

Edge of Eternity: Book Three of the Century Trilogy

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Ken Follett's extraordinary historical epic, the Century Trilogy, reaches its sweeping, passionate conclusion.

In *Fall of Giants* and *Winter of the World*, Ken Follett followed the fortunes of five international families—American, German, Russian, English, and Welsh—as they made their way through the twentieth century. Now they come to one of the most tumultuous eras of all: the 1960s through the 1980s, from civil rights, assassinations, mass political movements, and Vietnam to the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Missile Crisis, presidential impeachment, revolution—and rock and roll.

East German teacher Rebecca Hoffmann discovers she's been spied on by the Stasi for years and commits an impulsive act that will affect her family for the rest of their lives. . . . George Jakes, the child of a mixed-race couple, bypasses a corporate law career to join Robert F. Kennedy's Justice Department and finds himself in the middle of not only the seminal events of the civil rights battle but a much more personal battle of his own. . . . Cameron Dewar, the grandson of a senator, jumps at the chance to do some official and unofficial espionage for a cause he believes in, only to discover that the world is a much more dangerous place than he'd imagined. . . . Dimka Dvorkin, a young aide to Nikita Khrushchev, becomes an agent both for good and for ill as the United States and the Soviet Union race to the brink of nuclear war, while his twin sister, Tanya, carves out a role that will take her from Moscow to Cuba to Prague to Warsaw—and into history.

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Ken Follett is one of the world's best-loved authors, selling more than 160 million copies of his thirty books. Follett's first bestseller was *Eye of the Needle*, a spy story set in the Second World War.

In 1989 *The Pillars of the Earth* was published, and has since become the author's most successful novel. It reached number one on bestseller lists around the world and was an Oprah's Book Club pick.

Its sequels, *World Without End* and *A Column of Fire*, proved equally popular, and the Kingsbridge series has sold 38 million copies worldwide.

Follett lives in Hertfordshire, England, with his wife Barbara. Between them they have five children, six grandchildren, and three Labradors.***This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof***

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CHAPTER ONE

Rebecca Hoffmann was summoned by the secret police on a rainy Monday in 1961.

It began as an ordinary morning. Her husband drove her to work in his tan Trabant 500. The graceful old streets of

central Berlin still had gaps from wartime bombing, except where new concrete buildings stood up like ill-matched false teeth. Hans was thinking about his job as he drove. "The courts serve the judges, the lawyers, the police, the government-everyone except the victims of crime," he said. "This is to be expected in Western capitalist countries, but under Communism the courts ought surely to serve the people. My colleagues don't seem to realize that." Hans worked for the Ministry of Justice.

"We've been married almost a year, and I've known you for two, but I've never met one of your colleagues," Rebecca said.

"They would bore you," he said immediately. "They're all lawyers."

"Any women among them?"

"No. Not in my section, anyway." Hans's job was administration: appointing judges, scheduling trials, managing courthouses.

"I'd like to meet them, all the same."

Hans was a strong man who had learned to rein himself in. Watching him, Rebecca saw in his eyes a familiar flash of anger at her insistence. He controlled it by an effort of will. "I'll arrange something," he said. "Perhaps we'll all go to a bar one evening."

Hans had been the first man Rebecca met who matched up to her father. He was confident and authoritative, but he always listened to her. He had a good job-not many people had a car of their own in East Germany-and men who worked in the government were usually hardline Communists, but Hans, surprisingly, shared Rebecca's political skepticism. Like her father he was tall, handsome, and well dressed. He was the man she had been waiting for.

Only once during their courtship had she doubted him, briefly. They had been in a minor car crash. It had been wholly the fault of the other driver, who had come out of a side street without stopping. Such things happened every day, but Hans had been mad with rage. Although the damage to the two cars was minimal, he had called the police, shown them his Ministry of Justice identity card, and had the other driver arrested for dangerous driving and taken off to jail.

Afterward he had apologized to Rebecca for losing his temper. She had been scared by his vindictiveness, and had come close to ending their relationship. But he had explained that he had not been his normal self, due to pressure at work, and she had believed him. Her faith had been justified: he had never done such a thing again.

When they had been dating for a year, and sleeping together most weekends for six months, Rebecca wondered why he did not ask her to marry him. They were not kids: she had then been twenty-eight, he thirty-three. So she had proposed to him. He had been startled, but said yes.

Now he pulled up outside her school. It was a modern building, and well equipped: the Communists were serious about education. Outside the gates, five or six older boys were standing under a tree, smoking cigarettes. Ignoring their stares, Rebecca kissed Hans on the lips. Then she got out.

The boys greeted her politely, but she felt their yearning adolescent eyes on her figure as she splashed through the puddles in the school yard.

Rebecca came from a political family. Her grandfather had been a Social Democrat member of the Reichstag, the national parliament, until Hitler came to power. Her mother had been a city councilor, also for the Social Democrats, during East Berlin's brief postwar period of democracy. But East Germany was a Communist tyranny now, and Rebecca saw no point in engaging in politics. So she channeled her idealism into teaching, and hoped that the next generation would be less dogmatic, more compassionate, smarter.

In the staff room she checked the emergency timetable on the notice board. Most of her classes were doubled today, two groups of pupils crammed into one room. Her subject was Russian, but she also had to teach an English class. She did not speak English, though she had picked up a smattering from her British grandmother, Maud, still feisty at seventy.

This was the second time Rebecca had been asked to teach an English class, and she began to think about a text. The first time, she had used a leaflet handed out to American soldiers, telling them how to get on with Germans: the pupils had found it hilarious, and they had learned a lot too. Today perhaps she would write on the blackboard the words of a song they knew, such as "The Twist"-played all the time on American Forces Network radio-and get them to translate it into German. It would not be a conventional lesson, but it was the best she could do.

The school was desperately short of teachers because half the staff had emigrated to West Germany, where salaries were three hundred marks a month higher and people were free. The story was the same in most schools in East Germany. And it was not just teachers. Doctors could double their earnings by moving west. Rebecca's mother, Carla, was head of nursing at a large East Berlin hospital, and she was tearing her hair out at the scarcity of both nurses and doctors. The story was the same in industry and even the armed forces. It was a national crisis.

As Rebecca was scribbling the lyrics of "The Twist" in a notebook, trying to remember the line about "my little sis," the deputy head came into the staff room. Bernd Held was probably Rebecca's best friend outside her family. He was a slim, dark-haired man of forty, with a livid scar across his forehead where a shard of flying shrapnel had struck him while he was defending the Seelow Heights in the last days of the war. He taught physics, but he shared Rebecca's interest in Russian literature, and they ate their lunchtime sandwiches together a couple of times a week. "Listen, everybody," Bernd said. "Bad news, I'm afraid. Anselm has left us."

There was a murmur of surprise. Anselm Weber was the head teacher. He was a loyal Communist-heads had to be. But it seemed his principles had been overcome by the appeal of West German prosperity and liberty.

Bernd went on: "I will be taking his place until a new head can be appointed." Rebecca and every other teacher in the school knew that Bernd himself should have got the job, if ability had been what counted; but Bernd was ruled out because he would not join the Socialist Unity Party, the SED—the Communist Party in all but name.

For the same reason, Rebecca would never be a head teacher. Anselm had pleaded with her to join the party, but it was out of the question. For her it would be like checking herself into a lunatic asylum and pretending all the other inmates were sane.

As Bernd detailed the emergency arrangements, Rebecca wondered when the school would get its new head. A year from now? How long would this crisis go on? No one knew.

Before the first lesson she glanced into her pigeonhole, but it was empty. The mail had not yet arrived. Perhaps the postman had gone to West Germany, too.

The letter that would turn her life upside down was still on its way.

She taught her first class, discussing the Russian poem "The Bronze Horseman" with a large group seventeen and eighteen years old. This was a lesson she had given every year since she started teaching. As always, she guided the pupils to the orthodox Soviet analysis, explaining that the conflict between personal interest and public duty was resolved, by Pushkin, in favor of the public.

At lunchtime she took her sandwich to the head's office and sat down across the big desk from Bernd. She looked at the shelf of cheap pottery busts: Marx, Lenin, and East German Communist leader Walter Ulbricht. Bernd followed her gaze and smiled. "Anselm is a sly one," he said. "For years he pretended to be a true believer, and now—zoom, he's off."

"Aren't you tempted to leave?" Rebecca asked Bernd. "You're divorced, no children—you have no ties."

He looked around, as if wondering whether someone might be listening; then he shrugged. "I've thought about it—who hasn't?" he said. "How about you? Your father works in West Berlin any way, doesn't he?"

"Yes. He has a factory making television sets. But my mother is determined to stay in the East. She says we must solve our problems, not run away from them."

"I've met her. She's a tiger."

"That's the truth. And the house we live in has been in her family for generations."

"What about your husband?"

"He's dedicated to his job."

So I don't have to worry about losing you. Good."

Rebecca said: "Bernd-" Then she hesitated.

"Spit it out."

"Can I ask you a personal question?"

"Of course."

"You left your wife because she was having an affair."

Bernd stiffened, but he answered: "That's right."

"How did you find out?"

Bernd winced, as if at a sudden pain.

"Do you mind me asking?" Rebecca said anxiously. "Is it too personal?"

"I don't mind telling you," he said. "I confronted her, and she admitted it."

"But what made you suspicious?"

"A lot of little things-"

Rebecca interrupted him. "The phone rings, you pick it up, there's a silence for a few seconds, then the person at the other end hangs up."

He nodded.

She went on: "Your spouse tears a note up small and flushes the shreds down the toilet. At the weekend he's called to an unexpected meeting. In the evening he spends two hours writing something he won't show you."

"Oh, dear," said Bernd sadly. "You're talking about Hans."

"He's got a lover, hasn't he?" She put down her sandwich: she had no appetite. "Tell me honestly what you think."

"I'm so sorry."

Bernd had kissed her once, four months ago, on the last day of the autumn term. They had been saying good-bye, and wishing one another a happy Christmas, and he had lightly grasped her arm, and bent his head, and kissed her lips. She had asked him not to do it again, ever, and said she would still like to be his friend; and when they had returned to school in January both had pretended it had never happened. He had even told her, a few weeks later, that he had a date with a widow his own age.

Rebecca did not want to encourage hopeless aspirations, but Bernd was the only person she could talk to, except for her family, and she did not want to worry them, not yet. "I was so sure that Hans loved me," she said, and tears came to her eyes. "And I love him."

"Perhaps he does love you. Some men just can't resist temptation."

Rebecca did not know whether Hans found their sex life satisfactory.

He never complained, but they made love only about once a week, which she believed to be infrequent for newlyweds. "All I want is a family of my own, just like my mother's, in which everyone is loved and supported and protected," she said. "I thought I could have that with Hans."

"Perhaps you still can," said Bernd. "An affair isn't necessarily the end of the marriage."

"In the first year?"

"It's bad, I agree."

"What should I do?"

"You must ask him about it. He may admit it, he may deny it; but he'll know that you know."

"And then what?"

"What do you want? Would you divorce him?"

She shook her head. "I would never leave. Marriage is a promise. You can't keep a promise only when it suits you. You have to keep it against your inclination. That's what it means."

"I did the opposite. You must disapprove of me."

"I don't judge you or anyone else. I'm just talking about myself. I love my husband and I want him to be faithful."

Bernd's smile was admiring but regretful. "I hope you get your wish."

"You're a good friend."

The bell rang for the first lesson of the afternoon. Rebecca stood up and put her sandwich back in its paper wrapping. She was not going to eat it, now or later, but she had a horror of throwing food away, like most people who had lived through the war. She touched her damp eyes with a handkerchief. "Thank you for listening," she said.

"I wasn't much comfort."

"Yes, you were." She went out.

As she approached the classroom for the English lesson, she realized she had not worked out the lyrics to "The Twist." However, she had been a teacher long enough to improvise. "Who's heard a record called "The Twist'?" she asked loudly as she walked through the door.

They all had.

She went to the blackboard and picked up a stub of chalk. "What are the words?"

They all began to shout at once.

On the board she wrote: "Come on, baby, let's do the Twist." Then she said: "What's that in German?"

For a while she forgot about her troubles.

She found the letter in her pigeonhole at the midafternoon break. She carried it with her into the staff room and made a cup of instant coffee before opening it. When she read it she dropped her coffee.

The single sheet of paper was headed: "Ministry for State Security." This was the official name for the secret police: the unofficial name was the Stasi. The letter came from a Sergeant Scholz, and it ordered her to present herself at his headquarters office for questioning.

Rebecca mopped up her spilled drink, apologized to her colleagues, pretended nothing was wrong, and went to the ladies' room, where she locked herself in a cubicle. She needed to think before confiding in anyone.

Everyone in East Germany knew about these letters, and everyone dreaded receiving one. It meant she had done something wrong- perhaps something trivial, but it had come to the attention of the watchers. She knew, from what other people said, that there was no point protesting innocence. The police attitude would be that she must be guilty of something, or why would they be questioning her? To suggest they might have made a mistake was to insult their competence, which was another crime.

Looking again, she saw that her appointment was for five this afternoon.

What had she done? Her family was deeply suspect, of course. Her father, Werner, was a capitalist, with a factory that the East German government could not touch because it was in West Berlin. Her mother, Carla, was a well-known Social Democrat. Her grandmother, Maud, was the sister of an English earl.

However, the authorities had not bothered the family for a couple of years, and Rebecca had imagined that her marriage to an official in the Justice Ministry might have gained them a ticket of respectability. Obviously not.

Had she committed any crimes? She owned a copy of George Orwell's anti-Communist allegory *Animal Farm*, which was illegal. Her kid brother, Walli, who was fifteen, played the guitar and sang American protest songs such as "This Land Is Your Land." Rebecca sometimes went to West Berlin to see exhibitions of abstract painting. Communists were as conservative about art as Victorian matrons.

Washing her hands, she glanced in the mirror. She did not look scared. She had a straight nose and a strong chin and intense brown eyes. Her unruly dark hair was sharply pulled back. She was tall and statuesque, and some people found her intimidating...

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