

# *A Flower of the Field*

## SYNOPSIS

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It's the winter of 1349 and the Black Death is at its height – and none more so than in the city of Kilkenny in southeast Ireland. There we find St. Francis's Abbey, where Father John Clyn, a gentle friar, is the sole surviving member of his order and spends his time tending the hundreds of infected people in the abbey. Recently, however, a rumor has emerged, started by a mysterious man, that a distant well cures people of the plague if they walk through its waters, causing the sick to flee St. Francis's Abbey. Clyn does not believe the story of the well is real and dreads what will happen to the people of Kilkenny who have put all their faith and trust in a cruel falsity.

Before too long, Clyn learns from the self-important Richard Ledrede, Bishop of Ossory, that another danger lurks – namely, Dame Alice Kyteler, an accused witch who murdered her four husbands some twenty years ago and who fled Kilkenny after the Bishop tried to capture her, taking with her the daughter of a maidservant who was subsequently burned at the stake. Ledrede, formerly imprisoned by Kyteler and filled with vengeance, has heard that Kyteler was recently sighted in Kilkenny and warns Clyn to look out for her. Around the same time, Clyn also finds himself tending an infected man – Mathias O'More – who suddenly appeared at the abbey and who Clyn recognizes as the man who previously spread the lie about the well.

Despite Mathias's deception, Clyn nevertheless heals the man and feels a special connection to him. As such, he tries to take the gritty, cynical Mathias and mend his broken soul – but this plan is interrupted when a mysterious, sinister woman appears at the abbey door one night. It's none other than Alice Kyteler herself, accompanied by the quiet, shellshocked Basilia de Meath, the young girl with whom she absconded over twenty years ago. Mathias is repulsed by the evil Kyteler and, losing faith in Clyn as a source of goodness, flees the abbey.

Because Basilia is unwell, Clyn allows Kyteler and her maidservant to stay at the abbey, but then quickly senses that Kyteler is there for a more nefarious purpose, especially when she refers to Clyn as "Robert Artisson" - a name he knows only too well, because it is his own. Indeed, says Kyteler, she knows he isn't really John Clyn at all, but a fake, a phony, and a fraud, who took the real John Clyn's identity as his own and is masquerading as a healer.

Cornered by Kyteler, Clyn locks her in a chamber, buying himself time to plan his next steps – which include a hope that Mathias will have a change of heart and return to help Clyn take care

of the sick... for when the people of Kilkenny learn that the distant well does not save lives, they will return as desperate as ever – and who else is there to give them hope?

With Kyteler imprisoned, Mathias still absent, the Bishop on a vengeful streak, and now being saddled with a mute, distant young maidservant – as well as very little time – Clyn must fight to champion the hope he has worked so hard to build – but how can he do it... and who and where is the real John Clyn?