well, you are both going to have to wait until I have settled my empty stomach, little Maw. The longer the wait, the sweeter the joy, so they say. And, what have we here, wife?’

‘There was a chicken that had gone off lay, husband, and I gathered some leeks and cabbage, and put beans with it. Here is a slice of bread.’ And she places a large piece of rye bread before him. She knows that he likes to sop up his gravy last.

They sit before him on their stools, elbows on table, chins in hand. A major and a minor; like two peas in a pod, one small, the other large, round faces watching his every mouthful. Even Alice, wiping her hands on her skirt, watching from the door.

‘And, has all gone well, wife?’

‘Aye, and merrily, husband. The garden bears well, a fine crop of apples and pears ripening. There’s fine weather that’s ripening our corn well, and not before time, for there are many with healthy appetites...’

‘God bless you, yes,’ he says, ‘and, I’ve just been talking to Tom about that, and arranging with Henry to mill the remaining corn. Let’s hope the weather holds, for we have a few mouths to feed before then.’

He swallows the last mouthful on the plate; could he eat some more? But, no that would be truly unkind to his little and big ‘uns.

‘So, who’s to be first?’

* Trencher: a plate. Sometimes old hard bread used as such and fed to animals after.

‘Me, Dada! Me!’

‘Alright, then!’ He notices a small nod from his wife, and in the background Alice is stuffing her skirt to her mouth with excitement. ‘Let’s see what it’s all about, shall we?’

He takes up the smallest bundle. ‘See here! And what can this be?’ he says as he slowly rolls out the ribbons and the silk from the cloth around them, holding them out to both child and woman.

‘Oh, Mama, see!’ Mathilda’s voice is shrill and loud as she snatches up the red ribbons from her father’s hand and runs to the little maid at the door - ‘to tie around my hair. Tie them in, Alice.’ They fall in a cascade of colour around her shoulders as she dances around the room.

‘And for you, sweet one, the golden cloth around your neck,’ and he gathers Margery toward him, placing the silk in folds around her laughing face, and up to where it will meet, and be pinned to her hat. ‘See how fine you will look when next we go to the markets at Walsham or Yarmouth, as fine as any, I’d say. But see...’ and he reaches for the larger bundle, opening it in greater haste than before, because he knows that there is only just so much waiting for them now. The green cloth pours out across the table.

‘Ooh! ent that so fine.’ The words spring from Margery, and Alice, and they both run their hands over the cloth, picking it up carefully, holding it to their faces, feeling its softness. ‘Oh! ’Tis so soft,’ they repeat in unison.

‘That’ll keep you busy, my old dear, there’s plenty of stitching for you girls before Christmas, I think. But, there’s more yet,’ and he draws out the pamphlet of pages from his jerkin. ‘This too will need stitching together before I begin to read to you.’ While he knows that this will not bring the excitement of the other goods, he is sure that, in time they will realise the value of learning to read.

There’s enough of this, he thinks. I would to take a walk up the fields to take a look at the corn; and ‘tis not the only thing that I have in mind, for there are many a bundle of hay still to be gathered, and they make a fine place for what I have in mind.

‘Come, wife, help me put back my boots, for I would take a look at the corn, and see how it is ripening.’

FOUR

Julian's Cell, June 1379

This morning the sun floods in with its rays, even finding their way through the thick darkness of my curtains, and illuminating the sign of the cross that is on the outer side, making its pattern on the inner one, as though it were the thinness of cotton.

Soon people will come, and I will hear the sound of their voices, voices that often beg of me to intercede for them, ask me to understand, wish for a prayer to make their lives easier to bear. These days they come often, expressing their pains, fears, and sometimes their anger. So often they ask the question – why? ‘Why are we being taxed so heavily?’ ‘Why are our sons being taken for wars that have no meaning for us?’ ‘Why has God taken my husband?’ ‘Why does my husband beat me and the children?’ ‘Will this lifetime suffering ever end?’ ‘My children have no shoes...does not the king know that his taxes takes the shoes from their feet, the very bread from our table?’ And above all, the words, those that I know but which concern me with their despair: ‘Dame Julian, pray for me, for I have no-one to help me, and I fear that God has forgotten me’.

And to all I will express my sorrow and compassion, find the words to bring comfort, and pledge that I will, indeed, intercede and pray for those who sorrow. And I will exhort those who do not cant, but desire peace, that they themselves say in their daily prayers the simple words ‘God help me’, and that they find in their suffering a closeness with our lord saying ‘Lord Jesus, son of God, have mercy on me.’ For I truly believe that such prayers help people to understand that, although we feel alone and sometimes in pain, all will be well if we walk our way in belief, and in the gaining of strength that those prayers invoke. But I cannot provide food for their table, shoes for their feet. Yet, I do feel that, should I have recourse to one with wealth and caring, this could be. But people of wealth do not come to my curtain, nor yet my to door, although there are some who give a penny or two from their small earnings, so that I can put it toward sewing, or mending clothes, for those who have nothing.

Sarah brings to my attention those people who bring us gifts, sometimes of food, sometimes a gift of cloth, or leather, and she has told me of a countryman, she thought him

to be a farmer, who brings us at every quarter, a bag of salt, a welcome enjoinder to our food. She has also told me of women who come to ask that they may speak to me. They are those who would wish to join me in prayers to lessen the suffering of our Christian people, and who would seek my support and the wisdom that they feel has been granted me by the grace of God. I have found that, of those, some are friends who gathered to hear Roger's evening and Sunday readings, before he was taken. Such are Emma Stapleton and Katherine Manne, and it was with a feeling of pleasure that I welcomed them to the possibility of joining me in the way I have chosen. I have said to all who aspire to a desire to help the poor and suffering, 'then take the path that I have taken, and give strength to our prayers, and enjoin with me in holding love and compassion for those who have such a need'.

During this past year I have found that there are also others who would join our sisterhood. To those I have read the Ancrene Wisse as we have sat together in my parlour, the book that has been writ to show us the way to lead the life of an anchoress – the clothes, food, prayers – the way in which we can hold a place to hear and hold faith for the sick and suffering. For those who are lettered there are no difficulties, but for the unlettered the learning of words in prayer can be an obstacle, yet not the reason to discontinue in a chosen work. Devotion to God, love for the weak and needy, the ability to listen to the words of those who come to us; to show compassion, and offer prayer and intercession, these are the reasons that we come to be anchoresses.

And those who discipline themselves need to remember to take time to learn our devotional and intercessory prayers, and the times we may take communion. These are the ones who will remain close to the people who come to their windows. They learn, as the Ancrene Wisse advises, to conduct themselves with decorum and patience, and not take part in any gossip that people may bring in their pleas for help, they must eat sensibly twice a day, and with little meat unless there is a health need so to do; they must work with the needle for the church or poor, and sew to clothe themselves simply and warmly in winter.

They also understand that visitors are allowed in the parlour occasionally, and that, should their visitor be a man, to conceal their face. They learn to crop their hair regularly, and wear a hat and veil, or merely a veil, for the full wimple is not thought

necessary. Above all, although they cannot read, they learn to say their prayers at the hours set down for prayer, and in constancy, for this is our strength, this the place in which we bring what help we can to those who must tell their pain to someone. For, it is in the telling that pain is released, in the listening that relief may take place, and in our prayers that all will be well if we believe it to be so.

Soon I shall kneel to Prime prayers, but, before I do, I will take myself to the small garden that Sarah and Mary are making in the courtyard outside the parlour door. There they have planted the enclosed area with vegetables and herbs. There are the onions, leeks, cabbage and garlic that are included with oats for our vegetable broth. Herbs scent the air – thyme spills its aroma to my touch, as does the mint and sage; and there are green mounds of parsley growing to pick, and to add further goodness to our broths. There too that most gentle of sleep giving – camomile, that which Sarah mixes with water taken from the water butt, and warmed to make my evening drink

In the hedgerow surrounding the graveyard, I will smell the scent of wild roses blooming, filling the air with welcome sweetness, while in the distance I hear the sound of Norwich stirring, voices shouting, the sound of feet moving, bringing up goods from the unloading ramp on the Wensum, and the crackle of cart wheels taking them away. Rooks and crows will float through the morning air, pigeons will flap their wings with a slap, slap sound, and swallows and swifts chirp, flitting wildly in and around the eaves while the morning comes awake, picking up insects as they go.

I take pleasure that I am still able, though mostly quiet during the day, to have these moments of gratitude for the beauty of the morning, and for that time of connection that helps me feel close to people, as though I am still in, although not of the world. And I do believe that this is the very meaning for me, that while still being in the world, I can be more there for those that come to me from that world. That in hearing these sounds and smells I am close to the living feelings of those who come. That, if I closed myself away entirely, then my human self who has known great pain also, would not be there to recognise the pain, anger, and despair – the suffering of my even Christians. I would not be able to speak the words of comfort or wisdom that have been given me by God's grace, words that will help them as they find their way through their difficulties. Nor would I be

able to bring the greatest comfort to them – that I would intercede, pray for them, and place their name and sorrow before God.

Only yesterday, I read again the words that I wrote soon after my visions. It was fortunate that Sarah, in following me to my cell, was able to bring with her the parchment roll of my writings. It is my wish to have it copied, whether by myself, or if I can find the coins, by a scribe. It does seem to me that my words contain a meaning, like the words written by those English masters: Hilton, Rolle, and the writings of St Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, those words that Roger brought back from his visits to the Low Countries and read to us in days gone past; words that bring a greater understanding, and a greater belief to those who hear them.

*I found words that were most comforting in the last book that Roger brought to our attention. For in this little book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the work of a writer whose name I know not, were the words that helped me find the path to belief, and which opened my heart. For these were the words, and I hope I remember them clearly, that confirmed my belief: ‘By love he can be caught and held, but by thinking never.’ And again when explaining that God is not something that we can know, and although we call God he, God is neither he nor she, but both and none; nothing we can know by our thinking senses. It is our language that lessens our knowledge of him. There is, however, one way that we can move through the cloud of lack of knowledge of God, and that is through love. ‘Strike that thick cloud of unknowing with the sharp dart of longing love’, is how I remember the writer’s words.*

It is my wish that I return to those words, and hold onto them. And in the way of that writer remain unknown, but clarify my belief for myself, and present to those who would read my words my understanding of images and words that were given to me during my shewings. I think again on the hazel nut that was placed in my hand, and the words that accompanied it, the story of the Lord and servant that was shown me in such detail. I would return again to the meaning for evil and sin in this world, and how its reason was told me. And again, I learnt in my visions how, by his sufferings, Jesus is the fulfilment of feminine wisdom in the Trinity that is God, and is the true meaning of wisdom and love.*

** Shewings: Julian’s unique way of writing showings.*

My wish is that the reader should take no note of me or my name, for that would only distract them from understanding the meanings I hope to portray in my words. For this is my reason for writing them that, not only are they my meanings, but that they show the teachings of our mother church to be those that are constant, that remain with us, and succour and comfort us. Indeed my oneing has shown me the depth and wonder of God's given grace.*

I feel a touch on my shoulder. 'Mistress,' I hear the voice of Sarah, 'are you ready to break your fast? I have oats cooking, and milk warming, and honey on the table.'

** oneing: the mystics' inner experience of feeling to be one with God – both enclosed in , and enclosing, God. Julian writes it onyd: meaning oned. I have modernised.*

FIVE

The Murder and the Meeting, June 1381

'Husband, God help us! Would you allow yourself to be drawn into the ways of Litester and others, those who dare to confront the king, and all the strength of Spencer's men? What do you think will become of you? And what, I may ask, of the manor and the people here... and us?' Her hand pulls on his arm in an attempt to hold him back. Her voice is shrill; it cuts about his ears like the harsh, easterly winds that blow strongly in winter, and shriek their way across the marshes. The restraining hand, and the strength of her voice, stops him in his movement toward the door.

He turns and strikes her. The open palm of his hand hits her face with the sound of axe on wood – a dull crack. She drops to the floor of the hall, hat and scarf falling off, skirts in disarray, a crumpled figure. He sees Mathilda and Alice running toward her, the sound of their voices crying out echo in his ears, and, as he thrusts himself out through the door, he yells, 'wife, know your place!' He is aware of the strength and volume of his voice, issuing as it does as a result of his anger, an anger bred also of fear, for he knows the danger to which he may be opening himself.

But he has had enough of this, he thinks. A man must make a decision for himself. It is not only the well being of his own family, and the Thrigby famuli, but also the loyalty and love that he feels for his friend of many years. He knows that John is desperate about the state of the poor; and there are many around Norfolk made destitute by tolls that have taken the very bread from their mouths, and, for what? For a war that helps the power of a boy king, and his uncle, Gaunt.

Only recently, on his last visit to Norwich, he had learned from John the discontent that was now abroad in the city, and as far a-field as in the North Norfolk countryside. People were suffering badly from the last toll in '79, and now, this latest and harshest imposition – twelve whole pennies a head. It was as much as a family could earn in a month or more, and for some, the difference between living and starving. John was beside himself, and he spoke of the many people, the country people, the guildsmen, as he was himself, and some of the better-off lords and land owners. They were angry, and the person

they most blamed was the young king's uncle John of Gaunt, and many of the rich London noblemen.

'Mark my words, Bart, it will come to a head like all poisons do,' he had said.

Now, word has come to Bartholomew that many men are gathering in North Walsham to rebel against the toll, and to press for an end to villeinage. But, although he would strenuously argue against tyranny, he must be careful not to be seen to be a part of a rebellion. Le Spencers men at arms are strong, and are many. Bartholomew is angry, and although he will not admit it to her, in his heart he knows there is much truth in Margery's words. He must not be seen to have aligned himself with the rebels; this would be dangerous for himself, the manor-hold, and the whole village.

But, he thinks, a woman should not take it upon herself to tell a man what he must do. Margery has been more than a little uppity lately – ill tempered and a constant nag. Not the Margery he has known and loved. He had had no sister, but he has heard it said that, when a woman gets to a certain age, she changes, and is unable to have more children. Certainly their hopes of another child had not come to fruition. But Margery complains often of this and that, and is cold in his bed these days. It has caused him to seek comfort elsewhere, and this makes him feel even more uncomfortable. Although it is necessary to be careful, Mistress Maud Alewoman is a great deal more available, and happy to be so.

He strides across the yard to the stable. He will at least take himself to Norwich to find out what is happening. Gathering up the old boy's bridle, he walks to the neighbouring meadow where the horse is grazing. Normally he would listen to morning birdsong, enjoy the scent of the morning air, but today was different; today he was taking a chance that might change his whole life. He knows it, but knows also that he must find out what is happening, and whether John, his long-time friend, has become involved, or needs his help.

He catches the horse by the mane, and slips the bridle on. 'Another journey, old fellow', he murmurs into an ear that is twitching with his breath. 'But this time you will not need to pull a cart. This time we have other business.' His mind returns to the years when they have made their way over the well known road to Norwich, years that have seen the Thrigby famuli* and village freemen, enjoy periods of work together, years when the crops

* Famuli: servants of the lord of the manor.

have been good, and hunger had not been seen there, when they have played and worshipped, and even though the tolls have bitten in to the people's wellbeing, there has been much community sharing and caring. Bartholomew knows that a lot had depended on his stewardry, and he is proud of that fact. But now...he leads the horse to the stable, where, saddle on, he scrambles atop the horse's back. Not as easy these days, he thinks, I must be getting old – well, forty or so, but not dead yet.

Not dead yet. That sentence, and another word – beware – stays in his mind as the horse makes its way along the familiar road. Should he talk to somebody about this? There was none of the village men that came to mind, except the farmer, Roger. And he must not involve Thomas, either, for who would there be to take over running the famuli at harvest if anything should happen to him?

Then it is that he sees the vicar Peter trudging along on the roadway before him, his priest's gown gathered in one hand, long staff in the other, and hood slipping down onto his shoulders, where his straight hair straggles. He is not a fine figure of a man, but for all that, he is a good man, and one who has brought a strong faith to the village church congregation.

'God bless you, Peter. And where be you a-goin'?' he calls down from his seat in the saddle, slapping the saddle to draw attention to himself.

'To Norwich, Bartholomew, God willing', the reply comes from the brown clad figure, face turning to look upwards as he speaks. 'It is not my wish to become in any way a part of trouble, but...'

'Find a stone and hop up behind then, bor, for I could do with a listener.'

'And I, Bart, for I too need likewise. And t'would be a help for my old legs. Hold on, my man,' he says to the horse, as he finds a log laying alongside, gathers up his priestly robe, and with the help of a hand, sidles up behind Bartholomew, gasping for breath. 'I fear what we shall find there, though,' he continues slowly, 'for there are no good words coming from that direction.'

'It's a bad day, vicar,' says Bartholomew.

'A bad day indeed, and a day that I have prayed with deep intent for help in my belief, for how can I accept what is being inflicted upon a people who are so undeserving, and so poor? How can I advise our people to accept that which is not in our Lord's

teachings. I tell you, Bart, I have come to a place of despair, a place in which I am uncertain as to whether I can still work for a man who, I have been told, has already taken up arms against those who are asking for justice.'

Bartholomew could hear it in Peter's voice. He could feel the pain in the body now pressed so closely to his own. That he should feel badly, he accepted, for to be one of faith, somebody of Peter's calling, to see and not be able to help, was a state that would make the main Christian teaching a falsity. Indeed that of loving your neighbour as yourself, was our Lord's main teaching.

'Aye, 'tis true, Peter,' was all he could say in rejoinder. He rattled the bridle against the horse's neck, for it would be as well to leave the village behind until open country gave them the chance to speak with confidence. Although he knows his people, it is as well to be careful. Beware must be his watchword.

He thought that both the horse and he could walk this track with eyes closed, they knew it so well. There has been many times when he had been backwards and forwards to Norwich, from the time when, as a young boy he had walked there to learn, and later with goods to sell, and on occasions, for festive times. There had been the times, too, when the plagues had struck and it was not wise to go there.

He remembered that, as a young boy of ten, he had heard told that, in the first plague, the bodies had lain, many piled, in the streets waiting to be buried. His father, a hardworking man, but wise also, had advised the people to stay away, and not only from Norwich, but from South Walsham and Yarmouth too, for 'it is there that you will find the disease,' he had said. And he had been right, for in that plague, the first, there had been fewer deaths in the country villages, although it had become something to be constantly feared and suffered. His thoughts turn inward to his own loss – Henry, my son.

'You know, Peter,' he said, as he left the village, and its people behind, 'when the good king Edward reigned, they were the times we will remember as fine times. There were the plagues, of course, but we had a king that we could love and trust, and know that he loved and trusted us. He would not have brought the misery to his people that they are now suffering. Even though he knew how to spend money, and make war, he would not have taken the little money his people had, nor the bread from their table, think you?'

‘T’is true. We have come to a pretty pass. And I am saddened that, although I pray, and I pray most mightily, it seems that there is nothing I can do. It truly strains my belief, Bart.’

Their talk continues. Their inner feelings, hopes and fears, are expressed but in a halting manner, for the motion of the lumbering trot of old boy, jogging and jerking, makes it difficult to continue a conversation. The journey to Norwich has always been a pleasure for Bartholomew, each part of the familiar road bringing an expectation, be it arrival or return, neither of which holds any pleasure for him today. Whatever had happened in the past, and there had been many hardships, God knows, none had filled him with the fear that he is feeling now. Nor has he ever felt so confused about Margery, their last encounter still being so close and clear in his mind. It is as though the very fabric of his life is being torn apart in many ways.

He understands the fear that is uppermost in his mind, that the uprising may have led to much loss of life, and that John, who was more than likely to have been a part of the uprising, had been captured by Bishop le Spencer. As the sun moves higher in the sky, and the road approaches the outskirts of Norwich, that fear almost overcomes him with the possibility of what they will find. His throat becomes dry, his heart beats faster.

The cathedral bell tolls the hour of mid-afternoon as they reach the Bishop’s bridge. Peter clutches at his shoulder, ‘I think it best that I leave you here, Bart,’ he whispers in Bartholomew’s ear. ‘It may be that any two or more people together would be seen to be a part of the rebel group. God go with you, and take ye care,’ as he slips from the horse’s back onto the ground.

Even that whisper sounds loud, thinks Bartholomew, for they had entered a silent world – a city with no people. At least there were none that he could immediately see. Where were they all? Yet, as he asked himself that question, there was a sound almost like a distant wave on a shoreline. It was, he knew, the sound of a crowd’s slight movement in body and voice, and it came from the direction of the castle where the gallows stood. Was it a cowed crowd, possibly fearful for their safety, even for their lives?

What should he do? Firstly he must find a place for the horse. On horseback he would stand out, and that would not do. The Adam and Eve, he thinks. The stable boy there knows him, he would not be with the crowd for he would be needed in the stable, and he

would be only too happy to earn a penny. Past the cathedral he goes, and takes the first street into Elm Hill, over the cobbles, to the stable-yard of the Adam and Eve.

‘A penny for you, lad, if you look after my old feller,’ his voice sounds croaky in his own ears, fearful and frightened, yet the boy seems unconcerned.

‘Be you goin’ to the hangin’, master,’ he says, a half smile on his face, a hank of hair falling over his eyes, and dirty face, hands outstretched to catch at the reins. ‘They do say that the bishop caught up with the men at North Walsham, and has brought them back to the gallows.’

‘Not for me, my boy. My business is different. But I will be back before dark, be assured,’ as he moves swiftly away. Best not let him know too much. But what will he find when he catches up with the sound he can now hear from farther away? For suddenly the sibilant rustle that he first heard, has become a soft murmur of voices.

He moves swiftly, past the cathedral to his left, hurrying through Tombland, and now running into King Street, and turning right to where the fish markets are usually held. That would be the bishop, he thinks, to take a life where people come for food. It would be how he would think. Even though Bartholomew is indebted to the church for his see, he was more than aware of his bishop’s character.

And there is the place, an area of ground usually full of a lively group of people, talking, shouting, and bargaining. A silent crowd now stood here, but across from them, in a space, he could see a bedraggled figure, being pulled and pushed by men in the bishop’s livery, toward the gallows erected in the shadow of the castle. Could it be? Yes, the figure was –John Litester. What he had most feared. Bartholomew edges closer to the front. All around him the crowd of people are pressed together. Many would know John. Many would be wishing that they could cry out, and stop what they knew was about to happen, but would be fearful of the many bishop’s men that surrounded them. Few would exactly know the terrible sight they were about to see.

John throws back his head, and Bartholomew can see the face he knows so well, now drawn and pale, bruised and battered, yet with the light of his convictions still burning in his eyes. The men holding him push him toward the standing gallows. Beside them Bartholomew sees a man with a long knife in hand. Oh no! Oh, not that, he thinks. Not the

worst of all. Now a crowd, further come, presses against him, and he realises he is unable to get away. He will have to watch the whole procedure.

The bishop arrives. As usual he rides his white stallion, and Bartholomew remembers the last occasion, three years ago, when he has seen him thus mounted, on a very different occasion. He is high above the crowd, demanding attention. Cold and haughty, not a hint of emotion on his face when words issue from his mouth:

‘You have led rebels, and conspired against your king, John Lister. For that you will be hung, drawn and quartered. And may God forgive you, for no man shall.’

A shudder runs through the crowd, a slow movement of bodies, closely pressed, and a low murmur begins. He hears what seems to be an echoing of ‘oh, no!’ coming from different sides of the crowd. The bishop’s face displays a look of anger, and he holds his hand up in an imperative motion that stops any further sound. Then John shuffles onto the step beneath the noose as best he can for he has been brutally used, his face a mass of blood and bruises, his clothes torn and dirty.

He is shown to be such a small figure, pitted against the large figure of the bishop, man and horse above him. Nevertheless he lifts a head crowned with tangled hair and speaks proudly, ‘Yes, I have led rebels, bishop le Spencer. I have led them against the tyranny of a king and a government who have brought evil by the iniquity of high taxes, and have caused much pain and sorrow that all poor people have had to bear. I go to my death with pride, and God forgive you, my lord, for it is certain no man in this kingdom will.’

Words fall clearly from the swollen lips. Then he lifts his head to place it within the confines of the noose. Bartholomew finds it difficult to restrain his emotions as the hanging begins. There is the sound of indrawn breath from the crowd, and then a deep and horrified silence. No man speaks up for the king. In the silence somewhere a cockerel crows, and it seems to bring a greater sense of drama, a connection with a story of a denial and a death, and a story of which most people standing there would know so well.

The hangman places the noose around the neck of the condemned man, and kicks the step from under his feet. The swordsman lifts his sword, and before John’s body makes its last and convulsive movement, cuts and slices through his chest and stomach. There was a sloshing sound, a gushing and spraying of blood falling onto people standing close by, a

red flood spreading over the earth. With horror Bartholomew watches all of John's intestines spill out while yet John lives. There is a length of steaming, wriggling bladder, heart attached and still beating, and with it a strong smell, the rank smell that Bartholomew can only compare with the yearly killing of the pig. My God! It's like the killing of an animal.

He senses also another scent, that of overwhelming human fear. A small wavelike movement sways the watching crowd, and there is an intake of breath almost as loud as the sound of John's head, as it is struck from his body, and falls with a thud to the ground. Close by Bartholomew, a woman sobs, and there is much coughing and shuffling of feet, but nobody dare say a word.

Only a few moments before, he has looked into John's eyes, as they found his own amongst the crowd. In them he had seen no fear, but only the essence of John's courage - and pride, pride that he is facing this final terror in truth, with strength, and as an example of courage for all those who have surrounded him at the last. And strangely, it seemed to Bartholomew, that John's eyes seemed to be joyfully locked onto a distant place of beauty and wonder.

'Listen carefully, you that are here. Know that for his false setting against our king, the head of this plotter shall be impaled at the main Norwich gate, a quarter of his body will hang over his house, and the other quarters in the main squares in North Walsham where he was caught, and in the market places of Lynn and in Yarmouth. And the same will be meted out for anybody who attempts the same. God save the king.'

A look of disdain for the crowd spills from a face, which is flushed and ugly in its anger. The bishop turns the horse's head quickly, digging into his sides, almost knocking over some of the shocked and silent crowd as he leaves.

The head and parts of the body are lifted into a waiting cart. Bartholomew watches a trailing arm and hand attached to a body part, still partly clothed in what now appeared to be dirty rags. He holds his hand over his mouth for he fears that he will spew, that any food that he had eaten so much earlier will spill out, as rotten as the sight that he had observed. He was no ordinary observer, his feelings went so deep that he could not weep, and yet he knows that, if he began to do so, he would never stop. There had been many sad events in

his life, and even though his son's death had filled him with despair, yet it was nothing compared to the feelings that this witnessed slaughter had brought.

The crowd disperses in silence. I must get away, he thinks, but where to? In a daze, and without thought, he stumbles away from the blood soaked ground. His steps follow the way back to the inn, and then as King Street opens to his right, he finds himself walking again the familiar street on which, in the past three years, he has often come with a gift of salt for the anchoress. This is where he must go. This is where he will find, he thinks, someone who will possibly bring him the strength of belief and faith that will help to see him through this awful time.

It is a street with trees and buildings that has always brought pleasure to him, but not today. At the farther end he turns to walk the last few steps uphill, and as usual, he goes around the church to the door of the anchoress' home. Will she allow him entrance, he wonders, for his words to her must not be spilled out loudly through the curtain of her cell, for fear of being overheard. He knocks at the door, and the face of the anchoress' maid Sarah appears.

'Why, master Edrich, and God be with you. What would you wish?' she asks. There is a sombre look on the face that faces him, not the smile and bright greeting to which he was used. Has the news already reached the anchor-hold? This is a woman who must be well aware of the happenings of today, he thinks.

'I would wish to have words with the anchoress, Sarah, should that be alright,' Bartholomew's voice sounds hoarse to his own ears, as it says the first words that come to his confused mind. He does not think of the preliminaries that may be needed for such a request, he only knows that he needs help for what is necessary for his dead friend. Whether that will be possible he does not know, but for now he can only pray that this simple wish will be met. For where else can he go? He must speak to someone.

Sarah answers him 'Do you come in, master Edrich, and I will go ask my mistress if that be possible, for she may be at prayer right now,' and Sarah opens the door and beckons him into a small room, simply furnished. He sees a chair with foot stool before it, and a small table, on which parchment and feathered quill lies, pushed against a wall where a crucifix hangs. Another chair stands by a wall where there is a chest with woollen material spilling from underneath the lid. A brown handmade woollen mat lies on the floor, and

there a cat is curled. Curtains blow inwards, caught by a strong easterly wind; their colour, a dark green, contrasts strongly with white walls. An herbal smell permeates the air, and the intense quiet brings to him an immediate and welcome sense of peace. Even the cat is still, its mottled colour blending into the brown mat, as though a part of it. Sarah indicates another chair standing by the wall underneath the window. 'I will not be long, Take a seat, if you please.' she says as she walks away through a doorway, and into a passage. He sits, a dishevelled figure, feeling dirty in this place with its simple cleanliness. But he is here, and here he will stay until either he is given audience, or told that he must go. What is it that he will request of the anchoress, Julian?

Firstly he will ask that, in her goodness she will pray for his friend, and for his soul to be received in heaven, for there will be no chantry church mass, or any church prayers for his soul. And he will ask that she pray for him to make the right decision for his own actions. Lastly he will request, if she so wishes it, that her prayers be directed toward good for the many people who are now suffering under the yoke of a tyranny.

He sees the cat begin to wake, and he watches the sinuous movement of its limbs, stretching from back to front in a fluent motion. It yawns, a wide pink mouth opening wide, and as it sits up, turns to lick and smooth the fur along its back. It stands, and before he realises what is happening, jumps onto his lap. Bartholomew knows little of cats. He is not a small animal lover, for they are meant to work, like the village people, and like other and larger animals. Cats are in the buildings to catch rats, as are dogs. Therefore, he is taken unawares as to what he should do with this little creature, now purring on his thighs. He puts tentative fingers in on the cat's soft fur, and strokes, and lifts his head as Sarah moves through telling him: 'Our lady Julian asks that you will wait for a short while before she joins you, Master Edrich. And she wishes that I bring you a drink of ale, should it be your wish.'

'I would be glad of that, Sarah,' he answers, for his throat is dry and aching with emotion. It is with gratitude that he takes a full pot from her hand when she returns, and murmurs the words 'God and you be thanked, Sarah.' He drains the ale in one short motion of upending, before returning it empty.

'You see I have company,' he says as he continues stroking the little cat.

‘I do, sir. She’s that friendly, and sometimes a nuisance. Is she alright with you? Call out should you wish her gone,’ and Sarah bustles away.

A while after Sarah leaves me I move swiftly from the cell and into the parlour, my feet making little sound, my body and mind still held in the quietness of prayer. There have been many requested these past few days, for the people who come to my window tell me of the fearsome events that are now taking place. My prayers and intercession have been requested for many a sad or disastrous thing that has befallen them; some are without food surpassing the need for clothes or shoes, for how may man live without bread? These thoughts are in my mind as my steps take me into my parlour.

There he sits, a countryman by his dress, and as I enter he removes his hat, holding it in one hand, and remains seated, for our little ‘puss’ has made her way to his lap.

‘Ah, I see puss has found you, good sir,’ a soft voice sounds near him, and he turns to see a brown clad figure who has come silently into the room on slippered feet. This he knows is Julian, for although he does not see the full face, covered as it is by her veil, he sees, and recognises the eyes as he had seen them before. He remembers the kindness that had shone in them then, a look it appears that is constant. As though love was contained therein, and was there, at that moment, for him alone. So it would be, he thinks, for anyone who would find themselves before her. ‘I do not think that you will be released easily,’ she says with a little laugh. ‘I am sure, however, that we can conduct such words as we will share, and without her help, do you not think?’

As I welcome this man, and sit down, I take in his appearance. His clothes, a countryman’s, are awry, and they smell of horse and sweat. His hair is rumpled, face and beard grubby, and there is an air of one who has travelled afar today. But, beyond the sweat and dirt, there is a kindly face that contains blue eyes that are full of intelligence, and a rather large nose. I see that those eyes have only recently seen tears. I ask his name.

‘I am Bartholomew Edrich, lord of the manor at Thrigby, lady,’ he says in reply to her enquiry. ‘And I am in much distress... today I have lost a friend, and in the most horrible way...’ the words crowd quickly, loudly and hoarsely, from a mouth straining to speak the words of such an indecency, a despairing, loud torrent. The cat, as though shot by an arrow, leaps from his thighs, and onto the ground, and then to the welcome soft material of the gown that covers the lap of Julian.

Like the cat, it is as though I can feel his pain. This thing, most dreadful, has affected him so that he can no longer withhold his emotions. I feel I must assure him of my will to help him in his distress.

Ah, puss! You too feel the pain of another, but you must sit quietly now on your mat, for there is work to be done,' she says, as she picks up the cat, and places it back on the mat before returning to her chair. 'I am here, and it is God's will, sir,' she says, as she settles again there, 'that I attend, listen, help, and pray for those that come to me in distress. Be not afearred that what you ask will not be heard and helped, both in prayer and love.'

'I ask, mother Julian, firstly that prayers be said for the soul of my friend John Litester, who has been so terribly killed this day. His voice falters, and he breaks down into sobs, and fractured words... 'and his body parts...hung...and I fear... I fear, Mother Julian,' and now his words come in a rush... 'that there will be no priest, nor any person in Norwich who will do the rites for him, no church anywhere that will chant mass for his soul. I fear that he has gone to his death without absolution... and he a good and kind man who would do no harm to anybody, but died because of the love he had for his neighbours, the people who were around him and whose pain he could see.'

John Litester – he is one I have known in my other life, a dyer to whom we took our cloth. What has befallen this man with whom we dealt? I know that I am here to be a conduit for God's power, and wisdom, that my own past is now no longer a part of this life I now lead, but I am unable to quench memories that arise in my mind.

For a moment I am silent. The enormity of what has occurred needs both my own comprehension, and a calming sense to be brought to bear. I bring my hands together in prayer form and ask the Lord to give me the wisdom to find words of comfort and care. I speak slowly and deliberately, so that the words will show that care, and slow this man's emotions to a point, where what I say will bring him to an understanding of my concern for his feelings... 'I cannot stop pain and distress, Master Edrich', I say, 'I can, indeed, pray that God, who is all-knowing, has compassion for his death, and will, because of his love for us humans, receive his soul. I pray also for your distress, and the distress of any who are of his family. This will I do, and will continue to do, so that comfort is brought both to you, and to those who have loved John Litester.' I place my hands together and pray,

'Father of all, dear God, we ask that you receive the soul of thy servant John Litester. He has been a man of deep respect for the ways of your church, and has followed thy way through all his time. His love and compassion for his fellow men have led him to an untimely end, and we pray that you will receive him not only for his worshipful soul, but for that loving soul for others that he has always held. We ask that he will now be found a place beside you in heaven. We ask this, dear Father, for the sake of your Son, our Lord, who is all-suffering, and all-loving, and who understands our own suffering; and who brings love to your people, as indeed he does to all those who suffer, even as did John Litester. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen'

I am quiet, searching further in my mind. 'And while you will continue to pray, maybe you will see that a mass be said for your friend's soul to be granted acceptance in your own church. I would also wish that you will make these prayers that I will tell you, soon and often – at this time and always. And they are to God: 'God help me', and to Christ 'Jesus, son of God, have mercy on me.' Those are the prayers that will bring you comfort. But, be assured that my prayers will also be continued for your friend's soul. I will pray that he is shriven of any misdeeds, and that his soul be received by God in heaven.' I turn my eyes to meet his, 'but, tell me, is there any other way by which I can aid you to go your way with less distress,' I say.

Their eyes meet for a brief moment. Then as hers close, and her hands move to take a woman's way of prayer, he closes his own, and feels the words, 'God help me' move like a kindly soft breeze in his mind. There is a stillness and quiet in the room, broken only by the sound of the cat's purr; and even that seems as a prayer. It was as though he was being covered and wrapped in a blanket of love. Warmth spreads around, and in, and through him, as though there were kindly arms holding him and rocking him close, like those of his mother in his childhood. And he feels and hears John's voice speaking in his ear, although there is no sense to the words he is saying, he feels John's closeness. He knows not whether this that he is feeling is real, whether what he is hearing is there, whether all this is a dream. It does not seem to matter. After a while, he hears the voice of the anchoress speaking, and these were her words: 'Remember, Master Edrich that all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'

I say those words, so well remembered from the time of the shewings that God granted me through his Grace. I know that they will remain in his mind and bring him the hope his soul needs so much. I know also, that these are the words that will continue to bring hope to all those who come to me in distress, and in need of solace.

She raises her head and speaks again, ‘and now, Master Edrich, is there anything more that we can speak about, anything that would aid you to go about your way with less distress?’ For a moment she is quiet, and then she continues: ‘but before you answer, ‘is there a practical way that you may help? Would Master Litester have a family needing aid? This would, I think, not only be beneficial for them, but would also give you a way to assuage the grief you feel.’

It is my way when in meditation, and in the quietness therein, that I ask that I be given some direction in the way I assist those that come to a means of moving toward a way for them. Not to direct them, but to propose a possibility that they can grasp, a practical way for them to move onward in love and compassion, as prayer opens their hearts and minds.

‘He has a wife, Mother Julian, who will be beside herself with grief, for they had a good marriage. I cannot think how it will be for her, when they bring part of his body, to hang over their house and shop. Their only son was taken into the king’s army, so she will have...’ and here his voice stopped and he again felt his emotions overcoming him... ‘no one to turn to, you mean,’ the anchoress concluded. ‘But there you are there, Master Edrich.’

‘And it had crossed my mind that I could assist in that way, but it would need great care, for there are many watching. While I wish to help, there is my own family and the village people, and I would not want to be brought to the attention of those who would injure them in any way. But I cannot help but ask why, why it is that a man of God could not see the needs of the little people, and stand up for their rights?’

This is a question that has come to my mind often, and particularly when I hear the words of those who ask for my help, both in prayer and intercession. For so many have been used and assaulted by the rich. Is it through lack of love and concern for a fellow human being? Some would think it more. Is it, then, evil? I hear the words of God again: ‘Evil is necessary’, but I cannot help but wonder why. And then I return to Christ’s

suffering, and I begin to understand the possibility, that though evil may bring suffering, it is through our own suffering that our hearts, and indeed our souls, are opened to the pain, hurt, and suffering of others. And this is where compassion is born. But what if, like the poor whose first need is food and clothing, such words – love and compassion – are just words, in a place where survival of self and family comes first, and is all? This is a question that needs all my power of prayer and discernment, and one that I will return to again, and again. What, however, is the answer that I can bring to this man?

‘It is not for us to ponder that question, Sir,’ I say. ‘We may need to attempt the act of forgiveness. But, I think that we must leave that question to God’s will, and pray that good deeds, and not evil ones, are brought into the minds of our rulers. And pray also that we have the strength to overcome suffering, and learn from it, so that we may help those around us who are in pain, even as did our Lord. It is by our actions that we will be blessed, and to pray ‘God help me’ with all our strength, and learn to understand with all our hearts, that his love will prevail, in whatever way he wills. Pray like that, help your neighbour, be there for those that depend on you, and you will walk in the ways of our Lord, Master Edrich. And as it was told to me: ‘All shall be well.’

Bartholomew sits quietly, and for a few moments in silence. Then he speaks again. ‘I am most grateful that you have taken time to listen to my needs, kind lady. I am most grateful that you drew me, together with yourself, into a prayer that has set some of my fears to rest, and that you have asked for the soul of John Lister to be brought to rest by your own prayers. I ask most humbly that you will pray for me to take the right course for the good of those around me, and that, in your prayers, you will also ask that the endurances of the king’s people be strengthened’.

I rise slowly from my chair. ‘That will I do, sir, most gladly. But, as I see the day closing around us I must needs go to my evening prayers. First, however, before I leave, and you begin your journey back to Thrigby, let us both stand to say a prayerful aid to the coming nightfall’. And, with me, Bartholomew stands to join in the words of the evening prayer. Our words come together, slowly and gently: ‘Lighten our darkness we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night;

*for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.’**

‘I will add my prayers for your safe return tonight, Master Bartholomew,’ I say, as turn away, and make my way back through the passageway, and, gratefully to the warm darkness and the comfortable silence of my cell.

For a short while Bartholomew sits in a state of quietness such as he had not felt since the news of the revolt that had reached him in Thrigby. He feels as though he has been released from the pain and the anger that had enveloped him, if only temporarily. He now has the freedom to plan, and to know that the intention he now holds in his mind is the right one. He knows that he must make his way to John’s house, under the cover of the evening’s dusk, to find Martha. The words and prayerful advice given him by the anchoress have strengthened him, and brought him to the right decision: to take Martha away from the hate and fear with which she will be surrounded, and with him, back to Thrigby - for John’s sake, and for her safety.

He bends over the sleeping cat, trailing a finger over her fur, and waking her. Sarah comes into the parlour, wiping her hands on a cloth, a look of concern etched on her face. ‘Ah, Master Edrich, but it has been a sad day for Norwich, this day.’ Sarah stretches her hand to touch his shoulder. ‘But we must all pray for those who have lost a loved one. May God go with you this night.’

Alongside Sarah a little maid stands, perhaps another maidservant? Her hands are held together in prayer, as though to add to Sarah’s. ‘And,’ Sarah continues, ‘should you be journeying home tonight, you must haste to leave the city before curfew. Later you will have a moon to light your journey.’ It was as though she had guessed the necessity for his early departure, and he supposed that in Norwich, where much was known of neighbours, friends and others, there was little, he could see, that escaped her eyes. ‘Would you be wishing for a drink ‘ere you go’, she continues.

‘I thank you, Sarah. You are most kind. My journey awaits me, I think.’
‘Then, God go with you,’ she repeats, as he turns away from the doorway, and with an acknowledging uplifted hand, moves into the evening dusk.

He now knows what he must do.

* This, the Evening Prayer from Common Prayer Book. It could have been similar then.

SIX

Martha, 1381

He is pleased that he has left home wearing his old boots, for their leather soles are soft and as silent as a slipper. He will need to make his way carefully through a city where Spencer's men would be watchful for other rebels. It was fortunate that he knew Norwich well, for he would have to take back streets, and make his way to John's house in a roundabout way.

Instead of returning by King Street, he turns left out of the churchyard and begins to walk down Rouen Street, thence past the market-square, and farther to the road that runs alongside the new city walls. From there it is easy to slip along side streets until he finds the dyer's house by the river. The city is quiet, as though holding its breath after the afternoon horror. There are few people abroad although, as he passes various ale houses, he can see many men gathered. There seems less sound coming forth, he thinks, and certainly not the singing, to which ale and companionship, often leads. He sidles past those doorways in short, fast steps.

Soon he hears the sound of the river, and knows that he cannot be far from John's place. He dreads what he may find there. He is fearful of how he may enable Martha (if she is still alive) and himself, to make their way back to the Adam and Eve, and thence to Bishop's Bridge and away. The horse is a problem, but he says, 'thanks be to the Lord' under his breath that the old boy is quiet, and fortunately needs re-shoeing, so his hooves when striking the cobbles will make less sound.

Getting away from Norwich with Martha is the first problem, but there will be more to face when they arrive back in Thrigby. Should he give her a new name? How to explain her arrival in the village? And above all, he wonders if Margery will accept the fact that he intends to make Martha a part of their household. It was only what John would have done for him, after all. So, a new name, a new area from which she has come, maybe South Walsham, and total silence about her connection with John, otherwise he is aware that his rental of the manor will be at stake. His mind darts around over all these questions, for he must have the answers ready.

He turns into the well known alleyway that leads to John's house. Very soon he will face, he knows, the remnants of his friend, for he cannot avoid the entrance to the dyer's yard. His steps falter, but then he sternly tells himself to be a man, he has a job to do, and his strength must flow to help this poor woman who is in dire need. It is then, with his arrival, that he sees what he has most feared – his friend's dead hand hanging from the portion of his body. Hanging down still, but not out to greet him as it had been in the past.

He did, then, what he afterwards felt was like a commitment to the man with whom he had been so close. He took the hand between the two of his own and whispered: 'I am here, John, I am here to help Martha. So sleep well, old friend.' He felt the tears on his face, and brushed them off quickly. No time for that now.

The house is closed. He pushes the door open and makes his way through the shop and to the back, where the mixing vats stand. Martha,' he whispers, and when there is no reply, 'Martha, Martha, 'tis Bartholomew. Are you there?'

There is a slight movement, no more than the scuffle of a rat, but there is no sound. The smell of the vats, now holding days-old dying cloth, almost overwhelms him, and he holds a hand over his nose.

'Martha!' he says more urgently, where are you? 'Tis Bart, Martha, don't be afraid. I am here to help you. There is no-one else here, Martha, make a sound do...'

And then he hears it, like a little puppy yelping, a high sound that becomes a low moan. Where is it coming from? Behind the farthest vat, he thinks, and pushes his way past the nearest vats and round to the back. He finds it hard to see at all, but his eyes, now becoming accustomed to the deep darkness of the room, finds a huddle of what looks like a heap of cloth on the damp floor. He reaches it, and kneels down to touch, to hold, and then to lift a limp body. He holds her close. Where is the large and plump Martha he once knew? It seems that her bulk has vanished, gone suddenly like the felling of branches from a tree.

'I'm here! I'm here,' he murmurs, as though assuring a little child.

'Oh, Bartholomew,' it is a choking voice, not at all like the laughing, merry voice he remembers, but at least she has managed to find it. 'Oh, Bartholomew, what am I to do?'

'Well, Martha, you are coming with me. That's what you are going to do. I am taking you home to Thrigby. But first I must tell you that this must be planned with care,

for there may still be many of Spencer's men on the main streets, looking for other rebels. Can you do this, do you think? And then, when we are on the road, we will need to find you another name, and another place from whence you have come. But I will talk with you about that as we make our way back. You must be brave, now, Martha,' he continues, as he releases her, 'you must be strong, for it will be a shock for you to see what they have done to John.'

She speaks again. 'I have seen it. Bart. After they came with such shouts and noise, and hung his poor body part above the gateway, I went outside, and there...his dear hand hung...and I kissed it...and I wept for my poor man,' again the choking sound, but no tears. It seemed that the shock had been too great for tears, or maybe that she had already wept them away.

'We cannot wait around too long, Martha,' he says, 'We must make our way out of the city before the curfew is called, and then a full moon will light our way home. First you must bring a bag, holding something that you will be seen to be delivering, and I will fill a sack, or hold a piece of cloth, that is if you have some?'

'She answers, 'yes, we have...in the back room,'

'Then, I will find something to hold, as though I have bought it. You will walk in front of me. Cover your face as much as you can. I will follow shortly behind. We will take the back ways to the Adam and Eve, to get my horse, who you will ride and I will lead. If we are stopped, we are pilgrims who have been to the tomb of the boy William, and because we have not found board, are starting on our further pilgrimage to Walsingham.'

It took just a few moments for the gathering of the few books that had been, for John, such precious articles, for Martha was not happy that his well loved books should be left for anyone to take. Other small and well loved items find their way there, things that had belonged to John, little intimate things that Martha had treasured, a small silver beaker, the spoons with which they both ate, her needles, and a slip of paper with writing on that she pushed down the side. She did not indicate what it was, but Bartholomew felt that it must be something that John had written to her in the past. All bundled into a cloth bag. On the top she laid a piece of cloth.

Bartholomew finds a piece of un-dyed cloth, and winds it up to look like a bolt that he has bought. 'Now, Martha...now we really must trust that God will be with us, for it serves no purpose for you to be left here to chance what could happen.'

The worst thing, he thinks, will be passing John's body part. It is grim, for already a nasty smell is beginning to attach itself to the remains; the hot June weather, and loss of blood, have seen to that. They both manage to move past without being touched by, or even looking at the hanging hand. Bartholomew turns to look at the sky, and sees that there is some time before dusk, and gives Martha a little push forward. 'You first,' he says.

It seems that fortune is with them, for their way through the streets is easy, she in front, and he some steps behind, walk on without any dangerous meetings. Soon they are standing in the stables of the Adam and Eve. There is no sign of the stable boy. Bartholomew walks through the darkening stable to the back, and there he finds the boy fast asleep on a bundle of straw. It is good it is thus, he thinks, because they will be able to get away without anyone at the inn getting a glimpse of his companion. He bends down and gives the boy a little shake.

'Hey, boy, here is your penny. Don't get up. I'll not need your help to saddle my horse.'

The boy shudders awake. He rubs his eyes with a grubby hand, and croaks, 'Ah Master, there you are. I had thought you'd been hanged too.' He takes the penny in one hand, 'I should ask for more seeing you've been so long...'

'Put it aside, lad, and go back to your slumbers,' Bartholomew gives the boy a little shake, and pushes him back into the straw. 'And think yourself lucky that you haven't received a clip over the ear for your cheekiness.'

He rises up, and moves swiftly back to where Martha stands by the horse. She has laid her head against his flank, and is rubbing her hand along his mane, pulling out the coarse hair to her face. 'There's something about the smell of a horse, Bart', she says, 'something so comforting.' He is pleased to see her returning to be like the Martha he knows. Well, almost anyway, as apart from the mighty shock of John's death, she would have had a natural fear for her own safety.

Bridle fitted, saddle flung over and belted up, and he places his hand down for her foot to be placed into it, as she mounts the horse. Her gown rides up above her knees, and

she rearranges it while pulling the covering back on her head. The bag rides before her, and he places the bolt of cloth above it. 'Alright?' he asks. Then, taking the bridle leather in his hand, he leads the old boy out onto the street, turning right toward the cathedral. This will possibly be the difficult part, for the bishop's palace lies in that direction. This might be the best bit of acting I have ever done, he thinks.

He leads the horse up the rise and into Tombland. Turning left, he joins the walkway by the river that will take him to the Bishop's bridge. Everything seems quiet, no Spencer's men around as far as he can see. His feeling is that he and Martha do not stand out as anything but ordinary people. The horse's feet make a steady soft sound on the cobbles. The cobbles will be hard on his hooves, he thinks. On his return home they will need some attention.

There are evening family sounds, the smell of cooking as they pass houses, and he realises that he is hungry. Apart from the bread offered at Julian's anchorage, there had been so little thought of food in the past few hours. He looks up to the sky, rooks are drifting home in ones and twos, and starlings are gathering in flocks, to sweep across the sky back to their resting place in trees. At any other time he would be standing watching and enjoying an evening's rest from the toil of the day, now his mind is on moving quietly, without a sign of haste, and away from the city. The cathedral tower stands to his right. They do say that there is to be a stone spire built, and he wonders, momentarily, when that will be. The river bends, and he sees the new Cow Tower. They are nearly at the bridge.

A figure walks toward them – a man. 'God be with you, Master and Mistress. Where be you off to, then? You look fare to travel,' a voice enquires.

Bartholomew thinks quickly. 'And God be with you, too, Sir. We've been to the shrine of the boy William, and we will now be taking to the road for Walsingham. Our journey, until it ends, will be long. From Suffolk we came, and now we journey to Walsingham, and must haste after to return to get the harvest in.'

'Aye, harvest-time – it be that way soon. God be with you both while on your journey, Master and Mistress.'

'And God go with you, Sir,' Bartholomew replies, feeling great relief, for, thank God this man was not a Spencer's man. He picks up the reins again. They had dropped from his hand, in the shock at seeing somebody when they were so close to their escape

from the city. He will need to be walking beside the horse a short time more, before he could mount to ride behind Martha. There was still a long way ahead, but he hoped that they would be able to buy a pot of ale, and maybe a piece of cheese, and a hunk of bread. Soon, though, he would need to rest, for the day had been full of pain, and very long.

The well known road lies before him, and his steps gather speed. There is little sound from the woman. Was she sleeping where she sat? Or had the events of the day finally stilled her tongue. He is glad about that, because he needs all his breath to continue. There will be ample time to talk later.

At the Field of Blows he finally stops the horse. 'I'll be jumping up behind you, Martha,' he says. 'We will make better time, and it will rest my legs.'

'But see, the moon rises in the sky. It will surely aid our way, won't it,' comes her reply.

'That be true, Martha.'

He looks for a stone or something to help him mount the old boy. He spies a large boulder lying by the side of the dirt road, a natural place to rest when on a journey, no doubt, and placing his foot on it, reaches around Martha, and gathers the reins in his hands. He settles himself behind her soft body. The saddle they share is unlike the ones rich people use; those are high leather seats with stirrups attached, and made for lone riders and battle; his is a wide homemade strip of flat leather on a piece of unbleached cloth. He needs no stirrups, for he does not ride old boy often, but when he does it is sufficient to have something between their skins, for his own comfort.

The horse goes at a steady pace, and the road rises before them. They reach Burlingham as the moon reaches a quarter of the heavens. The street is quiet. Most children would be abed, and most men and their wives likely there, too. He sees candlelight spilling from the door of the alehouse, and hears raised voices. It would be good to drink some ale, he thinks, and pulls the horse to a standstill outside, sliding off.

'I could do with a drink, Martha. And you?'

'That would go down well, Bart,' came the reply. 'Shall I stay here while you go? Maybe 'twould be better if I hold his head?'

'I doubt he'd move, Martha. But if you'd like to stretch your legs a bit, I'll lift you down.'

‘I can slide, Bart. After all I was a country girl.’ Again he notices the change in her body as he eases her down. Fear, and then suffering, has taken its toll.

‘Bide here a moment or two while I see what is to be had here. I’ll maybe find some food, too,’ he says as he moves to the doorway.

It is not long before he returns with two beakers filled to their tops, placing them in her hands, ‘hold these a moment while I fetch a hunk of bread and some cheese that the mistress here has given me. When we’ve drunk we’ll find somewhere to sit a while, before we move on, for I am fare tired.’

She lifts one beaker to her lips and drinks long. She finds herself trying to think when she last ate or drank, and is unable to remember. The past few days have been like a nightmare. So dreadful. She cannot feel what life would be without the man who has been her work, and life, and companion, for almost twenty years – since first she had left her village, a girl of fifteen or so, to marry and live with him in Norwich. It had seemed to her a very exciting life after the village. They had had a son whom they called Peter. They had worked together and built up a good trade. And now there was no John, no work, no Peter. God knows where he is, taken away as he had been, into the king’s army.

What life will hold for me now, she thinks. Well, thank the blessed Lord I have been brought away by a good man from all those dreadful things. John was a good man, too, and he lost his life for the people he saw to be suffering. And he cared for those people, and wanted to see a better life for them. I cannot blame him for that love, nor for my loss, for he was following the way of our Lord. Even though he knew the danger, he would not know that his concern for people would leave me alone in this world.

Bartholomew drinks his ale, drawing it into his throat with a slurping sound. ‘Bye! That’s better! When you’ve finished I’ll take the beakers back and we will be on our way.’

She tips up the beaker, and drains the last drop before handing it back. ‘Aye, I’m ready.’

‘I think,’ he said, ‘that we will go as far as Acle before we stop to eat. There’s water there for the horse. Anyway, I’ll just take these back,’ and he turns to re-enter the noisy atmosphere of the alehouse.

She puts the cheese and bread carefully in her bag, on top of her goods, and stands by the horses head awaiting his return. She will need a lift up again, for he was no pony,

but a large horse with a wide back, as befits working horses. How patient and how blessed he is, not to have to suffer the pain of loss as humans do. He has a good master, she thinks, as she sees Bartholomew on his way back. And I, I could not have wished for a better friend when I most needed one.

‘Up then, Martha,’ he places his hands together again, a place for her foot, and with a grunt he lifts her. ‘We had good wishes from those at their ale, for our pilgrimage to Walsingham!’ He chuckles. ‘Off we go, old boy.’

The moon, now higher in the sky, does indeed light their way, and after a while they reach Acle. There is no movement in the street, and they are silent, rocking to the movement of the horse that, while pleasant, increases their feeling of weariness. An almost somnolent mood falls upon them, and Martha yawns loudly.

‘Aye, I feel like that, too,’ he says. ‘But we’re nearly at the place where we can eat, and rest. We both need a rest, I think. We’ll not be able to cross the ferry, until Simon wakes, anyway, and that’s a way yet. If I know anything about him he will be there at dawn. Then it’s not far to Thrigby, and home.’

There is little response from Martha as she slumps forward, in utter tiredness. Bartholomew finds it difficult to hold both the reins, and her limp body. He was thankful to catch a glimpse of the river, and the willow tree, his usual stopping place, and draws the horse up alongside.

‘Here we are,’ his voice sounds hoarse and tired, even to his own ears. ‘Here we are, Martha,’ he says giving her a little shake. ‘You’ll have to wake up for a moment for me to get us down.’

A mumble, that he takes to be assent, answers him, and her body straightens momentarily. He slides off the horse, and turns to help her slack body. It’s as well I brought the roll of cloth, he thinks, as both it and the bag fall alongside. We will find it useful for covering, for we will be here most of the night, and while it is warm at present, it will cool down later. He throws it over to the tree trunk, and turns to Martha, ‘just a few steps now, maw, and you’re there,’ placing a hand around her shoulders, and urging her forward.

She staggers toward the tree, and as quickly as he can, he spreads the cloth on the ground, and turns to help her sit there. ‘Lean against the trunk,’ he says, ‘for it would be good for you to eat something before you rest.’

She wakens a little, and he hears a weary voice say 'I'm sorry, Bart. I do feel so overcome with sleep.'

'And it is probably the first time you have felt able to rest for some days, Martha, so it's alright. That's what you can do, and very soon.'

Martha settled, the horse led to water, fastened to a branch, and he turns to take his own place by the tree. He has brought the bag, and fumbles within to find bread and cheese. It would have been nice to have had an onion, for he fears both cheese and bread will be dry. 'Better than nothing, though' he says as he takes out his knife, and cuts off pieces. 'Here, take this.' He turns to her, and hands first a piece of bread, and a smaller one of cheese. It was dry, but he finds saliva beginning to run in his mouth.

'Nothing like what Margery makes,' he says, 'but it'll have to do,' and begins to chew, and between mouthfuls tells Martha how he would explain her presence to the village. Margery would have to know the truth, of course, and he wonders how she will take it. He feels, he says, that it could only be helpful, for Martha would be able to bring her knowledge of different cloths and dyes to Margery, and the village. For the people there, Martha would be his cousin, her name de Walsham. Her husband had died recently of the sweating disease, leaving her with a large heriot to pay, and penniless.

'I will be able to take that part, Bart, for if you remember I lived close-by,' she says. 'It is some years since I have returned, but Pilson Green was my home.'

The moon is lighting the willow leaves that fall like a curtain around them, and casts shadows on the ground. Somewhere an owl calls, and he can hear the shrill cry of a vixen out hunting for her young. Then, suddenly, a burst of birdsong fills the air, notes full and fluent, climbing up and down – a nightingale singing to the moon. It adds to his pleasure, for, although he finds it hard to forget the past day, he cannot, as a countryman, ignore those familiar sounds, and the pleasure they bring. He turns to her, 'Sleep now, Martha. I will wake you at dawn,' and lies down beside her.

In his half-sleep he is with Margery. They lie, he feels, as they so often have done in the past, on fragrant hay, curled round one another. He flings his arm around her and feels his manhood rising. This is how he is, a lusty man, always ready. He pulls her body near to his own, and holds her close, feeling no resistance. 'My old Margery,' he murmurs, releasing the cord around hose, and draws a warm body into his.

After... he wakes. And then he becomes fully aware of the place, the woman beside him, and what has happened. 'Oh, Martha,' he says, 'what have I done? I was dreaming... and I thought you were my wife.'

She places a hand on his chest. 'It has brought me comfort, Bart. It has warmed a place in my heart that my John had, and I thought would never be opened again. A man and woman...' she murmurs falteringly ... 'they come together. It's as natural as breathing.'

This woman, he thinks... what a warm person. 'But it must not happen again, if you are to live in our house, Martha. It would not be right.' He is deeply ashamed of himself. His randy moments with ale-woman Maud do not trouble his conscience, but this... Something in him wonders, if their shared grief had brought about their coming together, and he remembers the first rising of his manhood at the death of his mother; how he had found a woman, and then felt the continuity of life to be so welcome.

He sits up, adjusts his braies,* pulls up his woollen hose, ties his rope belt, and pulls down his tunic. He is still bemused by what has befallen them. And yet, and yet, it is sometimes, as Martha had said – a comfort, a man's way to comfort. It comes with the closeness of a woman's body, and the ease of a man's arousal. He is such a man, and he cannot deny it. John had been as close as a brother. Would he have been offended by such an act – see it as brotherly? His mind seems to be going around in circles of confusion. But, he finally admits to himself that the less that is said about it, the better it will be.

He stands up and moves through the willow branches, and turns away to ease himself. The sky is lightening. They must be on their way. His voice cracks with all the emotion that the last day has brought.

'Come, Martha, it is time we moved.'

He unties the horse and brings it over. He is relieved to see that Martha is back from her morning ablutions, sees that she has washed her face in the water, and though it is still haggard, there is a brightness about it that was not there yesterday. 'Thank you, Bart,' she says, as he loads her, and the bag and cloth, up again on the horse's back.

* Braies: men's underwear made of linen, held up by a cord threaded through the top, and then rolled up around the cord to stop it cutting into the skin. Long initially, but shortened when the tunics, especially those of the rich, became shorter.

‘I’ll ride behind you part of the way, Martha. But when we arrive nearer to the village I will walk you there. You know how it is. People talk.’ And they would have cause to if they knew, he thinks.

Once more he goes through the procedure of hands cupped for her foot, lifts her on to old boy’s back, and looks for a log to help him on. He grabs the reins quickly, as he is now aware of her body before him, and eases back slightly. The horse starts off and finds its way, without directive movement of reins, onto the track leading to the ferry crossing. The sun has now cleared the wide horizon of the water-lands. It will be another perfect June day. He begins to feel less ashamed of his night-time experience, and feels hope that this choice of bringing Martha home to his manor house will work out well. He cannot think that she, the kind and warm woman that she is, will not settle comfortably, and be a good help for Margery.

Here is the ferry, but as yet, no Simon. He slides down from old boy, and walks up the river a way. There he finds Simon, on his way from his hut upstream.

‘God be with you, Simon, and are you ready for trade?’

‘Aye, Master Edrich, that be what I’m hasting for.’ His reply is quick, but, regardless of those words, he does not hurry. That is not his way. He ambles along through the tall grass by the riverside toward the ferry, taking his time, as though it does not run his life. Well, thinks Bartholomew, he would have plenty of time during the day, between the comings of the few people wanting to cross.

‘God be with you, Mistress’, Simon turns to Martha, removing his hat and bowing. ‘Do not get down from the horse. He won’t move for he has been on my ferry many a time. And where’ve you bin to, Master Edrich?’

‘South Walsham, Simon. We left, before dawn. My cousin is returning with me to Thrigby.’

‘Twill be a fine day for the rest of the way, methinks.’ Simon manoeuvres the raft up to the bank, and Bartholomew leads old boy over the muddy river side, and onto it.

‘Aye, and a good time to travel, Simon,’ he says, steadying Martha and the horse. A good time to travel, for sure, but what will await him on his return?

They reach the other side, and Bartholomew proffers a penny to Simon. ‘God bless you, master,’ he says with a bow, as Bartholomew leads the horse away.

‘And God be with you, Simon,’ he replies.

The track lies before them. A straight track through Stokesby village, past the Hillborough farm, and then the way lies close to Roger Bacton’s outlying farm before Thrigby appears. His mind worries again about what is awaiting them. There will have to be explanations to Margery, to be held together, and in confidence. While the village will be told what he has conjured up in his mind – Martha is his cousin, whose husband has very recently died.

He did not think the latter would be questioned, because, although the main ravages of the pestilence had stopped, there were still small outbreaks of that, and the sweating disease. No, it was just Margery who concerned him, for she could be uppish when she chose to be. He thinks of the episode before he left. There would have to be some soothing done there. Margery would be as aware of the importance to keep the secret of Martha’s connection with John. After all, the rental of the manor depended on it.

Around him the sounds of an awakening morning fill the air. How good to hear birdsong, and to see the softness of water in the distance. The horse’s hooves strike softly on the ground. Should he mount him again, he wonders. Then decides against it, for who knows if there would be any village folk on the road. He looks up at Martha. She is silent, no doubt wondering what this new life will hold for her.

As they arrive there they see the village awakening – men and boys walking out to work their holdings, women bustling around in vegetable patches, and children coming back from hen-runs with eggs in caught-up clothes. In the distance the corn stands high. A few villagers stand and stare at them as they move through, and there are many calls of greeting as he brings the horse, and its rider, toward the manor. He does not stop, but merely acknowledges the greetings with a wave of hand, and shouts a ‘hello’. He looks up at Martha. Her face is covered, her shoulders slump. He knows that folks will be wondering, and talking to one another as to her identity. And he is already working out in his mind how he will introduce her. First, though, it will all need to be cleared with Margery.

He walks the horse and rider into his manor yard to the stable where he helps Martha down, before taking off the bridle and saddle. I’ll turn him out to grass as soon as

we have been inside, he thinks. He will not be comfortable until he has taken Martha in, and told the household of the reason for her coming.

They mount the steps up to the hall, and he opens the door. Margery sits working her shuttle with Mathilda at her feet. She looks up, and stands. Her face takes on a look of enquiry.

‘Husband, you are returned,’ she says, as he walks toward her. Mathilda stands back behind her mother, as though in fear.

‘Hello, little one,’ he murmurs as he ruffles Mathilda’s hair. He turns, ‘Martha, come forward.’

‘I would have you know, wife, that this is my cousin from Walsham, who has come to live with us. She has lost her husband, and is in sore need of a home. I know that she will be of much help to you, as she has good knowledge of cloth and dyeing.’ He thinks, this latter should alert Margery to Martha’s real identity, and he waits with a certain fear for her response.

‘You are most welcome, Cousin Martha,’ her voice, thank God, shows no dissent. ‘And I feel sorrow for your loss. Please tell me, are you on your own? Have you no children?’

Martha finds her voice. ‘No, Cousin Margery. My only son, a fine archer, was taken into the king’s army, and I am alone since my husband’s death, for all has gone – my home – all taken by the heriot I had to pay. My gratitude is to your good man that he has offered me a place to be, and I can assure you that my thoughts will only be that I bring help to you, and your household. God bless you both for your kindness.’

‘Then, come and sit down.’

Margery pulls a stool toward them, and beckons Martha to it as she sits down. She re-commences her shuttle work as she turns to Bartholomew, ‘now, do you take the horse to water and out to the meadow, while Mistress Martha and I have time to talk together, Bartholomew,’ she said. ‘When you return there will be food and drink for you both,’ and, moving to face Martha, ‘tell me, Martha, what do you do with cloth that would be of help to us, and, are you also good with managing maid servants, and household needs?’

‘I work with weaving, and with natural dyes that are found around us, Cousin. My household work, I think, would be of use to you, for I have had much understanding of that as a wife and a mother,’ she glances in Mathilda’s direction, and smiles.

‘You will, I hope, forgive my questions, Cousin. I am happy that you have come to us now, for I am finding it hard to see as well as I have done in the past. Of course, I am able to work with wool, it does not need my eyes,’ and she indicates the shuttle. ‘But it is harder with weaving. To tell the truth I would be so much happier working in my garden, Martha.’

Bartholomew, halted at the door, hears this exchange. He senses that Margery has already reasoned out a different situation from that being presented, and has let him know that there is acceptance on her part, but also at her own direction. A cunning one, he thinks as he strides toward the stable. And then – but what is it she was saying about her eyesight? Was she really losing her sight, and had this affected her changed ways recently? There is much that he will need to talk over with her.

He ponders these points as he walks slowly across to the stable. Unlatching the door, he grabs old boy by the mane, and brings him out to follow him, first to the pond and a long draught of water, and then to the unlatched meadow gate.

‘Off you go,’ he says with a slap on the horse’s hindquarters, and watches him doing his usual trick of kicking up hooves, and galloping around the small place. He reminds himself that old boy really must be shod, but first things first. The Martha thing must be sorted out with Margery. He closes the gate and strides back. Hopefully things seem to be turning out alright.

It was only later, when household arrangements had been sorted out, that, in the privacy of their own room, he was able to tell her the whole story, but without one item. That must remain secret. But he wasn’t surprised to hear Margery say: ‘Your Martha story is good, husband, but I did realise who she was. I will not tell, Bart, because I know that it is to our own benefit. She seems a good woman, and will help with our duties. We will bring her to the village with the name that you have decided, and nobody shall know otherwise. But, as far as I am concerned, the name of Lister is now dead, like its owner. He was your friend, I know, but his views always made me fearful.’

And that, as far as she was concerned, was that – a fact that Bartholomew had to accept.

SEVEN

Julian May, 1393

Yesterday, early in the morning, I heard the sounds of much merriment in the streets, and coming and going in the surrounds of our church.

‘T’is Mayday, Mistress,’ says Sarah in answer to my inclination of head, and my questioning look. She comes into the parlour with a bowl of gruel in her hands. ‘They gather in the streets to choose the May Queen, I’ll be certain.’ She places the bowl and spoon before me, and continues, ‘remember how we all rushed to the green to see the sights, and hear the music played, and join in the dances when we were young, Mistress?’

‘And, you know, that was not how it was for me, for we were away from the village apiece, and my father would not have me join in. He was all for his sheep, and shearing and such, at that time of the year,’ I reply, with a shake of my head.

The years past, as a solitary, have brought me to an established discipline of prayer, and an ability to take that prayer to support, and bring hope to people who come to my window with tales of their pain, and despair. For, no matter how things change, and sometimes they do for the better, there are always those with their own particular troubles. Sometimes it is the death of a husband or child, sometimes a tale of brutal treatment, sometimes an inability to provide for family. Their needs come in many different ways. I do observe that people seem to be more understanding of their letters now, and, that learning gives the poor a greater strength of purpose. And I have also noticed that more women approach me, wishing to take up the life that I have embraced, in order to bring care to those in need. Sarah tells me that there are as many as ten anchoresses and some anchorites, in Norwich. I know of wise friars, who also bring care to our Christian folk at this time. It does seem that Norwich is blessed with much good and reverent belief.

I remember that it was on May the eighth in 1373, (it now seems so many years ago) that I was Graced with my visions. And it helps to make me feel a need to return to the words I wrote soon after, for I wish to clarify and re-write that time in a fuller way, and to tell of how I have learned to understand more completely what was told me, and how it changed me, and how it strengthened my whole way of belief in our Lord, and his beloved Son, Jesus. My words were copied by a scribe, who desired to so do, and that he might sell

the work. I was content then for this to be, for I wished that the understandings revealed to me should also be brought to those who desired more knowledge of the depth of the love of God. Since then they have been greatly strengthened by my prayer, and the silent contemplation, that is my daily discipline, has renewed my own spiritual strengths.

‘Sarah,’ I say, ‘I am resolved to return to the writing of my revelations. Tell me, do we have much sewing to do at present? Now that we have summer with light evenings it will enable me, with the help of you and Alice, both to sew, and to write, in my allotted work time. It will be well for my enterprise if you will buy parchment and ink, when you next go into Norwich. What recourse to money do we have just now?’

‘Sewing is now up to date, and you may remember, Mistress, that we received a behest in Master Roger Reed’s will, in the March just past. It still lies untouched, as we have been well blest with gifts of a rabbit or two, some fresh caught perch, and a bag of oats and some salt from our friend Master Edrich. So, would you wish me to buy some pages of parchment, and some ink, from the scrivener, and when?’

‘Today, Sarah, if you are not otherwise engaged, and it pleases you. It is my wish to begin at the earliest moment now that I feel its necessity, and it is clear in my mind.’ I hear myself speak with conviction, for I know this to be what God wishes me to do – to make clear my shewings to my even Christians. Sarah bustles away – a good servant, who is constant in her care of me.

My mind dwells on that wondrous time, and on the images that, by God’s Grace, I was given; in it they are as fresh now, as they were then. There were so many – sixteen in all. And I wrote of them in a short description, words that found their way to the scribe’s pen, and were sent out to those who wished to buy it. I am now moved, in my heart, for my even Christians, to help them understand God’s love for all his creations that the readings of my further work will tell. They will be words that describe, in images, the truth that God gave to me, and the knowledge and wisdom that was accorded me, and to be known only as the writer by the name of my calling – Julian, the anchoress.

I feel that it is only when a person has experienced something, or suffered in a certain way, that they can truly understand, and give love and support to others who experience, or suffer likewise. I know, for instance, that because I have been a wife and mother, and have suffered both the physical pains of birth, and the deep and sorrowful

grief for the loss of husband and child, that I can feel, and have a deeper understanding for those who have undergone such losses. It also helps me feel the pain of Jesus' mother, Mary, at her loss, and as such brings back my own mother love, felt both as received, and given. And I felt most deeply a mother's loss when I was shewn, in my revelation of Jesus' crucifixion, Mary as both a young wife, and Mary suffering the loss of her son in such a gruesome end.

My bodily suffering brought me close to death, and made me as one with Jesus' suffering that was shewn me in images of his crucifixion and death. I saw it in such clearness, his body blood streaming, colour that changed as his suffering increased, and the shape of blood drops, so like the scales that I had so oft cleaned off herring, as it fell down, and off his face. My heart became full to see his face drawn with pain. And I have come to understand that, while I saw those dreadful images, I also felt the meaning, and, I suffered also. Thus, I learned that suffering releases a new, and sacred place of love and compassion for others, and that my own suffering had also brought me close to achieving that place, while directing me to the path that I must take, both as prayerful anchoress, and compassionate counsellor.

Those images, and the many others that I was shewn, remain in my memory as fresh as the moment when first I saw them. They never grow dim, but remain like a powerful dream, a constant reminder of the mystery, and the power, of God. And as the years have passed, each time I contemplate them I find a deeper understanding of their meaning. In their constancy they return to me, as a shewing of the strength of the love that God bears for all his creations.

One of the first images was that of a small round object that God shewed me, lying in my hand. It was about the size of a hazelnut, such a little thing that I wondered why it was there. And it was told to me, not in spoken words, but as though I knew, that it bore God's love the same as the largest of his creations. The image brought to me the sense that the enclosed nut was like the soul, wrapped warmly in the love of God.

As a child I would pick hazelnuts in thickets of the woods surrounding my home, and delight in pulling off the outer green leaves that surrounded the shell, and, cracking the shell with my teeth until they met the sweetness of the kernel. And I did not see then, but do now, that the green leaves are like the protection of God's power, the shell is the

wisdom that acknowledges that protection, and the sweetness of the kernel is like the love that the Holy Spirit brings to mankind. A Trinity indeed, for I see, and wonder, at that protection, acknowledgement, and love, flowing through the whole of creation, from the largest to the smallest, in human, animal, and vegetation.

*As Trinity we recognise God's Power, His Wisdom and His Love. We cannot know God as representative of anything human, even though we speak of Him as He, and creation as His, for he is nothing that we can know, yet he is everything that we can feel. It is only in his love of us that we can understand the power of the father, the wisdom of the mother, and the love that comes from both power and wisdom, and that brings, and spreads, love through the Holy Spirit. The motherhood of God has been written of through centuries of those with spiritual understandings. It is my understanding, and I follow the teachings of Mother Church in this, that Jesus serves to bring through his chest wound, mother wisdom and the milk of human kindness within participation of the mass. Truly is the Trinity Father, Son, and Spirit in all aspects of their being, as truly as God is Mother in our aspects of knowing.**

Another image that was brought to my mind, and which I have had time to ponder was that of the lord and the servant. I saw a lord sending his servant out to do a job for the lord, and, on his way, the servant went gladly and quickly, and by so doing had a misfortune, and fell into a deep ditch, and could find no way out. (It reminded me of Norfolk peat diggings, yet was not of that, I thought). I saw the lord watching and feeling great sorrow for his servant, but doing nothing to help him. I spent much time thinking – what did this mean? Then, in my prayers, and silent thoughts, it was brought to me that the servant was Adam. He was like mankind, and had fallen into a bad place, and was unable to find his way out; and it was because of his forgetfulness of the right way, as the right way is in the following God's will. I understood then that Jesus had taken Adam's place, and had suffered for mankind in atonement, and as a deliverance, and redemption for Adam's sin.

I asked God why there was sin in this beautiful world of his creation? And He

** feminine wisdom in the Trinity that is God, and the true meaning of wisdom.*

answered in this way: 'that it is necessary'. I wondered why this should be for it seemed so far removed from his will, and He showed me that that there are two portions – one good and one bad, that which is good, and is taught inwardly by the Holy Spirit with love, and that which needs our salvation, and that is through the suffering of our dear Lord, Jesus. I saw, in some mysterious way that, in order to be known, goodness needs badness, so that it may be made clear that this was all to be seen, in the coming of Jesus' redemption for mankind. One cannot be known without the other. But He also answered my question, and my doubts, with words that have reverberated in my mind:

'I will make all things well, I shall make all things well, I may make all things well, and I can make all things well; and you will see for yourself that all things will be well.'

And so I knew that, whatever would be, even the most dreadful, was as God had told me, necessary for the revelation of compassion. Indeed I was brought words, at the close of my revelations that told me that Love was God's meaning. 'Know it well,' He told me, 'who reveals it to you? Love. What did He reveal to you? Love. Why does He reveal it to you? For love.' And like those other words, these have remained, and ever will be close to my heart.

All the things that I heard, and saw, came as though I were in that other to which I had become onyd; in His thoughts, and in his Sight. I did not hear words with my ears, but I knew them to be there in me. I did not see the images with my eyes, but they were imaged in my mind. I was apart, and yet I was a part. And I knew that while I called God Him, it was not what He is, for He is no thing that we can know, but in his creative works, everything that is. That was the most marvellous thing that I learned, and the most mysterious, that I, such an insignificant being, was made at one with this wonder.*

Now these remembrances have been brought back to my mind, I know that they are the main gist of what will be the return to my Revelations of Divine Love, as I named my first writings. I will take my prayers to ask God's help in my further exertions, and that I may truly write as He would wish, and how He would will my pen to write.

** onyd: Julian's middle English manner of saying oned – the mystic's experience of feeling at one with God.*

EIGHT

Bartholomew, in 1403

It is Michaelmas in the year of 1403. How the years have passed, he thinks. Today, twenty one years after his birth, I was with John to witness the deeds that make him the tenant of a quarter of the fee of the manor of Owby, in all, sixty acres of land. It should do.

My son! He never tires of saying those words to himself, for while he remembers the blessed day of John's birth in the spring of 1382, yet at first he had known him, not as his son, but as the son of his dead friend, John. Martha had called him Walsham, and he had never thought of young John being aught but that (although he thought it should be Litester); never thought that the all too brief moments of his own lust could have brought her to conception. It was only later that he had seen the evidence that suggested otherwise.

God bless the woman, Martha became the helpmate, and companion that his Margery most needed, for she had fast lost her eyesight, and Martha was her friend and right hand. It eased the way that their little family worked together, and particularly eased Margery's times of bitterness for her plight, her blindness, impatience, and for her often irritable manner. He had spoken of certain eye doctors who might be able to remove the film that clouded her eyes, but she would have none of it, saying:

'Well! For what would I be paying good money to see an old eye doctor? He can't help me. You look...my eyes are filmed over. Such was the way of my mother when she grew older. I have Martha now. She is my eyes.' And she had pressed Martha's hand.

Sometimes, he had wondered if Mathilda could be jealous of Martha, for it seemed that where she had, in the past, been close to Margery, Martha was now the closer. His daughter had become his companion, following him here and there, and asking to learn the ways of farming. She was healthy, and had a good mind, taking in what he taught, and became as fine a hand with farm work as any boy. As she grew older, she would ask to accompany him when he visited Norwich, and he had found that she became very good at selling their salt, wool, and grain.

She went to the Tombland horse sales in Norwich with him, to buy a replacement for the old boy, on the Thursday before Easter, in 1388. His horse, the fine Suffolk, had become aged, and slow. 'It's time we put you out to grass, old boy', he had said, patting the

horse's flank, and turning to Mathilda, 'the Tombland horse sales will be coming up shortly. We'll give him his last trip there, and you will show me what sort of a judge of horseflesh you are.'

The trip to Norwich had followed the same roads and tracks as usual. It was too early for wool, but they had taken a considerable amount of salt tied onto the side of old boy, and walked their way along the well known tracks on the day before the sale, staying at the Adam and Eve hostelry overnight, after they had made deliveries. He had taken a small bag to the anchorage, where he had known that he would have a conversation with Sarah that would include his health, and that of Margery, the village, and how his crops fared. This time, however, he had brought his daughter, and introduced her to Sarah, praising Mathilda, and telling Sarah what a fine help she had become.

'We be a-goin' to the horse sales tomorrow to find another horse to take the place of my horse, who is gettin' like me, far too long in the tooth, and slow in the walk,' he said.

And Sarah had taken the girl's hand in hers, and spoken to her for a while, before she said 'God bless you, my dear.' Then she had turned to him and thanked him for the salt that they'd brought. 'Mother Julian is glad that you bring this to her so regular, Master Edrich. She do so enjoy a little salt to taste her food', she had said, before wishing them farewell, and a 'God bless your way today.'

He had come to the horse fair many years before, and at that time he had been successful in his purchase of the old boy. There had never been a finer worker, and a calmer horse than he, Bartholomew thought. He was a good judge of animals, and had a natural ability to care for them, and he had wondered if he would find the same ability in his daughter.

The market place was full. He and Mathilda walked through the many horses standing alongside their owners. He saw her stop at one, open its mouth and inspect the teeth. At another, she ran her hands over the flanks, lifting a hoof, replacing it, and walking on. And so she continued, as she carefully tested age, body, legs and hooves, and the reactions of the horses to her movements. Finally, she stopped at a bay, a male horse. Once more she opened the mouth, and tested his body, and his reactions.

‘Father, I would like to walk this horse,’ she said, and turning to the owner, ‘with your agreement, kind sir, I would that you would take me a few paces with your horse, for I would also like for my father to climb on him, to try his ways.’

The owner looked at Bartholomew as if to gain his approval. ‘It is as my daughter says, Sir,’ Bartholomew had said, ‘for she is the one who is buying a horse today.’ And the owner led the horse away before them.

‘Look, father, he has a good gait. He is young, has a soft mouth, a good eye, and holds his head well. Now you get on his back and see how he behaves. I think that you will find he is gentle.’

It was then that Bartholomew gained much respect for his young daughter, for it was as she had said. This was not a heavy workhorse, indeed lighter than the old boy, but he was strong on his legs, and well mannered.

‘Twill do, Mathilda,’ he said, as he slid off the horse. ‘Now you make the purchase. Go for ten shillings, but no higher than twelve. If you strike a bargain with that, we may also buy a good saddle, and a bridle, that you may ride him home.’

The horse had been bought, the saddle and bridle purchased at the leatherworkers for another three shillings, and old boy collected from the Adam and Eve. Mathilda’s long skirts had fallen over her legs, covering them, as she mounted the new horse, Bartholomew followed suit on the old boy, and they were on their way back home.

‘And what will you call him, Mathilda?’ he had asked.

‘Well, I thought, Prince, Dada. I hope he lives up to his name.’

And he surely did, for he had, as she had seen, a soft mouth, a good gait, and had been well broken in. As they were both mounted, their return was made easier that day. He had led the old horse out to pasture, had given him a light tap on the flank, and noticed that no longer did he kick up his heels, or blow noisily down his nostrils, but just slowly ambled to stand and graze under a tree close by. ‘You’ve earned your rest, old boy,’ he murmured. It was good to see his contentment, his golden coat under a tree, his tail swishing the flies away, and to hear his friendly nicker when he joined him there.

Young John would often come with him there, and he would give the boy an apple, or a carrot, for the old horse. One day he lifted John up onto the old boy’s broad back.

‘Hold onto his mane, John,’ he said and watched the boy lay face down, his small hands

spread on the horse's neck, and clutching at the mane. It was this that had brought his attention to John's hand, a sight he would recognise later, as one of the finest moments of his life. John, he saw, had a crooked little finger on his right hand. There was no mistake. He looked at his own hand – yes, it was the same shape. They were identical. Both had a definite bend that set the finger quite apart, as though placed on from another angle. He could hardly believe it. He wanted to shout with joy, 'I have a son.' That he loved his daughter, there was no doubt, but, this added not only a pleasure, but ensured continuity of family. How his father would have liked that.

He had found it hard, then, to contain his feeling of joy. Did Martha know? Surely she must, if, as he guessed now, that there had been no marital congress for sometime before John's death. And what of Margery, even though she had become totally blind, he had seen her using her hands, to feel, instead of see. Had she felt John's crooked finger? Had Mathilda, the maidservants, or the village folk noticed, and had their own suspicions?

He now thanked God that he had respected Martha, and not had further congress with her until their marriage. Although he had had all the feelings of any man, he would not have been able to feel right about that. Now, he thinks, now that the years have passed by, at last, after Margery's death and my marriage with Martha, I have been able to acknowledge my own son.

Much change has come about in the country. The death of King Richard has brought another king to the throne – King Henry 1V. It is to be hoped that he will be a kinder ruler, for Richard was one who showed little justice, or care, for his people, over the twenty years of his reign. He had died in Yorkshire, at Pontefract Castle in 1389, and some say that he was starved to death, but whether that was true could not be proven. Many had wished him gone, for he had used his riches to satisfy his own spoilt ways, and led the country farther into the war with France, a war that seems never to end. In the end, though, it is sad to lose a king in this way. Henry is from the Tudor line, and although there has been disquiet in other parts of the country, it is to be hoped that new blood may bring in new ways.

The concern has not as yet affected Norfolk and, if God pleases, it will not. There is enough to worry about without the fear of being involved in fighting for powers, cooler and wetter weather being a greater threat to the village, the grain and food storage, and our very

existence. The famine years, though eighty years ago, holds a place in many a person's memory.

His own life had not changed in many ways, he thought. Yet, after he learned of his fatherhood, there had been a greater peace of mind. While the year's work went on as usual around him, it was his constant joy to watch his son growing up. He had noticed and was pleased to see the companionship of his two children, for Mathilda and John were good friends. The contentment in his household, and having friends around him in the village was a blessing, for which he thanked God. Each year had settled into the rhythm of working the land for sewing crops, shearing sheep, and harvest. Even though the weather bothered him sometimes, there were the times of the Harvest Home*, the Christ's Mass, and other yearly festivals that brought much pleasure to his life.

Young people had grown up, and with the return of two vicars, Nicholas Swetying in 1388, and Thomas de Lodne in 1392, weddings were once more held at the church door. Before then it had become necessary, for him, and his church warden, to care for the church, gather the money in tithes, arrange the church ale day, and appoint visiting vicars from nearby villages, to take mass.

Thomas, he thought, is a fine vicar, as he has brought God's way back to the people. He has held a daily Mass, regular services, and started a small school in the vicarage, where the children have learnt their letters. This has been of great benefit to the village, for it is his own belief that learning could bring nothing but good for people, and Thomas agreed. It was a pleasure, then, for Bartholomew to have a companion with whom to talk over the affairs of the village, the country, and sometimes to share a game of chess. Yet he had not confessed, nor hinted of his newfound parenthood to Thomas. He often thought of the anchoress, and that, should he confess, he would wish it to be with her. But it had not been the time for confession, nor acknowledgement while yet had Margery lived.

He had, however, been pleased with the way that John had become a part of the family and the village. He played games with the other young people, and learned with them at the feet of the Vicar Thomas, and was always the first to challenge the young of the neighbouring village of Filby, in the yearly football tussle. He enjoyed playing music

* Harvest Home: a time of feasting, singing and dancing after the gathering in of harvest.

on the flute, joining in with the tabors, pipes and whistles of the other youngsters, and dancing, in round, in village festivals. Above all, he was a good worker, his constant companion and, like Mathilda, always wishing to learn more about farming craft. Indeed, Thrigby was a happy place, and remained so for him until the March of 1398, when Margery had died.

She was, Bartholomew realised, in her mid fifties, when she had said to him, ‘an old woman you have by your side now, husband, ’tis time that I should go,’ and she took his hand and placed it on her neck where he felt its softness, and how large it had become. ’Tis the scrofula,* husband,’ she coughed as she spoke, ‘and I feel so tired and do not wish to eat my food, even though Martha brings me that which I have always enjoyed.’

‘Then I will bring a doctor to you,’ he’d said. But her words, next spoken, came with much force: ‘Nunna them ole doctors, husband. I wish for nothing, but that you take me out to my vegetable patch, and to the orchard to smell the ripening fruit, and to my little hens in their run, that I may say farewell. And then, I would that you bring Thomas to me, for I wish to receive his blessing.’ He had done as she wished, and brought Thomas in to her, but with much sorrow in his heart.

The weeks when she had lain in their bed brought many of the village women to her bedside, but none was more faithful than Martha. Gradually Margery had grown weaker, and the day came when she spoke her final words: ‘God bless you, husband, and you Martha, for both of you have been caring of me.’ She held her arms out, vainly searching until they met Mathilda’s shoulders, fastening there in a tight grip, ‘farewell, my dear daughter, you have been most dutiful, and I have loved you well.’ Her face, in rest, was peaceful, a happy face, part of all his memories of her in the first bloom of their marriage, in the coming of the children, Henry and Mathilda, and sometimes, even, in the later years.

‘You know, Dada,’ Mathilda said, after they laid her mother in the ground, and the Chantry Mass for her soul had been sung, ‘you know, Dada, that I have known for years that John is my half-brother. It worries me not, but I would wish that we look to our affairs,

* Scrofula, or King’s Evil, is a tuberculin infection of the lymph nodes in the neck causing much swelling, the supposed cure being the King’s touch, or that of his hand-held coin.

and how such goods as you have shall be divided. I would not wish that John is not recognised as your son, for I have a great love of the boy.’ She spoke from her twenty four years of living, and, while he would have wished for her to be married, and with children, she had always said, ‘there is none here Dada that I would wish to be bedded to, nor to work with.’

She told him that there was one wish that she had; no, two. Firstly that he should take her to visit the anchoress Julian, and secondly, that she should take a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham’s shrine. ‘This I wish most strongly, Dada, but first, that I may talk with the lady Julian, for there is much that concerns me. There is that which I would enquire of the wisdom of a holy woman to help in what path my life should take, for I do not find my heart is in a life here, even though I love you as any daughter should.’

Early one morning, in the time between shearing and harvest, in the following year, they had hitched the cart to Prince, and packed it with goods for sale. As usual, they took rolls of unwashed wool, bags of salt brought up from the pans, and what could be spared of the grain in the barn, all loaded with the help of Martha and John. They said their farewells, and took their seats at the top of the cart.

‘If we make good headway we’ll be back tonight, else tomorrow,’ Bartholomew said as he took hold of the reins and urged Prince away onto the familiar tracks. He found it more enjoyable with Mathilda by his side, for they spoke of the village, and of the many jobs that would need their attention on their return; of repairs to the church building that would be undertaken by the whole village after harvest, and before the winter storms; of Thomas and his work; of the changing life, death, and marriages of the people there, and lastly of Mathilda’s intention to go on a pilgrimage. Her discontent with Thrigby concerned him the most.

‘You must know, Mathilda,’ he had concluded, ‘that it would not be my intention to deprive you of anything to which you have a right. Of course I would have to look after John, but you were there before him, and that counts for much in my mind. But, you must also know that I will always be fair to you both.’

She answered, telling him that it was not only the holding of the manorial see, but that for years John had not been known as his son, and now would be. Not only would

there be much talk in the village, but her father would be brought before his own church council. It would be a scandal, and a family shame that she would find hard to bear.

He had told her that he also had this concern. He constantly wondered what he should do that would be fair for them all, and how should he atone for what would be seen, in the eyes of God, and the village, as a sin. He spoke of his wish to make Martha his wife, but he would wish that it would be Mathilda's wish also, for Martha was a good woman. It would, he had said, not be the right thing when taking all into account, to put her in the position of looking after the household, and not to give her safety. And, of course there was John; it would only be correct to give him a place of recognition.

'I have thought long on this matter, daughter,' he said, and explained that his adultery had been momentary, a time of consolation for them both after the terrible death of Martha's husband – his own dear friend. He had stayed true to Margery through all the years that Martha had lived with them, and he wished for nothing more than that he could make penance for what had happened. To confess, or to talk with someone who would help him come to a wise decision about Martha, and John, and also, herself. That could not be Thomas, for he was too close to the village. 'The lady Julian would seem to be the right person to take our problems to, do you not think?' he concluded.

'I sometimes think that I would wish to come to my faith in some way, not as an anchoress, but more as in a life that is with the animals and the natural world that I so love,' she had said. As she had been taught and had spoken with their Vicar Thomas, she could feel, as had St Augustine, that the beauty of our world could be understood as an image of God's creation. She told him then that she had long held a wish to visit the shrine of the Lady of Walsingham, and the priory of White Friars, Augustinians, who lived there, drew her to the belief of the saint's. It was a way that she could follow, and she wondered if this is where she could settle. 'There is something telling me strongly to take this step, Dada,' she had said.

In the late morning, they had arrived to see the city of Norwich spread before them, in bright sunshine. They wended their way through the narrow streets and alleyways to make their sales and, after, they bought a meat pie from a baker on the street, and had eaten it while sitting on the moving cart, which was now turned into the wider King Street.

He told his daughter of the love he had for Norwich since the time when, as a young boy, he had lived and learned his letters here. But this part of the city, the river, the stalls, the friaries, and the tall trees held a special place in his heart.

‘I was here on the day that Julian was enclosed, and that day will ever be in my mind,’ he said. He continued by telling her how that had been for himself, and how her retreat from the world had led him to remember Henry, his son, and Mathilda’s elder brother, who had died from the great pestilence.

He had driven the cart to the churchyard, and tied Prince to the limb of a tree. ‘It is in sight of the parlour,’ he said. ‘I cannot think that anyone will take him from there,’ and they made their way to the door. Sarah met them as though greeting old friends, and led them inside.

‘Be you seated here. I’ll fetch Mary to bring you a draught of ale, while I see if my lady will see you.’ It was sometime before she returned, saying, ‘my lady says to wait awhile, but she will be here soon.’

‘We be enjoying your fine ale, Sarah, and are quite content,’ he replied.

The quietness of the parlour had enveloped them in its peaceful ambience. The scents of cooking from a farther place, the sound of the ever present cat’s purr, and the sight of spread parchment and feather quill on the desk, all brought the familiar pleasure remembered by Bartholomew from when he had waited before. They sipped their ale with appreciation, he in a chair, and Mathilda on a stool. After a time they heard the sound of moving skirts, and Dame Julian appeared.

‘Master Edrich, it gives me pleasure again to see you, God be with you. And you have a companion, welcome, and God be with you,’ as she had turned toward Mathilda, with, what the girl thought, would be a smile, although it was not possible to see it from behind the veil that covered her face, but only in her eyes.

‘God bless you for seeing us, Dame Julian. I have brought my daughter, Mathilda, for there is something that, with your permission, we would bring to you for your help, a difficulty for which we have a need of your wisdom.’

‘If I can help you, I will, Master Edrich. And a welcome to you, Mathilda, please do sit,’ she took a chair in her hands, turning it to the others before she sat. ‘I will do what I

can, and with God's help. For it is only through Him that we can find answers, and true peace.' Her voice was soft, and slow, but clear, and not at all muffled by the veil.

Bartholomew's words came quickly. He spoke of that time when he had come to her in great distress, and of this she might remember, and of his finding, and removing Martha from danger, and then...and his voice had trembled for a moment... of his sin, and the birth of John. He told of his joy in the discovery that John was his son, but the shame of knowing that he had sinned. He had been careful that neither his wife, nor anyone else knew, and that she had accepted him to be the son of John Litester, Martha's husband. And so it had been until, at the death of his wife, Mathilda had told him that she knew John to be her half-brother.

He felt, he had continued, that he should in some way atone for his sin, and that possibly he should make a confession. He would like to be fair in what he gave to both John and Mathilda, and to make sure that what was given to Mathilda would not, in any way, be lessened. And he spoke of the true help that Martha had been to Margery in the years of her blindness, confusion and illness, before her death,

'And is this what you would wish, Mathilda,' Julian turned to the girl, 'that your father be married to Martha, and your brother, for I feel this is how you know him, be accepted as your father's son, but maybe gradually and later on?'

'My Lady, we have spoken of this on the way to Norwich today, and I have no wish to stop the marriage. Martha is a kindly and caring woman, and would look after my father well. John and I are good friends, and I would not wish him to have other than his rightful place. But I would find it hard to live in Thrigby with this fact known, and the scandal it could cause. I have no wish to marry there. My great wish, as I have told Dada, is to go on a pilgrimage to Walsingham to the shrine of My Lady the Mother of Christ, for I feel that the Mother of the Son of God would direct me to the right path.' She stopped speaking abruptly, and for a while there was silence.

Dame Julian had spoken slowly. 'It seems that there is only good will between you both. There appears to be no quarrel, but that you wish only to determine a decision, a decision that would, you both wish, be right for all concerned. Master Edrich, you speak of confessing your sin; I cannot take your confession, for only a priest can do that. Nor can I direct you to what you may do. I can, however, listen, tell you my understanding of the

problem, and pray that your decision is right for all concerned, which is what you do appear to have done in the past years.'

'Mathilda,' and she turned to the girl, 'you appear to be kindly and thoughtful. You hold no bad thoughts for Martha and John, nor for your father, even though this could bring shame to you. There is only a good feeling between you all, as I see it. Your father's wish is that he does what is right for all concerned, and this is, I believe, what is most needed in any decision. He wishes, however, to atone for his misdeed. I call it this, and not a sin, for it was not done with any intention to hurt anyone, but only, as I see it, to bring consolation at a time of great distress for both Bartholomew and Martha. After all, he was not as King David, who lusted after a woman, and took a life. He has tried to make sure that no-one is hurt, or loses anything. Therefore it was a mistake. And now he wishes to work out the way to bring contentment to all.'

Julian had sat, Bartholomew remembers, for quite a few moments, her hands held before her in prayer. Finally she had turned to Bartholomew.

'I think you know how this shall be brought to a conclusion that will find everybody contentment,' she said. There is no reason why you should not marry Martha, Bartholomew. When a man loses a wife, it is usual and proper, that he takes another, for he needs a woman's helping hands, and Martha is not of the forbidden*. That it assists in John being accepted as your son is true, and how that affects Mathilda is also true, and this is something that you will be able to find a way through, and you will also find a way to atone for a mistake that was made. God does not wish us to be ashamed of being human, but God does desire that we do not do onto others that which we would not have done to ourselves. God does not command, but encourages us to show kindness and compassion.'

She then turned to Mathilda. 'Mathilda, you wish to go on a pilgrimage to Walsingham, and I can understand your reason, for the Lady Mother of Christ brings much wisdom, and it is, indeed, a beautiful place. There are two roads, one that goes directly and through the centre of Norfolk, and another that runs by the sea all the way to Blakeney. At Blakeney you will find seabirds of all kinds that flock and flight over the marshes in the autumn. This is where you turn inland for Walsingham. Many pilgrims

* Forbidden: close members of family, or relatives, forbidden by the Bible to marry.

advise this as the road to take, for the sights of the sea, fishermen, and the beautiful evening sunsets bring a great pleasure. The church of St John at Trimingham, also, holds the hand of the Baptist, and you will find other churches, and sights, that hold interest to visitors.'

Her voice had lingered on the words as though she remembered being there. Had she been on that same pilgrimage, Bartholomew wondered. Had she had another life before she became an anchoress, and what sort of life would that have been? She had the appearance of a nun, and yet there was a naturalness about her that spoke of being a part of the living world.

'I have said that I see there to be much kindness between you both, and as you have spoken of Martha and John, there feels much there also. I do not see there to be any reason that you should not be able to resolve this question. I shall pray, and most heartily that this be so. And now,' and she pushed the chair away, and stands, 'God bless you both and farewell.'

'And may God bless you most fully, Lady Julian,' he had replied. They had said farewell to her, and made their way from the anchorage, with the ever helpful Sarah hovering by.

'May your way be blessed on your way, Master and Mistress Edrich,' she had said.

He remembered the warmth and calmness he felt as they left. There was always such a kindness that he felt not only from the anchoress, but from the servants also, a sense of everything being alright. He now knew what must now be done. As they returned he asked Mathilda if this had helped her to feel more comfortable about his possible marriage with Martha. And she assented that of course she would, now that things were straight between them. 'That is, if she is willing to be my wife,' he had added. But he did not think that she would wish it otherwise, for they were very comfortable with one another, and he knew that she would understand his wish to acknowledge their son.

And so, it was in the time of harvest-home in 1398, that he and Martha had been wed. And it was in the autumn, immediately after, that he had taken the pilgrimage along the track by the sea with his daughter, had drunk the milk of Mother Mary, made a penance of money to the White Friars at the priory there, found and paid for a lot of land where, in a small house there, he had settled his daughter. He had known that this was where she wanted to be, and that she would be content. But to put his mind at rest, he had once more,

after a year, ridden the road to Walsingham, to assure himself that this was so. He missed her company, but there was the future with his wife and friend, Martha, and his son, and those were the finest of all pleasures.

And now, turned sixty three, as he remembers the past years, he knows that the recent decision he has made to be the right one; he has paid the lease on the land at Owby. And he has welcomed, as John's wife, Joan de Beeston, a seemingly fine girl, now one of his family, and with child. He looks forward to that moment when he will hold a grandchild in his arms, whether boy or girl it will not matter; but if a boy his joy will know no bounds.

As yet, he still feels able to continue his lordship of Thrigby, and indeed he is happy there, kindly cared for by Martha, and surrounded by friends and working companions of many years. He will end his life here, he thinks, for where else would he rather be than surrounded by the water world that he has ever known. He had no doubt that the years will tell, and that he will become slower until he is no longer, but while he is still able, he will stay where the wind blows a salt air in from the sea, stirring the reeds over near waters, while sunsets cast a magical glow over all that is home.

He knows, that when the end comes he will have made his final will, and what remains monetarily, will be willed to both his children, Mathilda, and John. The heriot paid, for he will see that there is enough in money, or animals, to fulfil that need. His goods and chattels – bed and linen, pots, pans, chairs and chests – such as they are, will be given to the vicar to distribute to those in his village who are most in need. But, in his will he will proudly proclaim John, once known as Walsham, to be his own son, with a wish that he will assume the name of Edrich and the continuity of the name. His father would have liked that.

NINE

Julian and John, 1405

Mary comes bustling into the parlour where I sit writing in the early afternoon. Now no longer my 'little Mary', but a buxom figure in middle age, unlike my dear, gentle Sara, who has now passed on. Mary is full of a life force, similar to a whirling wind.

'A young man be here, mistress, with a gift for you, and a real need to take of your time if you would be so willing. His name, he says, is John Edrich, and I didn't ask, but he do look a bit like Master Edrich,' she says in a rush of words.

I lay down my quill, and cover the pot of brown ink. Bartholomew Edrich – is this his son? How many years would it be since Bartholomew visited with his daughter? About five, I believe. I wonder if the pilgrimage to Walsingham was made, and if it brought the needed comfort to Mathilda. No doubt if it is he I shall be told. But I do not count in years, for time to be counted seems to be unnecessary now, each day bringing new people, and also those I know by sound of voice and name, seeking the comfort of my prayers. Precious are my own moments held in prayer and contemplation, the pleasurable garden moments, my sewing and the joy of writing down the understandings, those that have been given me by the Grace of God. I feel that I am bringing to the world and its people around me some degree of help. Indeed I am most content.

'Bring him in now, Mary,' I say, and adjust my veil.

She ushers in a young man carrying a bundle in his arms. He is in the dress of a farmer, smock and shovel hat, but there is certainly the look of Bartholomew about him, although he appears to be taller. What is the likeness, I wonder? Is it in the shape of his face with handsome, but strong features, large nose and a wide mouth? That assuredly, but it is more, maybe it is the bright blueness of his eyes that reminds me of Bartholomew. He brings with him the smell of wool and sheep, a well remembered smell of childhood, that oily, yet animal, scent of country life, swelling within my memory. I wish him well, and ask him to be seated.

'God be with you, Dame Julian,' is his reply. 'I am grateful that you would see me, but first I would deliver to you two gifts. One is from my mother, and one, a bequest from my father. It was his wish, before he died, that I bring you this purse, and its contents, and

tell you of his gratitude for your past help. My mother, while yet alive and living in my household, has asked that I deliver to you a cloth that she has woven, and dyed in colour that she was sure you would welcome for your wearing. She would have you know that it is cloth woven from the wool of our own sheep, and she hopes that it will keep you warm when winter comes.'

He places both purse and bundle on the table by my writing, and takes a seat on one of the stools.

'And God bless you for your bounty, Master Edrich, and I would wish you, when you return home, to convey my grateful thanks to your mother for that warmth that I shall, indeed, need in the coming winter. But I hope that you can tell me when it was that your father died, as I would also like to know the health of you sister Mathilda. You must forgive me if I do not remember the year, for time here does not turn on years, but on people and prayer.'

'My father, Dame Julian, died early in this year, in the month of March. He was buried in the churchyard of Thrigby. It was his wish that it be so, for it was where he had spent the whole of his life. Mother and I had a Chantry mass sung for his soul, and the whole village was there, for he was most loved for his kind lordship. But it was not the life that I wished for, as I had told him two years before. It was then that he set me up with the land at Owby when I told him that I wished only to work my own piece of land. I did not want to be beholden, lady, to the bishopric, of which Thrigby was, nor to be in lordship of the people there. I saw there to be more contentment to be working as a freeman farmer. That, I knew, would suit my family well.'

He had a straightforward gaze, this young man, meeting my own with no show of shiftiness. He would be trustworthy, I felt sure.

'And of my sister, Mathilda, we hear but little of her doings, although my father rode once more, to see that she had settled in alright, the year before his death. He was well pleased with what he found, for although she had not married, she had enough land to provide grain, vegetables, and the running of some sheep for wool. She was, he said, working her land, and weaving her wool into cloth, and seemed well contented that she was where she was, so close to the priory and the shrine. This means so much to her.'

'It pleases me that both you and Mathilda are suited to your lives, Master Edrich. God has indeed been good to you. And a family – are you with wife and children?'

'Our first child born, and is now two years old, lady. We have named him Henry for my half-brother who died in the great pestilence, and call him Harry. It pleased my father. He is all for now, for both my wife Joan and I have much work that engages our time. While mother remains with us we will manage, to be sure, but when she has gone we will hope to be able to take on labour. We have good land, a fine, but small flock of sheep, and for now that must do. We will never be of the rich, with fine food and clothes, but we are content, Joan and me. I think it is my mother who has taught us to welcome contentment, for she had a sore time during the revolt of '81.'

'As I do know, Master Edrich, and God be thanked that she has found rest and contentment in the life that she was brought to by the goodness of your father.'

We sit in silence for some moments. Both holding in our minds, I am sure, the times past. Violence still abounds in England, I am told, but at present Norwich is quiet, God be thanked.

'And shall you return home this evening, Master Edrich?' I continue, 'for if that is so I would wish you blessings for a safe journey home. Would you say the words of the evening prayer with me now?' and as I had done with his father years before I spoke those comforting words again:

'Lighten our darkness we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of the night, for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.'

His body stays still. For a few moments we sit together in silence and contemplation before he gathers up his hat and stands. His words come slowly.

'My lady, I am grateful for your prayers, and for the help you gave my father when he came to you in distress so many years ago. It is possible that, had he not, my mother would not have lived, nor that I would have been born. And for this I am doubly grateful.'

'I wish you well, Master Edrich. Your family will be in my daily prayers. God be with you on your way home.' With these words, I watch him bow, hear his spoken blessing, and see his figure move out of the door, and I hear Mary's voice wishing him God speed. It is not always that there is such a pleasant end for those who come to me. 'God be thanked',

I murmur, before seating myself once more and picking up my quill. The day settles around me.

I realise that a driving need brings many people to speak to a listening ear, and tell of their pains and fears. To be assured that there is somebody there to listen, to mediate, and to bring them to the power of God's love. But, in this case, it has truly warmed my heart, to see the power which is brought through the Holy Spirit, when we ask God for help with a true heart.

It is with a sense of coming home that I again, after my visitor has departed, settled into my life that I think of as so like the Desert Fathers, those who choose the life of the hermit and anchorite, as did St Augustine, and of whom Roger and I would read, all those years ago. That I could now follow the same loved daily way, take up my stick and go to our little garden with its delight of scents, fill my day with my prayers and meditation, and be there for my even Christians, in talk and in prayer. This is how it must be for me.

Only recently Mary brought in to me our little puss, a young female, lately given us.

'See, mistress,' she says, 'this little creature, the poor little mawther. She has been sadly set on by a tom cat. Will you not hold her?'

I hold out my arms, and know that I am able, with God's help, to bring love to the distressed. Her pain, for I know this is the result of a mating, opens my heart. We mothers – we bring our children into the world in labour and love, much as our Lord brought our redemption from sin through his labour, and with his great love. It is ever the way of the Motherhood of God, I thought. And with that thought, such a welling up of love fills me, as though I, too, like the little cat, am held in loving arms. The golden glow surrounds me once more and I hear, not through my ears, but deep within myself, those words and they reverberate through me, as though a musical note, rising through the heavens, and to the whole world:

*all shall be well,
and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.*

The End.

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